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PROFESSIONAL NEWS

POPULATION EDUCATION REPORT

This report represents an attempt to delineate an area for research and discussion among anthropologists, and an arena for dialogue between anthropologists and members of other disciplines and professions. The area of concern represents an intersection between three intellectual domains: the study of population processes, including the determinants and consequences of demographic events; the study of education, both formal and informal; and the study of sociocultural groups, as represented by anthropological endeavor. The thought of applying a label to this area is somewhat horrifying, since it propels us into an era of such potential double hyphenates as "population-education-anthropology" or lengthy descriptive headings like "education and population processes in sociocultural context." Instead of trying to define a scholarly field into existence through use of labels, we prefer to specify some of the research and policy issues that have been raised in discussions with colleagues and that have been brought to the committee's attention. Whether these issues provide sufficient focus to generate and sustain an intellectual community remains to be seen. If such a community does in fact develop, the members will no doubt provide us with labels by which they can be identified.

We have divided the report into three major sections. The first deals with topics for research and includes three major subdivisions including (a) learning in relation to demographic events, (b) the demographic context of learning, and (c) population policy and education. The second section considers the topic of anthropological input into educational endeavors aimed at affecting demographic behavior and the third deals with the future prospects of anthropological inquiry into population education.

1. Topics for Research

A. Learning in relation to demographic events.

Perhaps the most obvious area for research has to do with the impact of education (including all those processes generally encompassed by the terms "socialization" and "enculturation") on beliefs about, and attitudes toward, demographic events and the activities that are instrumental in bringing them about. We might begin with marriage, which has been the focus of much anthropological writing. Thus, the ethnographic literature is replete with statements about beliefs, attitudes, and practices associated with courtship and marriage; in fact, this may well prove to be our strong suit in getting involved in the area of population education. But as we

get closer to the concerns of demographers, particularly those aspects of marriage that most directly affect childbearing, the literature is more spotty. Examples are beliefs about and attitudes toward getting married, living in an unmarried state, age at marriage, remarriage, and, of course, those aspects of role relationships associated with marriage that implicate children. The crucial questions of concern here are not so much what beliefs and attitudes are, but rather how they are formed. When and how does the significant learning take place, and in what context? Of more direct demographic concern are beliefs and attitudes associated with childbearing, including relevant antecedent and consequent conditions. What learning processes structure cognition and emotion associated with sexual intercourse, contraception, prenatal care, abortion, child spacing? At a more general level of concern are such topics as ideal perceptions of family size, composition, and lifestyles. Embedded in these topics are a multitude of specific research issues that cry out for anthropological investigation. What, for example, are parental attitudes toward children at different ages (infancy, early childhood, puberty, and so on), how are these attitudes formed, and what are their impacts on child spacing? What kinds of satisfactions do children provide for parents, and how are these conceptualized and communicated? Likewise with costs, whether these are conceived in economic, social, or personal terms. What goes into socialization for sex preference, whether it be for boys, girls, or some combination? What kinds of learning experiences structure parental aspirations for children, and how are such aspirations reflected in attitudes toward family size and composition? In what way, if any, does the composition of an individual's family of orientation affect his attitude toward the composition of his family of procreation? These are only samplings of specific topics that can benefit from crosscultural research.

Although birth is the demographic event that has been given the most publicity recently in the context of the "population explosion," the other two events in the demographic trilogy, migration and death, also articulate with education in a manner that begs for research. Migration involves such elements as cognitive aspects of spatial perception, especially as it implicates living patterns; attitudes toward land, social relationships, economic opportunities, and other contingencies that strengthen or weaken anchorage to particular places; and concepts of and attitudes toward crowding, as well as reactions to it when it occurs. It also raises questions of

adaptation to new environments and mechanisms for coping. All of these topics have been researched by anthropologists, but as yet little has been done relating educational experiences to migration experiences. Attitudes toward death, particularly as it relates to age and status, are important insofar as they affect attempts to avert it. Thus, ethnographers have noted differential attitudes toward the demise of infants, children, adults, and old folks; between chiefs and commoners. One might assume that this results in differential care for the ailing and differential mortality. What, from a learning standpoint, lies behind such attitudes? From a somewhat different perspective, what perceptions do people form about mortality probabilities for different categories of people, and how are these learned and altered? A related area for research is the formation of attitudes about one's own mortality, and the way people learn to cope with it.

The research topics posed above raise a number of issues that are central to anthropological approaches to education. These include considerations of the degree to which learning is explicit or implicit, the media of communication, the nature of information, the forms by which it is encoded and decoded, and the like. Also of focal concern are the timing and context of education. Sample research topics are: How early are beliefs and attitudes toward demographic events formed and crystallized? Who are the persons, groups, or categories of persons that are most significant in generating these beliefs and attitudes? How congruent are messages from various sources—for example, from parents, peers, and teachers—and which are most influential? What is the role of myth, children's stories, mass media, and others? How fixed are these beliefs and attitudes? Is socialization continuous, discontinuous, sporadic? How is learning during the post-childhood period affected by particular role relationships, for example, between husband and wife? To what extent do parents learn from their children; i.e., how much feedback is there between the presumed socializers and the socialized? Whom do individuals learn to approach for information regarding decisions implicating demographic events?

We should point out at this juncture that two of the most potent variables that account for fertility, migration, and mortality differentials in societies around the world are years of formal education and religion. Yet very little is known about the specific influences these variables have, or to put it differently, [what is their effect] on the mechanisms of influence. Just what is it about formal education that tends to produce a damping effect on fertility? To what degree is educational content relevant? How much is the result of overt learning, how much covert processes? Or is education primarily a surrogate for other variables that have an impact, such as a family value system that encourages formal education? The importance of religion as a variable also raises

questions of causation. The fact that religion does not always have the same impact—Catholicism, for example, is associated with high fertility in some countries, low in others—suggests that theological content by itself does not produce consistent effects. What is called for are studies of religious education in a variety of contexts so that we can better assess the ways that religion affects demographic processes.

B. The demographic context of learning.

Although anthropologists have been more cognizant than many other disciplines of the social ecology of learning, as yet they have paid little explicit attention to the implications of population size, composition, and change on educational processes. If we assume that the social characteristics of individuals available to socialize children, and the number and ratio of socializers to socialized, are important dimensions of education, then clearly we cannot ignore the demographic context of learning. A sharp decrease in infant mortality, for example, may drastically alter family size, particularly the number of siblings that children must relate to, and there is good reason to believe that this has a profound impact on socialization processes. Overall mortality declines, resulting in longer life spans, mean a higher probability of grandparents surviving through greater portions of their grandchildren's childhood, and fewer orphans and half-orphans. To the extent that the death of significant others is an event of some importance—for example, in continuity or discontinuity of learning contexts—changing mortality patterns may have marked effect. Dramatic alternations in fertility and migration patterns may likewise affect the social context of education in a given community. Migration, in particular, may radically alter age and sex ratios in relatively short periods of time and thereby change the composition of socializing units, whether these be households, lineages, or other groupings.

The importance of absolute and relative size of population for education is an additional area requiring study. In what ways, for example, does the absolute size of a community constrain or facilitate educational ventures? One would suspect that the kinds of differentiation that occur in formal institutions of education, allowing for specialized curricula, depend on certain minimum population bases. Likewise, the ratio of population to resources is something that must be taken into account. It is one thing for a population to be expanding in an area with relatively fixed and limited resources, quite another where resources are expanding as well. And we must not fail to note that there are communities where resources have expanded dramatically (perhaps in the form of remittances from out-migrants) while population remained stable or declined. What effects does this have on the willingness of parents and communities to invest in education and educational endeavors?

Two additional areas for research relating demographic variables to the social ecology of learning are population density and adaptation to new environments following migration. The former raises questions about the effects of high density or low density on communication forms, intensity of interaction, and other correlates of spatial arrangements (and changes in them); the latter asks the question of how changes in social and physical ecology alter the contingencies bearing upon socialization. We have in mind here not the need for new learning to cope with new environments, already mentioned above, but the way in which alterations in structural supports for patterns of child rearing and peer socialization implicate educational processes.

From a broader perspective, changing age compositions may render certain educational needs increasingly important. For instance, longer lifespans mean that a higher proportion of people live to old age and that coping with gerontological problems may become more prominent. To the extent that increased social and economic diversification accompanies rapid population growth, training requirements are likely to expand accordingly, possibly generating a multitude of other changes. The ways that communities respond to such educational challenges in various cultural settings should be of considerable interest to anthropologists.

C. Population policy and education.

A third general area for research centers on the interactions between the formation and implementation of population policy and education. There are two sides to this research issue, both of which are worthy of study. The first can be subsumed under the question, "How is population policy translated into educational programs, and what is the impact of those programs on particular populations"? The other side of this issue can be subsumed under the question, "What is the impact of education, including particular kinds of education, on the formation and implementation of policy"?

One of the more obvious means by which population policy is translated into education is through family planning programs, particularly those that contain a strong propaganda component. Although there have been a number of evaluation studies of such attempts to influence a populace, few have been done from an anthropological perspective. What is needed are studies that focus on the communication process in its overall context and on what is learned about social and political relationships as well as what is learned about birth control technology. But research need not be limited to organized efforts to "convert" a population to family planning. In some communities pro-natalist policies prevail, and presumably they also influence the acquisition of beliefs and attitudes toward birth planning. Nor should we limit ourselves to explicit policy and organized attempts to influence fertility behavior;

political ideologies and structures often implicate demographic decisions at a covert level in a profound way. Culling out these implicit messages and their educational impact may prove to be among the more rewarding endeavors in this research area. The effects of policy on what is learned about migration and mortality (in the form of medical practices, or "death control") are equally in need of study, and should not be neglected in the rush to provide family planners with answers to their problems.

The way that education influences policy formation on demographic issues likewise deserves study at both the overt and covert levels. If we were to examine the educational backgrounds (both formal and informal) of policy-makers who have taken strong stands on population issues, what would we find? And if we were to focus on adult socialization, what kinds of messages do policy-makers get about population processes and events, from whom, and to what effect? One of the more challenging criticisms of ethnographic research is that we have focused too heavily on the politically powerless segments of complex societies; this may be an opportunity to examine the processes that shape those with power, and through them, other segments of the society.

II. Anthropological Input into Population Education

There is little doubt that increasing pressure will be put on anthropologists to contribute their expertise to assist applied demographers (including family planners) to implement their programs, and although personal instincts may often be to comply in order to help contain the worldwide population "explosion," our anthropological intuition ought to promote caution. As anthropologists we should recognize that rapid population growth affects many different system levels simultaneously—the individual, family, community, nation, world—and that the consequences for one level may be quite different for another. Likewise, certain segments of a population may benefit from growth while others suffer. The important point is that we ought to avoid dashing to the aid of family planning propagandists, lucrative as that may prove to be, and make our own assessments of relationships between demographic and social, cultural, and psychological variables. Perhaps our main educational input therefore ought to be to communicate an appreciation for the complexity of population processes in their total context; by so doing, we may be able to help stave off some of the excesses that stem from the near religious fervor with which many proponents of population control go about their business. Our assumption in stressing the importance of understanding complexity is that rational decision-making at all levels is likely to be better served through an awareness of how much we do not know than by merely taking into account what we think we know.

Related to this is a concern that input into problem-solving in the population area may involve an over-representation of Western thought and, hence, values—in short, that “rationality” may become identified with the viewpoint of only one segment of mankind. By explicating the logic of alternative systems of thought and value, particularly as these relate to variant ecological conditions, anthropologists can provide representation for viewpoints that would not otherwise be heard. This, we might add, may be as important in our role vis-a-vis non-Western elites, whose rapport with more traditional elements in their societies may leave much to be desired, as with change agents from the West.

There remains the question of a more direct educational role anthropologists might play in relation to “target” populations. This is obviously a value-laden issue and we are reluctant to offer even tentative prescriptions, but it might be worthwhile to consider ways of educating people to assess for themselves the implications of their demographic behavior, individually and collectively, as it relates to their well-being. To do this effectively, of course, would require learning a good deal more about this process than we now know.

We have emphasized population growth and fertility in this section of our report because these topics have generated the most passionate dialogue in recent years, and because it is the focus of so much activity in the developing world. This should not lead us to ignore possible educational input into programs oriented toward migrants, mortality control, and other population processes.

III. Future Prospects

One does not have to accept the doomsday warnings of the neo-Malthusians to recognize that population problems of considerable magnitude are going to be with us—“us” being the human race as a collectivity—for some time to come. The engines of rapid population growth will take time to slow down, and as space and resources become relatively scarcer, issues involving fertility control and population redistribution (migration) will become more intense. New patterns of mortality can also be expected, although the forms they will take are open to speculation and the issues surrounding them are as yet obscure. The point, however, is that although perceptions of population problems may change, the aura of urgency will not likely recede for generations to come. We are therefore not facing a faddish issue, and it seems reasonable to assume that anthropologists will be able to play important roles both as researchers and educators in this area for some time. In accord with this judgment, we believe that the yet nebulous domain outlined here is a fertile (blush!) one, and one that might especially attract the attention of anthropologists interested in education. From a purely pragmatic point of view, this would appear to be an area in which the job market will expand for those with appropriate skills and expertise. It is up to us to show that anthropology has something special to offer, if indeed we do.

**Alan Howard, Chairperson
Ad Hoc Committee**

[Ed. Note: Persons interested in this report are invited to attend a “rap session” in the CAE suite, Hotel Fiesta Palace, Thursday, 21 November, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.]

NIMH FELLOWSHIPS IN ANTHROPOLOGY OF INTEREST TO EDUCATORS

Andrew Miracle (Florida): *Perceptual Patterns and Behavior in Bicultural Environment*

Lynn Ager (Ohio State): *Games in Eskimo Cultures.*

Anne Farber (Columbia): *Social Constraints on Bilingual Usage.*

Gordon Schoepfle (Northwestern): *Behavioral Anthropology in Urban Education.*

Rita Wilhite (Washington): *First Language Acquisition Among Mayan Children.*