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Kathryn M. Anderson-Levitt

Journal of Social History, Volume 38, Number 4, Summer 2005, pp. 987-1006  
(Article)

Published by Oxford University Press  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jsh.2005.0042>



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## THE SCHOOLYARD GATE: SCHOOLING AND CHILDHOOD IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

By Kathryn M. Anderson-Levitt

University of Michigan-Dearborn

Deux et deux quatre  
quatre et quatre huit  
huit et huit font seize  
Répétez! dit le maître.  
Deux et deux quatre  
quatre et quatre huit  
huit et huit font seize.  
Mais voilà l'oiseau-lyre  
qui passe dans le ciel  
l'enfant le voit  
l'enfant l'entend  
l'enfant l'appelle:  
Sauve-moi  
joue avec moi  
oiseau! . . .

Jacques Prévert<sup>1</sup>

### Wanting Out, Wanting In

The ultimate task here is to ask how schooling as a global phenomenon affects the experiences of children around the world and the cultural construction of childhood. But before I can suggest directions for research on those questions, I must ask whether or in what sense schooling is in fact a global phenomenon. Just as it is inaccurate to conceive of global cognitive effects of “literacy” because literacy is not a single thing in lived experience, so it would be inaccurate to think of schooling as having a single effect on children, for it represents different lived experiences. Still, certain patterns or “grammars of schooling” have persisted over the long term across wide regions.<sup>2</sup> It is the first task of this essay to determine whether we can now discern a particular grammar of schooling that encompasses the whole world. Since I am an ethnographer, let me begin with some concrete images.

In France, a low fence often surrounds urban elementary and pre-elementary schools, and parents turn over their children to teachers at the schoolyard gate. The fence, although not the high chain-link affair that one sees at some urban U.S. schools, functions symbolically to separate the children’s lives in school from their lives at home and in the neighborhood. I begin with a question about the schoolyard gate as a way to launch a reflection on what schooling means for children and for childhood. The question is, is the gate keeping children in or keeping children out?

In a brilliant synthesis of anthropological theory on formal schooling, John D'Amato begins from the premise that, all else being equal, children do not want to be in school. He cites examples of children challenging teachers' authority from North America, Europe, and Japan to support his case.<sup>3</sup> Tom Sawyer eluding the classroom to sneak off to an island in the Mississippi is one image that comes to mind. Another metaphorical image to conjure up is one of schoolchildren clinging to the schoolyard gate (or gazing out the classroom window, as in Prévert's poem above), longing to be free. Indeed, a primary reason for children's resistance, says D'Amato, is that "school is compulsory and otherwise constraining."<sup>4</sup>

Now, continues D'Amato, "if children nonetheless comply with school, then the perceived benefits of school must in some way outweigh the costs."<sup>5</sup> The perceived benefits may be extrinsic, intrinsic, or both. On the extrinsic side, D'Amato notes that most middle-class children as well as working-class children of immigrants recognize that school brings "external rewards for compliance and sanctions for resistance," specifically, that school achievement will probably lead to a decent job and reasonably high social status for them as adults. In contrast, "caste-like" or "involuntary" minorities and lower-class children cannot count on extrinsic rewards; the same applies to children in the low-achieving classrooms in any school. Notably, African American and Native American students tend to believe, with some justification, that school achievement will not necessarily pay off for them because of job ceilings.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, on the side of intrinsic rewards, children may choose to comply with school when they find it "an intrinsically enjoyable process" by virtue of a positive relationship with teacher or peers, a sense of mastery and accomplishment, or (although not mentioned by D'Amato) the joy of learning.<sup>7</sup> If schooling neither promises extrinsic rewards nor offers immediate intrinsic rewards, students will resist schooling and will flee it as soon as they can.

With those thoughts in mind, I went to do fieldwork in the Republic of Guinea. To my naïve eye, schools there seemed even less inviting than D'Amato portrayed them. Benches were hard and crowded, classrooms were hot if not stifling, and almost all teachers indulged in corporal punishment to greater or lesser degree. Indeed, whereas U.S. teachers often talked about making learning "fun," in Guinea I was told, "*Il faut souffrir pour apprendre*" (to learn one must suffer).

Thus my fascination when, on making a first visit to a school in downtown Conakry, I approached the school gate and witnessed a schoolboy—a boy about the age of Tom Sawyer—clinging to the *outside* of the gate, begging to be let in. The director had punished this student for some offence by banishing him from school for the day. A burly man with a "whip" made of a strip of rubber stood at the gate, keeping the boy from entering. Then I recalled that my colleague Ntal Alimasi had explained to me about his own childhood in Zaïre that students wanted to be in school and certainly preferred school to being home, where they would have to do chores. That is why the big punishment was to be "*bâni*" (banished), turned away from school.<sup>8</sup>

One can also find a similar disjuncture in views of schooling between the global North and South in the research literature. Since the days when functionalism lost favor, much educational literature in Europe and North America has cast schooling as a repressive arm of the state. However, you will rarely find

an African intellectual making such an argument, and scholars in Latin America have pointed out that the most repressive regimes there had dismembered, not embraced, state schools, while local populations were appropriating rather than resisting schools. In Mexico, for example, public schools can be seen, at least for those children who manage to get in and stay in, as a liberating force that offers a relatively equalizing experience to the nation's children in the context of strong gender, class, and ethnic distinctions outside of school.<sup>9</sup> In Guinea, where primary schooling still reaches only about half the country's children, parents mobilize to build schools in the hope of enticing the state to send a teacher to their village. I saw parents petitioning a school director to ignore the official limit of 50 children in a first grade and let their child enroll.

Here are two contrasting images of schools, then: Children clinging to the gate wanting *out* in the global North, children clinging to the gate wanting *in* in the global South. The contrast implies that schooling does not mean the same thing everywhere, nor do children experience it in the same way around the world. Indeed, I will argue that Ministries of Education, teachers, and parents appropriate schooling in ways that make the lived experience different from country to country and, in fact, from school to school. The biggest differences will be found when contrasting schools in the most and the least affluent countries.

Nonetheless. Nonetheless. I will also argue that schooling, in spite of the great variation in its embodiment in different places, really can be said to be a global phenomenon. I will make this argument first in a simple-minded way, by pointing out how schooling has spread almost to every corner of the earth. A quick tour of world culture theory (neo-institutionalism) will offer a non-functional explanation of why that spread took place. Then I will return to D'Amato's synthesis to suggest that his argument may after all apply to schools in the South as well as the North. That argument will require us to consider functions of schooling, particularly the infamous sorting function.

Having better established what schooling is as a global phenomenon, I will then turn to two questions about which I can offer speculation more than a body of research. These are, first, how global schooling affects children's lived experiences; here I will argue that schooling has brought parallel kinds of sorting to all countries, assigning life chances to children based on childhood achievement. Second, I will ask how schooling affects the cultural construction of childhood; here I will argue that the particular way in which we do schooling at present leads us to categorize children by micro-age-grades and by newly defined individual traits like "maturity" and "intelligence."

### Education and Schooling

From an anthropologist's perspective, "education" means much more than schooling. In its broadest sense, education means the entire learning experience of children or other novices, whether provided deliberately or more haphazardly within the culture.<sup>10</sup> In a narrower but still anthropological sense, education (or "formal education") means deliberate intervention intended to affect the learning experience of children or other novices through "formal, predictable, stereotypic learning experiences."<sup>11</sup> Formal education includes such

practices as apprenticeship, initiation, and lectures, sermons and scolding as well as schooling.<sup>12</sup> Schooling, in frequent contrast to initiation and to apprenticeship, is formal education usually carried out in a place separated from ordinary life and conducted by an expert “stranger.”<sup>13</sup>

This essay concerns schooling. In particular, it concerns schooling of the current “Western” mode as opposed to older forms such as Mandarin examination-based education or Brahmin apprenticeships, or alternative contemporary forms such as Quranic schools.<sup>14</sup> More specifically yet, this essay refers to primary schooling, the years of basic education in literacy and other foundational skills and knowledge, except where I make specific reference either to pre-elementary education or to secondary or postsecondary education.

The focus on primary schooling means that this essay concerns children whose chronological ages range from about 5 to about 13 years of age. In most nations, basic schooling is now mandated by law,<sup>15</sup> and begins officially at age 5, 6 or 7, depending on the country (the average being 6 on most continents and 6.5 in Africa). Comparative data sets usually assume a primary schooling cycle of 6 years in length (although primary schooling in the United States commonly lasted 8 years until the emergence of junior high schools and middle schools).<sup>16</sup> However, in many countries children may enter earlier and often enter later than the specified age; they may also drop out much sooner than legally permitted, and sometimes linger in primary school far beyond the standard age. Thus the children I observed in primary schools in Guinea, which covered six years of instruction, ranged in age from 5 to about 15.

For reasons that will become clear below, I focus on the historical period since primary schooling became a mass rather than an elite phenomenon, beginning in the 19th century in Europe and North America, and beginning in the mid-20th century in the rest of the world.<sup>17</sup>

## Globalization and Global History

“Globalization as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole,” says Roland Robertson.<sup>18</sup> “Compression” is a label for the accelerating growth in the 20th century of connections among people around the world. Human beings have migrated and traded from the beginning of the species,<sup>19</sup> but there seems to have been a sharp recent increase in the number of migrants, the volume of traded goods and the distances of typical trades, the accessibility of instant communication (accelerating since the invention of the telegraph), and the speed of travel.<sup>20</sup> Among the most important connections are those of economic interdependency, and thus globalization is often defined in terms of the spread of a capitalist world system.<sup>21</sup> However, the accelerating connections include the flow of ideas as well. Thus globalization is a word for the fact that one of my 45-year-old colleagues in Guinea liked to listen to Bob Dylan, Céline Dion, and Michael Jackson, while I like to listen to Orchestra Baobab. It is a word for the experience of hearing a child in an elementary school courtyard in a provincial town in Guinea singing the Macarena in 1998.

Robertson’s reference to globalization as an intensification of consciousness of

the world as a whole defines globalization as a mindset or ideology. This mindset has been attributed to the experience of seeing photographs of the world taken from space, but the consciousness actually developed much earlier.<sup>22</sup> The sense of globalization as consciousness is related to the concept of globalization that I find most useful: world culture theory or neo-institutionalism.<sup>23</sup> World culture theorists argue that a single global model of schooling has spread around the world as part of the diffusion of a more general cultural model of the modern nation-state, a model that also includes templates for organizing government, health systems, the military, and other institutions.<sup>24</sup>

Importantly, Peter Stearns reminds us in the Conclusion to this issue that globalization must mean more than simply modernization. Globalization is not just about the diffusion of modern model of the state and its schools, but about a point at which people came to believe that the model must inevitably diffuse to every corner of the world. World culture theorists imply that that moment came in the history of schooling by the 1950s.

“Globalization” does not always mean Westernization. Food, manufactured goods, high art and popular culture flow South to North as well as North to South.<sup>25</sup> However, the world culture as described by world culture theorists does have Western roots;<sup>26</sup> indeed, these theorists see much of its foundation in “the distinctive culture of Western Christendom.”<sup>27</sup> Importantly, “Western” is not synonymous with “North American.” Indeed, from the world culture perspective, international organizations have played a major role in diffusing world culture since the 1950s. Moreover, the West is hardly a monolith; it is rife with contradictions and competing ideas.<sup>28</sup>

To say that there is a world culture—a set of learned norms and vocabulary and half-formed know-how shared around the world—is not by any means to say that the world is homogenized. It is not to say that there is only one culture in the world. Rather, it is to say that in addition to all the national and ethnic and occupational and religious and other cultures in the world, humans have now invented a world culture that provides models and norms for certain parts of life: military systems, national governments, schooling, hospital systems. The world culture rubs elbows with, influences and is influenced by a myriad of other cultures.

### The Diffusion of Modern Schooling

The idea of modern schooling has indeed spread to the entire globe, and Western-style schools can be found everywhere now. They co-exist with other systems of formal education such as Quranic schools and have displaced alternative school systems such as those that used to exist in China and Japan.<sup>29</sup> Virtually 100 percent of children of the appropriate age range attend primary school in Canada, Sweden, the United States, and other nations of the North.<sup>30</sup> By the late 1990s, 87.6 percent of the entire world’s children of the relevant age group were attending primary school, and between 40 and 100 percent reached grade 5 in reporting countries.<sup>31</sup> Even secondary schools have become systems of “mass” rather than elite instruction in the world and of nearly “universal” instruction in the North.<sup>32</sup> Postsecondary education is also becoming a “mass” system in the North.

According to world culture theorists, the diffusion took place in three phases. From early in the 18th century through the 1870s, the core countries of the global North established national schooling and achieved almost universal education.<sup>33</sup> In the second phase, from the 1870s through World War II, other countries and colonies gradually “entered the system,” beginning to keep track of their small but growing population of schooled children. Then, starting in the 1950s, the spread of mass educational systems accelerated rapidly. By that point, “there seems to have been much less resistance to, or fewer alternatives to, mass education expansion.”<sup>34</sup> The first phase may be labeled “modernization” rather than “globalization.” However, a sense of “global inevitability” had developed by the 1950s if not, incipiently, during the second period. Hence, even though the world is significantly more schooled since the 1970s (with rates per continent of 75 percent or higher) than it was in the prior two decades (continental rates of 40 percent or higher), the critical change dates from the 1950s if not earlier.

Not only has the idea of schooling spread across the globe but, argue world culture theorists, schooling all over the world takes the same general form.<sup>35</sup> Schools everywhere are mass, co-educational institutions ostensibly designed to encourage economic growth, development of the nation and, sometimes, development of the individual student. School systems tend to be administered by national ministries of education, although the United States is an exception. The outlines of a common global elementary curriculum can be discerned.<sup>36</sup> Schools tend to consist of age-graded “egg-carton” classrooms (one teacher per group of 15–100 students), and whole-class lecture and recitation paired with seatwork tends to dominate.<sup>37</sup> Some see even more convergence—for example, on a 6-year elementary, 3-year middle school, and 3-year secondary pattern, or on the ideal of child as active learner.<sup>38</sup>

### Differences in Schooling around the World

However, what has really spread around the world? Do countries have in common anything more than a paper policy? Is schooling really universal enough and uniform enough that it might be said to have created a new “common circumstance” for children everywhere?<sup>39</sup>

First, we realize that just because most countries demand 6 to 10 years of schooling does not mean that all children comply. The rate of school attendance is only 60.4 percent in the least developed countries, and as low as 24 percent in Niger, 19 percent in Haiti, and 13 percent in Bhutan.<sup>40</sup> Among those who attend school, some spend 20 years or more and some only a year or two or even a few months. Moreover, there is great variation in enrollment between boys and girls and between urban and rural residents in many countries, as there are differences in years of schooling attained across social classes in every country.

Second, the material conditions of schools North and South vary drastically. For example, every school in France and many individual classrooms in the United States have computers, whereas schools in the Republic of Guinea would be lucky to have as many as one book (of any kind, whether reader, mathematics textbook, or storybook) per child. Schooling in Japan takes place in sturdy

and functional buildings; in some parts of the world it takes place in a hot room under a leaking roof, or in no building at all.

Moreover, as we saw, children in the South tend to want *in* whereas children in the North, if D'Amato is right, tend to want *out*. This difference derives from other differences in the experience of childhood. Where would the children be when or if they were not in school? In the North, they would be swimming, roaming the wilderness, playing video games, or otherwise skylarking—or so Mark Twain implies. In Guinea, as my colleague Alimasi hinted, unschooled girls would be selling products in the marketplace in the city or cultivating a field in a rural area; unschooled boys might be shining shoes in the city or climbing palm trees to collect palm oil nuts in the countryside. In other parts of the South, children work in manufacturing, care for their siblings, or otherwise contribute in cash or non-cash labor to the family economy.<sup>41</sup> Schooling in the South, then, can be seen as liberating in both intellectual and physical terms. It “liberates” children’s minds from the “bonds” of illiteracy—or, less cynically, it really does open up a global network of ideas to students by training them in a world language and by providing at least hints about how to learn more. But schooling also liberates them, at least for the hours spent on its benches, from physical labor.

Beyond these gross differences, which are rooted partly in the difference between affluence and poverty, schools differ because of national cultural differences. For example, student-teacher ratios differ between Japan and the United States not for financial reasons, but because of underlying differences in pedagogical philosophy.<sup>42</sup> The language of instruction may be a child’s home language, another language spoken in the community, a national language unfamiliar to some or all of the children when they enter school, or a completely alien world language like English or French. And as R.J. Alexander has lovingly documented, national traditions influence teachers’ philosophies and thus the shape and flow of a “lesson.”<sup>43</sup>

Moreover, at the local level teachers and parents and children themselves may appropriate the forms and activities of schooling to suit local meanings, as in Pulpap, or in rural Mexico of the 1920s.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, national and local cultures are so powerful that many ethnographers argue that schools are not really alike at all around the world, whatever superficial parallels one may find in their official organization or official curricula.<sup>45</sup> There are also differences from one school to another in the same country, from one classroom to another within the same school, and even from one class to another when holding the teacher constant.<sup>46</sup>

What has spread around the world, then, is nothing but a shell. The lived experiences of teachers and students and the meanings of those experiences are not the same.

### How Might Global Schooling Shape Childhood Experiences?

Yet, however thin the shell of global schooling compared to its rich local cultural content, I argue that global schooling nonetheless must have an impact on childhood experiences and on notions of childhood. In this section and the next, I propose what kind of impact that may be. Although I draw on my own



and others' research, my ideas here are untested—they call for verification by other comparative researchers. The rest of this article, then, is a program for further research.

### *Learning*

The ostensible purpose of schooling is to help children learn. Schooling exposes children to literacy in a national or world language, and as rates of schooling go up, official literacy rates follow. Some scholars argue that “a minimum of six years of primary schooling is necessary” in order “to ensure irreversible adult literacy,”<sup>47</sup> and we have noted that not all children stay for six years. Nonetheless, shorter exposure to school must have other impacts.

Certainly, even brief schooling makes new ideas available to children as learners. Schooling usually exposes children to a national or world language, even in countries where schooling begins in a local language. In Guinea, for example, children learn two or three local languages at home and on the street, but they learn French at school. In many countries, a world language is an important passport to urban jobs from the civil service to driving a taxi. Moreover, exposure to the idea of books, even if books are not readily available in the classroom, introduces children to new definitions of authoritative knowledge that may differ from that learned in the extended family, in Quranic School, or in other settings. For example, the ideology of school knowledge in West Africa as free and available contrasts with local traditional ideas that important knowledge is secret and reserved for the few.<sup>48</sup>

As world culture theorists argue, schooling also exposes children to a certain conception of themselves as individual citizens of a nation.<sup>49</sup> Thus in Guinea children learn that, whatever their linguistic and religious ties to local groups and to groups that transcend West Africa, they belong to the nation of Guinea with its peculiar geography, political structure, and post-independence history. The same children learn, too, about the wider world that they have not seen (although they may well visit it some day). In the inland Forest region of Guinea, children memorize that “an ocean is a vast expanse of salt water,” and they copy maps of U.S. geography into their notebooks.

Meanwhile, time spent in school is time taken away from traditional childhood tasks, which means loss of opportunity for other kinds of learning. For example, as children in the Amazon basin in Ecuador increasingly participate in Western-style schooling provided by North American missionaries, they have less time and opportunity to learn to chant, make tools, hunt, and gather.<sup>50</sup>

### *New Niches for Child Development*

Schooling also shapes the contexts in which children develop and learn. According to Beatrice and John Whiting's extensive research on childhood across the globe, the age and the sex of the people with whom a child interacts are among the most powerful influences on a child's developing personality.<sup>51</sup> I cannot comment on the sex of schoolteachers as child caretakers, for there is no fixed world pattern for the sex of elementary schoolteachers, who are more likely to be female in the North but may be male or female in the South. I

can comment on the sex of children's playmates and classmates. In some societies, such as traditional Navajo society, children tend to cluster or may even be pressed into same-sex playgroups.<sup>52</sup> Yet almost universally, elementary schools are co-educational. Even in countries where female seclusion is important, such as Pakistan, separate girls' schools have apparently not been common, at least not until very recently.<sup>53</sup> Schooling has thus shifted girls and boys in many parts of the world from a gender-segregated to a gender-mixed world. Granted, the effect must depend on local gender practices and gender ideologies, but it is the global imposition of co-education that raises the question in the first place.

Regarding the age of caretakers, there is great variation in world socialization patterns, from child nurses to care by grandparents. The Whitings found that children reared largely in child peer groups tended to be more nurturing and less independent-minded, while children who spent much of their time with adults tended to be more independent but less nurturing. Schooling places children in a room with 15–100 children and 1–2 adults for several hours a day, often for several years. For children who would otherwise have been reared in the adult-centered environment typical of industrial societies, schooling increases exposure to child peers. For children from societies that encouraged sibling care (as do many pastoral and horticultural people in rural areas of the world), schooling may expand dependency on adult supervisors.

The precise impact of the classroom age structure also must depend on the actual child-to-adult ratio and the teachers' philosophy about it. Thus Japanese preschool teachers reported that a ratio of 40 children per adult teacher was a good thing because it allowed children to interact without adult intervention, whereas a ratio of about 8 to 1 is required by law in U.S. preschools.<sup>54</sup>

Schooling also affects age grading, overriding biological definitions of childhood stages even more forcefully than other cultural interventions. Schooling has expanded well into the reproductive years, to the point that girls' school achievement depends in some countries on their success in avoiding pregnancy.<sup>55</sup> Extended schooling can delay the age of social adulthood by as much as a decade for those who go to graduate school.<sup>56</sup> Schooling also reaches back before what human growth scholars call the "juvenile" stage (that is, before the age of about 7), incorporating children too young to fend for themselves into an organization composed of "strangers" rather than kin.<sup>57</sup>

#### *Sorting Children into Adult Statuses*

Another function of schooling everywhere is to sort children into the statuses they will hold as adults. Western schooling came to function as the key credentialing system in Germany beginning in the 18th century, then in the United States and Japan in the 19th and early 20th century, and in the rest of the world by the mid-20th century.<sup>58</sup> Schools became the mechanism—or at least the officially recognized mechanism—for social reproduction and social mobility ("success"). Granted, children still tend to inherit their parents' social statuses, for academic achievement correlates with race and social class of origin. However, the children of the elite now have to inherit via the mechanism of academic selection, or at least appear to do so. The child from a high status fam-

ily will not automatically succeed, and the child living in difficult circumstances has at least a slim chance of succeeding.

Western schooling crowds out other forms of formal education like initiation rituals that were designed to bring an entire age group to the same level rather than to weed out students.<sup>59</sup> Western-style schooling also has supplanted or is supplanting other systems for reproducing social statuses, and not just the system of direct inheritance of wealth. Some societies provided a mechanism for mobility through competition in a realm such as entrepreneurship (as in the United States even, to a limited extent, today) or through the military. Some societies—notably Mandarin China—relied on their own non-Western educational systems to train and even to identify the ruling classes.<sup>60</sup> However, the establishment of Western-style schooling in all of these societies has displaced other systems of credentialing.<sup>61</sup> Now the child's future fate depends at least in part on effort made and success achieved in school.<sup>62</sup> Thus, schooling dangles external rewards, not just in the North but throughout the world.

It follows that D'Amato's synthesis, with which I began this essay, may apply to the global South after all. In the North, there are two different categories of students operating in a stratified society where status is controlled by access to university, especially to high-status universities. Caste-like minorities and lower-class students are required to attend school but question that they will gain access to the university and its rewards; hence some of them resist from within. On the other hand, for children in Guinea and in other countries where schooling is not yet universal, future status is determined, first, by who gets into school at all. Therefore, relatively speaking, all the children in Guinean schools are in the position of the voluntary immigrants' children in the United States.<sup>63</sup> Although they face hardships and inequities, they can see a reward for those who manage to enter and continue in school analogous to the reward in the North for students who manage to complete university studies. Therefore, whatever intrinsic joy in schooling they may find—and some do find it—children in the global South have strong *extrinsic* motivation to stay in school and to succeed. They are ready to put up with long walks to school with long hours on hard benches in hot classrooms, sometimes without breakfast, and with corporal punishment for the reward they hope school will bring.<sup>64</sup> By D'Amato's logic, all students in the South, like immigrant students in the North, bend to school's tyranny for strong instrumental reasons.

### How Might Global Schooling Shape Cultural Conceptions of the Child?

I suggest that schooling as we have currently organized it also shapes everyday and scientific conceptions of childhood.<sup>65</sup> To begin, schools encourage us to focus attention on traits of the individual child to explain performance in school. This is not surprising given that we depend on schools to evaluate children as individuals and to sort them accordingly. The tendency to focus on the child's traits rather than the teacher's performance is exacerbated to the extent that egg-carton schooling makes it difficult to compare teachers and hence lets the teacher slip into the background as the taken-for-granted and seemingly constant element in a classroom of varied children.<sup>66</sup> (Note however that certain systems of teacher mentoring, as in China and Japan and some training experi-

ences I witnessed in Guinea, encourage teachers to compare themselves to their peers and hence to notice their own effect as well as student traits as explanations of student learning.)

Much of the talk about children's traits focuses around the world on the child's effort and motivation. At least, it was certainly the case the teachers punished children for failing to make an effort in Guinea. Meanwhile, studies of teachers' beliefs in the United States, Belgium, Germany, and France identified "effort" as a salient category when teachers explained students' performances.<sup>67</sup>

In Europe and North America, teachers also explain a child's performance with the curious concept of "maturity." Maturity, in the school context, can be thought of as a child's mental age. For example, one teacher who took the notion of maturity particularly seriously told me, "Sébastien [age 6] was tested by the psychologist, who found that, as far as reading and math go, he has the age—that is, the level—of 5 years 3 months to 5 years 6 months, so he cannot learn to read." I suggest that this notion of "maturity" developed in response to structural features of schooling in the North. First, given the function of the school to sort, we evaluate children as individuals. Second, we have organized the curriculum in the form of a linear, graded set of stages.<sup>68</sup> A linear, graded curriculum makes it easy to judge individual children against one another according to their progress through the expected stages. Schooling comes to resemble a race. Third, where there is a compulsory starting age for school, we tend to associate progress through the stages with the typical or average age at which children reach each stage. Given those three conditions, what is more "natural"—albeit culturally constructed—to speak of a child as a "year behind" or "six months ahead" of his or her peers?

Teachers in Europe, the United States, and elsewhere also talk about the child's intelligence. Apparently every society has a notion of intelligence or competence by which people, including children, can be judged.<sup>69</sup> Cultural notions of intelligence vary—being associated, for example, with quickness in some societies but with slow deliberation in others.<sup>70</sup> However, I suggest that the notion of academic intelligence as we now understand it in the United States is another concept that derived from the advent of compulsory schooling.<sup>71</sup> Alfred Binet designed early tests to measure intelligence with reference to children's school performances. Binet interpreted his measure of performance as "mental age," the rough equivalent of the concept of maturity discussed above.<sup>72</sup> It follows that the concept of academic intelligence derived from the same features of schooling—evaluation of individual children, linear graded instruction, and a compulsory starting age—as the concept of maturity. The concepts did not emerge from pure psychological research; rather, psychologists who refined these concepts (Jean Piaget as well as Binet) first developed the concept in response to problems posed by mass compulsory schooling.<sup>73</sup>

Another trait that teachers often cite in first-grade classrooms in France and the United States is the child's age, measured in months. For instance, a teacher in France said of a child, "She's old; she was born in January," just as teachers in the United States have been heard to say, "He's a January child" or "He's an August birthday."<sup>74</sup> All else being equal, teachers expected older children to perform better. Taken in global perspective, this focus on pinpoint chronological age is an astounding new development. Kapsiki parents in Kenya measured

childhood not in months but in chunks of time that span years. They divided childhood into only three stages, as did Ifaluk parents on the other side of the world, while Marquesans did not differentiate among “kids” at all until the sexually active stage.<sup>75</sup> Western Europeans themselves only gradually broke childhood into stages during the 16th and 17th centuries and, even when they did, age grades mattered little in some rural areas until well into the 20th century.<sup>76</sup> Yet teachers in France and the United States have created micro-age stages—in societies where human beings live longer and are schooled longer than ever before.<sup>77</sup>

I suggest that the focus on age is encouraged by the same features of schooling that lead us to focus on maturity and intelligence, plus one additional feature—a fixed start date for the school year. As a result of the fixed day for school entry (in early September in France, for example), new first graders do not begin the race at *exactly* the same age. The legal school-entry age in France, for example, actually ranges from 5 years 9 months to 6 years 9 months.<sup>78</sup> It is true that 12 months represents a large portion of a first grader’s life. Yet consider how, in the context of the 4-year range of school-starting ages of the 17th century, a 12-month range would have appeared negligible.

My arguments about age and maturity do not apply for children in those parts of the global South where starting age, even if set by compulsory schooling legislation, remains fluid in practice. No one would expect teachers to measure student ages in months when their first graders still range in age, as they do in Guinea, from five to ten years old. It should also follow that the concepts of maturity and of intelligence in the sense of “mental age” would not offer themselves as readily to teachers in those countries. Here is a testable hypothesis: where schooling becomes completely universal and more strictly linked to age, as in the North, expect more talk about age, maturity and academic intelligence, not simply because these concepts diffuse from North American and European academia, but because of the real circumstances in which teachers find themselves evaluating children and explaining their performances. Indeed, we should be able to test this hypothesis already, for example, by comparing teacher talk in Latin America, where participation rates are high, with teacher talk in sub-Saharan Africa or the Indian subcontinent, where participation rates are lower.

## Conclusion

In summary, schooling as a common shell, albeit practiced very differently on the ground, has spread around the globe. Almost everywhere children participate in it for at least a few months if not a few years.

The spread of Western-style schooling means that children growing up around the globe have a more uniform experience of socialization than in the past. That is because, varied as it is, schooling is a more uniform experience than family socialization, which has taken several different forms. In spite of local and national variability, classroom experience has roughly a single structure.<sup>79</sup> It may also be more uniform than children’s work experiences, if you compare shoe shining in the streets of Conakry to caring for siblings to making carpets in Afghanistan. Perhaps it is more uniform than apprenticeships (how many children learn through apprenticeships today?). It may or may not be more uniform

than exposure to pop music and television, but we know that children learn more from face-to-face exposure than from television, at least when it comes to learning language. If not more uniform than early induction into the military, schooling is, mercifully, the more common experience.

Schooling has partially displaced other socialization patterns, including sibling care, gender segregation, and the learning of local knowledge through formal or informal apprenticeship to elders. It has brought new kinds of age grading, including micro-age-grading of the early years, and new conceptions of intelligence and maturity. Because of school's sorting function, the performance of young children will determine their future (and perhaps that of their family)—in contrast, for instance, to situations where success depends on events in adolescence or young adulthood, such as making a good match or on starting out one's farm or business well. By sorting, schooling blocks the mobility of many in the North, contrary to its alleged purpose. However, schooling probably sorts more fairly than many other systems in stratified societies—caste, rank, or wealth. As scholars from the South remind us, it promises mobility as well as intellectual liberation, and it sometimes makes good on its promise.

*Department of Behavioral Sciences  
University of Michigan, Dearborn  
Dearborn, MI 48128-1491*

## ENDNOTES

Acknowledgments. Research in Guinea that influenced my thinking about these questions was generously funded by the Spencer Foundation, and made possible by the participation of Guinea's Ministry of Education and its Institut National de Recherche et d'Action Pédagogique. Earlier research in France was supported by the University of Michigan, the University of Michigan-Dearborn, the National Science Foundation, the National Institute for Mental Health, and the Council for European Studies. I am grateful to Peter Stearns for the invitation to participate in this conversation, and to the participants for their insights and suggestions, particularly Wolf Schäfer, Peter Stearns, Elizabeth Kuznesof, Brian Platt, and Bruce Mazlish. Nils Kauffman and other students in Lynn Paine's Winter 2004 Comparative Education course at Michigan State University also helped shape the argument.

1. Two and two four/ four and four eight/ eight and eight are sixteen/ Repeat! says the teacher/ Two and two four/ four and four eight/ eight and eight are sixteen./ But there the lyre-bird/ passes by in the sky/ the child sees it/the child hears it/ the child calls to it:/ Take me away/ play with me/ bird! . . . "Page d'écriture" in *Paroles*, Paris: Gallimard, 1972, 145, my translation.
2. Elsie Rockwell, "Recovering History in the Study of Schooling: From Longue Durée to Everyday Co-Construction," *Human Development* 42 (1999): 113–128, p. 125.
3. John D'Amato, "Resistance and Compliance in Minority Classrooms," in *Minority Education: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Evelyn Jacob and Cathie Jordan (Norwood, NJ, 1993).

4. D'Amato, 188. He also cites as reasons for resistance the "contentious" nature of instructional interaction, which requires students to compete in publicly evaluated displays of knowledge, and the fact that students are taught in groups, so that resistance can become a group norm.
5. D'Amato, 189.
6. D'Amato, 191. The point about involuntary minorities builds on John Ogbu's theory; see, for example, John U. Ogbu, *Minority Education and Caste: The American System in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New York, 1978); John U. Ogbu and Herbert D. Simons, "Voluntary and Involuntary Minorities: A Cultural-Ecological Theory of School Performance with Some Implications for Education," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 29 (1998): 155–188. Recent evidence of the persistence of job ceilings comes from Marianne Bertrand and Senhil Mullainathan, "Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination," National Bureau of Economic Research, available at <http://www.nber.org/papers/W9873.pdf> 2003. Ogbu's theory is very influential, although it has been challenged in the case of gender (Roslyn Arlin Mickelson, "Why Does Jane Read and Write So Well? The Anomaly of Women's Achievement," *Sociology of Education* 62 [1989]: 47–63), and in the case of some European countries (Margaret A. Gibson, "Complicating the Immigrant/Involuntary Minority Typology," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 28 [1998]: 431–454).
7. D'Amato, 191. The value of culturally relevant pedagogy, in this context, is that it increases intrinsic rewards by according more respect to students and thus making the classroom more appealing.
8. Granted, there were exceptions; I encountered an urban schools that held no recess for its afternoon session on the grounds that many children would have gone home and not come back during that hottest part of the day.
9. Elsie Rockwell, "Ethnography and the Commitment to Public Schooling: A Review of Research at the DIE," in *Educational Qualitative Research in Latin America: The Struggle for a New Paradigm*, ed. Gary Anderson and Martha Montero-Sieburth (New York, 1998).
10. For example Margaret Mead, "The Education of the Samoan Child," chapter 3 in *Coming of Age in Samoa* (New York, 1928).
11. Yehudi A. Cohen, "The Shaping of Men's Minds: Adaptations to Imperatives of Culture," in *Schooling the Symbolic Animal: Social and Cultural Dimensions of Education*, ed. Bradley A. U. Levinson and others (Lanham, MD, 2000), 86.
12. Jules Henry, "A Cross-Cultural Outline of Education," in *Educational Patterns and Cultural Configurations: The Anthropology of Education*, ed. Joan I. Roberts and Sherrie K. Akinsanya (New York, 1976).
13. Cohen.
14. See Randall Collins, "Comparative and Historical Patterns of Education," in *Handbook of the Sociology of Education*, ed. Maureen T. Hallinan (New York, 2000).
15. By 1990, even in sub-Saharan Africa, which has the lowest rate of Western-style schooling, nearly 60 percent of countries had passed a compulsory school law (John Boli

and Francisco O. Ramirez, "Compulsory Schooling in the Western Cultural Context," in *Emergent Issues in Education: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Robert F. Arnove, Philip G. Altbach, and Gail P. Kelly [Albany, 1992]).

16. "Children" are released from school (whether primary or secondary) at 16 in the United States and Canada, and at ages varying from 15 to 18 in Europe, from 12 to 16 in Central America, and in Asia at ages varying from 10 in Bangladesh to 17 in Japan. The length of compulsory schooling, which may include secondary schooling, ranges from 5 years in some Asian countries to 13 years in the Netherlands. Table 394, Selected Statistics for Countries with Populations over 10 Million, by Continent, "International Comparisons of Education," National Center for Educational Statistics, 2000, available at [http://nces.edu.gov/programs/digest/d02/tables/PDF/table 394.pdf](http://nces.edu.gov/programs/digest/d02/tables/PDF/table%20394.pdf), downloaded 2/14/04.

17. Martin Trow defines "mass" participation, as opposed to elite participation, as enrollment of more than 15 percent of an age cohort. We are, however, especially interested in levels of enrollment he labels somewhat misleadingly as "universal participation," that is, greater than 50 percent of an age cohort; Martin Trow, "From Mass Higher Education to Universal Access: The American Advantage," in *In Defense of American Higher Education*, ed. Philip G. Altbach, Patricia J. Gumpert, and Robert O. Berdahl (Baltimore, 2001).

18. Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (Thousand Oaks, CA, 1992), 9.

19. Jerry H. Bentley, *Old World Encounters: Cross-Cultural Contacts and Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times* (New York, 1993).

20. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, 1997).

21. Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Rise and the Future Demise of the Modern World System," in *The Globalization Reader*, ed. Frank Lechner and John Boli (Malden, MA, 2000).

22. In response to the first Ptolemaic map in Europe in 1400, according to David Harvey as cited by Bruce Mazlish, "An Introduction to Global History," in *Conceptualizing Global History*, ed. Bruce Mazlish and Ralph Buultjens (Boulder, CO, 1993), 17. The notion that the "sun never sets on the British empire" evokes an image of the whole world at once, as does the account of the global voyage of the Pequod with its international crew in *Moby Dick*.

23. The label "world culture" comes from Francisco O. Ramirez, Yasemin Soysal, and Suzanne Shanahan, "The Changing Logic of Political Citizenship: Cross-National Acquisition of Women's Suffrage Rights, 1890 to 1990," *American Sociological Review* 62 (1997): 735-745), and from John Boli and George M. Thomas, eds. *Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations since 1875* (Stanford, CA, 1999). Other authors refer to the ideas of John W. Meyer and his colleagues variously as "institutional theory" (Nitza Berkovitch, *From Motherhood To Citizenship: Women's Rights and International Organizations* [Baltimore, 1999], 7); as "institutionalism" (Martha Finnemore, "Norms, Culture, and World Politics: Insights from Sociology's Institutionalism," *International Organization* 50 ([1996]: 325-47); "neo-institutionalism" (Benjamin Levin, *Reforming Education: From Origins to Outcomes* [New York, 2001]); as "global rationalization" (Scott Davies and Neil Guppy, "Globalization and Educational Reforms in Anglo-American Democracies," *Comparative Education Review*, 41 ([1997]: 435-459); and,



somewhat misleadingly, as “world systems theory” (W. K. Cummings, “The InstitutionS [sic] of Education: Compare! Compare! Compare!” *Comparative Education Review* 43 ([1999]: 413–37).

24. John W. Meyer, John Boli, George M. Thomas, and Francisco O. Ramirez, “World-Society and the Nation-State,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 103 (1997): 144–181, 168.

25. Ulf Hannerz, “The World in Creolisation,” *Africa*, 57 (1987): 546–559.

26. Francisco O. Ramirez and John Boli Ramirez, “The Political Construction of Mass Schooling: European Origins and Worldwide Institutionalization,” *Sociology of Education*, 60 (1987), 12–17.

27. Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez, 168.

28. Kathryn M. Anderson-Levitt and Ntal-I'Mbirwa Alimasi, “Are Pedagogical Ideals Embraced or Imposed? The Case of Reading Instruction in the Republic of Guinea,” in *Policy as Practice*, eds. Margaret Sutton and Bradley Levinson (Norwood, NJ, 2001).

29. John Boli, Francisco O. Ramirez, and John W. Meyer, “Explaining the Origins and Expansion of Mass Education,” in *New Approaches to Comparative Education*, eds. Philip G. Altbach and Gail Paradise Kelly (Chicago, 1986); Collins (note 13); Brian Platt, this volume.

30. National Center for Educational Statistics (note 16).

31. UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), *World Development Report 2000* (Oxford, 2000), 194–197.

32. Again, using Trow's definitions of “mass” (more than 15 percent) and “universal” (more than 50 percent.)

33. Ramirez and Boli (note 25).

34. John W. Meyer, Francisco O. Ramirez, and Yasemin N. Soysal, “World Expansion of Mass Education, 1870–1980,” *Sociology of Education*, 65 (1992): 128–149, 142.

35. Kathryn M. Anderson-Levitt, “A World Culture of Schooling?” in *Local Meanings, Global Schooling: Anthropology and World Culture Theory*, ed. Kathryn M. Anderson-Levitt (New York, 2003).

36. Aaron Benavot, Uyn-Kyung Cha, David H. Kamens, John W. Meyer, and Suk-Ying Wong, “Knowledge for the Masses: World Models and National Curricula, 1920–1986,” in *School Knowledge for the Masses: World Models and National Primary Curricular Categories in the Twentieth Century*, eds. John W. Meyer, David H. Kamens, and Aaron Benavot (Washington, DC, 1992).

37. LeTendre, et al.

38. John W. Meyer and Francisco O. Ramirez, “The World Institutionalization of Education,” in *Discourse Formation in Comparative Education*, ed. Jürgen Schriewer (Frankfurt/New York, 2000).

39. To use Raymond Grew's terms from his essay in this volume.

40. UNDP, 197. Note that where there is less than 100 percent participation, gender patterns vary. Whereas girls have a better chance than boys to attend school in certain countries of Latin American and Africa, in the least developed countries as a whole they average only 80 percent a boy's chance of going to school (UNDP, 256–258). I have not yet found data, if they exist, on how many years children actually spend in school in various parts of the world.
41. See Elizabeth Kuznesof in this volume.
42. Joseph J. Tobin, David Y. H. Wu, and Dana H. Davidson, *Preschool in Three Cultures: Japan, China, and the United States* (New Haven, 1989).
43. Alexander, *Culture and Pedagogy: International Comparisons in Primary Education* (Malden, MA, 2001); see also Karen Bogard Givvin, James Hiebert, Jennifer K. Jacobs, Hilary Hollingsworth, and Ronald Gallimore, "Are There National Patterns of Teaching? Evidence from the TIMSS 1999 Video Study," paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, April 21, 2003.
44. Juliana Flinn, "Transmitting Traditional Values in New Schools: Elementary Education of Pulap Atoll," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 23 (1992): 44–59; Elsie Rockwell, "Keys to Appropriation: Rural Schooling in Mexico," in *The Cultural Production of the Educated Person: Critical Ethnographies of Schooling and Local Practice*, eds. Bradley Levinson, Douglas Foley, and Dorothy Holland (Albany, NY), 1996.
45. See the chapters in Anderson-Levitt, *Local Meanings*.
46. Kathryn M. Anderson-Levitt, *Teaching Cultures: Cultural Knowledge for Teaching First Grade in France and the United State* (Cresskill, NJ, 2002), 32–33.
47. Mathieu Brossard and Aboubacar Sidik Yattara, "Close-Up of an Educational System: Guinea under Scrutiny," *ADEA Newsletter* (Association for Development of Education in Africa) 15 (2003), 21–24.
48. Caroline Bledsoe, "The Cultural Transformation of Western Education in Sierra Leone," *Africa*, 62 (1992): 182–202.
49. And perhaps as citizens of the world; Deborah Reed-Danahay, "Europeanization and French Primary Education, in Anderson-Levitt, *Local Meanings*.
50. Laura Rival, "Formal Schooling and the Production of Modern Citizens in the Ecuadorian Amazon," in Levinson, Foley, and Holland.
51. Beatrice B. Whiting and Carolyn Pope Edwards, *Children of Different Worlds* (Cambridge, MA, 1988); John M. Whiting, "Adolescent Rituals and Identity Conflicts. In *Cultural Psychology: Essays On Comparative Human Development*, James W. Stigler, Richard A. Shweder, and Gil Herdt (Cambridge, 1990).
52. Suzanne G. Frayser, *Varieties of Sexual Experience* (New Haven, CT, 1985).
53. B. Herz, K. Subbarao, M. Habib, and L Raney. "Letting Girls Learn: Promising Approaches in Primary and Secondary Education," *World Bank Discussion Papers*, no. 133. (Washington, DC, 1991), 29.
54. Tobin et al. (note 41).

55. Caroline Bledsoe, "School Girls and School Fees among the Mende of Sierra Leone," In *Beyond The Second Sex*, ed. Peggy Sanday and Ruth Goodenough (Philadelphia, 1990).
56. However, adulthood is highly variable across cultures. In rural Ireland it did not come for a man until his aged parents finally retired, at which point he might be in his 40s himself.
57. Biological anthropologists define childhood, a stage unique to human beings, as the stage between eruption of the last baby teeth and the appearance of the first permanent teeth (Barry Bogin, "The Evolution of Human Growth," in *Human Growth and Development*, ed. Noël Cameron [San Diego, 2002]).
58. Collins (note 13).
59. Describing the severe hazing of initiation in an aboriginal Australian group circa 1900, George Spindler argued, "The whole operation of the initiation school is managed to produce success. . . . There are no dropouts" ("There Are No Dropouts Among the Arunta and the Hutterites," in *Fifty Years of Anthropology And Education 1950–2000*, George D. Spindler and Louise Spindler [Mahwah, NJ, 2000], 185). Some of my colleagues in Guinea raise the objection that children actually are permanently typed based on their stoicism during initiation ceremony. However, it is still true that none of them gets officially excluded in the way that opting for a vocational track excludes a student in France from taking the math-oriented baccalaureate exam or failing calculus excludes students from certain career paths in the United States.
60. Collins (note 13), 214.
61. Collins (note 13), 236. The theocracies in Iran and Afghanistan are two apparent recent exceptions. See Ruth Hayhoe, "Modernization without Westernization: Assessing the Chinese Educational Experience," in *Emergent Issues in Education: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Robert F. Arnove, Philip G. Altbach, and Gail Paradise Kelly (Albany, 1992) for an overview of the transformation of the Chinese system.
62. For families who can afford to invest in a child's secondary and perhaps post-secondary schooling, the fate of the family may depend not on the child's ability to bring in income, as Kuznesof documents in this volume, but rather on the child's ability to pay off on a family investment in his or her schooling.
63. Actually, the situation is more nuanced. Rural children's schools are less likely to lead to adequate academic achievement, and girls face more barriers than boys.
64. Boubacar Bayero Diallo, *Parcours scolaires des filles en Afrique: le cas de la Guinée*, unpublished doctoral dissertation (Montréal, 2004) illustrates the individual and familial strategies of children, particularly girls, who succeed at getting into secondary school in the Republic of Guinea. These case studies show the students and their families focused on the extrinsic rewards of schooling.
65. Kathryn M. Anderson-Levitt, "Behind Schedule: Batch-Produced Children in French and U.S. Classrooms," in Levinson, Foley, and Holland; Anderson-Levitt, *Teaching Cultures*.
66. There is also a tendency built into the structure to attribute problems to a child's parents or home. At least in the North, as Willard Waller pointed out, parent and teacher

are natural enemies (*The Sociology of Teaching* [New York, 1965]). Schooling in the South may not have the same structure built in, and hence the focus may be all the more on the individual child's traits.

67. Anderson-Levitt, *Teaching Cultures*, 217–219.

68. For the most part. The curriculum in France and in some U.S. schools does allow for a certain circling back to cover in more depth the same content covered a year earlier.

69. Lewis R. Goldberg, "From Ace to Zombie: Some Explorations in the Language of Personality," *Advances in Personality Assessment*, ed. C. D. Spielberger and J. N. Butcher (Hillsdale, NJ, 1982).

70. For example, M. Wober, "Towards an Understanding of the Kiganda Concept of Intelligence," in *Culture and Cognition*, John W. Berry and Pierre R. Dasen (London, 1974).

71. Anderson-Levitt, "Behind Schedule."

72. William Stern later converted Binet's concept to the concept of the intelligence quotient or I.Q., which so influences thinking about intelligence in the United States. Like Binet, Stern interpreted his measure of performance as "mental age." However, Stern expressed mental age not as "years behind" or "years ahead" of peers, as Binet had, but rather as a quotient, mental age divided by chronological age. His mathematical transformation of the concept meant that there was no making up a lag; I.Q. was expected to be fixed.

73. Anderson-Levitt, "Behind Schedule." An important point about concepts of intelligence: In the global North, schooling tends to make boys look "stupid," at least in the primary grades where girls outperform them in language arts. In secondary school and higher education, a select subset of boys then begins to look smarter than girls as they outperform girls in math. In contrast, in parts of the global South such as Guinea, schooling constructs "stupidity" in girls. Both teachers we interviewed and girls themselves tended to believe that boys were smarter, as demonstrated by their superior school achievement.

74. The French quote comes from Anderson-Levitt, *Teaching Cultures*, 201, the U.S. quotes are from M. Elizabeth Graue, *Ready For What? Constructing Meanings of Readiness for Kindergarten* (Albany, 1993), 183 and 193. What counted as "old" or "young" was not exactly the same between France and the United States: a child beginning first grade at the age of 6 years 1 month would be considered "young" in the United States but not particularly young in France.

75. Sara Harkness and Charles M. Super, "The Cultural Construction of Child Development: A Framework for the Socialization of Affect," *Ethos* 11 (1983): 221–231; Catherine Lutz, "Ethnopsychology Compared to What? Explaining Behavior and Consciousness among the Ifaluk," in *Person, Self, and Experience*, ed. Geoffrey White and James T. Kirkpatrick (Berkeley, 1985); James T. Kirkpatrick, "Some Marquesan Understandings of Action and Identity," in White and Kirkpatrick.

76. Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood* (trans. by R. Baldick) (New York, 1962); Antoine Prost, *Histoire générale de l'enseignement et de l'éducation en France* (vol. 4, *L'école et la famille dans une société en mutation*) (Paris, 1981).

77. Is this analogous to the micro-stages of infancy presented in manuals for new parents? Perhaps, since one month represents a about the same proportion of a baby's first year of life as 5 months—the difference between a “July birthday” and a “December birthday” represents to a first grader. Even so, the question remains—are we recognizing biologically determined stages or creating culturally defined stages?

78. Schools were not always organized that way. The rural French children that Laurence Wylie observed in the 1950s began school on the day of their birthday, whatever the time of year. Some urban school districts in the United States used to let children enter school in either September or January (*Village in the Vauchuse*, 3d ed. [Cambridge, MA, 1974]).

79. At most, there are two basic forms of primary school classroom organization: the “traditional” face-front age-graded classroom with one teacher and 20–100 students, which was once the modern system that replaced the old one-room school recitation-based classroom; and, secondly, the student-centered classroom with students working on different projects in small groups or individually. I submit that the latter model is not as common as we think, although it is present as an alternative to the standard.