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Ghana in Search of a Homegrown Pedagogic Approach in Basic Education - Focus on Creative Dramatics

Baba Haruna and Tabitha H. Bissi Deh

Department of theatre, Arts University of Ghana, Legon.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the Banking Concept of Education as it applies to Ghana's educational system and to establish whether the educational reforms carried out over the years have made any impact in producing a meaningful alternative to the banking education. Through textual analysis of existing literature on the subject, the study found out that the banking concept of education has persisted in Ghanaian basic schools in spite of the numerous education reforms. This is because the teacher education curriculum does not make provision for any alternative pedagogic approach. The study therefore argues that in order to produce critically thinking students who will be able to proffer solutions to basic problems, creative dramatics must be included in the teacher training curriculum of the University Colleges of education, and incorporated into every discipline, so that every teacher will be trained to apply the concept of creative dramatics to enhance their teaching irrespective of the subject they teach.

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Introduction

Education has been variously defined by many scholars and researchers, whatever its definition, the purpose is to make the individual learner functionally literate. According to Taneja and Taneja (1985), cited in Alphonse (2003), "The essential elements in the education process are a creative mind, a well-integrated self, socially useful purpose and experiences related to the interests, needs and abilities of the individual as a participant in social living."

John Dewey defines education as "the process of remaking experience, giving it a more socialized value through increased individual experience, by giving the individual better control over his own powers. (Alphonse, 2003).

Almost every country around the globe considers the education of their citizens the number one priority because, it is seen as the prerequisite for development. The process of education involves a teacher, a learner and the knowledge that is imparted. And it has been so for centuries.

Paulo Freire (1970) in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, criticized the process of education where the teacher is seen as the one who knows everything and imparts the knowledge to a learner, who does not know anything, refering to it as the 'banking concept of education' where narration (with the teacher as narrator) leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them into "containers," or "receptacles" to be "filled" by the teacher. The more completely he/she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher he/she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are.

Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. They do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store. But in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. (Blair Hilty & Freire, 2019)

Embark Saleh, (2013) cites Freire (1974) as insisting that the "banking education implies manipulating learners through forcing them to conform to the objectives of the dominant elite who do not wish to lose their power. By accepting their passive role in the learning process, learners encourage more manipulation to be practiced upon them." Lankshear (1993) described banking education as a means of maintaining an oppressive social order because the more students allow teachers to deposit information in their minds, the less they can attain the critical consciousness. Students who are taught through banking education are likely to internalize the same rigid patterns of relationship structure of paternal authority.

This explains the prevalence of this model of education in many parts of the world. It has been argued that some teachers believe that by implementing banking education they assist students through offering them a packed content of knowledge to repeat and memorize. However, the counter argument is that this is a false belief because this [kind of] assistance will definitely lead to disempowering students and increasing their passivity. The banking type of education is designed to prevent critical thinking and perpetuate the status quo. Here the educator is the guardian of a secret. Teacher teaches and the students are taught. This kind of education, according to Alam (2013), is akin to John Locke's theory of *Tabula Rasa*, an empiricist view of learning which stipulates that in learning "a child's brain is considered as a white paper

Tele: E-mail address: dehtabitha@yahoo.com

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or tabula rasa where knowledge obtained from experiences is stored." (Alam, 2013)

On the contrary, the nativist approach to learning claims that "knowledge is innately determined. Human mind of a new-born child is no tabula rasa. According to Noam Chomsky, "Learning process is actually facilitated on the basis of the learner's innate knowledge, not of the teacher's kindly-transferred knowledge in the classroom." Like Freire, Nativist approach to learning puts emphasis on learners' inherent potentiality (Alam, 2013) and not the teacher's kindness.

Perhaps this is why Freire and others consider the banking education as unfair, inhuman, authoritarian and oppressive. To assume that the learner is a simple object who has no mind of his own but instead will have to receive knowledge from someone else, otherwise he will remain ignorant for his entire life, is an attempt to present the human learner as an object rather than a participant in knowledge construction. In that case, what happens to the living experiences of the individual? People learn by their everyday experiences: their own personal experiences as well as experiences of other people and their environment.

It is important to consider the socio-cultural environment within which the education process takes place. For decades, or centuries, people have been born into a system of education which has virtually become a part of the culture of the people; teachers are to teach, and pupils to learn. Therefore, "the teacher's practice of authority and learners' tendency to accept it, even to be dependent on it, in the classroom has close association with the structures of their social and cultural norms." (Alam, 2013). Alam further makes this interesting analysis:

If we analyze the social context where banking education is prevalent, we will observe that outside the classroom learners are accustomed to believing themselves inferior to their elders. They acknowledge the authority of their elders, and this belief is injected in their unconscious mind. This belief of inferiority makes them willingly accept the authority of their teacher in the classroom. Conversely, the teacher is supposed to be superior in the classroom because as an elder he/she plays the same role in the community outside the classroom. (Alam, 2013)

This appears to be the situation in many societies in the world. It is as if the teacher is always right, and the learner has no right to hold a contrary view. He will be considered rude and disrespectful. In some instances he may be asked to leave the class, or reported to the higher authorities of the institution, and a more severe punishment will be exacted. This, for Freire and others, cannot be conducive for the effective nurturing of the learner's mind. Freire therefore thought there has to be a better way of going about it. Thus he proposed the 'Problem-posing' concept of education, which he insists is the more creative and democratic pedagogical alternative.

Problem-posing Approach

Based on the dangerous nature of the banking system, Freire believes that the best model is the Problem-Posing model, which engenders critical thinking and conscientization of the learner. In this new model, there is a mutual interaction between the teacher and the learner, in which their experiences are thoroughly discussed and consequently evaluated. (Alam, 2013). Freire described the problemposing concept as an act of learning together, where the teacher and the learners enter into a "dialogue" through which

they investigate the problems together. "The basic assumptions are that "no one can teach anyone else", "no one can learn alone" and that "people learn together, acting in and on their world." (Alphonse, 2003). In the words of Soul (2007), "the facilitator provides a framework for thinking, creative, active participants to consider a common problem and find solutions. In this way, People are actively involved in the social construction of knowledge". On the face of it, this argument sounds as though the authority of the teacher is undermined, and the learner elevated to the level of the teacher. However, Freire (1998) pointed out that "he did not reject the authority of the teacher but rejected the authoritarian model of teaching." He argued that "there are moments in which the teacher , as authority, talks to the learners, says what must be done, establishes limits without which the very freedom of learners is lost in lawlessness" (Freire, 1998:63, cited in Embark Saleh, 2013). In other words, Freire, in proposing the problem-posing concept was not oblivious of the fact that authority and freedom must work together to produce discipline. It may simply be the case of 'too much of everything is bad'. A critical balance between the two is required in the learning process in order to achieve the learning objectives. To support this argument, Saleh quotes Freire to emphasize the point thus:

Freire (1998) argued that neither classes characterized by authoritarianism, nor those of unbridled freedom could maintain discipline. Discipline could be realized only in those classes or practices in which freedom and authority are found together. He explained that this is because the harmony between freedom and authority necessitates discipline. (Saleh, 2013)

It is common knowledge that discipline is the bedrock of pedagogy. The principles, strategies and practices of teaching and learning are strongly built on the foundation of disciple; discipline on the part of both teacher and learner. But of course, the limits have to be spelt out as part of the process; otherwise there will be no need to have a teacher in the classroom at all.

It might appear as though the banking concept of education has no merit and must therefore be done away with, and replaced with the "problem-posing" concept (Freire), or the 'learning by doing' concept (Dewey). But these concepts may not be as simple as the proponents would want to make it appear, especially if one looks at it from the socio-cultural context of the learning setting. There must always be a teacher who will only serve as the facilitator, and not a dictator.

This argument finds strong expression in the words of Alphonse Fernandes, when he stated that:

There is no doubt that the child should learn by doing, as Dewey suggested, but the theory has its limitations. Many of the facts known to an individual are acquired from other persons. It is almost impossible for one individual to experience every fact known to him/her. Thus the educated should also try to benefit from the experience of his/her teacher, educator and colleague. (Alphonse, 2003)

With all its challenges and disadvantages, it may not be easy to completely do away with the banking concept of education, even though it has to be progressively deemphasized. If we want to reject banking model of education we have to alter the structures of social and cultural norms which is nearly impossible to do overnight... "Every child is born, with some inherited characteristics, into a specific socio-economic emotional environment, and trained in certain ways by figures of authority." (Kalam 1999: p. 8).

In support of the banking concept of education Ihejirika, C.(2017) strongly argues that:

The banking system of education has been found as a veritable tool in the maintenance of the status quo. Through transmission of existing cultural and lived ideologies, the received views which make up the history of any people are kept safe. Banking system of education is therefore history preserving and identity securing. (2017)

In the light of the above arguments and counter arguments this paper discusses creative dramatics in the following section.

Creative Dramatics

Creative dramatics as a pedagogical method has as many definitions by researchers and scholars of the concept. It operates mainly on improvisation and spontaneity. It is a teaching and learning process in which drama is used as a tool for education. But in this case, the learners are not performing a scripted play to an audience. Every learner in the class is a participant. According to Kratochvil (2005), Davis & Belm (1978) stated that Creative Dramatics (or Creative Drama) was officially defined in 1978 by The American Association of Theatre for Youth, as "an improvisational, non-exhibitional, process-centered form of drama in which participants are guided by a leader to imagine, enact and reflect upon human experience" (Davis & Behm 10-11).

Another scholar who gave an apt definition of creative dramatics and was cited by Kratochvil is Nellie McCaslin.

McCaslin, N. (1968), in her book, *Creative Drama in the Classroom and Beyond*, acknowledges that the activities involved in Creative Drama are always improvised, that the players create the dialogue, and that what is created is not intended for an audience. Participants are guided by a skilled leader rather than by a theater director. (Kratochvil, 2005)

On her part, Margaret Woods refers to creative dramatics as "the most natural but neglected avenues of learning." According to her, Dienesch describes it "as improvised activity in which the child creates his own forms; full selfrealization develops as the child becomes involved in thinking, feeling and experiencing." (Woods, 1957) From the foregoing, it can be inferred that creative

From the foregoing, it can be inferred that creative dramatics has a lot more to offer the learner, especially at the basic level of education since children generally learn by playing. The impulse to play, according to Kratochvil (2005), is fundamental to the human experience, and essential to educational drama. It is constructivist in nature. Dramatic play for young children offers an opportunity and means of understanding and making sense of the world, and is a bridge between the child's world and the adult's world. This magical spirit of play that children innately construct is often overlooked in the public school environment, yet it is the place where children begin to build their creative and imaginative potential.

The essence of creative dramatics

Anything that will encourage a child to discover himself and the world around him must be worth the attention of anyone who has the interest of the child at heart. Through creative dramatics, according to Heinig, (cited in Kratochvil, 2005), "children explore who they are, who they have the potential to be, and have the opportunity to reach a deeper understanding of their emotional, physical and social environments." Heinig reiterates that when children are involved in acting through creative drama activities, "they become an integral part of the ideas and concepts, internalizing information and increasing the likelihood of its being remembered".(Kratochvil, 2005). This kind of remembering will not necessarily lead to what is popularly known in Ghana as "chew-pour-pass and-forget". This experience remains and grows with the child through his life. Margaret Woods supports this assertion by stating that, "through the art of creative dramatics, dreams and ambitions, attitudes and values, inner controls, aesthetic appreciation, sensitivity of spirit and a song in one's heart daily fill the learner's store house. (Woods, 1957).

Research has shown that when children engage in creative dramatics, their ability to learn to listen and compromise is enhanced (Kratochvil, 2005), and in the process they get to learn about themselves, their colleagues and the world around them. This, perhaps, explains the author of this study's appreciation of certain liturgical stories from the Qur'an and other Islamic literature, through the 'Makaranta' system. Makaranta is a Hausa word which literally means a 'place of learning'. As an active member of the drama group of the Makaranta, and taking part in most of the plays that were performed during the night of Maulid (a celebration in commemoration of the birth of Prophet Mohammed), stories about such prophets of God as Ibrahim (Abraham), Sulaiman (Solomon), Yunus (Jonah), Yusuf (Joseph) remained with me up till now. We also enacted the life history of Prophet Mohammed and some Islamic religious rituals such as the performance of Hajj. Hajj is one of the fundamental pillars of the Islam enjoined on every Muslim who has the means, once in a life time. Even though these were not strictly in the nature of creative dramatics, as in being improvisational and spontaneous, the firsthand experience in the dramatic performances, has impacted tremendously on the participants' understanding of the The reason these Qur'an and the Islamic religion. performances would not be considered as creative dramatics is that they were scripted and performed to an audience. However, this is understandable because, literature of any religious nature is considered sacrosanct, and can therefore not be opened to improvisation. Nevertheless, the experiences stayed with the learners for the rest of their lives.

Reforms have taken place in Ghana's educational curriculum throughout its history, but for whatever reason, in none of such reforms has creative dramatics been considered as an instrument deserving a place in the curriculum. In the next section, the study looks at the history of educational reforms and their impact on the child learners over the years. **Brief History of the Educational reforms in Ghana**

Although Ghana's education system had previously been regarded as one of the most highly developed, and effective, in West Africa (Foster, 1965), by the 1980s it was in near collapse (Scadding, 1989; Peil, 1995) and viewed as dysfunctional in relation to the goals and aspirations of the country. (Kadingdi, 2006).

Poku, Aawaar, & Worae, (2013) have discussed some of the educational reforms carried out in Ghana as far back as the pre-independence period. They stated among other things that Ghana "made a number of attempts to reform its education system in order to solve the problem of unemployment/under-employment." In 1951, according to them, as Palmer (2005) asserted, when Ghana, then Gold

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Coast, became internally self-governing and led by Kwame Nkrumah, the pre-tertiary school system was composed of up to seventeen years of education: six years of primary, four years of middle school, five years of secondary school and two years of sixth-form (Poku et al., 2013).

Then in 1960 the need to reform the educational system arose, and so "the then CPP government launched educational reform by implementing the Education Act 1960, Act 87, making primary schooling compulsory and free with effect from September, 1961." (Poku et al., 2013). Subsequent to that a number of committees were set up to reform the educational system or curriculum (for example, the Kwapong Educational Review Committee, 1966; Dzobo Educational Reform Committee, 1972). Thus, 1974 saw a reform of the system, instating the Junior Secondary School on an experimental basis. The Junior Secondary School introduced practical subjects and activities allowing students to acquire technical and occupational skills, which after an apprenticeship lead to the qualification for self-employment. (Boahene, 2000)

But it could not survive due to economic constraints. The Basic Education Sector Improvement Program (BESIP) –or more popular- the Free Compulsory, Universal, Basic Education (FCUBE) which was based on the Dzobo committee report... was implemented by the Government in 1987 to effect new structure and content in education. (Poku et al., 2013). This time it was implemented on a nation-wide basis (Boahene, 2000) and has since remained the structure of the educational system in Ghana. Poku et al. (2013) in their analysis of the educational reforms in the history book of Ghana, passed the following verdict:

On the basis of the number of reforms that the education sector of Ghana has experienced over the period, a preliminary evaluation is that, education in Ghana can be described as being under experimentation, especially the pretertiary, without a very clear direction and focus. The country appears very indecisive regarding the education system to adopt for the pre-tertiary level. (Poku et al., 2013)

This assertion, among others, could perhaps have informed the government decision in 2018 to have a relook at the curriculum of basic education in Ghana. Fundamentally, the National Council for Curriculum Assessment (NaCCA) contends that "the review of the curriculum is to respond to a national priority of shifting the structure and content of the education system from merely passing examinations to building character, nurturing values, and raising literate, confident, and engaged citizens who can think critically." (NaCCA, 2018). Currently, introduction of the Free SHS and the numerous challenges are still glaring in everybody's face. **Creative Dramatics/ Drama in Education in Ghana's Educational system**

Drama in Education primarily is a process that uses drama to teach. Drama in this sense serves a related purpose as a teaching tool used to help children explore factual knowledge and concepts, in other subject areas. For instance, games can be used as the technique to explicate concepts like multiplication, division or fractions in Mathematics. Storytelling as a form can be the method for teaching the history of a country. French lessons can be dramatized for children to gain easy understanding and role play can be used to clarify models in an English language class. Demonstrations in a Science class can be used to illustrate certain procedures in order to gain more understanding into the models.(Deh,T.H.2016) Drama in Education as a concept is designed to offer teachers a wide variety of resources to introduce drama skills and activities into their classrooms; from theoretical discussions of pedagogy and concepts of theatre, to practical exercises. Drama in education, as a classroom-based methodology, fundamentally helps to expound on problematic subjects and to make learning delightful. The dramatic processes are aimed at developing skills of imagination, spontaneity, and mental flexibility. These skills are geared towards personal development; self-discovery and self-esteem.

'The ultimate purpose of drama in education is to open the learner's minds, stimulate their imaginations and language abilities and spark their enthusiasm for continued development and personal discovery'' (Siks, 1977, pp. 9-10). Dramatic processes like mime, improvisation, creative dramatics, children's plays, etc. are used to help children overcome challenging experiences they are likely to encounter whether inside or outside the classroom. Some of these challenges may include learning difficulties, truancy, hyperactivity, depression, excessive fear/ phobia, peerpressure, etc.

"A school that lays special stress on individual discovery and creates opportunities for creative work, insists that knowledge does not fall into neatly separate compartments; and that work and play are not opposite, but complementary" says (Allen, 1981, pp. 72-74). Drama is a useful tool for teaching other subjects, but only after drama exists within its own right. Regardless of the purpose to which drama is situated in a given situation, the experience can only succeed for a child when he/she has acquired some basic drama skills and has learned how to use these dramatic skills/processes with confidence and understanding.

It is not as though the idea of producing critically thinking pupils or students has not been considered before in Ghana. Only that it has concentrated more on the teachercentered learning, rather than creative dramatics. Indeed, the current curriculum includes a subject like creative arts, at the basic level, which the Ministry of Education describes as "essential to the development of emotional, material, spiritual and intellectual life." The Ministry contends that "opportunities to actively participate in creative or in artistic processes; (singing, playing an instrument, drawing, carving, acting, dancing, composition and appreciation) enhance the growth of one's imagination and self-expression. The only thing missing here is the elements of creative dramatics which leads the pupil to act out the scenarios. Admittedly, as part of the learning process, the pupils are sometimes asked to do things on their own, including scribbling, drawing, molding and so on. However, when it comes to drama, they will still have to memorize scripts and perform to an audience, still very much in line with the banking concept of education.

The reason for this, it seems, is because the teacher, who is supposed to lead the process of dramatics, is usually not given enough of the necessary orientation to carry out dramatics as a teaching method. Apart from that, because drama has never been integrated into the curriculum, it is left to the discretion of the teacher in charge of the drama club, who only meets members of the group outside teaching hours. To get full impact of creative dramatics, it ought to be incorporated into all subjects of learning in the classroom. "Gavin Bolton (1979: 2) also believes that educational drama should be incorporated into all subjects in the classroom. The 54212

whole class should be involved in a decision-making and a discovery process. The lesson should be centered on the pupils' needs, opinions and feelings whilst the teacher provides stimulus and control. The teacher is not solely responsible for all answers - the pupils have to discover answers for themselves." (Wood, 2005). However, as Alphonse argues:

The traditional school, says Dewey, stressed specific subjects - reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, history, and grammar. The teacher lectured or dictated a lesson, and the students copied it in their notebooks. The students then learned by heart what was in their note-books and recited what they learned from their textbooks. The teacher enforced order and quiet except for recitation periods. Students sat at rows of desks fastened to the floor, and they could not move or talk without permission. (Alphonse, 2003).

This is exactly what the situation has been all these years in the Ghanaian educational system. In an attempt to find a more functional system of education, reform upon reform has have been undertaken, all of which, unfortunately seem to have brought us back to the same point-the banking concept. It appears Ghana has been doing the same thing and expecting different results. According to the National Council for Curriculum Assessment (NaCCA, 2018), "the current pre-tertiary education curriculum, among other things, emphasizes an activity-based approach which involves inquiry, creativity, manipulation, collaboration and social interaction but upon implementation, the learning and teaching activities in classrooms tend to favor an expository or didactic teaching approach which is largely teachercentered." It is significant to note that whatever system of education is adopted, the teacher will be key to its success, and must therefore be given the necessary impetus to implement it.

The NaCCA supports the assertion that the teacher plays such a critical role in inspiring and challenging learners to achieve their potential, that their training and subsequent development require the highest possible standards in knowledge, conduct and practice in the workplace. (NaCCA), 2018). However, the Ministry of Education laments that, the "insufficient support for teachers to integrate critical thinking, creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship, communication, collaboration and problem-solving skills in the school curriculum. The reason, according to the Ministry is not far-fetched. The current curriculum in teacher education is weighted heavily towards subject-content knowledge to the detriment of curriculum space for developing understanding of pedagogy and practical classroom teaching skills, a situation referred to as 'academic drift'; ...insufficient space is provided for encouraging the development of transversal skills, of problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, innovation, entrepreneurship, digital literacy etc., required for productivity in the twenty-first century;(MoE, 2017)

There is therefore the urgent need to refocus the teacher training curriculum in order to equip the teacher with the appropriate skills to be able to guide the learner to actively participate in the knowledge construction, and not as a passive depository.

On the face of it, it appears the Ministry has finally got it right in its attempt to produce critically thinking teachers who will in turn produce critically thinking students. The aims spelt out above, if achieved, would produce teachers who, in the course of their training, will be imbued with the right kind of skills to help guide their students. However, the course or activity that will make it easier for the trainee teacher to make learning fun for the student is considered as part of cocurriculum activities that are not included in the classroom curriculum, but must be carried out after school hours.

The problem with this arrangement may lie in the lack of interest by teacher trainees who may have interests which are at variance with the pedagogical essence of creative dramatics. After all they have a choice. If any teacher trainee chooses not participate in dramatics as a co-curriculum activity, but instead decide to join, for instance, the debating club, he may leave school without the necessary skill in creative dramatics and therefore may not be able to guide his students/pupils to practice it. Once it has been established that creative dramatics has the tendency to stimulate the learner's imagination and activate his interest in learning other subjects, the least any curriculum reform can do is to find a way of including it in every taught course in the University college of education, so that by the time every teacher graduates from the college, he has imbibed the tenets of creative dramatics and can therefore pass it on to his students. Every subject can be more effectively taught by use of creative dramatics.

Conclusion

Whichever concept of education is adopted, whether Banking concept, Problem-posing or Creative dramatics, the teacher is key and must be placed at the center of the process, irrespective of whether he/she is designated a teacher or facilitator. The new curriculum for basic education in Ghana appears to identify the teacher as the key success factor. The argument of this study is that for Ghana's educational curriculum to succeed in producing critical thinking pupils/students, the teacher training curriculum must be reformed to include creative dramatics in every subject or course thought at the college of education. In this way, every teacher, irrespective of the subject he teaches, will be able to lead the pupils to use their own imagination to improvise and critically think of solutions to basic problems. Children form exceptional and amazing images and ideas in their minds during playful moments and when they get involved in creative activities. These ideas become helpful in moments they are needed in real life situations. In most cases, their imagination, capabilities and motivations are strategically exploited at different stages of their development.

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