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Ghanaian Specific Culturally Relevant Ways of Interaction between Teachers and Children: The Case of Three Schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis in the Central Region of Ghana

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Abstract:
The study was a video-based qualitative study of three Kindergarten classrooms in Cape Coast in the Central Region of Ghana. The design for the study was a qualitative video analysis of three early childhood centers in Cape Coast using video cameras to capture classroom interactions to be able to answer the question: What are some Ghanaian specific culturally relevant ways of interaction between teachers and children? The findings showed that some Ghanaian values that children experienced at home were transferred to the classrooms and used by the teachers as specific culturally relevant ways of interaction between the teachers and children in the participant schools. They included the following: Punishments and Rewards, Silence, Eyeing (stern looking), and Singing and Dancing.

Keywords: Culture, punishment, eyeing, singing, dancing

1. Introduction

Classroom interaction is a social activity comprised of verbal and nonverbal behaviors that teachers and children manifest and interpret in face-to-face encounters (Shultz & Florio, 1979).According to Shultz and Florio (1979) a teacher's role in contextual situations changes and the series of steps the teacher takes in accomplishing the steps also changes. By performing a set of behaviors in a systematic manner, the teacher is communicating to the children they should pay attention to her. In the absence of those behaviors, children do not need to attend to what the teacher is doing (p. 180). From Shultz and Florio's (1979) assertion, it is important that verbal and nonverbal behaviors are used in a consistent manner so as to convey the intended messages to the recipients. It is in this vein that Ghanaian specific culturally relevant ways of interactions between teachers and children should be looked at.

Culturally distinct interactional styles and the socialization practices that produce them have received considerable attention from educators and researcher because of their usefulness in explaining the educational outcomes (Paradise 1994). According to Paradise (1994) communication involves learned, culturally patterned behavior that must be understood in reference to social context (p. 157). Cultural meaning seems appropriate when studying young children whose comprehension and use of language is either nonexistent or limited (p. 157). Understanding one's cultural heritage gained from observing and participating in everyday social interaction can be thought of as practical knowledge of appropriate ways of behaving and experiencing everyday social life (Paradise, 1994). Concluding her study, Paradise (1994) stated "freedom to create classroom environments that are based upon a common respect for their cultural values, social organization, and discourse patterns, an ease and smoothness of in-classroom behavior will emerge, forming the basis upon which learning can develop" (p. 167).

"Culture can be conceptualized as 'shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives that are transmitted across generations" (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta 2004, p. 15). I personally think that culture is the total life of any group of people. It includes their cultural artifacts, mores, ways of dressing, their clothes, foods, names and naming ceremonies, marriage, child rearing practices and other traditional institutions including chieftaincy and parting with the dead. According to Joy & Kolb (2009) Culture acts as a strong socialization agent that influences information processing and cognition. Thus there is reason to believe that the differences in cultural socialization tend to influence learning preferences and produce different learning styles (P.72).

The school could be considered as an agent of culture transmission and it is expected that whatever the school does including teaching and learning would be geared towards continuing from where parents and adults whose children are in the schools expect their children to know and do. Parents and adults teach their children the history of their being so that children could preserve that legacy from getting extinct.

When parents send their children to school for formal education, they expect their children to return to the same community in a way that makes them fit into the very community from which they went to school. Therefore, parents and their communities would not appreciate a school system that offers children a kind of education that would make their children not fit into their very own communities. This is where teachers and the schools have a dilemma. Merging the

schools' principles, methods, and practices with the cultural environment of the children has been a problem (Ladson-Billings 1995).

According to Ladson-Billings (1995), children experience difficulty in schools because educators traditionally have attempted to insert culture into the education, instead of inserting education into the culture. This would develop a closer link between children's home culture and the school. There is a problem of discontinuity between what children experience at home and what they experience at school in the speech and language interactions of teachers and children (p. 159). The assertion by Ladson-Billings (1995) could be true for the Gold Coast (Ghana) where before the Europeans landed at the coast, the people were living and already had a way of rearing their children and doing other things. Sociolinguistics have suggested that if children's home language was incorporated into the classroom, children were more likely to experience academic success (Ladson-Billings 1995), hence the usefulness of Ghana's National Literacy Acceleration Program (NALAP)

In Ghana, teachers particularly those living in rural communities would visit the homes and parents of each of the children in his or her class. Teachers are not obliged to do that but somehow teachers do that to strike an acquaintance with the parents of the children as well as create a bond of friendship between the teachers and the parents of the children that they teach. What such acquaintances do includes making the children aware that his or her teacher knows the parents and therefore could report any misbehavior to the parents. This in a way helps to maintain discipline and classroom management for effective delivery of lessons.

Culturally relevant teachers utilize children's culture as a vehicle for learning. Ladson-Billings (1995) defined culturally relevant teaching that rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) Students must experience academic success. The way by which academic skills would be developed may vary but all children need literacy, numeracy, technological, social, and political skills in order to be active participants in a democracy; (b) students must develop and /or maintain cultural competence. Culturally relevant teaching requires that children maintain some cultural integrity as well as academic excellence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (p. 160).

2. Methodology

The data for the study were secondary, having been collected by a team of researchers for the New Civics Grant Program in an initial study to find apprenticeship and civic themes in Ghanaian Kindergarten classrooms. The design for the study was a qualitative video analysis of three early childhood centers in Cape Coast in the Central Region of Ghana using video cameras to capture classroom interactions to be able to answer the question: What are some Ghanaian specific culturally relevant ways of interaction between teachers and children?

The study was a video-based qualitative study of three Kindergarten classrooms in Cape Coast in the Central Region of Ghana. The study was a qualitative study involving visual data using videotaping in three early childhood centers in the Cape Coast metropolitan area in the Central Region of Ghana. The design was a visual methodology using video cameras to capture classroom interactions. Visual methodologies are used for interpretation of visual materials (Rose, 2012). A qualitative research design focuses on participants and their experiences with an emphasis on understanding their social context (Janesick, 2011; Merrian, 2009). According to Merrian (2009), qualitative research is categorized in the interpretive and constructivist epistemological perspective, and it is intended to describe, understand, and interpret multiple realities that are context specific (Merrian, 2009).

Hatch and Coleman-King (2015) say that qualitative research in early childhood education is inquiry that is done about children, adults, practices, and programs involving children from birth to age eight. Such inquiry seeks to explore issues that directly affect children's development. Therefore using the qualitative research design in the current study to discuss the role of verbal and nonverbal prompts in Ghanaian Kindergarten classrooms would be appropriate considering the socio cultural background of the children being studied.

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2.1. Site and Participants

The study drew from video recordings collected from three public early childhood care and development institutions in the Central Region of Ghana. The schools were purposively selected from a total number of 62 kindergarten schools (GES, 2016) to allow for easy access and to be able to collect data within a certain time period. The average age of the participants was about five (5) years. The rationale for the sample size was that it was both purposeful and convenient for the study being done (Tongco, 2007). According to Tongco (2007), the purposive sampling technique is a type of non-probability sampling that is most effective when one needs to study a certain cultural domain with knowledgeable experts within (p. 147).

3. Discussion of Findings

As is the expectation of every parent and the community at large, some Ghanaian values that children experienced at home were transferred to the classrooms and used by the teachers as specific culturally relevant ways of interaction between the teachers and children in the participant schools. They include the following:

3.1. Punishments and Rewards

According to Kholberg (1976) a child's sense of morality is externally controlled and that children accept and believe the rules of authority figures, such as parents and teachers, and they judge action based on its consequences. The child at age five and at a Kindergarten facility would not have internalized the cultural norms of his or her society but such a child would be able to understand the results or consequences of his or her behavior and actions. For example after repeated performances, the child would himself or herself come to understand which of the actions would bring a smile from the mother or caregiver and what actions or behavior would bring a scorn. Kholberg (1976) described three stages of moral development as pre-conventional where the social orientation of the child is obedience and punishment. Any behavior that would bring pain to the child would be avoided thereby leading to obedience. At the conventional stage, the social orientation is "good Boy" "good girl". At this stage, children come to appreciate being called "good boy" or "good girl". Children would therefore strive to do things that would bring them their expectations. The post convention stage does not apply to children at Kindergarten but deals with social contract and principled conscience.

The convention on the Rights of the Child is the first legally international instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights – civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. The Constitution of Ghana (1992) states in article 28(3): "A child shall not be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment." On the other hand, it is widely believed that discipline is required for children in order for them to be successful in education, especially during the compulsory education period (p. 242). Article 13(2) of the Children's Act 1998 confirms the concept of "justifiable" and "reasonable" correction of a child. In a report by the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (UNICEF, 2015) it was stated "Neither these provisions nor the provisions against violence and abuse in the Criminal Code 1960, the Domestic Violence Act 2007 and the Children's Act 1998 are interpreted as prohibiting all corporal punishment in childrearing" The Constitution of Ghana was reviewed and in its final report, published in 2011, the Constitution Review Commission acknowledged receipt of submissions concerning the need for clarity regarding discipline of children but did not recommend that prohibition be included in the new Constitution. It made a general recommendation that the Children's Act be "substantially revised". The Government went on to reject the majority of recommendations that the Commission made concerning children's rights, stating that "there are enough laws which address the concerns of children and the challenge has to do with enforcing them". (UNICEF, 2015). Corporal punishment is lawful in day care under provisions allowing "reasonable" and "justifiable" correction in article 13(2) of the Children's Act 1998. Corporal punishment is lawful in schools. Pursuant to the Education Act 1961, the Ghana Education Code of Discipline for second cycle school provides for caning up to six strokes by a head teacher or person authorized by the head. Article 13(2) of the Children's Act 1998 (see under "Home") also applies, allowing for "justifiable correction" (UNICEF 2015).In a study by Agbenyega (2006) in some basic schools in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana the findings indicated "an overwhelming majority of the teachers (94-98 percent) used corporal punishment to enforce school discipline.

Some supporting teachers at University of Cape Coast and Pedu Metropolitan Assembly Kindergarten administered corporal punishment to some of their children during the morning assembly sessions. At the University of Cape Coast Kindergarten, one of the supporting teachers standing behind the children knocked the head of a child on two occasions thereby drawing tears from the child. When the child tried to use his hand to wipe off the tears, the supporting teacher brushed off the hand and pushed him to stand properly in the line. At Pedu Metropolitan Assembly Kindergarten, one of the supporting teachers saw an altercation between two children and quickly rushed to separate them hitting the head of one of the children and drawing the other child away to a different position. Although not a corporal punishment, the teacher at Kwaprow Metropolitan Assembly Kindergarten used silence as a signal to bring discipline to the classroom. After repeated attempts to get the children to stop shouting "madam" "madam" she stopped talking and sat down quietly just watching the children. That action seemed to have worked as the children did not display that behavior again showing appreciation to children at home is a cultural tool that parents and adults use at home and in the communities. They use appreciation to encourage children to continue to exhibit good and acceptable behaviors. This cultural tool has been transferred into Ghanaian schools and classrooms where teachers would most often show appreciation either by word of mouth or through any other form(s). All the teachers in the participant schools showed various forms of appreciation to the children as a way of reinforcing their behaviors and also for praise and redirection of attention.

3.2. Silence

Silence may be described as a state in which a person involved in a communication stops the interaction and may sit down quietly. It is a form of communication during which the individual would simply not say anything or do anything that involved noise. One of the cultural practices in Ghana is to observe silence at home during certain times of the day or night. For example in the olden days when wars were prevalent and towns and villages could be attacked by perceived enemies without any notice, it was expected that people would be silent most of the time, so that people could pick noise from footsteps of advancing armies. Children at home might not be told the truth about asking them to be silent but parents would tell them stories that would make them believe whatever they told them about keeping silent. For example children were not allowed to whistle in the night because whistling was a tool used to alert villages about

impending attacks and doom that most often occurred during the night. The reason was that if children kept whistling at night it would be difficult to distinguish between what was done during normal times and dangerous times.

When rituals were being observed, it was important for silence to prevail and so parents would teach their children to be silent at home when such rituals were being observed in the village or town. The rituals might necessarily be performed in the home of a particular child, but the child had to obey the instructions given by the parents. For instance the observance of funeral rites in a town or village could not be done in a noisy atmosphere. There should be silence in other to mourn the departed souls. The celebration of "Akwasidae" which is one of the very important rituals on the Akan calendar is observed in a very solemn manner devoid of noise making.

This Ghanaian culturally relevant practice was observed in the participant schools. Teachers used silence to convey messages of disapproval to the children. The teacher at Kwaprow Metropolitan Assembly Kindergarten used silence as a signal to bring discipline to the classroom. After repeated attempts to get the children to stop shouting "madam" "madam" she stopped talking and sat down quietly just watching the children. That action seemed to have worked as the children did not display that behavior again. The lead-teachers at University of Cape Coast Kindergarten and Pedu Metropolitan Assembly Kindergarten also used silence during their interactions with their children.

3.3. Eyeing (Stern Looks)

Parents in Ghana use their eyes to speak volumes of messages to their children. The eyes could be used to congratulate the child for a good effort or behavior and could also be used to convey messages of disapproval of a behavior. Eyeing the child is done when both parent and child are at a place where although the parent could use words to convey the message, the parent would want to keep the communication between only the two of them. The stern looks that the parent carry across to the child would most often be to stop a behavior that the child was engaged in. It is a harsh face showing anger towards the child and it is done in a way that conveys the intended message to the child. It is however very important to note that communication between the parent and the child through eyeing would not simply occur when the child puts up an undesirable behavior. That form of communication might have been used several times at home between the child and the parent to the extent that both parties understand the communication. The child knows that the parent also knows that he or she understands the communication, and the parent also knows that the child understands the communication.

This Ghanaian culturally relevant way of interaction between teachers and children was observed in the participant classrooms. Sometimes the eyeing occurred as if the teacher had lost words to communicate the message to the children. For example in the case of Kwaprow Metropolitan Assembly Kindergarten, after persistent reminders to the children not to shout "madam" "madam" she eyed the children at a point in time. When the children later repeated the undesired behavior, she eyed the children, looking at them in a stern manner before bending her head and sitting quietly. The teachers at University of Cape Coast Kindergarten and Pedu Metropolitan Kindergarten also used eyeing during the instructional process.

3.4. Singing and Dancing

All the schools used singing and dancing in and out of the classroom. In Ghana, schools began their morning assembly and devotion with singing of songs. They also sang the national anthem, as well as sang marching songs before moving into their classrooms to begin classroom activities. For example at the University of Cape Coast Kindergarten, one of the songs that the teacher and children sang as part of their morning devotion was "Day by day, day by day. O, dear Lord, three things I pray; to see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, follow thee more nearly, day by day" At the Pedu Metropolitan Assembly Kindergarten both the lead teacher and the children sang the song "When I look at the mountain, look at the valley, look at the sea, you are Lord, you are God" At Kwaprow Metropolitan Assembly Kindergarten, both the lead teacher and the children sang the songs "Gabriel menye wo den nie, wo ye bue" and "Asebu Amenfi"

4. Conclusions

In Ghanaian local parlance, there is an idiomatic expression that says the crab does not give birth to a bird. In other words, the fruit does not fall too far away from the tree that produces it. The child is therefore a direct reflection of the parents and the community as a whole. Rogoff's (1990) socio-cultural theory provides a relevant lens from which to understand early childhood education as a reflection of the cultures and societies of which it is a part. All the child-rearing practices that the community provides including teacher-child interactions in and out of the classroom make the child a symbol of that community and therefore the behavior of the child is the direct consequence of the socio-cultural values of that community Such specific culturally relevant interactions between teachers and children help to bring up children in the way that parents and the community at large very desire.

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