

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The division of my bibliography into four sections (Irian Jaya, Research Methods, Literacy, and Hunter-Gatherers) evidences the wide range of issues which a study of mission-sponsored vernacular literacy programs in Irian Jaya involves. This multiplicity of facets is also evident in this chapter where I recommend qualitative approaches to the study of education, review ethnographic monographs on Irian Jaya cultures, and discuss ways to examine the possible roles of outsiders such as missionaries or health care workers in culture change. Since many of the groups in Irian Jaya are semi-nomadic, necessitating some adaptation of education methods evolved under more sedentary conditions, studies of the relationship between environment and educational systems, and of the dynamics of hunting-gathering societies, must also figure in this review. Consideration of adaptation brings with it a range of approaches, from use of folk-religion models, parallels to health care delivery problems, production of indigenous literature to serve as culturally harmonious models, to local involvement in leadership and maintenance of educational systems.

Qualitative Study of Education

First, it is useful to consider the ways that the

ethnographic study of education allows researchers to analyze the social aspects of education. Such a researcher uses the skills of the anthropologist, including participant observation, analysis of local environment, and close attention to details of interaction between people, to reveal the distinctive features of the educational process in that culture. An important emphasis is upon learning the place that education holds in a society, of what uses literacy is in the local context. Smith (1983), Kantor, Kirby and Goetz (1981), and Meggitt (1968) emphasize the importance of viewing education as a integral part of the culture. Smith's comments are directed toward social change in the United States, but the anthropological principles he discusses fit well with the situation in Irian Jaya. My study of Irian Jaya educational settings may provide the kind of comparative analysis Smith recommends, an opportunity to compare "the mandate of American schooling with that of other possible educational arrangements." But it should also help literacy workers in Irian Jaya and in similar settings look for patterns in their own work that should be recommended to others, and should suggest fruitful perspectives to workers who wish to try other alternatives.

Erickson 1986, Glick 1974, Kimball 1987 , Macias 1987

and Spindler and Spindler 1987 also suggest some of the strengths of ethnographic methodology for educational research. Erickson, for example, recommends using the term "qualitative" for a study such as mine, since it does not have as its core a single, sustained ethnography based on a long-term stay in one cultural area. As an interpretive approach, my study pursues interpretation of information in a complex sociological base, not easily reduced to a few numbers. It involves anecdotes, and case studies, and attention to histories and patterns. My study depends, in fact, on the comparison and interconnection of a number of literacy programs within one province of Indonesia, with a view toward ascertaining dominant patterns and common problems. Above all, this approach requires that we pay close attention to context. After all, education, whether in the jungles or grasslands of Irian Jaya, or in France, or in Iowa, is something that is very much contextual. It is very much part of the whole fabric of society. If we were to mistakenly treat education in Irian Jaya as being something that we can hermetically seal away from the rest of society, we would lose some of the most important observations we should make. And if we were to dismiss Irian Jaya educational problems and attempted solutions as belonging only to that place, we would also be poorer.

Irian Jaya Ethnographies

One key element of the successful study of education in an ethnographic context is the accurate and specific depiction of the culture being studied. Irian Jaya, with its nearly 300 languages and its still-critical problems of acculturation, is a strategic location within which to observe a variety of programs designed to introduce literacy to people who until recently had no written language. (And many of these languages still have not been reduced to writing). Some Irian Jaya cultures have been the subjects of previous studies, most notably Heider 1969 and 1979, Peters 1975, Zollner 1977, Naylor 1973, Koch 1967, Trenkenshuh 1970, Zegwaard 1959, O'Brien and Ploeg 1964, and Cook and O'Brien 1980.

Analysis of Mission Activities

Since missionaries are an important part of the dynamic of vernacular literacy programs in Irian Jaya, they also must fall under the scrutiny of the ethnographic eye. Salamone 1977 looks at the traditional conflicts between anthropologists and missionaries, suggesting more middle ground than others have admitted, Lake 1960 analyzes some of the potential controversy in the relationships between missionaries and local political control, Lake 1979 reviews the history of adjustments that

Irian Jaya missionaries have made to isolation, and to the needs for educating their own children (Lake 1978). Some studies by Christian missionaries have evaluated the role of religion in culture change (Hayward 1980) and focused on educational and linguistic problems in a survey of mission tasks in those domains (Bromley 1977). Bromley later (1986) shows the increasing role of indigenous workers, notably in Bible translation. My present study incorporates some of this material as documentation of a long-standing attempt by missions personnel to train local people for such tasks (Appendix G) and as elucidation of the overall milieu in which missions work is carried out.

Literacy and Society in Melanesia

Walker (1987) and Ayamiseba (1987) also examine Irian Jaya literacy. Walker studies the Western Dani language group from a sociolinguistic perspective, extending an education study to the Toli Valley, a geographical area covered in O'Brien and Ploeg in their 1964 study of acculturation dynamics. Ayamiseba is originally from Irian Jaya, (Ph.D. University of California, Berkeley) and is a proponent of change in educational programs in Irian Jaya. He urges use of the local vernacular language in the first two or three years of schooling by the Indonesian government, on the basis that the current system is "not

adapted to the sociocultural context and daily living situations of the pupils in Irian Jaya" (1987).

I concur with Ayamiseba's contention that most Indonesian schooling systems in Irian Jaya may ultimately fail if they do not take into account the ethnic and regional distinctives of the Irian Jaya people. He proposes that vernacular education can be a bridge to the national education system. As will be seen in some of my data, few individuals exist who know both vernacular and national languages well enough to be those bridges to the national program. An urban trend, well-known in developing countries, or a Java-trend, as is the case here, threatens to take away the very linguistic bridges that local school systems, churches and communities need. In many cases, the young learn the national language, and move away to civil or military jobs, leaving their elders in the village with the old language.

Kathryn Miller, an SIL member who is a candidate for the Ph.D. at University of Pennsylvania, is studying Papua New Guinea's national literacy programs, which incorporate vernacular education. (Miller, nd.) While the Papua New Guinea (PNG) situation differs from that of Irian Jaya on the level of infrastructure, history of government-mission cooperation, and official government integration of vernacular literacy programs into the state educational

system, both sides of the island of New Guinea do share such factors as numerous small, isolated language groups (over 700 in PNG), some of which are semi-nomadic, largely missions-guided education, and limited financial resources for supporting technological change. In her study Miller examines the fit between program and practice, based on observations in village and school settings.

The question of how adaptation to local conditions in schooling is approached is handled tentatively in Walker (1987). Here, the introduction, spread, and functions of literacy in the Western Dani areas are examined with reference to such texts on literacy, ethnography and socio-linguistics as Scollon and Scollon (1979), Scribner and Cole (1981), and Heath (1980).

Culture, Religion and Education Among Hunter-Gatherers

Semi-nomadic groups in Irian Jaya raise important questions about the nature of religious and educational practice among hunter-gatherers. Since much of the formal ethnographic work in Irian Jaya, and in Papua New Guinea (PNG), has taken place among the highland agricultural groups, some significant comparisons and contrasts between the two remain to be drawn. One significant study is Trenkenshuh (1970), which contains an explicit comparison

between the Dani and the Asmat, using about twenty criteria. More theoretical examination of the contrasts, as in Hiebert (1982), suggests a fundamental difference in religious categories between hunting-gathering and settlement horticultural groups. This is a development of his 1978 piece which also examined religious categories, but extended these to educational systems as well.

Implicit to such studies as Hiebert and Trenkenshuh is an understanding that religious and literary education subsist within an environmental context as well as a cultural one. Or, more accurately, the ecology is a factor in setting cultural parameters. Awareness of ecological settings in Irian Jaya is an important aspect of any planning of missionary or educational endeavor. Similar observations in Luzon, and Guatemala (Headland 1984, 1985, 1986, Green, Rich and Nesman 1985) suggest some patterns of acculturation within the larger ecological framework.

This present study is an attempt to focus on the time and location restraints placed upon programs by a culture's response to environmental factors and resultant economic and social pressures, similar in some respects to the thinking pursued by Netting 1977, and Posey et. al. 1984, and Sahlins 1968. This current study suggests the need for more attention to the environmental constraints placed upon literacy education in settings like those in

Irian Jaya.

The question of cultural analogies to educational systems as we know them is indeed a broad one. Some PNG examples are given by Stringer (1983; 1984). Zollner (1977) pursues the problem of folk religion models lending themselves to Christian education systems, and finds important clues to their affinity in the similarity of forms in both Christian and vernacular Yali texts. Peters, using a similar approach in his 1975 dissertation, applies the study to the Dani group, and Oosterwaal (1962) examines a north coast lowlands group. Ellenberger (1971) and Bromley (1977) raise several important issues relevant to this problem. Ellenberger views literacy programs as beneficial to local cultures for their provision of opportunity for commerce, for opening doors to further education, especially in community development issues, and for equipping learners for the Indonesian school system. His focus in this article on one letter written in the vernacular, and then a discussion of the social ramifications of this new-found communications tool, are significant aspects of this article.

Perils of Introducing Educational Systems

Another consideration for literacy workers seeking to introduce outside subjects to a culture is raised by Desowitz (1981). Although not about literacy explicitly, his book raises parallel issues as seen in health care problems. A major emphasis is that control of disease is a cultural matter, not just a purely technical medical one. Similarly, and avoiding the disease metaphor for literacy, I hope, education matters are also issues of culture, not just technical operations. Ominously, health programs are seen by Desowitz to have far-reaching social effects. So do the educational programs as I observed them in Irian Jaya. Introducing schooling to an Irian Jaya village that has never had it before will undoubtedly have repercussions, some of them serious. What are the typical ones for these Melanesian cultures? As in Desowitz's medical examples, the introduction of a leader (the health worker, or in our case, the teacher) impinges upon traditional power structures. Worsley, in his classic study of cargo cults, examines some of the power changes that mission activities have brought about in Melanesia, suggesting that

"as in most colonial regions, organized mission activity is a powerful force in Melanesia. Religious proselytization takes place on a vast scale, and the powers possessed by the mission are very extensive, particularly in the fields of education and health. The power in the hands

of missions, consequently, can be compared with that in the hands of the Church in the Middle Ages. Education is almost entirely a mission province. Native understanding of White society, therefore is colored by an education which lays special stress on the religious elements in our own culture." (1968:240)

In my own analysis of the religious elements in Irian Jaya education, I suggest (Chapter 5) that some of their characteristic force in the classroom may be due more to tradition and cultural factors than to high-handed imposition by powerful outsiders. Nonetheless, Worsley's contentions are important to consider, especially as his perspectives help explain the pervasiveness of millenarian movements and similar materialistic tendencies in these groups.

Naylor (1975) examines Irian Jaya development programs, several that were notably unsuccessful. In seeing the failures induced by the ways such programs were introduced, Naylor's observations suggest the importance of more careful investigation of the social fabric before introducing outside structures, schools among them.

Traditional social roles are undoubtedly impacted by education. Studying O'Brien and Ploeg (1964) today with references to the contemporary situation in the Toli Valley provides contrast between historical social roles and present social fabric almost 25 years later. Comparison with Hayward (1980) and with Walker (1987) both

about the same cultural group as O'Brien and Ploeg, shows some significant changes. The question of the role of kinship patterns in semi-nomadic cultures such as the Berik, Iau, Momena, Asmat, and others, can be partly investigated with the help of Service (1974) and of Cook and O'Brien (1980), a text that contains essays by other Irian Jaya specialists such as Pospisil, Ploeg, Bromley, Heider, and Koch.

In addition, the part children play in the social fabric, as impacted by the introduction of education that takes them out of some of these roles some of the time, is comparable to the roles played by literacy and education in Amish culture, as examined in Fishman (1984). Other interrelationships between education, specifically literacy, and culture are seen in Meggitt (1968) and Oxenham (1980).

Irian Jaya literacy programs seem to have many of the problems shared by such educational systems as those discussed in Delgado-Gaitan 1987, Chance 1987, Macias 1987, and Ferguson 1987, though those are each from a different cultural context. Indeed, each of those studies looks partly at the longer range, historical context of the introduction of educational systems to see long range effects.

Ferguson, in particular, dealing as he does with a

hunter-gatherer group, notes the social effects of a mission station becoming a center of economic and educational activity. Though his study must contend with the foreshortening effect of looking now at events and processes that occurred from the 1830's to the 1930's, he makes valuable observations about the importance of accurate and diligent linguistic study:

"A common feature of the introduction of literacy among the Diyari and the Aleut was the role of the missionary-linguist. In each case the missionary was committed to the use of the local language and learned to speak it with considerable fluency. In each case, he produced several books in the language which could be used immediately in the community and wrote a grammar and dictionary as tools for teaching and research." (233)

Ferguson also makes important observations on the uses of example in developing local literacy, and the central role of the translated Bible in sustaining the importance of literacy among both Diyari and Aleut converts to Christianity: "As some Diyari began to accept the Christian religious teaching, however, the reading of Scripture became highly significant." (229) Writing also had important roles as the social context changed:

". . . as some of them began to work as drovers and laborers, both on the mission and on ranches and other sites, they would have found the sending of letters and keeping of simple records valuable for exchange of family and community news and carrying out their work." (229)

Parallels to Mohanti (1971) and Ellenberger (1971)

are clear. And one Diyari literacy project shows some important parallels to the Christian writer program in Karubaga in Irian Jaya (described in Appendix H): "One Diyari speaker, Sam Dintibunna, who attended the mission school in the early 1890s and was literate in Diyari but not in English, was able to write out several myths in Diyari, which were translated and published in the 1930's." (229) In Ferguson's conclusions, however, are some important contrasts to the situations in Irian Jaya: he claims to have found

" . . . no evidence that the missionaries to the Diyari or the Aleut sought to relate literacy in any way to local patterns or local needs. . . . Instead, these missionaries saw literacy as an essential part of the proclamation of the gospel and the establishment of Christian public worship." (233)

Encouragement of Local Texts

The production of indigenous literature is another area of importance in a consideration of Irian Jaya literacy situations. Bernard (1985) describes a program to use electronic typesetting and other means to speed up the preservation of texts to bolster local identity and provide culturally-based materials for literacy training. Similarly, the work of Peggy Wendell has resulted in numerous attempts to design local curricula that preserves local stories and promote their publication and distribution. (Wendell 1982)

Encouraging Indigenous Leadership

Just as the successful village health programs Desowitz describes all had local leadership in common, and ultimately, local initiative, several long-standing Irian Jaya literacy programs (those in the Toli Valley and also in Bokondini) also feature local involvement at the highest levels. Walker's examples corroborate many of the descriptions I brought back from the field. Economic changes as a result of education have long been observed. Ellenberger (1971) and Mohanti (1971) both trace some early evidence for the absorption of some external influences into local economies. More important, of course, is the problem of maintainability of whatever education system is introduced, a concept referred to in mission circles as "appropriate technology." Cultural adaptation to local educational situations is a complex process with roots and branches in a number of aspects of human behavior and historical precedents.