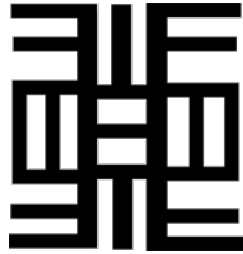


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**Situating children's agency in grades 2 & 3 Ghanaian public schools'
classrooms: A sociomaterial perspective**



NEA ONNIM NO SUA A, OHU

“He who does not know can know from learning.”

Akan symbol of knowledge, lifelong learning, and continued quest for knowledge

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Doctor in Human and Social Sciences

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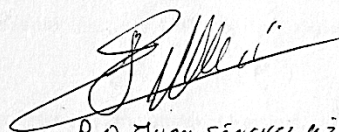
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Neuchâtel, le 12 mai 2023



P.O. JUAN SÁNCHEZ BRANDER
Le doyen
Louis de Saussure

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Abstract

Classroom practices are situated within complex and interconnected systems that include material settings, cultural norms, power dynamics, and historical legacies. Yet the material and intangible characteristics of classrooms are often overlooked, omitted, or portrayed as the background and passive actors (Iannaccone, 2017). This thesis presents an empirical account of how the sociomateriality of the classroom environment shapes children's agency and daily learning experience in Ghanaian public schools. The study takes a sociomaterial perspective, which decentralizes human actions to concentrate on the non-human things whose existence and performativity extend beyond fulfilling human needs and intentions (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008). This thesis aims to situate children's agency by answering the following research question: How do indigenous knowledge, colonialism, and the sociomateriality of the classroom shape children's agency in grades 2 and 3 Ghanaian public schools?

The qualitative research design involved ethnographic tools, including participant observations, interviews, photographs, videos, and school documents. Over one and half years, 36 classrooms in 24 schools, comprising 18 government and 6 private schools in rural and urban settings, were visited. Semi-structured interviews with 22 adults, including 9 teachers, 4 heads of schools, and 9 parents, were conducted. Eight children's participants were interviewed using child-friendly methods such as small group role-playing exercises and informal group discussions (Clark, 2011). The school documents comprised children's classroom work, children's drawings, and teachers' instructional material. Photographs and videos taken on the school grounds were also included.

One key finding suggests that the current classroom environment, practices, and dynamics are centered on material artifacts, such as the blackboard and notebooks, making them the main actants that negotiate the social intra-actions, patterning, dynamics, and temporality of the daily activities of the classroom. These sociomaterial characteristics are systematized by complex entanglements of indigenous and colonial practices and principles and create hybrid practices. This hybridization has conflicting dynamics, limiting children's agency and the application of child-centered practices. Furthermore, these hybrid principles and materialized

practices over time crossed borders in the family realm and consequently became inseparable cultural norms (Iannaccone & Marsico, 2013). This permeability is important to consider in promoting child-centered practices. Another key study finding suggests that indigenous principles share similarities with social-constructivist pedagogy and theories. Incorporating elements of indigenous principles of communal peer culture in classroom practices can promote a more holistic and culturally responsive approach to teaching and learning. It is important to note that the benefits of incorporating indigenous principles go beyond temporal considerations.

The study's relevance and timeliness lie in the promotion of children's participation in classroom practices through the social constructivist pedagogy that is part of the policy reforms. This approach requires teachers to step away from existing teacher-centered pedagogy and embrace a child-centered approach that reconnects with traditions and initial cultural principles that align with Ghanaian beliefs and perceptions about children. The study encourages educators, parents, and policymakers to rethink, re-indigenize, and decolonize classroom practices and the perception of learning by developing a sociomaterial perspective about the classroom culture in public Ghanaian schools. By raising awareness of the detrimental impacts of the continuous colonial legacy on the classroom environment and practices and reintroducing indigenous knowledge and socialization methods, children's agency can be enhanced, leading to more meaningful and culturally relevant learning experiences.

Keywords:

Children's agency, early childhood, Ghanaian public schools, sociomateriality, indigenous knowledge, colonialism, power dynamics, historical legacy.

Résumé

L'environnement de la classe et les pratiques qui s'y déroulent sont influencés par divers facteurs sociomatériels, tels que les paramètres matériels, les normes culturelles, les dynamiques de pouvoir et les héritages historiques. Cependant, ces caractéristiques matérielles sont souvent négligées ou présentées comme des éléments passifs en arrière-plan (Iannaccone, 2017). Cette thèse se penche sur l'impact de la sociomatérialité de l'environnement de la classe sur l'agentivité des enfants et leur expérience d'apprentissage quotidienne dans les écoles publiques ghanéennes. Elle adopte une perspective sociomatérielle qui met l'accent sur les objets non humains et leur rôle dans l'action, au-delà de la simple satisfaction des besoins humains (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008). L'objectif principal de cette thèse est de comprendre comment les connaissances autochtones, le colonialisme et la sociomatérialité de la classe influencent l'agentivité des enfants dans les écoles publiques ghanéennes de 2e et 3e années.

La méthodologie de recherche qualitative implique l'utilisation d'outils ethnographiques tels que des observations participantes, des entretiens, des photographies, des vidéos et des documents scolaires. Pendant dix-huit mois, trente-six salles de classe réparties dans vingt-quatre écoles (dont dix-huit écoles publiques et six écoles privées) situées en milieu rural et urbain ont été visitées. Vingt-deux adultes, dont neuf enseignants, quatre chefs d'établissement et neuf parents, ont été interviewés de manière semi-structurée. Huit enfants participants ont été interrogés à l'aide de méthodes adaptées à leur âge, telles que des jeux de rôle en petits groupes et des discussions informelles (Clark, 2011). Les documents scolaires étudiés comprenaient les travaux des élèves, leurs dessins ainsi que le matériel pédagogique utilisé par les enseignants. Des photographies et des vidéos prises dans le contexte scolaire ont également été incluses.

Les résultats de cette étude mettent en évidence le rôle central des artefacts matériels, tels que le tableau noir et les cahiers, dans l'environnement de la classe. Ces objets jouent un rôle actif dans la négociation des interactions sociales, la structuration des activités quotidiennes et la temporalité des apprentissages. Ces caractéristiques sociomatérielles sont le fruit de l'entrelacement complexe de pratiques et de principes autochtones et coloniaux, créant ainsi

des pratiques hybrides. Cependant, cette hybridation engendre des tensions et limite la liberté d'action des enfants, ainsi que l'application de pratiques centrées sur l'enfant. De plus, ces principes hybrides et pratiques matérialisées ont traversé les frontières de l'école et sont devenues des normes culturelles indissociables (Iannaccone & Marsico, 2013). Cette perméabilité doit être prise en compte pour promouvoir des pratiques centrées sur l'enfant. Une autre conclusion importante de cette étude est que les principes autochtones partagent des similitudes avec la pédagogie socioconstructiviste. L'intégration d'éléments issus de la culture communautaire autochtone dans les pratiques de classe peut favoriser une approche de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage plus holistique et culturellement adaptée. Il est essentiel de souligner que les avantages de l'intégration de ces principes vont au-delà de considérations temporelles.

L'importance et l'opportunité de cette étude résident dans la promotion de la participation des enfants aux pratiques de classe, en adoptant une approche pédagogique socioconstructiviste qui s'inscrit dans les réformes politiques en cours. Cela implique un changement de paradigme pour les enseignants, en passant d'une pédagogie centrée sur l'enseignant à une pédagogie centrée sur l'enfant, en renouant avec les traditions et les principes culturels initiaux qui correspondent aux croyances et aux perceptions ghanéennes sur l'enfant. Cette étude encourage les éducateurs, les parents et les décideurs à repenser, à réindigéniser et à décoloniser les pratiques de classe, en adoptant une perspective sociomatérielle sur la culture de la classe dans les écoles publiques ghanéennes. En prenant conscience des effets néfastes de l'héritage colonial persistant sur l'environnement et les pratiques de classe, et en réintroduisant les connaissances et les méthodes de socialisation autochtones, l'agentivité des enfants peut être renforcée, conduisant à des expériences d'apprentissage plus significatives et culturellement pertinentes.

Mots-clés:

Agentivité des enfants, petite enfance, écoles publiques ghanéennes, sociomatérialité, connaissances autochtones, colonialisme, dynamique de pouvoir, héritage historique.

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List of abbreviations

ACERWC	African Charter on Rights and Welfare of the Child
EFA	Education for All by UNESCO
GCED	Global Citizenship Education
GES	Ghana Education Service
GS	Government (public) School
HoS	Head of School
MoE	Ministry of Education of Ghana
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Education Science Culture Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children Education Fund
UN CRC	United Nations Child Rights Committee
USAID	United State Agency for International Development
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene
WENR	World Education News and Review

Chapter 1 Introduction



Sankofa ¹

“Se wo were fi na wosan kofa a yenkyiri”²

The wisdom of learning from the past to build the future.

Dzokoto, (2018)

1.1 Overview

This introduction chapter is organized into three sections. The first section provides the reader with an understanding of the theoretical, contextual, and methodological background that guides the research processes, assumptions, rationale, problem, and the three research questions. Additionally, it includes the researcher's positionality, which is made explicit to enable readers to situate the researcher's personal and professional background and expertise. The second section provides the background of the learning settings, which helps situate the Ghanaian classroom. It also includes a detailed description of important terminologies used throughout the thesis. The third section summarizes all six chapters that

¹ Adinkra symbol: San (return) Ko (go) Fa (look, seek, take) meaning ‘Go back and get it’. The mythical bird treasured his eggs (representing the past) by extending his neck, which represent the dedication and the efforts to properly honour the past in the present life (bringing the egg forward) to inform the future.

² Literally means ‘it is not too taboo to go back to what you forgot’.

constitute the thesis and a conclusion that combines the quotes introduced at the beginning of the chapter and the content of the chapter.

“The following features of indigenous African education can be considered outstanding. Its close links with social life, both in a material and spiritual sense; its collective nature; its many-sidedness; and its progressive development in conformity with the successive stage of physical, emotional, and mental development of the child.” -Walter Rodney.

This powerful quote from Walter Rodney, a prominent Pan-Africanist, summarizes what indigenous learning principles and practices were all about. Nevertheless, education, as Westerners call the learning organized in classroom settings that currently require young children to sit facing a blackboard all day, is perceived as the key to unlocking the potential of Africans and paving their socioeconomic transformation (Asabere-Ameyaw, et al., 2012).

African countries like Ghana, as the quote indicates, had a well-organized, economically sustainable, and holistic learning system in place before the colonial era, including their education systems. The colonial powers enriched their empire and reversed the economic and social development of the country, including educational practices (Rodney, 1972). In my dissertation, I describe how indigenous learning systems focused on the holistic development of children, and although not perfect, I explain how this approach to education is relevant to the colonial-influenced learning system in which sociomateriality limits children's agency. The problem identified in this study is that classroom settings have been taken for granted, unchallenged, and systematized as the normative setting to socialize Ghanaian children. This study investigated the current classroom settings and their sociomateriality and recommends that learning settings be historically contextualized, indigenized, and de-colonized. Children's learning environments have changed considerably since the introduction of colonial education, and Western hegemonic practices and principles have replaced the indigenous ones in the classroom. This said, my dissertation findings suggest that some indigenous principles persisted and amalgamated with colonial practices, creating hybrid socialization norms. However, these hybrid norms were found to be conflictual and hinder children's participation in their learning. Consequently, in the current classroom setting, children are colonized bodies (Agbenyega et al., 2016).

My dissertation aims to situate children's agency in the current classroom contextually, identify the sociocultural factors that shape children's active participation, and analyze them using sociomaterial (Iannaccone, 2017) including postcolonial lenses to develop a new perspective of the classroom and the effect of its sociomateriality on children's agency. My intention in this thesis is to develop a contextual and empirical perspective using current and most relevant interdisciplinary theories and methodological approaches that reflect, respect, and align with the great diversity of local Ghanaian perspectives (Adu-Gyamfi, 2013) and situated realities. This perspective is timely and relevant as the 2019 Ghana national curriculum requires teachers to implement a child-centered pedagogy and participative practices. However, in the current classroom settings, many challenges are obstructive (Agbemiase, 2009, Ayayi, 1961, Epstein, 2019), and empirical knowledge can help to understand what they are (Braun & Clarke, 2019) and what can be done to overcome these challenges and implement a constructive learning environment for children.

1.2 The research questions

Research questions were developed based on the initial literature review conducted and my previous experience developing projects focused on child learning environments in other countries situated in the Global South. From my previous exposure to child learning settings in Vietnam and Ethiopia, I was aware that when there is a gap between what educational policies state, and what the international donors and scholars report, it is necessary to develop empirical knowledge of the local reality. The theoretical perspective that informed the type of questions I developed are social constructionist and sociomaterial. The process of developing the final research questions was lengthy and done in different stages (Braun & Clarke, 2006). My initial questions were broad and focused on the cultural-historical elements guiding classroom practices. Within the initial analysis processes, the questions were refined to the following:

RQ-1 How do indigenous knowledge, colonialism, and the sociomateriality of the classroom shape children's agency in grades 2 & 3 Ghanaian public schools?

RQ-2 What are the sociocultural factors limiting children's everyday learning experience and active participation?

RQ-3 How can a classroom setting facilitate a better learning environment and foster children's development of contextually appropriate skills, attitudes, and knowledge?

Through careful analyses of these three research questions, I explored how these elements shaped the learning environment for 6 to 8 years old Ghanaian children, including gaining insights into the following issues:

- how indigenous principles (respect and unidirectional interactions) hybridized with colonial principles and became the new Ghanaian norms;
- how colonialism changed children's everyday classroom routines, including the peer culture;
- how colonial principles and practices transform children's social representation, positioning, and agency in their learning;
- how the materialization of learning changed the perception of learning and the discourses about correct actions in the classroom to ensure the socialization of children;
- how colonial practices and principles permeated the family realm and changed traditional communities and social disciplinary norms; and
- how colonial material objects like the blackboard created new learning dynamics and dictates the spatial arrangement of the classrooms.

The thesis theoretical approaches are inspired by sociocultural psychology, and sociomaterial perspectives like a postcolonial theory to situate the heterogeneous elements making up the classroom setting and practices. The diverse sensitivities were useful in developing a holistic and sociomaterial perspective of the classroom, and situating children's agency in the current practices, and historically. The theoretical frameworks enable an understanding of how knowledge and learning materialized and systematized, as well as how this process replaced indigenous practices and principles. The focus on the material has been growing in studies of culture in the field of education (Beetz, 2016) for its consideration of the social performance of all actors, including, humans and more-than-human (Myers, 2019, Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, Kumpulainen, 2019) entities. In Ghana, however, a sociomaterial approach to classroom settings is innovative and enables the development of a perspective on how

classrooms are materially assembled (Iannaccone, 2017, Mayes, 2019). The rationale investigates the internal continuity of colonialism forces in the classroom settings empirically and analyses how colonial materiality impacts children's agency.

This qualitative study provides in-depth descriptions of how research participants perceive and experience the social phenomenon of public classroom settings within their culturally informed learning context. This type of ethnographic method has been absent in previous research conducted on Ghanaian public classrooms, which presented an opportunity for me to contribute to the literature. To collect data, ethnographic tools such as participative observations, semi-structured interviews with adult participants, and child-friendly interview methods such as group discussions and role-playing were used. In addition, data collection from children included notebook exercises, children's drawings, photographs, and video recordings. This range of data collection methods enabled me to interpret how people perceive and experience the social phenomenon within the culture-informed learning context of children's socialization practices (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

Over a period of one and a half year, I visited and conducted ethnographic observations in 24 schools and 36 classrooms from August 2018 to December 2019. I interviewed nine teachers, nine parents, four heads of schools, eight children between the ages of six and eight years old and had many informal discussions with many children of different ages. I was accompanied by a research assistant who was at the time a university student. For her psychology study she had done some work in the same school system. Her assistance allowed us to adhere to child protection protocols by ensuring two adults were always present during child interviews. Additionally, she supported improved understanding of culturally relevant perspectives shared by participants and ensured that the data collection processes were ethically and contextually respectful (Chilisa, 2018).

Collecting data from 6 to 8-year-old children was an innovative approach in the Ghanaian context. Sociocultural norms previously excluded children of that age group (grades two and three) from research because they were perceived as too young and immature to voice their opinions (Kwaw, 2016). Despite this, I selected this age group for several reasons, including my extensive professional expertise with children of that age, and my interest in exploring

the contradiction around their age. On one hand, children of that age are thought to be too young to develop and express an opinion, but on the other hand, they are considered by adults to be old enough to take care of younger siblings. Additionally, I wanted to include this age group (2nd and 3rd graders) in my research because they are often left out of research due to the absence of standardized exams, which makes it difficult to quantify their academic achievements. The literature primarily focuses on transitional grades such as Kindergarten and first grade, even though international standards define this age group as early childhood (Wolf, 2018).

1.3 Background of the learning setting

Every society, whether situated in the Global North or the Global South, highly populated or not, has established learning systems and material objects to ensure the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next (Nombuso, 2008). One characteristic of human nature is to ensure the socialization of children and cultural continuity (Kien, 2008). To do so, humans embedded their practices into material artifacts, creating relational materiality (Kien, 2008) that becomes inseparable (Kumpulainen, 2019). However, the problem is that when a country is colonized over a long period of time, as was the case for Ghana, the indoctrination process spreads across political, economic, and social systems and changes them to the colonizers' institutional ideologies. The imposition of new dominant power resulted in discrimination against indigenous practices and principles, and, eventually, the loss of indigenous knowledge and practices. Consequently, over time, people forgot how daily life was before the colonial norms and visions became assimilated into cultural norms (Akkari & Dasen, 2008).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the concept of learning has become inseparable from the education associated with schooling and classroom settings (Akkari & Dasen, 2008). In the name of modernization (Adu-Gyamfi, 2016), academic knowledge taught in European languages (Dasen & Akkari, 2008) has become more valued (Agbenyega, 2008) than any indigenous, tribal, and holistic learning that was once highly valued (Nombuso, 2008). The introduction of school and the division of children into classrooms has created its own learning and material culture. Learning has become inseparable from certain artifacts, like the blackboard,

the presence of an adult teacher, spatial arrangements filled with student desks, and other social elements (Fenwick et al., 2011) of the classroom culture. These sociomaterial complexities create ongoing and unpredictable (Fenwick, 2010) dynamics or what Soderström called 'the sociomaterial practice of school' (2016). This is the case in Ghana, where the learning culture has, as in many other colonized countries, changed drastically during the colonial era with the introduction of schools and the implementation of western imperialist pedagogies (Shiza & Makuvaza, 2017) in classrooms.

The Problem with Learning Systems in Ghana

To better understand the educational norms in place today, it is important to explore their origin and history, as suggested by Falola (2002), to identify what has changed, how, and what effects these changes have had on institutions and people's perceptions and expectations. Adu-Gyamfi's research indicated that too many changes from too many different countries have been shaping Ghanaian learning practices (2014).

Despite being praised as a great example of education leadership in the West-African region, Ghana's education system has been reported to be poor (World Bank, 2018). One of Ghana's challenges is the need to improve and implement an equitable and quality learning environment, given its fast-growing population. Poverty also remains a concern, with 28.3 percent of children currently living under the national poverty line (Cooke, Hague, & McKay, 2016; World Bank, 2018). This means that more than 3.5 million of the 11.5 million Ghanaian children live in extreme poverty (UNICEF, 2020), excluding those living at or above the poverty level.

To address these socio-economic issues and improve youth capacity, Ghana's Ministry of Education developed the 2019 Ghana national curriculum that promotes for the first time the development of critical skills through participatory methods. This social constructivist practice, also referred to as child-friendly, aims to enhance children's proficiency, critical thinking, and learning outcomes at all grade levels through participatory activities. The 2019 Ghana national curriculum included major reforms, changing the number of subjects taught and adding Ghanaian history as a subject, which enables the implementation of social constructivist practices in all grades and classrooms. However, during my time assisting in the

teacher's training for the 2019 Ghana national curriculum, I observed some sociocultural and material obstacles in the newly introduced participatory activities. The observed classroom environment in public schools did not have the spatial arrangement and material for teachers to implement participatory activities. Additionally, the lack of teaching resources meant that the blackboard continued to be the main mode of knowledge transmission.

According to the UN (2020), as of March 15, 2020, 1.58 billion children, including all Ghanaian children, were out of school due to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in empty classrooms for the following 18 months in Ghana. Most children were left with “no learning opportunities”, as reported by the UN (2020). While the government broadcasted one hour of school lessons per day for each grade, the lack of television access for 40% of children and the absence of parental supervision for many meant that no learning happened, at least not based on western-centric standards that disregard out-of-classroom learning. This unfortunate and unnecessary situation was a crisis, but at the same time, an opportunity (Hugues, 2020b) to reveal how much learning had become materialized, divided, and inequitable.

The characterization of learning being fully dependent on a classroom setting, the inequity in access to school-based education in Ghana and globally during the pandemic, and the loss of indigenous practices and principles inspired this study to explore how people make sense of a child's learning space. The unchallenged normalization of learning is one of the problems identified in this study, and over time, through acculturation processes, some colonial practices amalgamated with indigenous principles and became sociocultural norms. Consequently, the sociocultural perspective about classroom practices and the current hybrid principles guiding them limits children's agency and the implementation of a child-centered classroom, a requirement of the 2019 Ghana national curriculum reforms.

In the Ghanaian context, concepts of sociomateriality, material semiotics, and social constructionist approaches were understood, considered, and implemented in the learning systems of tribal societies in the pre-colonial era. A material lens of human experiences is a return to considering indigenous principles and practices that have been overlooked, misunderstood, and discriminated against by colonizers for 487 years (Adu-Gyamfi, 2016;

Adekunle, 2000; Boakye-Boaten, 2010; Carmody, 2017; Ezeaunya-Esiobu, 2019; Funteh, 2015; Falola, 2002; Nsamenang, 1993; Shiza & Makuva, 2017). This study seeks to restore respect and dignity to Ghanaian ancestors' knowledge and principles by redeeming and reintegrating them into the current learning space.

1.4 Positionality of researcher

My thesis aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of early childhood education in Ghana by adopting an interdisciplinary approach grounded in local perspectives and realities. As a researcher conducting qualitative research in a foreign culture, it is important for me to be transparent about my social, cultural, educational, political, and ethical identities, and how they have shaped my research design (Chilisa, 2018).

As a white researcher conducting qualitative research in Ghana, it is essential for me to clarify my social, cultural, educational, political, and ethical identities, as these can impact the design of my research processes. I have a unique position as an observer, having conducted ethnographic observations in early childhood and primary years in numerous countries over the last two decades, in various cultures and sub-cultures, mostly in bilingual or multi-lingual settings. I was motivated to pursue higher education after limited opportunities growing up in rural Switzerland. After leaving the family watch factory, I became an international 'au pair' in Spain and California, which led me to take classes at Sacramento City College and eventually graduate from Hunter College in New York with a double major in English Language Arts and Urban Education. My experiences studying in Vietnam, Ethiopia, and Ghana have also shaped my understanding of the impact of Western hegemony on educational policies in non-Western settings. As Bartlett and Vavrus have pointed out, the ethical implications of racial origin as a white researcher are essential (2017).

Therefore, I have ensured complete transparency and open conversations with all research participants, including the Heads of Schools, District Officers, and teachers, to develop a mutual appreciation and respect across cultures and races. I have also developed clear ethical protocols that were endorsed by the ethical committee of the University of Neuchatel and the Ghana District Office for Education. The approach ensures that people understand that I

am observing the classroom to develop knowledge about children's experiences, as opposed to imposing a dominant perspective and wanting to homogenize classroom practices to reflect Western principles (Epstein, 2019).

In conclusion, as a white researcher, I must acknowledge and address my positionality in Africa. Instead of assuming expertise, I must listen and learn from communities, value their knowledge and expertise, share power, and be transparent (Bartlett Vavrus, 2017). By doing so, I can help overcome racial biases and contribute to meaningful change in education systems that benefit all children, regardless of their race, gender, or cultural background (see limitations, p, 107).

1.5 Terminologies



Figure 1 Importance of education

“Education helps to reduce social vices in the society. Education create people’s awareness about how to avoid criminal activities that are found in society. This goes on to reduce the crime rate in society. Education also prepares people towards their future work as people acquire knowledge, skills, and attitude it helps to exposed them to their future work”.

In this picture at a school in Tamale, a Northern rural region of Ghana, I thought that the definition of education on the blackboard was representative, relevant to the focus of this

thesis, and explains why it is important to provide details about terminology and clarify the meanings and definitions- of important vocabulary to ensure it is contextually relevant.

Material and materiality

In this study, the term "material" is used to refer to tangible objects and artifacts within the classroom environment that have cultural and physical properties, including the classroom (Myers, 2019; Kumpulainen, 2019). These objects have often been viewed as passive and secondary to human actions in previous research (Beetz, 2016). However, more recent studies have recognized the agency of these objects in mediating human intentions and actions and beyond (Ingold, 2012; Milne & Scantlebury, 2019).

Materials in this study are considered equally important as humans in shaping social relations and creating intangible forces called sociomateriality (Beetz, 2016; Myers, 2019). The example of the three strokes of the cane used in Ghanaian classrooms (See data presentation p. 133) illustrates how the sociomateriality of an object, in this case, the noise produced by the cane, can shape student behavior (Beetz, 2016), and change the classroom dynamics.

Material objects in the classroom embody meanings and morals beyond their practical use (Grosfilley, 2017). From a postcolonial theoretical and indigenous perspective, the materiality of artifacts, natural things, and abstract concepts were all considered in pre-colonial learning systems and everyday life (Yeboah, 2015; Myers, 2019; Chilisa, 2018). Artifacts have the power to shape an experience and create dynamics based on their fluid, processual, and relational properties (Ingold, 2007, Barad, 2007).

The concept of sociomateriality extends beyond tangible objects to include more intangible representations that inform classroom experiences, such as learning culture, social representation of children, and spatial arrangement (Myers, 2019; Kumpulainen, 2019). These entities impact the flow and patterns of daily classroom routines (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Barad, 2007).

Agency

The term agency is not attached to any one thing and is not a passive or constant attribute of children or objects. Rather, agency is a sum of the doing or making of something different and is given a figure or semiotic attribute, also known as an "actant" in actor-network theory (Law, 2019, Prout, 2000). An agency can be viewed as a snapshot of a performance of transforming something (A) from being in contact with another thing (B) through a relation with (C) (Latour, 2005). Therefore, focusing on situating children's agency in the classroom setting requires a comprehensive account of what shapes their agency and how it is situated in social phenomena, including translating the effect of the complex relational snapshots.

However, according to Latour, there is another dimension to this simplistic perspective that adds complexity (2005). The complex entanglements that create the rationality of children's or anything else's agency, or actants, are not equal, and they do not have the same force, performativity, or importance, as they have different degrees in which they shape the interactions. These degrees can add a second complexity in the effect, which can become a limitation, control, oppression, reproduction, reflection, development, expansion, or opportunity (to name a few symbolic attributes). This type of symbolic meaning is important and made explicit and visible in this study to demonstrate the social effect (Latour, 2005).

Children's agency is an ever-changing representation of their physical characteristics (body) and social positioning. For Prout (2000), these representations are mutually dependent rather than mutually exclusive, as children are embedded in heterogeneous networks (Latour, 1993).

The term agency is multifaceted because its meaning varies slightly when it refers to children's agency (human agents) versus material agency. When situating the agential properties of a social phenomenon in reference to children, it implies that there is an intentionality, subjectivity, conscious or unconscious capacity to act deliberately, and an ability to be active participants, make decisions, and voice their perspectives or inquiries (Beetz, 2016). Mead's description of how the self is gained through the perspective of others suggests that children situate themselves based on social expectations and their social

representation within social settings. To complete the definition of children's agency, the sociocultural perspective of Fenwick (2011) situates the capacity to act as socioculturally mediated and constructed within the emergence of a relationship that is not context-free but context-sensitive (Kontopodis et al., 2011). This illustrates that the term agency is more than a conscious or unconscious capacity and is not limited to an action-driven outcome but rather culturally and contextually informed processes. Agency can also exist in the metaphysical shades between full causality and sheer existence, where entities can make or promote a difference in another entity, regardless of their nature (Latour, 2005).

To overcome the humanist and post-humanist perspectives³, we extended the definition of agency to include non-deliberate and non-intentional processes, which allows us to investigate how these processes produce, emerge, materialize, and change the relations and therefore, the agency of the actors involved. Furthermore, the dynamics and forces these relational processes create are considered as they control, limit, position, and define the social representation of any entity involved, including material things and their materiality. Although the agency of material does not have intentionality, it is performative (Law, 2019; Sørensen, 2009), and by its simple existence, causes a response from people (Mayes, 2019). Therefore, this extended definition also includes the agency of matter (Barad, 2007; Iovino & Oppermann, 2012)

Symbolism

In the indigenous era, tribal chiefs used short proverbs to convey moral stories that were symbolic of wisdom. This concise way of communication was meaningful, as the words of the wise were short (Morrison, 2002). Adinkra symbols are also essential in the Akan culture, and numerous symbols are pictured in each chapter, representing various concepts, social representations, and key messages. Adinkra symbols consist of a sharp design and each one has a proverb in Twi, or another local indigenous language associated with it. These symbols

³ Both humanist and post-humanist reject reductionist views of humans as mere products of their environment and biology, they are limited by their focus on individual agency and subjectivity. Neglecting broader social and ecological contexts such as the entanglements of humans and more-than-humans (Kumpulainen, 2000) that co-constitute each other.

continue to be used in arts and crafts, illustrations, business signs, wax prints on fabrics, and as everyday verbal expressions in multiple local languages (Dzoboto, 2018).

In addition to material things and design, people's positioning is also an important symbolic representation in classroom culture. For example, the teacher represents the ultimate knowledge previously held by elders in tribes, and parents and teachers are symbols of authority and power in the eyes of children. Children, on the other hand, are symbols of immaturity. The symbolic representation of a person can change even though the positioning stays the same. Traditionally, children were the symbol of good men's health, wealth, and social security for the future of the family considering parents will eventually be too old to work or they may get sick or die.

Another tradition in Ghanaian culture is the symbolic representation of animals. The most popular one that literary scholars are trying to revive is the Akan folktale character, Ananse, also referred to as 'Anansi' or 'Kwaku Ananse'. Ananse represents the god of all knowledge in stories and often has the role of the trickster, symbolizing the human spirit of intelligence and cleverness (Sutherland, 1975). The symbol of Ananse has been passed down from one generation to another in an uninterrupted succession, and Sutherland (1975) added that culture is a symbolic reality.

Actant

In this study, the term "actant" coined by Latour (2005) is used interchangeably with the terms "actors", "agents", and "human and non-human actors". The term allows me to avoid mentioning dichotomies like human and non-human, and social and material, which is a particularity of using a sociomaterial perspective. This terminology is perceived as a neutral term and is a good starting point to place material objects as the main actors without making the narrative confusing (Beetz, 2016). The notion of actant comes from the Actor-Network Theory (A.N.T) and addresses the figurative aspects behind giving agency to something that is not identifiable in the anthropomorphic way (Latour, 2005, 1982). The main actant who is performing the action may be a material object, an intangible concept that has a figure, a

concept that is an idea-, or a dynamic that impacts, changes, or informs the social phenomena (Beetz, 2016).

Furthermore, Latour and Callon's definition in "Unscrewing the Big Leviathan" (Latour & Deke, 1981) defines actants as "elements which bend space around itself, makes other elements dependent upon itself and translates their will into a language of its own". This definition illustrates how "the sound of three strokes of a cane hitting a desk" creates and how they impact children's behavior, cause a behavioral response, and how the sound waves become a symbol of discipline and a warning by placing a sound as the actant of the narrative. Additionally, the concept of 'actant' enables us to illustrate social phenomena in four ways (Latour, 2005) which are illustrated with the following contextual examples. The first characterizes the structural aspect: The goal is to institutionalize a social constructivist pedagogy nationwide. The second characterizes the corporate way: The Ministry of Education requires the implementation of a social constructivist pedagogy. The third way characterizes the individual way: The Minister of Education requested the implementation of a social constructivist in all classrooms. The fourth characterizes a collection of individuals: The teachers in public schools are implementing a social constructivist pedagogy in their practices.

These terms of figuration are useful in defining the actant in the analysis of participant interviews who referred to certain practices as "it is our culture", "we do it this way," and "I must do what I am told". The concept of culture here is complex as it refers to entangled periods of history at different times. There is a sense of 'now and today', meaning it is a current practice, as it was yesterday and will be tomorrow, which implies a sense of time that is contemporary. Yet, it refers to something that has been repeated over time, for long enough to be called culture, and the addition of 'our' gives a sense of appropriation, of belonging, and referring to something that is normative.

Therefore, participants give a sense of figuration to the notion of culture that can have historical characteristics or what Latour calls 'structural' characteristics. Latour developed a hierarchical order to organize how an actant, the same one, can have different figurations (Latour, 2005). The first one is structural, which can include culture and traditions such as

"educational policies aim for the implementation of a child-centered or social constructivist pedagogy." The second level includes the corporate bodies and institutions as in "the Ministry of Education requires the implementation of a child-centered pedagogy "showing the direct effects of policies on the classroom practices." The third level of analysis is the group or aggregation of individuals, which encompasses children, teachers, or policymakers. For example, one might say "teachers want to implement a child-centered or social constructivist pedagogy" at this level of analysis. The fourth level of analysis refers to the individual level. At this level, there is a focus on the actions of specific people or agents. For instance, one might say "the teacher implements a child-centered or social constructivist pedagogy" to emphasize the agency of the teacher in carrying out a specific pedagogical approach. This level of analysis is sometimes referred to as the level of the "figure" or the "flesh," as it zooms in on the concrete, embodied actions of specific individuals.

Social

To understand the concept of "social" from a sociomaterial perspective, Fenwick, Edwards, and Sawchuk (2011) definition is used: "the outcome of the interactions between all actors which shape and are shaped by each other,". A slight definition modification is made here, as social refers to the process by which relations are formed, rather than the outcome (Beetz, 2016). This definition aligns with Latour's understanding of social as "the name of a type of momentary association characterized by the way it gathers together into new shapes" (2005). In other words, social refers to the temporary associations between all actors that result in the categorization of things and the formation of new shapes, making it a heterogeneous and partially material concept according to actor-network theory (Law and Mol, 1995; Latour, 2005; Hoffmann, 2016). This means that materials, such as a classroom, can produce social life, which, in the case of this study, refers to the social life of children, as described by Latour's "sociology of translation" (1993).

Traditional and indigenous

In this study, the terminologies traditional and indigenous are used interchangeably as they both refer to principles and practices that originated in the pre-colonial era and are related to the indigenous tribes. For both terms, a few issues have been misinterpreted for different reasons in the literature and must be made clear and explicit to avoid further confusion in this thesis.

The term indigenous has been rightfully, historically, exclusively, and clearly associated and situated in the literature as the pre-colonial era and refers to any aspects of life native to Ghanaian societies (Yenika-Agbaw, 2007; Behr, et al., 2011; Shiza & Makwavaza, 2017). When the Europeans arrived in Ghana, many indigenous aspects of life, rituals, languages, beliefs, or values were discriminated against (Adu-Gyamfi, 2016; Adekunle, 2000; Boakye-Boaten, 2010; Carmody, 2017; Ezeaunya-Esiobu, 2019; Funteh, 2015; Falola, 2002; Nsamenang, 1993; Shiza & Makuva, 2017) including its naming, as colonizers referred to them as uncivilized and savage practices (Yenika-Agbaw, 2007). In his study, Harber (2014) mentions that a certain degree of discrimination remains among Ghanaians who perceive certain indigenous practices as irrelevant to their modern lifestyle. In this study, the concept and temporality of the word traditional refer solely to the principles and practices that originated during the indigenous era, the pre-colonial time. The term is extended to any of the indigenous principles and practices that persisted and continue to inform learning. The literature revealed that the term traditional has been refereeing, though throughout the literature to different periods of time and locations. Therefore, the term should not be confused with the term traditionalists, which refers to the spiritual practices that were guiding indigenous societies.

Also, the term traditional has been very confusing in the literature as it refers to many different periods of time, different locations and at times, suggests the end of learning linked to the past (Akkari & Dasen, 2007). Scholars from the global North mention traditional education to refer to the instructivist, teacher-oriented classroom practices and imply that traditional education is old-fashion and outdated practices implemented in the 18th century

and earlier. Accordingly, for Sørensen, traditional is used as a reference to material elements and entities that come from that same period; the 18th century, same origin; the Global North, and to situate the temporal space within her current research (2009). Consequently, Sørensen calls materials like the blackboard, notebooks, and pencils traditional materials. While in this study, the concept and temporality of the word traditional refers to another period; the indigenous era, some African scholars used the term traditional aligning with western scholars' criteria to name the colonial educational model of instruction. As a result, the same perception of an old-fashioned educational system is implied, but what is perceived as traditional by African scholars is more accurately described as colonial (Adu-Gyamfi, 2016). The term traditional in this thesis refers solely to the many principles and practices that originated during the indigenous era, the pre-colonial era. The term is extended to any of the indigenous principles and practices that persisted and continues to be inform learning (Akkari & Dasen, 2008). Nevertheless, the terminology must not be confused with the term traditionalists, also used in this research, which refers to the spiritual practices that were guiding indigenous societies.

Although, throughout the literature review, the term traditional has been very confusing as it refers to different periods of time, different locations and depending on the historical perspectives of the authors (Akkari & Dasen, 2007). Scholars from the Global North mention traditional for educational matters in reference to instructivist and teacher-oriented pedagogy, and 19th-century western classroom practices. Accordingly, for Sørensen, traditional is used as a reference to material elements and entities that come from that same period; the 19th century, same origin; the Global North, and to situate the temporal space within her current research (2009). Consequently, Sørensen calls materials like the blackboard, notebooks, and pencils traditional materials. While in this study, the concept and temporality of the word traditional refer to the indigenous era. However, some African scholars borrowed the historical reference of the terminology from western scholars and mention it to refer to the colonial educational model of instruction. As a result, the same perception of an old-fashioned educational system is implied, but what is perceived as traditional by African scholars is more accurately described as colonial (Adu-Gyamfi, 2016). The term traditional in this thesis refers solely to the many principles and practices that originated during the indigenous era, the pre-colonial era. However, the term is extended to

any of the indigenous principles and practices that persisted and continue to inform learning (Akkari & Dasen, 2008).

Furthermore, the terminology must not be confused with the term traditionalists, also used in this research, which refers to the spiritual practices that were guiding indigenous societies (Falola, 2000).

Learning versus education

The terminology preferred to describe the transmission of knowledge is 'learning'. Learning is an organic and active process of acquiring new knowledge, strategies, and skills that enable a person to understand (cognitive) and make better sense of the world critically. Learning consists of actively acquiring practical skills, and behavior (norms), the higher thinking (values) is developed through active participation. The process includes handling objects, experiencing different environments, writing creatively, discussing new knowledge (language).

Education refers to a colonial system of schooling children historically dominated by teachers, primarily focusing on literacy skills. Education systems often result in the passive learning of children, with a spatial arrangement where they are taught to simply absorb and repeat the knowledge provided by their teacher (Adu-Gyamfi, 2013, Kapoor & Edwards, 2010).

1.6 The structure of the chapters

Chapter 2 provides the theoretical and historical background. It is divided into three sections. Part I provides a short background of African psychology and a perspective on educational psychology from more recent research conducted by African scholars. Part II describes the theoretical approaches guiding the research, which consist of sociocultural theories, and sociomaterial approaches such as postcolonial theory. Key concepts are explained and illustrated with contextual examples. Part III presents a historical perspective of Ghanaian learning practices over the last 600 years. The historical retrospective is innovative as it includes learning systems in place from the indigenous era, the introduction of colonialist

reforms, and proceeds through the independence of Ghana up to today, with some light mentioning of 21st-century discourses.

Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive description of the research methodology and design, including the sampling of schools and participants and the choice of ethnographic methods. The chapter also outlines the ethical considerations and authorization processes, as well as the adherence to the Child Protection Guidelines (APSA, 2019). In addition, the chapter describe the analytical process used in the study, which incorporates the six steps of Braun and Clarke's (2019) thematic analysis approach, as well as the use of MAXQDA software and the coding system of Saldana (2015). Through these analytical tools, each step of the process is explained in detail, contributing to the study's strength and rigor.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed account of the data collected in the format of a story. The story is told in chronological order and describes the daily routine of four children and their experience in a classroom. The choice of the storyline is a respectful narrative style that aligns with the indigenous way of transferring knowledge. The story has four protagonists, which represents the child participants in both rural and urban settings, and from various socioeconomic backgrounds. The school day starts at home, includes their journey to school, and includes anecdotes, quotes, and pictures to illustrate a holistic perspective of what children experience during a full day of learning in the classroom.

Chapter 5 is the culmination of the research, comprehensively presenting the findings. It reflects the deeper analysis of the data, which helped to connect the methodological tools and theoretical perspectives with the findings. The chapter is structured around the research questions, highlighting the themes and subthemes that emerged from the data. The findings were interpreted through the lens of sociomateriality, including postcolonial theories, which emphasize the inseparability of social, historical legacies, and material dimensions in shaping children's agency. As such, the chapter provides a sociomaterial perspective of the complex relationships that constitute children's agency in the classroom.

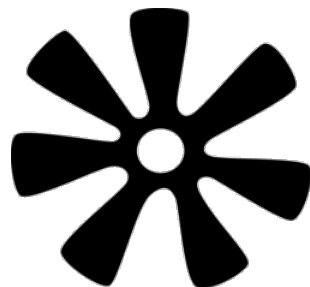
Chapter 6, the final chapter of the thesis, presents the conclusions drawn from the study, along with a summary of the key findings and recommendations for future research in this

area. The focus on children's agency is reflected in the conclusion and implications of the study.

Conclusion of the chapter

The Adinkra symbol San Ko Fa, which means 'Go back and get it', is introduced in this chapter. The symbol embodies the importance of properly honoring the past in the present to inform the future. Similarly, Walter Rodney's observation that indigenous African learning systems are outstanding due to their close links with social life, their collective nature, and their many-sidedness, highlights the value of connecting with and learning from cultural traditions. As this thesis examines the role of indigenous knowledge and sociomateriality in shaping children's agency in Ghanaian classrooms, these quotes serve as a reminder of the importance of acknowledging and incorporating cultural heritage into educational practices.

Chapter 2 Theoretical frameworks and historical background



Ananse Ntentan ⁴

The complexities of life experience combine knowledge, wisdom, creativity, and good judgment in decision making.

Dzokoto, (2018)

2.1 Overview

The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part provides an overview of African psychology to contextualize how the field emerged and to highlight some of the challenges faced in selecting African researchers to develop a theoretical foundation. The second part offers a detailed account of the selected theoretical approaches used to investigate the classroom from a sociomaterial perspective and their relevance to the indigenous paradigm developed in postcolonial indigenous research of Chilisa et al. (2012). The third part provides a historical background of learning systems and how their principles and practices changed since the indigenous era through the colonial period, which affected children's learning experiences and daily routines.

⁴Adinkra symbol: Ananse literally means spider. Ananse is an important symbol of wisdom, creativity, crafty attitude and of someone who can outsmart any prey by taking clever decisions.

Ntontan means the web which represent the spinning wheel of life.

2.2 Background of African psychology

Psychology in Africa can be traced back to ancient Egyptian civilizations around 1500 BCE, where the first psychology records were found (Juliao, 2018). The records show that the Egyptians understood mental conditions and associated the psyche with the soma of the indigenous people. These records documented cases of depression, dementia, and their effects on the physical bodies (Juliao, 2018).

In Ghana, indigenous societies understood the importance of cognitive, physical, and emotional development and incorporated them into children's socialization practices, emphasizing the development of empathy for others, the environment, and the spirits or other intangible entities the tribe worshiped (Morrison, 2002). In the pre-colonial era, indigenous societies explained and understood children's illnesses, diseases, body malfunctioning, or strange behaviors as a manifestation of a higher intangible power, often being the manifestation of the ancestors. These perspectives were not explicitly labelled as "psychology," but indigenous societies were considerate of people's feelings, beliefs, and other concepts that required the development of critical and higher order thinking skills. They understood that certain intangible elements created forces that impacted people's behavior or their physical bodies (Adunkele, 2000). However, the colonizers perceived these perspectives as primitive and savage, meaning uncivilized (Juliao, 2018), and they were discriminated against for a long time (Adu-Gyamfi, 2016; Adekunle, 2000; Boakye-Boaten, 2010; Carmody, 2017; Ezeaunya-Esiobu, 2019; Funteh, 2015; Falola, 2002; Nsamenang, 1993; Shiza & Makuva, 2017).

In 1920, Francis Cecil Summer, the "father of black psychology," was the first African American to receive a Ph.D. in psychology. His contribution to psychology was "race psychology," which critiqued Eurocentric methods of education that he believed mistreated African American children (Wober, 2014). Even though he studied in America, his contribution was a validation to take African descendent scholars seriously, to develop psychology for the African population on both African and American continents, and to develop a further understanding of how racism affected African's daily life globally.

Meanwhile, on the African continent, the field of psychology was developing slowly and was focusing on the psychology of the primitive, which Levy-Bruhl measured against civilized Euro-western psychology (1926). Levy-Bruhl's early work did not understand or consider the supernatural aspect guiding indigenous societies' perception of life (1926). He also disregarded 'the nature and function of symbols' and developed terminologies such as 'pre-logical mentality' and 'the primitive mentality,' both mystical aspects of life that were perceived as primitive rather than sociocultural factors. This was because British and American psychologists, who also controlled the field of psychology in 37 African countries, including Ghana, set the norms at that time.

Educational psychology

Behr et al.'s (1986) work was heavily influenced by the sociocultural theory of development, which was popularized by Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. This theory emphasizes the role of social interaction and cultural context in the development of higher mental functions, including language, memory, and reasoning (Wertsch, 1991). Behr et al. applied this theory to the African context, arguing that classroom practices and learning environments must be shaped by cultural and social factors in order to transmit knowledge and shape the future of African societies effectively. In addition to sociocultural theory, Behr et al. also drew on the work of Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, who proposed a constructivist theory of cognitive development. Piaget argued that children actively construct their own understanding of the world through exploration and discovery, and that their cognitive development proceeds through a series of stages (Piaget, 1952). Behr et al. recognized the importance of this constructivist approach in shaping educational practices, particularly in the African context where students may have different backgrounds and experiences that impact their learning.

Finally, Behr et al. acknowledged the role of behaviorism in educational psychology, particularly the work of American psychologist B.F. Skinner. Skinner's work emphasized the importance of reinforcement and punishment in shaping behavior, and Behr et al. recognized the value of these principles in shaping classroom management strategies (Behr et al., 1986). Overall, Behr et al.'s work represents a unique blend of Western and African educational psychology perspectives, drawing on a range of theories and approaches to develop a

comprehensive understanding of how to effectively shape classroom practices and learning environments in the African context.

2.3 The theoretical frameworks

The theoretical lenses that guided the study consist of sociomaterial approaches including postcolonial theories. The goal is to illustrate how these diverse lenses make it possible to situate empirically and holistically, children's daily classroom experience taking a sociomaterial perspective on children's agency and social representation. The diversity of perspectives used reflects the complexity of a classroom whose context is made of historical, material, and sociocultural elements (Haraway, 1991; Braidotti, 2013). These lenses align with the main pillars of this study which are the culturalist paradigm, the relational ontology, and the social constructionist epistemology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It is important to make explicit that even though Western scholars developed these selected approaches, they align, and they are respectful and inclusive of indigenous ideologies (Pence, 2011). In other words, the different frameworks used in this study are not foreign ideologies to the indigenous context; this is described in detail in part III of this chapter. Also, as often as it was available, indigenous scholars' publications were used to avoid developing an ethnocentric perspective (Chilisa & Bagele, 2019). Nevertheless, the goal of taking a sociomaterial perspective to study children's everyday experiences is to re-iterate the important fact that indigenous societies, in their everyday teaching and learning processes, understood and integrated the forces and meanings created by more-than-human entities (Myers, 2019; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Kumpulainen, 2019). Also, as suggested by Mortari (2005) to guarantee and produce quality research, it is important to make these assumptions explicit, as they are the roots informing the research processes.

Sociocultural psychology

A good starting point in exploring classroom practices and their materiality is through sociocultural psychology approaches (Kumpulainen, 2020). Sociocultural psychology connects psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, and semiotics to investigate the role that materials play in developing meaning in social phenomena and symbols, how these

symbols shape children's experiences, create consciousness or unconscious conditions or patterns, and become social norms (Valsiner & Rosa, 2007). Sociocultural psychology enables us to decentralize the focus from human actors and help illustrate how material and the materiality of social phenomena can be considered the main actors (Valsiner & Rosa, 2007; Beetz, 2016; Moro, 2015; Kumpulainen, 2016).

Initially, conventional psychology scholars in the field of developmental psychology, such as Piaget, described reality as an objective world that the subject thinks about (Moro, 2015). Piaget's (1952, 1954) described objects as separate physical entities that result from a person ascribing them attributes that are independent of the mind (Moro et al., 2015). Piaget's perspective of material objects aligned with other cognitive scholars, such as Vygotsky, who disregarded the cultural status of material objects. Initially, Vygotsky's attention focused on the role of language, which Moro (2015) assumed to be in response to Marx's philosophy. Drawing on pioneers of sociocultural theories, such as Vygotsky & Luria (Akhutina & Pylaeva, 2011), we can see the importance of focusing on understanding how humans transformed their thinking, perception, the environment of their everyday life through 'tool mediation' and their conception (Moro et al., 2015). According to Akhutina and Pylaeva (2011), Vygotsky explored how the development of human psychology forms through signs that he called 'meaningless' and 'reductionist' as they were random in essence and moved away from focusing on the meaning of signs, a point Moro (2022) re-emphasized. He later focused on the role of the environment and the cultural aspects of the social. However, whether Vygotsky & Luria made explicit that their consideration of material semiotics may depend on how language and signs are considered (Moro et al., 2015). Kumpulainen suggested that Vygotsky omitted to consider the inherent meaning of objects (2019) while Moro suggested that if signs are perceived as solely immersed with linguistic aspects of reality, from a sociomaterial perspective, there they are excluded. However, if language and signs are considered material, then Vygotsky and Luria did not exclude the concept of material-semiotic (2015). Based on this, it seems that Vygotsky and Luria are considering them as important material components.

Additionally, according to Cole (1996), in Vygotsky's cultural-historical psychology theories, the background of culture and history are important elements to consider as they can shape

the mental life of people and their behavior. Also, these two entities are not distinctive, but mutual and interactive, creating relationships (Berry et al., 2011; Oppermann, 2021) that influence one another equally. Thus, these mutual relations align with Lave & Wenger (1991) who stated that learning is situated. This perception of learning moves knowledge from being the content of the mind to the social sphere (Vygotsky, 1978). This is also described as “a set of relations among persons, activity, and the world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping.

Sociomaterial

In the Global North, the term sociomaterial has become familiar in education sciences, technology studies, sociology, organizational studies, postcolonial, and feminist studies (Oliveiro de Moura, 2019, Scott & Orlikowski, 2014). The term sociomaterial, here, is purposely written without the hyphen. The purpose of a hyphen is to link two or more elements as if they were two separate entities. The hyphen is taken away to emphasize their relationality as being one (Oliveiro de Moura, 2019). However, the term sociomaterial is not perfect because the word socio becomes the prefix of material. The role of a prefix is either to change the meaning of the root of the word or to make a new word. In this case, it is neither and this makes the terminology confusing and a pleonasm. The theoretical belief in this study is that the social is material, and the material is social as emphasized by Beetz’s concept of inseparable characteristics of both words (2016). Also, the term sociomaterial, is flexible and inclusive of the multiple agencies of matters (Braidotti, 2013) that characterize situated social phenomena. A sociomaterial approach enables us to develop an analytical process that gives equal agential performative properties (Iannaccone, 2017, Kirchoff, 2009) to any entities regardless if they are: human, material, and non-material things (intangible matters), meanings produced, relations when entities connect, patters created through daily life repetitions (Kirchoff, 2009) including the historical background, spatial arrangement, practices, norms, dynamics, and temporal dimensions (Murriss, 2019) of social phenomena. All these entities, called actants (Latour, 2005) whether they are present, or connected at a distance, like a cultural norm or historical tradition, all are, to some different degree or another, relational and create classroom dynamics. Additionally, the classroom dynamics also have agency and shape how people behave and think. The agency is not an attribute

(Kumpulainen & Kajaama, 2020) but the effect (s) they produce when they connect which shapes children's experience, how they perceive the world and how they (children) are perceived by teachers, and their parents (Beetz, 2016).

Moreover, a sociomaterial perspective is used to overcome the limitation of the previous research of Ghanaian classrooms that placed human actors at the centre of the social phenomena and omitted to consider the material elements as equal and active actors (Fenwick, 2012, Latour, 2005) that have performative qualities (Sørensen, 2009) and equal agency on one another (Oliveiro de Moura, 2019, Engeström, 1999, Sørensen, 2009). In conventional research, the material is a passive agent fulfilling human need and intentionality (Sørensen, 2009, Latour, 2005, Beetz, 2016). While this anthropocentric perspective can be useful in advancing a certain type of social studies about learning (Beetz, 2016), in this study human actors are decentralized and share the central stage (Beetz, 2016, Tunçalp, 2015). Consequently, the decentralization of the human actors in the social phenomena allows us, as Oliveiro de Moura emphasized, to investigate children's everyday experiences and to situate how the agencies of all actants shape their own agency (2016). Also, by considering the agencies of intangible entities other theoretical frameworks like postcolonial theories are compatible (Kapoor & Edwards, 2010) and include the following similarities (Oliveiro de Moura, 2016): Social phenomena are made of entangled heterogeneous entities (Latour, 1993, Mol, 1995).

The entanglement of these heterogeneous elements and concepts creates meanings, forces, and dynamics (Myers, 2019, Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, Kumpulainen, 2019).

These entities have a mutual and reciprocal influence on each other (Latour, 1993).

More-than-human (Myers, 2019, Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, Kumpulainen, 2019) actors like artifacts, material, spatial orderings, and intangible elements like matter, dynamics, and flow, have an equal agency which is also called 'distributed' agency and 'materially assembled agency' (Mayers, 2016). Human and more-than-human actors are actants (Latour, 2005), and these actants are performative (Russel & Dillon, 2016). Actants are relational and do not have preconditions, as they come to be, through their relations (Latour, 2005).

The sociomaterial characteristic of a social phenomenon is the situated process that creates an experience, a change, a transformation, rather than an outcome (Beetz, 2016).

The analytical approaches and narratives developed are non-humanist, and step away from dichotomies and reification (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, Oliveira De Moura, 2016, Orlikowski, 1996). These principles are a combination of keywords inspired by Beetz's (2016) material semiotics concept, by Law's Actor-Network theory (ANT), (1995), by Engeström's cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) (2001), by Braidotti, posthuman perspective (2013), Deleuze & Guattari, new materialism (1987), and postcolonial theories (Oliveiro de Moura, 2019, Kapoor & Dillon, 2010). These key theoretical concepts enabled us to investigate the sociomateriality that shapes children's experiences in a classroom, and support answering the research questions of the thesis.

Early sociomaterial studies described practices as activities made of entanglements (Latour, 2005, Oliveira de Moura, 2019) of the social and the material (Leonardi, 2007, Scott & Orlikowski, 2014). While such dichotomy is not useful, it allowed us to start the discussion of how to step away from conventional assumptions about knowledge, agency, subjectivity the social, and the real (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). It also highlights the importance of taking into consideration the social performance that surrounds material objects. For Vygotsky, classroom actions are social phenomena that include skillful performances that create drama (1987). Similarly, for Latour, they are performances (2005). Consequently, from a sociomaterial perspective, a classroom setting is perceived in this thesis as an entanglement of heterogeneous elements, called actants. These actants include the people, spatial arrangement, artifacts or things, dynamics like cultural beliefs, time, and historical elements of the various ecological niches, and interdisciplinary chronological fields like colonialism (Engeström, 2001). The concept of entanglement of heterogeneous elements has been growing in material culture studies, (Fenwick & Landri, 2012, Kumpulainen, Rajala, & Kajamaa, 2019), especially in the field of education (Kumpulainen, 2020). However, as Barad emphasized (2007), these entanglements do not unassumingly intertwine. A material body, whether human or more-than-human, 'lack an independent, self-contained existence' according to Barad (2007). She further states that existence is not an individual affair. Individuals, including intangible entities and things, do not pre-exist in their interactions; rather, they materialize through and as part of their entangled intra-relating' as they are

relational (Barad, 2007). The aim of a sociomaterial approach is to explore how all actants⁵ (Latour, 2005) entangled, what is changed and created within these entanglements.

Thus, a sociomaterial perspective enables us to analyse how cultural artifacts, man-made things like the classroom setting, shape the social phenomenon and how their performances create dynamics that ultimately impact children's agency (Bispo & Godoy, 2012, Oliveira de Moura, 2019, Leonardi, 2017, Orlikowski, 1996, Scott & Orlikowski, 2014). Furthermore, a sociomaterial lens helps to develop a practice-based perspective of the artifacts (Oliveiro de Moura, 2019, Bispo, 2015, Carlile, Gherardi, 2012, Nicolini, D. 2013), and the relations between all actants, and what is produced from these relations (Landri, 2014). From a sociomaterial lens everything in the classroom has relational effects, performative attributes (Iannaccone, 2017) and is emergent rather than steady and motionless (Oliveiro de Moura, 2019). The social phenomenon are everyday practices and experiences in the classroom, people's movements, transitions that are empirical and created patterns that are constantly changing (Fenwick & Landri, 2012).

The key concept is that they do not exist beforehand and do not have preconditions, as they come to be, through their relations (Barad, 2007). They can materialise simply by being present or taken away, by an action taken or the performativity of the actant because of the action of one versus another, or by the omission of a certain material (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, Oleivero De Moura, 2016, Orlikowski, 1996). The mutual permeability is organic and emergent and creates culturally informed relations that become inseparable (Leonardi, 2012). Cautiously, this inseparable perspective can be limiting as it diminishes the independent nature of social (Leonardi, 2012). To illustrate this with an example, in 2020 within the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic, children were reported having no access to learning as they did not have access to a classroom (Hugues, 2021). By taking away material artifacts, children's learning was on standby, reflecting the dependence of social phenomena and their material.

⁵ See page, x section 1.16 for full definition of actants which are humans and non-humans.

For Taguchi (2010), classroom activities are not linear processes. He refers to 'human discursive inscription upon passive objects as a dense mixture of material-discursive events that are folded upon each other' (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 22 in Myers, 2019, Barad, 2007). For Kien (2008), when the meaning behind the artifact is repeated, it can become a cultural practice creating a 'cultural voice' (Iannaccone & Cattaruzza, 2019). Hence, the material context is very much like a language in the sense that it develops meanings (Corsaro, 2015), has its own agency (Thomas, 1995), power (Latour, 2005), and equal reciprocity which create the entanglements that enable children's interpretive reproduction of their everyday routines (Corsaro, 2015).

Applying a sociomaterial lens to the current learning context can help illuminate previously unnoticed actors and dynamics, to develop a fuller representation of how educational practices are implemented and sustained (Fenwick, et al., 2011) and to use a theory that is not monolithic in essence but ever-evolving (Fenwick, & Landri, 2012). The approach illustrates the structural hierarchy at the micro-level, overcomes how social relations are established and persist, Latour (2005) and how these elements impact and are informing the social representation of all actants (Fenwick & Landri, 2012).

The intangible things such as people's perception of a classroom, socialization norms, symbolic actants like the noise made by the cane, sociocultural influences, spatial arrangements, the classroom infrastructure, location, as well as missing material or nothingness (Beetz, 2016) are all performative actants that create forces and dynamics. Thus, sociomaterial approaches enable us to answer the research question 'How do indigenous knowledge, colonialism, and the sociomateriality of the classroom shape children's agency? This question reduces the importance of teachers and teaching styles, as well as other anthropocentric perspectives (Beetz, 2016), and as Scott and Orlikowski (2014) suggest, positions the social as material, and the material as social. When sociomaterial perspectives are taken into consideration, then it is possible to reverse the discourses and conventional way of thinking about practices, pedagogies, the classroom environment (Iannaccone, 2017, Beetz, 2016), and its culture. Allowing the researcher to step away from a conventional adaptation of the environment to accommodate the implementation of the 2019 Ghana national curriculum, as is the case in the study context. Instead, the material semiotic inquiry

of Sørensen (2009) is useful in asking, ‘how can the space and material be organized to facilitate the learner’s autonomy, create a conducive environment, and enable their holistic development’.

This innovative perspective on sociomaterial also emphasizes that the material does not represent humans’ purpose, intentions, or directions (Scott & Orlikowski, 2014). The sociomaterial here aligns better with the one of Latour (2005). He perceives the social as the ‘translation’ of the momentary associations between all the actants and categorizes the way things come together as their own new shape. These principles share similarities with the constructionist epistemology guiding the philosophical view of my thesis, sociocultural psychology theories, postcolonial studies, ethnographic methods, and, more importantly, with indigenous practices.

Gfeller, in her 2020 study, emphasized the co-constructive aspects of dynamics, whereas, in this study, there are the relational aspects between actants and the emerging dynamics that enable us to address the ‘how’ things connect and to address the ‘how’ of the main research question. Therefore, sociomaterial approaches align with the relational ontology of Lather who stated, “theories of the subject shifted from an epistemology of human consciousness to a relational ontology” (in Beetz, 2016, p. 125). They also align with a Baradian perspective, ‘agential realism’ (Barad, 2007), and the relational ontology of Mayes who stated, “theories of the subject shifted from an epistemology of human consciousness to a relational ontology” (2019). This ontological perspective suggests that every experience emerging within the classroom is relational and performative (Scott & Orlikowski, 2008). All elements either social, historical, material, or systematized, produce relations, and cannot be separated from the social situation they create. In this ontological perspective, the material and the humans come to be, to exist uniquely through intra-actions (Tunçap, 2016, Barad, 2007). As Tunçap emphasized, the characteristics of both entities are shaped through these intra-actions which did not exist before, as no entities are given pre-existing agency (2016). To illustrate this, point the example of the blackboard is given. When a person enters or sees a picture of a room with a blackboard calls or thinks of the room as a classroom. In the Ghanaian context, when teachers set their teaching practices outside of the classroom when

the weather is too hot to be inside, they reproduce the classroom by taking the blackboard outside (See chapter four, p, 135 for a deeper analysis of this matter).

Before providing details about the classroom setting, it is important to understand how the key concepts mentioned previously are applied in various social settings. The first example illustrates a Christian church and a mosque. While both are community spaces dedicated to acknowledging god's spiritual messages, they are distinctly different. In a Ghanaian Christian church, men, women, and children sit together on chairs or long wooden benches forming rows that are facing a priest who faces them. The priest delivers long sermons while the choir stands near him animating the prayers with lively singing, expressed by standing up and moving their bodies to the rhythmic high beat along with the congregants who sing along in an energetic and dynamic manner. Alternatively, more subdued, in a mosque, men and women pray in separate rooms, there are no chairs or seats but big carpets laying across the room where its congregants pray standing up, all lining up in rows arranged to face Mecca, and deliver their praying by bowing and prostrating synchronously, performing series of repetitive quiet movements.

While both settings are places of worship where individuals meet to pray with other people, the materiality of each place differs, leading to different associated behaviors. The spatial arrangement of the church versus the mosque also encourages a different body expression, a different gender arrangement, and different voice volumes when praying. If a person is asked to imagine a church or a mosque, the person visualizes a different architectural design, and expects different discourses that exist in both settings, and are delivered through highly orchestrated, different procedures. This illustrates how the sociomaterial entanglements and their complexities, some visible and others intangible, can perform, with or without a human action, to shape people's thinking, feelings, and perceptions (Oliveiro de Moura, 2019, Engeström, 2001 Latour, 2005, Sørensen, 2009).

The key is to understand the differences demonstrated here that involve the sociomaterial elements that shape people's perceptions about them, their behavior, language, and body positioning (Iannaccone, 2017). The same is true for classroom settings and their architectural structures, spatial arrangements, body positioning, and material artifacts that are available,

and expected to fill the space. In the context of the Ghanaian public classrooms, key actants are, by order of significance, the blackboard, notebooks, teacher, the cane, and children. Additionally, essential materials complementary to the notebooks include pencils, erasers, rulers, and pencil sharpeners.

Specific to the blackboard, it is the one artifact that differentiates a classroom from any other room and has been reported to be the key actor in the findings (chapter 5, p.,162). In the classroom setting, if the blackboard is taken away, the room can become a voting center or anything a room can be converted into depending on the material present or the action of people within its walls. By just entering the door, depending on the materiality of the room and the positioning of the sociomaterial elements, a person will know their responsibilities, their social representation, who holds the authority, as well as what behavior and rules are expected. Similarly, a classroom without teachers or children has no performative properties but only symbolic characteristics. These latter localized and humanized examples can be extended to the material semiotics of the blackboard.

As a result, the material things, some visible like the blackboard by their physicality, others invisible by their conceptual nature, are given equal performative qualities to humans. In the last two decades, there has been a growing emphasis on the material aspect of classroom practices which consider artifacts not as passive actors (Latour, 2005, Beetz, 2016) but as active entities that have agency (Sørensen, 2009). As a result, the exploration of social phenomena positioned actants, such as the blackboard, people, and the dynamics of the classroom culture, each with an equal agency (Fenwick, 2014) and both performative (Sørensen, 2009) and continuously influencing one another (Oliveiro de Moura, 2019, Engeström, 2001, Sørensen, 2009), has been a growing interest in a variety of educational fields.

Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) contribution

The sociomaterial perspective draws on concepts like equal agency given to material and terminologies such as material semiotics developed within Actor-Network Theory (ANT). However, ANT is not without its limitations. For instance, as Law (2007) stated, the term ANT

is an oxymoron that uses both the words actor and network, yet it fails to explain how actors and networks are entangled. Furthermore, the focus on translation overlooks the ongoing process of negotiation that occurs between entities in a sociomaterial setting. While Latour's proposal to rename ANT the "sociology of translation" may be more apt, it still falls short of adequately capturing the nuances of sociomateriality. Moreover, the intentionality to separate structure (activities, networks) from agency creates a dualism that is avoided in the sociomaterial perspective, as all actants are perceived as inseparable (Beetz, 2016). Therefore, while ANT can be useful in explaining why networks are shaped, it falls short in describing how social phenomena are situated.

Similarly, while the post-ANT concepts of mutual and reciprocal attributes and situatedness are preferred in this study, it is important to recognize that these concepts are not without critique. For example, some scholars argue that the focus on mutual and reciprocal relations in sociomateriality risks overlooking the power dynamics that exist between different entities (Mol, 2002). Additionally, the situatedness of intra-action may not fully account for the broader structural factors that shape sociomaterial phenomena, such as colonialism or neoliberalism. Therefore, while the sociomaterial perspective provides a useful lens for examining the entangled relationships between actors, it is important to approach it with a critical eye, considering its limitations and potential blind spots. Using a sociomaterial lens in exploring the intersection of time and space in research is not without its limitations and critiques. While incorporating material semiotics and postcolonial theories can provide a more nuanced and multi-dimensional view of time and space, some scholars argue that it can also obscure other important aspects of the social phenomenon under study. For instance, some researchers point out that the sociomaterial perspective may underemphasize the role of agency and human actors in shaping social interactions (Orlikowski, 2007).

Postcolonial theories

In the last two decades, scholars have increasingly acknowledged sociomaterial characteristics in their postcolonial research (Seth, 2009; Anderson, 2009; Scott, 2007), but did not apply them to sociomateriality at the time (Hinton, 2015; Carlile et al., 2013; Fenwick et al., 2011). It is important to note that these sensibilities align (Oliveiro de Moura, 2019)

when considering the colonial legacy of classroom settings, practices, and people's perceptions of learning. A postcolonial theoretical framework makes it possible to examine and analyze the meaning produced by the invisible but persistent forces of colonialism's legacy and the processes that weakened the significance of indigenous learning culture (Agbenyega, 2012).

However, it is important to reflect on the postcolonial approach and acknowledge its limitations critically. For instance, some scholars argue that postcolonial perspectives reduce the complexity of colonial experiences and flatten the nuances of the relationships between colonizers and colonized (Chakrabarty, 2000). Additionally, postcolonial perspectives can focus too much on the binary of colonizer and colonized, leading to a simplified understanding of power relations (Said, 1994). Moreover, it is important to recognize that Ghanaian leaders were not successful to transform the colonial education systems and promote indigenous knowledge (Harber, 2017; Paracka, 2003; Subedi, 2008). A postcolonial perspective enables us to establish that classroom practices, while represented as neutral, are influenced by past and recent political discourses and decisions, by the forces created by the continuous materiality of the historical background, and sociocultural beliefs and processes at the government and local levels.

Classroom practices are not neutral as they are intertwined with Ghana's colonial past, disciplinary practices, the materiality, imperial discourses, and practices. The reality is that the historical entities have close, continuous, and direct effects on classroom culture (Agbemiase, 2010; Adelonke, 2000; Nunkunya, 2003). According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the effects of the colonial past are not distant ecological theories but are intangible actants that impact the everyday dynamic of the classroom, people's perception of classrooms, instructional practices, and discourses, along with socialization norms of other social settings, like home.

A postcolonial perspective also helps to identify the continuous discriminatory concepts, socialization norms, and children's learning practices that continue to be oppressive, despite the colonial power having disappeared (Harber, 2017; Manful, 2018; Morrison, 2002; Salifu, 2017). Today's Ghanaian classroom practices are intangibly guided by the unchanging

continuous Eurocentric policies and the 2019 Ghana national curriculum, as well as the disciplinary practices applied, in the choice of using English as the language of instruction, and, most perceptibly, in the school infrastructures which mimic or replicate colonial models. These characteristics align with Hinton, who concluded in his research that certain materials are still deeply entangled with colonialism (2015). Nombuso (2008) went further to state that the effects of colonial ideology and the underlying or invisible effects remain in people's beliefs, values, and behaviors which are unconscious and in the minds of people (Shiza and Makuvaza, 2017; Agbenyega, 2011).

Overall, a postcolonial perspective re-emphasizes that the imposed colonial ruling and power that lasted for 487 years, shaped the everyday life of many generations, and only ended 60 years ago. Considering this long duration, it is easy to see how certain colonial norms about the socialization of children became embedded in the classroom and became assimilated as Ghanaian family and community norms (Kapoor & Edwards, 2010). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the impact of colonialism on Ghanaian education and to analyze classroom practices through a postcolonial lens critically. By doing so, we can gain a better understanding of how colonialism has affected the educational system in Ghana and how it continues to shape the daily classroom practices and experiences of students. Ultimately, this can help inform educational policies and practices that are more equitable and responsive to the needs and experiences of Ghanaian learners.

2.4 The historical perspective of learning

The second part of this chapter is a historical retrospective to explore how the learning environment, practices, principles, and children's agency⁶ changed and how these changes were enacted over the last 600 years. The historical background is organized chronologically into four parts: 1) the original or traditional indigenous learning systems; 2) colonial education; 3) the current hybrid learning practices; and 4) the projected learning system called 21st-century learning (Hugues, 2018). The purpose of the historical background is to situate the origin of certain practices, principles and material elements that are implemented

⁶ agency and participation are terms used interchangeably.

and guide today's Ghanaian classroom practices, and to investigate how child participation changed from the pre-colonial era through today. The rationale of the historical review is to develop an understanding of how socialization practices came to produce the hybrid practices implemented today, to locate which period of time the principles and practices implemented today belong to, and to situate children's agency and social representation in their everyday lives in each period.

Indigenous Learning practices

The first learning practices explored in this historical journey are indigenous ones that were implemented before the colonization of Ghana. Back then, 600 years ago, indigenous societies were made of more than one hundred linguistically and culturally distinct tribes. This demonstrates the extensive diversity that existed in indigenous practices, however, Nsamenang (1993) identified similarities, common practices, and common principles across all tribes. The first common thread of indigenous learning systems is that knowledge was transmitted orally for many generations over thousands of years (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016). Consequently, the published literature is limited, but this limitation does not reflect any limitations about the system itself. Indigenous philosophy was established on one main concept, the development, and the emergence of the ethos of each individual (Nsamenang, 1993). According to Mungazi (1996), to build a good character, every member of the community, including young children, hold a special place in their tribe. Their positioning was not determined by their individual identity, but by their contribution to the well-being of the community. As a result, everyone was trained to develop empathy, and to have a sensitivity or awareness of the needs of others and the community. Accordingly, Boakye-Boaten (2010) in his broader African perspective stated that the pedagogical philosophy of African indigenous tribes was relevant to the existence of the child within the cultural context.

Peer learning culture

The empowerment of children through their peer culture was a key aspect of indigenous practices. Adult intervention was limited to occasional moderation of specific tasks, while elders served as mentors sharing their wisdom for special instruction. Children were divided into mixed-age peer groups, and older children helped younger peers practice and apply their new knowledge and skills through numerous repetitions, a process similar to Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding (1987). According to Nsamenang (1993), among themselves, a child's role was more constant and hands-on.

The content children learned varied greatly depending on the group they belonged to within their ethnic community. Some learned about the environment, while others learned about the logistical needs of the tribes. The distribution of children was mostly organized by gender, and elders had a say in who should do what based on their observations of children's aptitudes and character at a young age (Woolman, 2001). The development of strong physical ability and endurance was highly valued and necessary for full participation in activities such as hunting, fishing, water fetching, or farming (Woolman, 2001). The variety of skills learned also depended on the geographical location, with children in the north of the country learning to hunt and weave baskets, while those on the coast learned to fish and trade goods.

Like Nsamenang (1993), Funteh (2015) confirmed that many indigenous tribes shared similar practices and organized them within four principles: communalism, preparationism, functionalism, and holismism.

Communalism was based on the involvement of the whole community in the teaching and caring about the well-being of each individual within the community. Every single person in the community, young or old, was involved and had a role to play, to some degree or another, in the transmission of knowledge. Any older person, regardless of their age, was perceived as a potential teacher for the younger ones. Pratt et al., (2018) further emphasized that learning was intertwined with the daily life and needs of the community which also includes ensuring that everyone's behavior was aligned, appropriate, and respectful of the strict rules of their

tribe (Paracka, 1975). Paracka's statement, building on Funteh's (2015) idea of communalism helps situate the origin of the African proverb 'it takes a village to raise a child'.

According to Funteh (2015), the second principle that guides indigenous learning practices is preparationism. The socialization of children aimed to prepare children to be able to actively contribute to all aspects of the tribe's everyday life in their home, village, and within their ethnic field of expertise (Funteh, 2015). Pratt further explained that indigenous societies understood that "education is not a means to an end" (2018) but a lifelong journey. The preparationist principle emphasized how the time attributed to learning skills and aptitudes was not determined in advance but based on the needs and abilities of everyone. The age and the amount of time needed to master a skill or to develop an understanding were less important than the ability to demonstrate new knowledge and skills effectively (Funteh, 2015). In their research, Adeyemi and Adeyinka, (2002), compared the preparationist principle, to the Vygotskian (1987) sociocultural perspective on the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which consists of the consideration of the distance between what a learner can do alone versus what the learner is able to accomplish with the support of another person (Chaiklin, 2003).

Functionalism, the third of Nsamenang's principles (1993), considers how children's learning was motivated, depending on their position in the tribe. Indigenous societies understood that their survival was based on developing a system in which the differentiation of roles provided for workers at all levels. The development of practical skills, social responsibilities, and the ability to actively participate in effective functionality of the tribe's daily activities were also very significant. Children learned through scaffolding methods which consisted of them observing/listening/copying skills and practicing until perfect.

The key to socializing children was to convey the social, political, and cultural expectations of the tribe (Agbemiase, 2003) and to ensure that everyone developed good character, empathy and became good citizens (Mosweunyane, 2013, Woolman, 2001). A good citizen knew the community rules, followed them, and acted accordingly. Everyone was held accountable for the well-being of the community and the chiefs expected everyone to display good behavior and respect. Therefore, creative, and artistic activities like dancing had higher goals than just

being entertaining. Dancing, drum playing, and singing rituals were representative of human emotions (Auwawuer, 2018) and with their philosophical roots, teach social values in their patterns, symbol of historical events, proverbs, and poetry. The various creative expressions were essential in all rituals like funerals, graduations, celebrations, and competitions as their functions were to mediate, express and release internalized matters and emotions that words could not. Every aspect of life had a purpose which was to empower and foster solidarity among the group (Auwawuer, 2018) or tribe.

Funteh's fourth principle emphasizes the holistic nature of indigenous learning. This included active participation in tribal ceremonies and rituals, developing spiritual connections to ancestors, respecting, and caring for the environment, developing a strong healthy body, and demonstrating good moral values (Funteh, 2015, Adekunle, 2000, Woolman, 2001). Elders, and adults to a lesser degree, expected children to develop with age, a certain level of morality within the social, artistic, religious, recreational, political, and cultural aspects of their community (Adekunle, 2000, Nunkunya, 2003). Language was linked closely to the tribe and language development was taught using methods such as imitation, recitation, singing, storytelling, poetry, reasoning, riddles, praise, and tongue-twisters. Additionally, artistic performances consisting of dance, music, role-playing were important for teaching language. The art of mastering verbal skills was highly valued and required cooperation among a variety of learning groups to perform spiritual and ancestral worship through traditional dances, singing, proverbs, and storytelling (Dzoboto et al., 2018, 2006, Boateng, 1983 in Funteh, 2015, Woolman, 2001). As well, social relationship between the old and the young was prioritized (Boateng, 1985) and played a specific role, within the confines of strictly defined sporadic interactions (Funteh, 2015). The elders and more senior adults led the traditional rituals and storytelling where proverbs were used to illustrate morals shared by the whole tribe but elaborated upon through long stories. The elders were the ones in charge of leading the initiation rites, rites of passage, and channelling the ancestors' message (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014), and they also appreciated their role as the teachers of this important information.

Indigenous principles were founded on the integration of all individuals in the community, in collective reciprocity, rather than the individual per se. Learning was considered an ongoing process, with no age limit, and believed to be "from the womb to the tomb" (Nyerere, 1979).

The higher an individual was positioned in the hierarchy, the more they became advisors and respected (Funteh, 2015). Children's learning was measured and assessed based on daily behavior and their participation in rituals. Falola (2002) believed that the last learning ceremonies were did not take place before a man (no record for women) reached 40 years of age Even though children and young adults of all ages were required to internalize complex ideas, attitudes, patterns of behavior and other creative concepts (Funteh, 2015), only if a person showed the right level of moral wisdom approved by the elders at the 'wisdom ritual' (equivalent to a modern day graduation), was a person considered appropriately educated.

The limitations of indigenous learning practices

Although indigenous learning practices had tremendous value, they are not without their limitations. The first limitation was that all knowledge had to be memorized and conveyed orally for generations (Falola, 2000, Paracka, 1975). The oral transmission relied on people accurately remembering stories and historical laws, cultural and ancestral knowledge. Certain aspects were discriminatory against gender inclusion as women and men were expected to learn different skills and hold different responsibilities in the communities. Accordingly, from the age of eight, children experienced more gender role-focused teaching - girls by their mothers and boys by their fathers (Funteh, 2015) or by other community members of the same gender. As a result, the gendered expectations of the community were not always to the benefit of children (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014) who may have had interests or abilities of the other gender. Also, Boakye-Boaten reported (2010) limited skills due to the lack of exposure to other tribes.

Furthermore, the hierarchical age arrangement was strict, and children could be rewarded or penalized if they voiced their opinions too often, as it was considered 'bad character' (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014). Children only could speak freely among peers their age or younger and had to keep quiet around anyone older (Hofstede, 2011, Adu-Gyamfi, 2014). Children were highly valued for their obedience (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014) and adults used Akan proverbs to confer good behavior, expectations, and cultural norms (Mosweunyega, 2013).

Children's bodies and social representation

Le-Guerinel emphasized the importance of the body in the African cultures for its representation in social settings, and the status of the individual in spiritual and traditional rituals (1980, Woolman, 2001). The attainment of certain physical aspects such as size, and strength, especially for boys, and the arrival of menstruation for girls, were major milestones (Woolman, 2001). In some well-orchestrated rituals, children became adults. Girls whose bodies matured became candidates for marriage and boys, for farming (Woolman, 2001). However, the rites of passage from childhood to adulthood could be abusive and violent in some tribes as they may involve genital circumcision for girls, circumcisions for boys (Boakye-Boaten, 2010), tattooing, face scarring (Pratt et al., 2018) and other practices that inflicted pain. The pain symbolized a transitional stage, the belonging to the community, and was perceived as a social status creating a certain relationship between the practitioners and the receivers (Pratt et al., 2018). In the indigenous era, farming was the economic backbone for many families. Furthermore, the strenuous work a child could accomplish on a farm was a good money exchange (Frimpong-Manso, 2014), and pawning of children was prevalent. (Falola, 2000). Pawning practices were based on the indigenous beliefs that children were economic assets to their families (Agbenyega, 2011), and perceived as the most precious possessions that could be exchanged for money. It was acceptable for their economic value to bring them grief as families exchanged their labor for a loan, or as a security deposit. Nevertheless, children were perceived as “the custodians of the future of their communities” (Frimpong-Manso, 2014).

Indigenous learning practices and principles had their limitations regarding corporeal aspects such as the division of labor based on gender, the belief that pain was necessary for rite of passage ceremonies, and the economic value placed on children's physical labor abilities. However, indigenous learning practices understood the need to embrace the multi-faceted aspects of a child's development and guarded the centrality of child agency within the everyday life of the community (Agbemiase, 2009, Ayaji, 1961, Funteh, 2015). Therefore, the socialization of children was very organized and deeply embedded in the everyday routines of indigenous societies as everyone in the community had a part to play including children (Nombuso, 2008). Children were given time to make mistakes, practice and eventually,

master their skills. The learning was practical (Kenyatta, 1965), holistic and considered the physical, mental, emotional, and cognitive development of individuals, and learning was considered a lifelong journey assessed a few times along the way by the elders in well-orchestrated ritual ceremonies. Learning prioritized the transmission of moral customs and cultural heritage such as respect for the elders, the environment, and the development of a good character. The goal of learning was for all members of the community to contribute to its well-being, and for everyone to become respectful and suitable adults (Paracka, 1975, Woolman, 2001).

At the turn of the 20th century, missionaries were busy convincing Ghanaian communities that schooling children was the key to successful economic growth and successful life. At that time, Dewey (1902) wrote “The structure of education is balanced when the delivery of knowledge is done in consideration of the interest and experience of the child”. Dewey’s perspective on learning processes could have reflected indigenous learning practices, but instead, it was a critique of how Western schooling practices disregard a child’s prior learning and experiences and imposed concepts on them instead. Dewey was a pioneer in portraying learning in a classroom environment, despite being limited in its scope and pragmatism. This marked the beginning of the end to indigenous learning practices in Ghana which were about to be fully replaced by classroom learning practices.

Muslim education

The European colonizers and Christian missionaries were not the only ones seeking to establish their own learning systems in Ghana. Starting in the 7th century, much before Europeans arrived in Sub-Saharan Africa, Islam spread across West Africa by merchants, traders, and scholars. They came across the northern regions of Ghana, which at the time were the Akan States and included the Ashanti Kingdoms. Some of the Muslim merchants trading natural resources like gold and Kola⁷ nuts eventually established their homes and families and sought to establish their own education system, but the Akan resisted (Silverman and Owusu-Ansah, 1989). The Muslim community did not seek to impose their learning

⁷ Kola nuts are indigenous West-African seeds from the genus *Cola* plant and belongs to the cocoa family.

system on anyone, but the establishment of Islamic education was significant for their community and their family (Paracka, 2003). Therefore, its influence was situated and directed to children of Muslim families.

Currently, in the Northern regions of Ghana, predominantly two types of Islamic learning can be observed, the Wangana and the Hausa. Muslim families established Saturday and Sunday schools for children ages four to six (Falola, 2002), in Muslim communities. Nowadays, Islamic institutions offer Muslim children's opportunities to attend Saturday and Sunday schools all over Ghana. This brief account of Muslims is certainly not a reflection of the state or quality of Islamic educational systems in place today, rather it reflects the minimal impact Muslim educational approaches had on the non-Muslim Ghanaian population and public school system.

2.5 A brief historical background of the colonial effects

European countries have colonized Ghana for more than 487 years. Over that period, all social systems were restructured by colonizers (Morrison, 2002, Falola, 2000) including the family structure, religion, chiefdom, and learning settings. Eurocentric institutions replaced social systems as colonizers imposed their political beliefs, economic development discourses, and imperial ideologies. All aspects of life were institutionalized to fit European standards and facilitate the colonies' trading of raw materials and slaves (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016).

As a result of the economic boom in Europe and an emergent need for extra manpower, the Ghanaian kinship system was further broken apart by colonizers who were trading Ghanaian men to Europe. As a result, to ensure the development of large-scale commercial farming and mineral extractions from the colonies (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016), children were more vulnerable than ever as large-scale child labour was organized to replace men's work in the field and mines, interrupting children's learning. As a result, instead of contributing to the communal tasks of their family or community, children worked for the economic benefit of the colonizers.

Time Perspectives

It is important, before going into details about colonial education, to highlight a few dates to bring some timely perspective to this account. As of 2022, the British colonized Ghana and imposed their way of life on Ghanaians 487 years ago, and independence occurred in 1957, only 65 years ago. This means that some child participants of my research likely have grandparents who experienced colonial rule and were schooled during that period. The Ghanaian population over 65 years of age represent 15% of the total population⁸. This also means that most of the parent participants of my research had either a parent or a grandparent who attended a colonial schools and experienced colonial educational practices and systems. The degree of separation is only one to two generations back, a relatively small period of time.

Colonial education (CE) was established in different stages, for different grade levels, and gradually granted access to different groups of children (Morrison, 2001). Europeans arrived by sea and resided in castles they built along the coast where they established the first colonial classrooms. The establishment of the first library and learning space can be traced back to the Portuguese in 1470 (Boateng, 2018, Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016), in Sao Jorge town, today known as Elmina (Carmody, 2017). At first, Europeans were more interested to establish libraries and upper-level scholarly activities for their own entertainment until the Dutch, in 1644, established classrooms for younger students inside the castles (Falola, 2002). In 1647, the British arrived and eventually took control of the colonies and expanded their businesses and production to a commercial level and colonies needed clerks to manage the logistics (Boakye-Boaten, 2010). Consequently, the colonizers expanded the access to schools to more children and many schools were built outside the castles and outside the community (Carmody, 2017, Morrison, 2002). Establishing schools outside the community was a strategy borrowed from the European priests in Abbeys who isolated students to ensure that the indoctrination of their pupils was not influenced by any exposure to the outside world (Mungula, 1982).

⁸ (Population pyramid of Ghana, 2010. *Source*: Ghana Statistical Service, 2010 Population and Housing Census).

The pedagogy implemented in colonial classrooms can be summed up by Freire's terminology of the 'banking system' (1970). The name fits the initial goal of educating an elite group of children which was to produce a literate workforce to run the growing colony business. The teaching methods were instructivist in nature, and teacher-centered in what Freire (1970) called 'a depositor' method because children were treated as 'depositories' of a specific knowledge that was passively received, memorized, and repeated. The content was limited to what clerks in colony offices needed to know to work efficiently. However, the education system established by the colonizers themselves was elitist and short-lived.

Education of the elites

During the first 300 years (from the late 15th century to the late 18th century), according to the colonizers, the main objective of establishing an educational system was initially to 'civilize the savaged locals', the 'barbarian' children, to ensure the future success of the colonies' trade business, and to prepare good churchmen (Djamila, and Djafri, 2011). The establishment of educational systems for lower-grade children grew slowly and out of necessity as the number of 'mulatto' children, the name given to children born of a white master and a Ghanaian mother, was growing (Shiza & Makuva, 2017, Adu-Gyamfi, 2014).

Effectively, rich Ghanaian local traders and local chiefs started to give young Ghanaian women to white masters as gifts or in exchange for goods and to ensure that the 'mulatto' children became appropriately 'civilized' and eventually carry on the legacy of their father in the colonies, primary education settings were established (Carmody, 2017, Morrison, 2001). Eventually, children of the most prominent local traders and local chiefs, the most privileged Ghanaians with whom colonizers conducted business, were invited to enroll their children (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016).

Eventually, colonial education, its "One size fits all" (Taft, et al., 2019), alphabet-based learning started to be perceived as the ultimate way out of poverty and hard work in the field, "a keystone of progress" according to Adu-Gyamfi (2014). With a gain in popularity among the elite population, a gap in access to learning between children from the most privileged families and the ones from less privileged and poor families was created. However, not

everyone agreed with the colonizers who were persuading Ghanaians that Western education was the only way to be 'civilized'. In the 20th century, Sir Gordon Guggisberg, who was appointed governor of the Gold Coast, insisted that the education system in place was, '...rotten to the core. Not only it is inadequate in not going far enough, but it has proved inefficient in its results, inadequate, because it fails to provide facilities. For that secondary and higher education which is essential. Inefficient, because the character training necessary to citizenship and leadership has been largely omitted in the existing system.' (Adu-Gyamfi, et al., 2016, Woolman, 2001). Sir Gordon Guggisberg was an outspoken colonizer, also an author of many published works, who rejected the state of colonial education. He was one pioneer to advocate for an educational system that would be beneficial to Ghanaians and to their economic system (Williams, 1964).

Education for all

Meanwhile, in Britain, the first industrial revolution was in full bloom, and machines were slowly replacing the need for manual labor. This meant that fewer slaves were needed, which coincided with the endorsement of the abolishment of the slavery act. However, in 1787, the abolitionists felt that their victory was not enough and that they needed to do something to repair the damages caused by the cruel inhuman slave trade. They had the idea to send missionaries to help Ghanaians (Paracka, 1975) by educating all Ghanaian children as they thought that the schooling everyone would help boost social status and the economic situation (Paracka, 1975). These abolitionists were genuinely interested to do something good for the Ghanaian population, but they encountered a few issues. First, the white missionaries sent to Ghana died from diseases like malaria and cholera. So, abolitionists trained ex-slaves that were free to who become clergymen. These ex-slaves went back home as missionaries to spread the gospel and build schools in remote areas of Ghana. These returnees had become familiar with their host country's values, voluntarily or not, and most importantly they could survive diseases that white men could not. The mission was a success, Ghanaian people identified with them, and they played 'a central role' in transitioning out of the horrors of slavery (Paracka, 1975). The Gospel helped many Ghanaians to uplift their lives, provide new perspectives, and give them hope for a better future. Also, learning to read and write seemed a new way forward to achieve a brighter future. Consequently, little by little,

more and more families were sending their children to classrooms that consisted at first of a blackboard often placed outside of one of the community huts (Morrison, 2002, Mungula, 1982).

At first, missionaries helped translate the Bible into local languages. Christianity was a powerful vehicle to introduce scriptural instructions (Paracka, 1975) because, according to Boakye-Boaten, religion was an essential element of the cultural system “which epitomized the ontology and epistemology of one’s existence” (2010). However, colonizers, who facilitated many aspects of the missions, wanted to ensure strict control on the country’s activities and forced missionaries to use one single curriculum taught in English, the language they could understand. In this way, colonizers eased the administrative aspects of the school systems, ensured total power, and controlled the content of learning. By 1828, kindergartens and primary classes were made functional in most regions of Ghana by the Basel missionaries (Morrison, 2001) who had joined the cause in 1815 (Heuser, 2016).

The missionaries were their own people, who were economically well off, and one after the other were actively persuading community leaders that scriptures and white collars jobs were the way forward to enhance local community economic development. The missionaries, seated in the community, in clean clothing and with clean hands, served as a portrayal and proof that a better life was awaiting everyone. Unfortunately, as Paracka also stated at the time, missionaries denigrated African traditional beliefs and forced European powers (1975) to re-organize communities. Although missionaries were successful in establishing schools all over the country, they did not anticipate the financial burden of such a task. Quickly, in order to fund the building of schools and buy materials needed, school fees were introduced (Boakye-Boaten, 2010, Valentine & Revson, 1979) again extending the gap in the access to learning between the most privileged children, whose parents could afford the fees and the other children, whose parents could not afford the fees. Most local communities could not afford to or did not want to allocate funds to school. As a result, children from poor families were encouraged to work intensively to support the export natural resources, creating further and deeper gaps in the access to education and separation of the community (Paracka, 1975).

The establishment of schools' split communities, their everyday organization, interrupted mixed generations and peer learning. The learning was not anymore about the needs of the community. It was replaced by literacy, numeracy and reaching a certain material level. At the same time, women were required to work in the field outside of the community, compelling their girls to stay home and take care of younger siblings and the household. Most adults were focusing on commercializing goods, placing the needs of the community as a secondary matter.

2.6 In the classrooms

Most communities established some type of classroom setting and were adjusting to their new way of life. Children were adapting to the instructivist and authoritarian norms the missionaries were implementing. Children were required to sit in place, face an adult all day, listen passively, and make sense of a completely new writing concept on a new artifact, the blackboard. Every aspect of the classroom practice had changed from traditional learning, and this was all new to children, families, and communities. In wealthier communities, classrooms had walls, desks, a blackboard, and students had notebooks, while in the less fortunate communities, children sat on the ground outdoors, facing a blackboard attached to the external wall of a hut. The teachers, who were ex-slaves and missionaries, replicated the clergy environment of the church they were familiar with, as many of them had not attended school themselves.

Therefore, initial classroom routines replicated Christian models of church services, which position one adult standing as the symbol of power and knowledge, aligning with the indigenous representation the elders previously held in their communities (Boakye-Boaten, 2010). Like the elders, the teachers were not to be contradicted as they held knowledge (Morrison, 2002). Unfortunately, all initial teachers had experienced extreme corporeal discipline and suffered horrific and inhuman violence from their masters (Paracka, 1975, Geltner, 2014). As a result, the concept of flogging (Adu-Gyamfi, 2013, Geltner, 2014) was introduced as a disciplinary method in a classroom. Corporal punishment practices were reinforced and supported by the interpretation of Christian proverbs like 'spare the rod, spoil the child' which was literally translated. Christianity was slowly replacing traditionalist and

the local religion which had been intertwined with the daily socialization of children. As a result, the inclusion of the Christian religion in new learning was contextually appropriate (Onwauchi, 1972,) and eased the enculturation processes.

However, this new materialized concept of learning was detrimental to children whose previous learning methods were active, participative, and collaborative as the instructivist methods had reductionist effects on their agency. Another influential factor that came along with the classroom settings, namely the European paternalistic perception of children. In Europe, at the time, children were considered 'submissive subjects to be done unto' (Kwaw, 2016). This perspective is also welfarist in nature and considers children as the responsibility and dependence of adults rather than being independent actors with autonomous abilities. These perceptions were distant from indigenous societies that perceived children as an asset to the family (Kwaw, 2016). Children were also considered bad and needed to be punished to become obedient, which justified caning as the correct disciplinary approach in the classroom.

During the indoctrination processes, missionaries also discriminated against Ghanaian traditions norms, rituals, and their skin colour (Adu-Gyamfi, 2016, Adekunle, 2000, Boakye-Boaten, 2010, Carmody, 2017, Ezeaunya-Esiobu, 2019, Funteh, 2015, Falola, 2002, Nsamenang, 1993, Shiza & Makuva, 2017). Some colonizers went to the extent of having some western psychologists study Ghanaians as if they could understand how to acculturate them faster and break them away from their traditional culture (Woolman, 2001). Most colonizers did everything they could to bring shame and damage to local people's self-esteem, discouraged the practice of traditional rituals, and used violence on adults until the original culture was fully repressed (Woolman, 2001). As a result of the imposition of "cultural terrorism" and physical and mental oppression that lasted 487 years (Boakye-Boaten, 2010), many Ghanaian people were reported to have lost their self-respect and 'love for their own race' (Woolman, 2001).

The Independence of Ghana

After ten years of campaigning, the United Gold Coast Convention, led by Kwame Nkrumah, was successful. On March 06, 1957, Ghana gained its independence from Great Britain and became the first independent country in Africa. One of the six fathers of the independence movement, Nkrumah became the first Head of State (Akyeampong et al., 2007). One of Nkrumah's priorities was to enhance the country's educational system which he believed was the key to enhancing Ghana's economic and social development (Akyeampong et al., 2007, Adu-Gyamfi, 2016). Four years after he came into office, primary education became compulsory for all children and was free. The number of students increased from 457,000 in 1957 to 1,137,495 in 1966 (see table, 1. Below). Another one of Nkrumah's successful reforms was the establishment of a science and technology university (KNUST). He strongly believed that these two levels of education were essential to a healthy future of a country in full economic growth and development (Akyeampong et al., 2007).

Table 1 Colonial versus post-colonial enrolment

Level	1951		1966	
	School	Students	Schools	Students
Primary	1,083	15,336	8,144	1,137,495
Middle	539	6,617	2,277	267,434
Secondary	13	5,033	105	42,111
Teacher Training	22	1,916	83	15,144
Technical	5	622	11	4,956
University	2	208	3	4,291

Source: Hayford, B.K., (1988)

Comparing colonial and post-colonial education enrolment and establishment of schools, the exponential number of students is clear as between 1951 and 1966 the number of primary students grew from nearly 16 thousand (15,336) to 1.1 million (1,137,495). However, the numbers also reveal the increase of schools and trained teachers was much lower than the increase of students. These numbers suggest that the schools and particularly classrooms were overcrowded and missing trained teachers.

In the early 1970s, Ghana's education system was reported to be the most promising in Africa (Akyeampong, 2009). However, due to political turmoil, Nkrumah's political career and long-term education plan to develop a curriculum based on "an African view to solve the problems of Africa" which he believed should only include the Western ideas and concepts that were relevant to Ghana, was cut short (Akyeampong et al., 2007). Consequently, political uncertainties grew resulting in a quick decline of the country's economy, and funding for education was no longer readily available, greatly affecting the quality of education.

In the 1980s, Ghana's educational system was reported to be dysfunctional and near collapse, despite the country's aspirations, (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016). In hopes of better economic growth, and as many other African countries were seeking their independence, Ghana ratified macro-level policies known as the stability adjustment program (SAP) (Boakye-Boaten, 2010). SAPs encompassed major international partners whose focus was the growth of economics, agriculture, food, and nutrition security in Africa. However, these programs marginalized the development of social sectors like education (Heidues, 2011) the quality of public education further declined.

Subsequently, the establishment of private schools grew exponentially, further deepening the gap on access quality education between poor and privileged or richer families with children. Hence, in 2018, private schools were reported to provide the education to 40% of Ghanaian children all over the country (UNICEF, 2018).

Since Nkrumah's leadership, the country overcame major political and economic instabilities, (Adu-Gyamfi et al, 2016), and Ghana remains one of the most peaceful countries on the African continent. However, with the numerous political changes at country and continental levels, it has been challenging for Ghanaians to come to an agreement on what African value educational institutions should encompass and promote, to develop a learning system that includes African values (Heidues, 2011). As a result, Ghanaian leaders have failed to develop the promising African curriculum Nkrumah had envisioned, and school infrastructures, curricula, and daily routines still primarily replicate the colonial education model left behind.

2.7 The current state of education

Currently, the pedagogy implemented in the 22,289 primary public schools hosting 60% of Ghanaian children (age six to twelve years old) is locally referred to as 'Pour, Chew, Pass and Forget' (Quansah, 2019, UNICEF, 2019, World Bank, 2018). The terminology is used by the Deputy Minister of Education (Ghananews.com), educators, parents, scholars, and other stakeholders who advocate for changes and improvements in classroom practices. In 2018, the World Bank quantified in its Human Capital Index (HCI) report that 56% of the Ghanaian youth will not be able to economically contribute nationally due to the poor quality of education (2018). Their findings demonstrated that on average, children spend 11.6 years in a classroom and only 5.7 years represented instructional or learning time.

Many scholars and international actors report that teachers, their attitudes, and lack of training were major issues (Adu-Gyamfi, et. Al., 2016, Wolf, 2018, World Bank, 2018). It is also noted that the early childhood classroom environment and the teaching conditions make it hard to attract young people to become teachers (Wolf, 2018). As a result of the lack of government funding, and inequitable distribution or management (Frimpong-Manso, 2021), most school infrastructures are old and classrooms lack basic accommodations such as electricity, water, and teaching materials including instruction books or student desks (Adu-Gyamfi, et al., 2016). In addition to the contextual working challenges, teacher salaries are unattractive, their remuneration infrequent (Akyeampong et al., 2007), they lack opportunities to access professional development and professional recognition, and they have no voice as they must do exactly what their district office prescribes, verbatim (Wolf, Aber, Torrente, McCoy & Rasheed, 2015). As a result, teacher absenteeism, lack of accountability, burnout, as well as high turnover (Osei, 2006) plague the system, and teachers have a low level of motivation and satisfaction (Ziggarelli, 1995, Wolf, 2018). Wolf (2018) concludes that to ensure good practices, it is necessary to change teacher's beliefs and value systems and the way they are educated to teach (Agbenyega, 2017, Akyeampong et al., 2007). As Arif (2007) states 'teachers are the catalyst for change'. Newly trained teachers are required to do a one-year pre-service training (Akyeampong, 2009) after which they are often sent to rural areas in schools that have more extreme infrastructures and material gaps, which has the consequence of many new teachers quitting soon after starting to teach. For

the ones who continue teaching, they are required to implement what they observed during their one-year service training and replicate a teacher-centered approach with the use of corporal punishment to discipline children (Wolf, 2018).

For O'Neil (2009), the proximity of the cane was the main issue because students are conditioned by the possibility that corporal punishment can happen at any time, and at the discretion of the teacher (Agbenyega, 2003). Research by Adu-Gyamfi (2014) and Akyeampong (2009) also emphasized that in Ghana, teacher's instructive and authoritative approaches are oppressive to young children and teachers perceive students as 'receptacles in need of control' (Agbenyega, 2017). According to O'Neil, classroom practices are an unhealthy form of social control (2009) and obsolete in practices (Boakye, 2001, Edumadze, 2004). Others went further and analogized the cane as the replacement of indigenous socialization processes (Onwauchi, 1972, Boakye-Boaten, 2010). For them, caning practices have replaced the long stories that included the rationalizations of proverbs the elders shared with children to make them understand the morality of their everyday actions. Now, concluded Agbenyega (2003) and Boakye-Boaten (2010), children learn what is right and wrong by being caned.

Additionally, Adu-Gyamfi in his research found that the quality of education was impacted by the teacher-centered pedagogy (2016) in which the student-teacher ratio is set at 49 to 1, nationally for each classroom. Other researchers stated that the quality of education suffers because of the non-interactive and passive status of students, and discipline methods controlling student behavior (Mayisela, 2001). For Danso-Twum Imoh, the challenge is that culturally, children are perceived as 'stubborn' (2013).

Consequently, over the last several decades, some efforts to reform education were made but they have yet to be fully realized. Children start school at the age of six years (Adu-Gyamfi, et al, 2016) but the more innovative reform of President Kuffour to implement instruction in Ghanaian language for kindergarteners and lower primary grades (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014) was successful, nor were his reforms of a nationwide development of human capital for industrial growth, preservation of cultural identity & preservation of traditional indigenous knowledge and creativity (Adu-Gyamfi, et al, 2016). Since its independence, most Ghanaian reforms have

had a short lifespan (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014) reflecting the four years of electoral turnover that results in a lack of sustainable funds to successfully implement change. As a result, the primary language of instruction for all grades in the 22,289 primary government schools hosting 60% of Ghanaian children (Woolman, 2001) remains English. There are a few schools piloting the implementation of a local language program which was developed and funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID, 2018). However, the application of reforms from the various educational government agencies remains minimal. Nevertheless, the desire to change and improve learning into more practical and participative practices continues to inspire policymakers who developed the 2019 Ghana national curriculum which requires the implementation of children-centered pedagogy and the re-introduction of Ghana history as a stand-alone subject.

To conclude, the intent of this historical overview was not to develop ‘a reductionistic binarism of Western versus indigenous knowledge’ (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2020) or a dichotomous discourse that blindly romanticizes indigenous knowledge and practices (Mungula, 1982) and depicts colonialism as the reason for all issues in children’s learning. Instead, the intent is to bring awareness about the condescension of Western perspectives about traditional learning practices and principles upon Ghanaian society which has assimilated colonial norms as their own.

Traditionally, during the indigenous era, learning was designed to preserve cultural customs and knowledge, but today as Morrison (2001) underlines, education is perceived as an agent of change placing teachers as the main catalyst of the change (Salifu, 2013) rather than children. Also, the historical journey is useful for situating how children’s positioning, agency, social representation, and learning experiences changed over time (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014, Boakye-Boaten, 2010). As Boakye-Boaten (2010) emphasized, indigenous learning practices took place in natural, open, yet structured, conducive, and contextually appropriate spaces for children to develop and grow without much interference from the adult community. Children were autonomous and adults were moderators, and occasional catalysts in providing help when children needed it (Boakye-Boaten, 2010). The challenging history of Ghana has changed all of this significantly, and what exists now, is an amalgamation of traditional and Western influences that set the scene in which I have undertaken my research.

Chapter 3 Methodology



Dweninmmen

Humility⁹

Dzokoto, (2018)

3.1 Overview

The aim of this chapter is to give a detailed account of the methods and methodology used to address my three research questions (RQ):

RQ-1 How do indigenous knowledge, colonialism, and the sociomateriality of the classroom shape children's agency in grades 2 & 3 Ghanaian public schools?

The aim of this research question is to: 1) identify the relationality of the heterogeneous actants; 2) develop an understanding of how the relationality of the actants creates dynamics that shape children's agency; 3) determine the origin of the various actants that constitute children's daily learning experiences in the classroom; 4) explore adults' research participants perspective about children and learning.

RQ-2 What are the sociocultural factors limiting children's everyday learning experience and active participation?

⁹ Dweninmmen or the Ram's horns is a symbol of strength (mind, body, & soul), wisdom, humility, and learning. This symbol is the logo of the University of Ghana (the first and largest university in Ghana).

The aim of this question is to identify the classroom's tangible and intangible elements, including the voices of the research participants and sociocultural norms, that limit children's abilities to participate actively and develop holistically: physically, cognitively, emotionally, and verbally in classroom.

RQ-3 How can a classroom setting facilitate a better learning environment and foster children's development of contextually appropriate skills, attitudes, and knowledge?

The aim of this question is to develop a sociomateriality of the classroom environment including postcolonial theories. The sociomaterial methodology helps to analyse (Iannaccone, 2017) what aspects of the classroom is not accommodating children's learning. The development of a new perspective about the learning environment is useful for the 2019 Ghana national curriculum reforms to implement a social constructivist classroom setting.

3.2 The research design

Considering the nature of the three research questions, qualitative methods were used to provide a description of the complexities in the classroom, to allow a better understanding of different actors' experiences, and to develop an empirical, holistic, and evidence-based understanding of research participants perceptions about socialization practices in lower primary school (grade 2 and grade 3) classrooms (Adu-Gyamfi, 2016), and to enable in-depth exploration of a social phenomenon the materiality of the environment, and how people experience and interpret it within their culture (Creswell, 2014).

The first two research questions seek to interpret a local meaning that is situated in a particular group, rather than to quantify and generalize answers (Mertens, 2010). Although the field of psychology requires a certain level of generalization, the emphasis is on the context and the meaning of situated sociomaterial phenomena (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Additionally, qualitative research methods are appropriate to illustrate the multiple facets created by the relationships between all actants performing and emerging in the learning context and its environment through time. A qualitative approach was also appropriate for the third question which seeks to generate inductive yet contextualized information,

supporting the analysis of complex social settings like classrooms and their multiple meanings and allowing the allocation of time to develop “narrow, yet rich data, and thick descriptions” (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Mohamed Yousaf, 2020). Qualitative methods allowed me to explore, not predict (Mertens, 2010) the processes of the relationship between all classroom’ actants and how, when they come to be interwoven, dynamics and forces are created informing people’s thinking, behavior, and positioning.

3.3 Philosophical approaches

The philosophical approaches that guide this study encompass a culturalist paradigm, a relational ontology, and a social constructionist epistemology. The culturalist paradigm aligns with a sociocultural frame that informs the situated social phenomena explored (Iannaccone, et. al., 2017), the investigation of how “ordinary people think” (Di Cori & Pontecorvo, 2007 in Iannaccone et al, 2013), and what they do in their everyday classroom routine. A relational ontological perspective carries the assumption that all elements, either social, historical, material, or intangible, like the dynamics of materiality, produce sociomaterial relations that cannot be separated and are not only essential to our experience but constitute our experience. Practices do not exist in an ontological way, except in the situated and culturally informed relations that create them (Slife, et. al., 2022). Beetz added that nothing is autochthonous, especially the artifacts that are waiting for a researcher to describe their properties (2016). Furthermore, according to Mol, classroom practices aren’t the outcome of a hybridization (Mol, 2002) because everything is relational and a hybrid version of two or more entities that have created an entanglement (Beetz, 2016, Latour, 2005).

The term social constructionist pioneered by Papert (1998) who expanded on Piaget’s original terminology of constructivism (1979) is of interest in this study. However, if both terms, social constructivist, and social constructionist are used in this thesis, it is important to define them as they are different. Also, social constructionism and social constructivism include the term social, which accentuates their focus on how people make sense, construct knowledge, and perceive the reality about the world that surrounds them, and both share a subjective view of knowledge (Sommer-Flanigan, 2015), it is essential to underline that these two terminologies differ in their epistemological nature.

The term social constructionist, which was specifically developed for the education field by Papert, emphasizes that learning and teaching are contextually situated (1998). It assumes that children learn better when the context is adapted to their stage of development and capacities (Papert, 1998). From a social constructionist lens, knowledge, reality, and sense-making are constructed in the relations between people, people, and things, as well as things and people. The focus is on the social interchange not the cognitive and biological processes which characterize social constructivist perspectives (Sommers-Flanagan, 2015). Therefore, a social constructionist perspective includes all epistemic agents and the materiality of a situated phenomenon. This is what Floridi called “maker’s knowledge tradition” (2011) meaning the epistemic agents and materiality construct knowledge together. A sociomaterial perspective is added to expand on how dynamics are created when epistemic agents are simply present, or interact with one another (Beetz, 2016). A social constructionist perspective favors interactions and practical knowledge and differs from a social constructivist approach which accept a certain level of passiveness, mimetic in the sense of copying without the scaffolding effects, and the transmission of asserting knowledge (Floridi, 2011, Sommer-Flanagan, 2015). Furthermore, and importantly, a social constructionist perspective aligns and is respectful of the indigenous knowledge and practices that were in place during the pre-colonial era. The same was identified in Vygotsky’ concept (1978) of “zone of proximal development” (ZDP). However, as Timberlake mentions, a social constructionist perspective alone can be limited as its focus is mainly on the discursive constructions of things omitting to fully include the material aspects (2015). For these reasons, sociomaterial lenses that include postcolonial theories enable the development of a more holistic perspective.

The term social constructivist is used more often in this thesis because it is linked to the 2019 Ghana national curriculum reform that requires teachers to implement child-centered practices. This is aimed at enhancing children’s participation in classroom activities. However, the term reveals some incongruities during its initial implementation due to its humanistic nature which focuses on teachers’ activities and performance rather than the ones of children. Also, a social constructivist lens focuses on human activities and disregards the materiality of the environment as reality and knowledge are built from within the individual or what Floridi (2011) calls “user’s knowledge.

The above theoretical terminologies and methodological tools developed by western scholars are convincing, and applicable in the Ghanaian context, yet partial and biased without the addition of postcolonial theories and discourses. By combining these different, yet compatible frameworks, the methodological and theoretical onto-epistemology approaches align and are more respectful to indigenous knowledge as suggested by critical scholars (Bishop, 2008a, 2008b; Llamputtong, 2010; Mutua & Swadener, 2004; Smith, 1999, 2008; Swadener & Mutua 2008; Wilson, 2008, Chilisa, 2018). These same scholars articulated their willingness to step away from Euro-western methodologies and decolonize research methodologies that remain dominantly used. As suggested by Chilisa, the decolonization of research methodology centers its processes on concerns and perspectives (worldviews) of the colonized 'Others' (2018). By including their voices, understanding, assumptions, and perspectives, new knowledge is developed, not the other way around.

Therefore, a qualitative framework is useful in developing an analysis of data that, looks at the interactions and relations between all actants, searches for patterns, and seeks the stories behind the classroom settings, a colonial legacy, including its history and restore the development of cultural practices (Braun and Clarke, 2019, Chilisa, 2018). Consequently, qualitative research allows the developing contextualist, participatory, naturalistic, and multimodal research methods (Clarke, 2001, Braun & Clarke, 2013, 2019) that closely resembles everyday routines (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Such methods help to develop an understanding that includes values, principles, and lifestyles that have been suppressed by imposed and oppressive discourses that were and continue to be informed by discriminatory and racist ideologies and practices (Smith, 1999, in Chilisa, 2018).

Thus, a postcolonial lens allows to overcome the shortfall of the Eurocentric research paradigm that omits to include 'the role of imperialism, colonization and globalization (of international framework discourses) in the construction of knowledge.' (Chilisa & Bagele, 2019). The methodological processes and tools have been adapted to align with indigenous methodologies that consider what is culturally and locally preferred as a mode of data collection (Chilisa, 2018).

It should be noted that a qualitative approach does have its limitations such as the subjectivity of the researcher associated with their perspective and experience which shapes the research processes. Another limitation that Atkinson & Hammersley (1994) identified is that researchers make their own decision of how, what, and who they study in their ethnographic work. However, providing more reflective responsiveness and considering social movements like postcolonial allow for an expanded ethnographic perspective that create critical awareness about the current social setting.

3.4 Timeline of the research

The study process started in January 2018 and ended in June 2022. The initial phases were soft as I had just moved into the country and needed to make connections and establish relationships with the different actors in the educational field including international and local non-profit organizations (NGOs).

Table 2 Research timeline

Phase 1	January - August 2018	Initial literature review and reflection Map education stakeholders
Phase 2	August - December 2018	Identify District Education officer and start the authorization process. Establish collaboration with an NGO and start observations in private schools in the greater Accra region. Establish partnership with another NGO and visit public schools in Northern Tamale Region Meet with University and start to identify research assistant. Second phase of the literature review

		Develop a methodology and prepare research proposal. Authorization approved and selection of public schools to observe
Phase 3	October 2018 - December 2019	Start collaboration with research assistant. Start data collection in public schools in Accra. Second phase of literature review and deeper analytical reflection
Phase 4	January 2020 – June 2022	Third phase of analytical processes - in-depth data analysis Write thesis

3.5 The methods: Ethnographic design

An ethnographic design is appropriate to answer questions about social and cultural practices of groups of people, their life experiences and daily routine (Mertens, 2010) including developing a holistic and empirical vision and interpretation of how everyday routines and connections made between the various elements of social phenomenon such as socioeconomic, kinship and history (Mertens, 2010). Ethnographic methods also facilitate the development of an in-depth data collection and analyses to better understand how all actors perceive and experience the social phenomenon within the culture-informed learning context of the children’ socialization practices (Mack et al., 2005). People’s experiences or realities are essential to illustrate the sociocultural characteristics of learning and teaching (Heine et al, 2011) that impacts the actant’s performance within the context. Contemplating people’s perceptions on how the classroom materiality shapes the daily reality of actants helps identify the multiple facets of the relationships and dynamics between all actants (Latour, 2005) engaged, including the materiality of the learning context and its ecology (Skinner, 1957); This also includes the cultural environment (Vygotsky, 1978) which is important in the development of learning (Heine et al, 2011), considering its temporality.

In light of the challenges in finding ways to break down power imbalances between adults and children, there have been calls for alternative methodological approaches that prioritize children's participation and agency. One such alternative is the participatory approach, which involves children as active participants in the research process rather than as passive subjects (Lansdown, 2001). This approach recognizes children as rights-holders and encourages their involvement in decision-making processes that affect their lives (Lansdown, 2001).

One of the biggest challenges for researchers working with children is the power dynamic and status disparities between adults and children. Due to historical and cultural contexts in which children's voices have been marginalized, researchers face significant challenges in breaking down the power imbalance and creating a space where children can speak up and be heard (Christensen and Prout, 2000). As a result, researchers need to be intentional and creative in their approach to ensure that they are creating opportunities for children to participate fully in the research process and have their perspectives and experiences taken seriously. Another methodological alternative is the child-led research approach, which involves children taking the lead in the research process, identifying research questions and methods, and collecting and analyzing data (Greig et al., 2007). This approach places children at the center of the research process and recognizes them as experts on their own lives and experiences (Greig et al., 2007). These alternative approaches aim to shift the power dynamic in research from adults to children and prioritize children's participation and agency in the research process. By doing so, they can help to overcome the challenges in finding ways to break down power imbalances between adults and children and create space for children to speak up and be heard.

Despite my expectation of encountering power struggles due to age hierarchy, the initial informal group discussions and role-play had the opposite effect. Two factors contributed to this: my over twenty years of experience working with and studying this age group and the age group of children I interviewed, who were younger and in the initial stage of developing their competence and social understanding (Piaget, 1952). I used Western approaches rather than cultural perceptions of children's positioning to develop methods that reinforced their developmental abilities, while still allowing them opportunities to challenge the cultural hierarchical structure surrounding them.

Role-play was particularly useful in allowing young children, who may lack verbal expression in English, to express their feelings and share their perceptions of their world and their relationships with it (Corsaro, 2015). According to Corsaro, role-play can provide insight into the social positioning of actors involved in an activity and can begin as young as age 2 (2015). Children's culture and the context surrounding them impact their ability to express themselves and act in certain ways, but children do not necessarily conform to rigid societal frames at this stage in their lives when they are encouraged to seek approval from adults (Erikson, 1958). During the initial group discussion, we took turns asking questions. I asked some questions, then the children had the opportunity to ask some questions as well. At first, some children were making comments during the initial group discussion when I was asked open questions (Qvortrup, 1993). However, this was quickly overcome as the group developed a sense of trust and openness, and the children began to share their experiences more readily.

Also, an ethnographic design is appropriate to answer questions about social and cultural practices of groups of people, their life experiences and daily routine (Mertens, 2010) including developing a holistic vision and interpretation of connections made between the various elements of social phenomenon such as socioeconomic, kinship and history (Mertens, 2010). These elements are essential to develop a critical qualitative research and help to construct distinct categories (Braun and Clarke, 2019) and patterns from different angles informing reality. Ethnographic methods also facilitate the development of in-depth data collection and analyses to understand better how all actors perceive and experience the social phenomenon within the culture-informed learning context (Mack et al., 2005). People's experiences or realities are essential to illustrate the sociocultural characteristics of learning and teaching (Heine et al, 2011). To illustrate the changes actant's performance within the context. To contemplate people's perceptions on how the classroom sociomateriality shapes the daily reality of actants which helps identify the multiple facets of their relationships and dynamics produced (Latour, 2005), including the materiality of the learning context and its ecology (Skinner, 1957). Finally, ethnographic methods include the sociocultural environment (Vygotsky, 1978, Heine et al, 2011) and enable the researcher to collect data that include non-

explicit communication and hidden meanings conveyed by intangible dynamics and materials (Braun and Clarke, 2019).

Although, ethnographic methods require authorization from different structural levels, consent agreements from all participants, and clear child protection procedures (Mertens, 2010) before any data is collected.

The following child protection guidelines informed us of a series of steps that took place to address and prevent any ethical issues. These steps were essential to ensure that my presence in the classroom and at the school was acceptable to the government of Ghana, the district office, public school management and administrative leadership, teachers, parents, and children.

3.6 My ethnographic reflexivity

As a sociocultural researcher conducting ethnographic research, I must reflect on my positionality (see chapter 1, p,) and clear any uncertainties the reader may have about my role (Lichtenman, 2015) and how I affected both the research process and the outcome and how the object of the research mutually affected me (Slife, et al., 2022).

My interest in conducting ethnographic observations and interviews was to collect data about the everyday aspects of the classroom that are sometimes taken for granted or omitted in previous research because of their normative nature (Reeds, 2011). I must admit that my professional background advocating for children's rights such as participation influenced me when I started this journey. I believed that it was a teacher's duty to ensure children have more opportunities to become active participants. I did not know what children's participation application entailed in the Ghanaian context, but my pre-existing understanding evolved through my reflections on my field notes, the more I understood the classroom culture, the more nuanced children's participation became to be implemented in the classroom context.

Also, I knew from previous experience that it takes time to establish relationships with people, become familiar with the social setting, and connect with all aspects of the routine was important to be able to interpret and make explicit the significance of certain aspect of the everyday actions (Lichtenman, 2015, Braun & Clarke, 2019). So, I spent in all urban schools observed, a minimum of four days per classroom, considering that some schools had six classes in grades two and three Levels, in some schools I spent a minimum of twenty-four days. Also, I was considerate that it was the same for the research participants who needed time also to acclimate to my presence. The first exposure to a new environment and a new social situation is not always representative of the reality as the presence of an outsider, like me the researcher can change people's behavior.

What I realized in the Ghanaian context is that after a few hours of me being in the classroom, children forgot about me, while it would take one day or two for the teachers to adapt to my presence. Teachers needed at least one or two days before they stopped looking at me after doing an action or a narration. When teachers were cautious about me being in the classroom, their teaching activities and verbal instructions were mimicking what the trainers had told them during the teacher training. I could hear sentences that I had read in the curriculum, they applied rules as instructed in their training, but which would change once they forgot about me. On average, after two or three days, the verbal interactions between teachers and students would lessen and would use different narratives, different tones, and the same was observed for their actions. Although, I was aware of such dynamics and always tried not to write something on my notebook right after teachers looked at me and I tried to be cautious as well as not to look at them too much so they would feel "less observed" and more comfortable with me. Nevertheless, I would make eye contact and talk to them when the situation felt neutral, appropriate, non-disruptive, and non-judgmental. I had to keep in mind that I was introduced by the higher authority figure, the district officer and that I had to overcome a social barrier based on a hierarchy of power (Lichtenman, 2015). I had to build their trust and reemphasize I was a researcher, not a one of the district inspectors, reporting on them directly to the head of school as they were used to experiencing with other visitors.

Therefore, at first, teachers were reserved to overcome such social barrier I decided to share some anecdotes about my experience as a teacher, I demonstrated empathy and respect

toward their practices and re-instated as many times as possible that anything they said or did would remain confidential. Also, I asked regularly if they needed my help. However, teachers did not ask for any help as they come to realize that they have a high sense of responsibility and accountability for what they asked to do by the head of school. Their time is mostly spent grading notebooks and they take the marking very seriously. Although, after a couple of days, when teachers realized that I was paying more attention to the children, the work of the children, that I was taking pictures of materials rather than focusing on them, they relaxed and moved on into their more realistic routines. The relationship I had with teachers, the head of schools and the parents were respectful, professional, and friendly. I had a genuine interest to hear and know more about the Ghanaian culture, about Ghanaian children, and the participants were happy that someone was interested to listen to their anecdotes and stories to help situate their practices. Also, in general Ghanaian people are friendly and are easy to share a good laugh which was the case during the interviews.

My relationship with children was dynamic and relaxed. Children did not worry about the school politics and about me reporting their say to the higher authority. Although, children behaved with me differently than with the other adults. After reflecting on their social relationship with the other adults, I was the only adult who (in the school context) talked with them rather than to them, and who asked them open questions. Also, I asked them to illustrate and elaborate upon their short answer and I also asked them if they had any questions to ask me. As a result, when I was going around the school ground, there would often be a small group of children who would walk along with me or seat with me, and spend some time, listening to their peers telling me stories. However, most would lose interest after a few minutes and move on with their activities. In the classroom, the situation was different, when the teacher was out, some would come quietly and ask me questions about what I was writing in my notebook, and why but when the teacher was in the classroom, they did not pay attention to me. Children are used to having adult visitors in the classroom, the difference was that according to a few comments children made, I was always writing in my notebook like them.

3.7 Ethical considerations and child protection guidelines

Before any data was collected, there were a series of steps that took place to address ethical issues and to ensure that my presence in the classroom and at the school was acceptable to the government of Ghana, the public-school management, the principals and teachers, the parents, and the students.

Ethical consideration

This study follows the ethical guidelines recommended by the Société Suisse de Psychologie (SSP) and Federation Suisse des Psychologues (FSP-Article D15-D19). The following principles are in accordance with the Federal Act on Research (810.30) and the Nuremberg Code of ethics (1947).

The consent form, and parental consent for children, (Appendix) needed to be signed by all participants, prior to collecting any data and was guided by the following principles. The research procedures are clearly stated, transparent and the expectations are fully disclosed. To guarantee the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants, all names e.g., participants, schools, and locations will be changed. A hard copy of the consent forms will be given to all participants, including the children. The data collected will be stored in a digital application that requires a fingerprint and a password to be accessed and will only be used for the purpose of the study. All participants will be reminded, verbally, of all features of the consent form, and the purpose of the study, before any data is collected. I am required by each school where research is undertaken, to make a presentation at the school morning assembly, to participants, or at the PTA meeting, to inform participants about the purpose of the study and how it will be conducted.

2. The participants, by signing the consent form, will understand that they are voluntarily participating in the study and that all information collected will be collected in confidentiality and anonymously. All participants can withdraw from the research at any time if they are uncomfortable in any way. Also, to ensure that the field methods are non-intrusive, all data will be collected in public places within the school premises. Informal group discussions with

children will happen at a time decided upon by their teachers and always in the presence of at least 2 adults. Under no circumstances will children be asked to leave their classroom during a lesson or at a time when the teacher deems it not appropriate.

3. The research procedures will cause no psychological or physical harm to the participants. I, the main investigator, am always obligated, to use low risks techniques and reassess any methods planned or used, if a situation should bring any uncertainty. All data collection methods will be agreed upon with the Ghana District Education Officer who will supervise the field activities to ensure no harm will be done to the participants and that all methods are ethically and culturally appropriate and acceptable. I will meet and report monthly with the Ghana District Education Officer on the progress of the research and address any questions or concerns that may arise within the school community. All participants will have the contact information of the Ghana District Education Officer and will contact him/her directly if there are any questions, clarifications, or concerns.

4. I always seek to be respectful of cultural differences rather than discriminate, and I am aware that certain practices like corporal punishment are culturally accepted in Ghana. However, I do not support nor encourage such an authoritarian and oppressive approach and hope not to witness it. If I witness or hear about harmful, shaming, or wrongful practices that impact the dignity and well-being of a child. First, I will open a dialogue and have an open conversation with the perpetrator. When a practice such as corporal punishment is culturally accepted, people may not be aware of the harshness of the practice (Adu-Gyamfi, 2007). Second, I will share some alternatives and positive discipline methods. While I understand I cannot and do not wish to impose my western perspective, I believe it is possible to open the discussion with Ghana District Education Officer, heads of the school, teachers, and parents about the effectiveness of using the positive discipline guidelines developed by UNICEF (2010) which the Government Education Service (GES) encourages teachers to become familiar with. Third, I will discuss the situation during my monthly meeting with the district officer, who in my context is the appropriate authority, according to the school hierarchy. I am aware that corporal punishment in Ghana is culturally accepted, and I hope not to witness it personally. My perspective is that violence against children is unacceptable. I will make sure that all

participants will be treated respectfully with dignity, but I am not able to control the actions of other people.

5. The risks and benefits of the study and the values behind its objectives will be described and discussed ahead of time with the head of each school and the Ghana District Education Officer. This will ensure the transparency of the findings and enhance communication to avoid any misunderstandings. If any changes should occur in any of the previously shared steps, verbal and written explanations will be provided to guarantee a trustful collaboration. The findings of the research will be shared at all levels including with the Ghana District Education Officer, heads of schools, teachers, and the parents.

6. All the above information will be shared, verbally and in writing, by the Head of School, with the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). As a result, all school parents will be aware of the reasons of my presence on the school ground and the purpose of the study.

7. Another important ethical consideration in this study was ensuring the anonymity of the participants in the data presentation. To address this concern, all pictures were digitalized to prevent any participants from being recognized (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). This was done to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, as well as to prevent any potential harm that could arise from the sharing of their personal information. The digitalization of pictures is a common practice in qualitative research, particularly in studies involving vulnerable populations such as children (Greene & Hogan, 2005). By taking this measure, the study was able to uphold ethical standards while still presenting the data in an accessible and meaningful way.

3.8 Child protection guidelines

American professional society on the abuse of children (APSAC) 1997 practice guidelines and code of ethics guide my professional conduct in the field. the following principles are specifically relevant to my research.

PRINCIPLE A part 1 Major Principles: Best interests of the child

My role as an educational psychology researcher is based on always promoting best practices with the best interests of children in mind. However, by choosing to conduct research in a different culture than mine, I understand that varying values, norms, and interests about child-rearing and educational norms and practices must be respected rather than discriminated. Nevertheless, I must evaluate alternatives and rules in place in Ghanaian schools if I witness harmful practices against a child.

PRINCIPLE B Dignity of the child

My definition of dignity may differ or conflict with a teacher, parents, or head of school and I must respect their perception. I may witness what I perceive as hurtful or wrongful actions that impact the dignity of a child, and I must separate the personhood of the individual. Nevertheless, I can investigate and develop a better understanding of what the dignity of a child entails in the Ghanaian context.

PRINCIPLE B Non-discriminatory

I am a guest in the schools and in the country where I am undertaking my research. My role is to undertake my research and not to discriminate or degrade Ghanaian practices. I am aware of cultural differences and my perspectives must be unbiased. The child-rearing practices that are perceived as impacting the dignity of the child in the western and African contexts vary. Also, as a researcher, I must be impartial and collect systematic data to develop an understanding of what teachers, heads of school, and government officers perceive to be culturally acceptable behaviors.

PRINCIPLE A part 2 Standards of conduct. Professional competence

I must act professionally, in a caring and respectful manner, and develop an awareness of what a professional behavior in the Ghanaian setting involves. I have taken child protection and safeguarding trainings and I have international certifications at American and the international baccalaureate schools where I worked with children. I am not professionally trained to respond to harmful actions against children in Ghana.

PRINCIPLE B Part 2 Confidentiality and privacy

The right to privacy is central to develop a trustful relationship with the adults and student participants. I must honor the signed agreement with teachers that stipulate that the data will be kept confidential and private.

3.9 Data collection

Primary research data, “real world” (Mertens, 2010) data was collected through semi-structured interviews with participants and through observations in the classroom. Secondary data was collected via student’s notebooks or documents, children’s drawings, school records, and historical documents about African symbols and proverbs.

The participative ethnographic observations and interviews were audio or video recorded and included photo documentation of actors and the material in their natural settings (Clark, 2005). In the initial one or two days of observations, audio and video recordings were somewhat limited and introduced progressively. All participants signed a consent form that made explicit that pictures, audio, and video, were recorded for analytical purposes (Mertens, 2010). Also, parents were reminded of my methods by the head of school during parent-teachers association (PTA) meetings and to teachers during internal school meetings. These two approaches were chosen as they allowed me the development of a contextual understanding of peoples’ behavior, about their perceptions of socialization practices and to make visible certain aspects of the school activities that have been invisible or disregarded in previous research.

The Observations

Observations were conducted in as many different settings as possible, both inside and outside of the school environment and included twenty-four schools, thirty-six classrooms. However, the time I spent observing each setting varied greatly from a couple of hours to months. The observations outside of the classrooms were mostly not participative and consisted of three different PTA meetings, six teachers training, two trainings of trainers, two school performances, eleven teacher/staff meetings, three national student examinations, seven teacher prayer circles, thirty-six morning assemblies and numerous recesses considering that there are three recesses during a normal school day.

The type of observation method was partially participant-as-observer (Mertens, 2010) as my role as the researcher shifted at times from observer to participant. By positioning myself within the natural context (Hammersley, M. & Atkinson, P. 2007) allowed me to collect evidence-based data (Van der Riet et al., 2006) and provided an in-depth comprehension of all participant's behaviors and of their dynamics. Most importantly, it enabled me to experience the social phenomena, the interactions between all actors and helped identify the main agents in the complex entanglements between all actants (Latour, 2005). This in-depth approach was unusual compared to most observer roles which are usually for short periods of time. I conducted observations over a period of eighteen months. The time I spent in each school varied but consisted of at least 2 hours for my shortest visits. When I visited schools outside of the Accra district, as I collaborated with a couple of NGOs, my schedule aligned to the one of the NGO's. When I was visiting schools in the district where I had received the authorization to visit public schools, I spent on average of three to four days, over at least on two or three different weeks and over a couple of months. This method allowed me to develop a closer more trusting relationship as teachers kept seeing me coming back, visiting other classroom over a long period of time. As a result, with many teachers and children, we interacted daily and became comfortable with one another's presence in the school. Eventually, after spending two to three weeks in a school, everyone acclimatized to the presence of a second adult in the classroom. In all classrooms, there was a distinctive moment, from my fieldnotes the average was two days benchmark, when the research participants stopped glancing at me after an action or narration. At that point, I knew, they

had forgotten about my being seated in the back of the classroom for observations and I could then consider the social phenomena to be more natural, and I could step away from writing descriptive and generic notes about the classroom arrangement for example and start to write more about the dynamics of the classroom, the social interactions, and practices.

Observations were necessary to capture the dynamics of all actants in the daily routine of the classrooms (Darlington & Scott, 2002, and Tedlock, 1991), to make sense of the social interactions and behaviors of all actors, and to identify the implicit meaning behind the sociomateriality of the classroom routine (Iannaccone, 2017, Fenwick, 2010) and practices. Observations allowed me to better understand the role, performance, and relations between the spatial classroom arrangements, the actors, and the cultural artifacts present in the classroom. To go deeper into the reflective processes, some pictures were taken during observations and when appropriate, audio and video recordings made. The photos and recordings allowed me to revisit the setting regularly and to identify certain aspects that went unnoticed during the time spent at the school and helped identify additional daily patterns and routines.

Classroom observations focused on collection of primary data about sociomaterial elements of classroom practices (Iannaccone, 2017) and of the natural interactions between the human actors, particularly children, and more-than-human (Myers, 2019, Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, Kumpulainen, 2019) things and how the materiality created by their relations influence one another (Engeström, 2004). The ethnographic observations also were helpful in identifying sociomaterial orderings, identifying what elements make up the material culture of the classroom, and provided a general impression of the social relations created through their entanglements.

Numerous observation field notes were handwritten in a journal, The field notes facilitated the recording of matters that may have not been of importance at the time, but which created patterns and became significant (Creswell, 2014, Darlington, 2002, Fenwick, 2011) such as the time spent. For example, the recording of the time dedicated but not necessarily scheduled, for the various daily activities, ended up being important. Certain cultural aspects of the context that were not included in previous research such as the mapping of each

classroom's spatial arrangements and the students' body movements in the space became another important sociomaterial element. Also, as I witnessed certain social interactions, I did not understand or identify their social representation initially, but upon reviewing my field notes during the second phase of the analysis, they became valuable.

Also, in the analytical phases of this thesis, some field notes that were accompanied by audio and video recordings helped me identify patterns of movements, children's postures, gestures, and the symbolic representation of material and non-verbal communication (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) or what is referred to as materiality in this study. This combination of field notes and recordings helped further in identifying salient qualities, dynamics, and forces, helped identify how the classroom culture is produced, and provided me with a deeper perspective about the performances and relations between all actants. Furthermore, I could identify how the agency and subjectivity of the actants varied, and what sociomaterial elements were embedded in the agential entanglements. I was able to identify normative performances and develop a certain degree of generality about classroom practices (Beetz, 2016).

The amount of time spent conducting observations and the type of observations varied in the thirty-six different grade two and grade three classrooms as well as in the different schools and these variations are presented in table 1 below.

Table 3 Observation's background

Type of observations	Type of Setting	Number	Time spent in setting
Observations	24 schools 20 public 4 privates 4 rurales	36 classrooms In all primary grade levels	2 hours to several months
Participative observations	6 public schools	15 classrooms 2nd & 3rd grade classrooms	Full days and a minimum of six days per school
Passive observations	Assemblies	36	20-40 minutes each
Passive observations	Students' examinations	6	1 hour to a few days
Passive observations	Parent-teacher association (PTA) meetings	3	1 1/2 -3 hours each
Participative observations	Teachers praying circle	7	20-30 minutes each
Participative observations	Recess	Numerous There are 3 recesses a day	10-45 minutes depending on the time of the day a

			recess time varied throughout the day
Passive observations	Teachers' meetings	11	10 minutes to one hour depending on the length of the duration of the meeting
Semi-participative observations	Teachers' training	6	2 hours to 3 full days depending on the length of the training
Participative observations	Teacher' trainers training	2	2 x 2hours

This table demonstrates that the participative observations were the most dominant type of method used when observing the classrooms and the observations were passive when I observed other related activities. Outside the classroom, I made passive observations and collected field notes.

In the four rural and the four private schools that I accessed with the NGOs, some observations were as short as two hours due to the remoteness and travel time restrictions and schedule organized by the NGO officers who were always accompanying me. However, in a couple of them, I was able to visit twice and stay a full day. These daily observations gave me the opportunity to gather data about the daily routine of both rural and urban schools. The urban public-school classrooms, I spent eighteen months as an active observant were in one district.

In other settings such as parent- teacher meetings, or teacher/staff meetings, I stayed for the duration of the meetings which ranged from as short as ten minutes to several hours. At a

few teacher trainings, activities included active participation of the teachers and they always insisted that I participate as well. The participative activities in the teacher training enabled me to observe that the training consisted of the teachers doing every activity including the dancing and singing for every child song. I was able then, to observe their application by teachers in the classroom. Teachers replicated what they had learned in the training exactly in their classroom practices. At two schools, the head of schools asked if it was necessary that I observe their schools and to accommodate their request, I selected different schools.

The interviews

Interviews of eight children, nine teachers, four heads of schools, and nine parents from public schools were conducted using different types of interviews depending on the age of the participant (Braun & Clark, 2020) and whether the adult participant was a parent or teacher. Interview methods included semi-structured interviews with parents and five of the teachers, and short informal discussions with the other four teachers who did not have the luxury of time to conduct longer interviews. With the children, informal group discussions and role-playing were conducted. Most of the semi-structured interviews conducted with adults consisted of individual one-on-one semi-structured interviews which took place on the school grounds. There was one exception at one urban school where three parents asked to participate in the interview together as a group.

Every interview, regardless of its format, had an introductory component that made explicit the purpose of the study, the purpose of the interview, provided an explanation about confidentiality which each participant signed. Adult participants were asked if their participation was by choice, and they were asked to confirm that they understood what their participation involved and that they were comfortable participating and had made the choice to participate on their own (Mertens, 2010). For parent participants, the choice to meet at a location of their convenience was provided but they all chose to be interviewed on the school premises after dropping their children off at school, or they asked to meet after class in an unoccupied classroom. Parent interviews occurred in empty classrooms, the computer lab or outdoors in the shade under a tree, while teacher interviews occurred in their own classrooms during reading time or during recess. In general, teacher interviews occurred in

a noisy setting due to proximity to the children at school and given that public school classrooms do not have windows¹⁰ and if the interview took place during recess (as most of them did), the level of noise was a challenge considering that all students have recess at the same time on the school ground just outside the classroom.

Interview methods for children, considering their young age (six to eight years old), differed significantly from methods used with adults. First, parental consent was needed for children to participate, the time of day when the three twenty minutes interviews with children took place was determined by their teachers and was scheduled to happen at the end of phase two of instruction when children were done with their work. The schedule for interviewing children changed constantly and there were many last-minute changes due to the variability of the daily schedule and how long it took for children to complete their class work. The interviews were conducted either in an open public space like the schoolyard or the cafeteria during off-hours, and when either place was quiet. In keeping with child protection regulations and standards, there was always another adult present (Clark, 2010) at the child interviews, and this was often the research assistant. Child interviews consisted of mosaic methods (Brandao & Theodotou, 2020) and child-friendly instruments such as informal group discussions, role-playing and drawing.

3.10 Child-centered methods

All interviews with children were organized and implemented according to child protection and ethical guidelines (APSAC, 2019). To avoid any power struggle that can be caused when an adult asks direct questions to a child, small informal group discussions, informal discussions, and role-playing methods were used. These methods helped create a child-friendly environment where children were encouraged to express themselves in the format of a play, followed by a discussion between them, rather than with me, the researcher (Clark, 2011, Brandao & Theodotou, 2020). The groups consisted of six children who were given verbal space that allowed them to interact with one another in a semi-structured and casual

¹⁰ Classrooms in all public schools visited have a window frame, and wooden shutters that can be closed from inside the classroom, but do not have glass casement that enables to stop outside noise or heat to enter the classroom and vice versa.

manner (Hackmann et al, 2017). This was also advantageous because children's narratives can differ when adults ask them questions versus when they talk among their peers (Clark, 2011, Mertens, 2010). The group discussions allowed to collect children's perceptions in their own voices and to develop an understanding of their perceptions of their classroom routines, and their learning (Darlington & Scott, 2002). Most importantly, the informal group discussions allowed me to collect information from the voices of a group of children that have been excluded in previous research because of their young age. In Ghana, the cultural beliefs are that young children do not have the maturity to develop an opinion on important subjects like education until they reach the age of thirteen (Adu-Gyamfi, 2013). However, my observations and data suggest this is not the case. Finally, role-playing allowed students to dramatize their daily classroom routines, express their emotions spontaneously without boundaries, and to articulate their feelings without having to verbalize them (Kontopodis et al, 2011).

The challenge in conducting interviews with the children was to find a convenient time for them and their teachers, and to ensure that their learning was not disrupted or impacted. Two of the four teachers who had agreed to facilitate the extraction of students for interview purposes ended up changing their minds which reduced the child sample by half. However, the other two groups of children were interviewed, the time allocation worked perfectly, and we, the researchers, adjusted to the preferred timing of the teachers and no disruptions were recorded. The extraction of children for interviews worked well because of the large period of time teachers allocate to phase two of instruction when students copy the material teachers write on the blackboard into their notebooks (see chapter 4 p. 116 for details). Teachers selected child participants who they knew worked fast and who have free time during that phase of instruction, so there was no impact on learning for the children on days of the interviews or role-playing.

As a result, six children participated in the three planned activities (group discussion, informal discussions and role playing). Informal group discussions allowed children to express their perception about their classroom routine among themselves with as little intervention as possible from the researcher and research assistant. Informal discussions happened spontaneously during recess were very helpful to compensate for the groups of children who

could not participate and collect children's perspectives. During recess, I normally sat in one shaded area of the playground, rotating between outdoor spaces occupied by children like the parking lot and school entrance. I spent the recess time, observing children playing and taking notes. Often, there would be a small group of children, always different students, who would gather around me and look at what I was doing. Children were interested to see my notebook, commented on how much I was writing, and loved to look at their classroom maps (appendix F1 & F2).

Role-playing involved a child pretending to be the teacher, and the child gave instructions and pretended to be teaching in the classroom (to the other children in the role-playing group) for up to a minute at a time.

Another method used to collect children's perceptions about their classroom, which included the whole class cohort, was an organized drawing activity. A total of forty-four students participated in an instructional creative art class I conducted. While in their classroom, I asked the children to draw something that reflected their daily activities or reality in the classroom. I focused on obtaining art drawings while this approach enables children to express their realities through drama and art and to express their emotions spontaneously without boundaries (Kontopodis, 2011).

All interviews were conducted in English, but the research assistant who speaks a few of the local languages assisted and, in some cases, translated some sentences of the confidential form to some of the participants who preferred using a local language to explain certain concepts. I adapted my inquiry approach to accommodate the children, to ensure that they were comfortable and understood what they were being asked to do, and they were also advised that they could speak in a local language to avoid any 'power struggles' with the children.

Another adaptation made to avoid a power struggle involved interviews with three parents. The three mothers were friends, and one mother asked if they (the three mothers) could do the interview as a group. To accommodate them, a group discussion was organized instead of individual interviews. It was apparent that the group setting created a more relaxed

dynamics as they commented on each other's feedback and responses, often times switching to Twi, one of their common local languages. These incidents reflected their preference to speak among themselves in their local language, as they felt comfortable doing so, and suggested a certain degree of uneasiness to make explicit their deeper meanings using English.

The adjustments made were informed by indigenous psychologists such as Allwood and Heine, (2011), Kim and Beery, (1993), Kim, Yang, and Hwang, (2006), Sinha, (1997), and Nsamenang, (1993). All of them conducted their research using adapted and suitable methods for their local context, stepping away from 'western' methods (Heine, 2011). Accordingly, I re-organized my interview methods with teachers, and instead of a one-on-one long interview that appeared to be a formal setting for them, I engaged in informal short talks in the format of an exchange between colleagues. Therefore, conducting informal discussions created an equal level among myself (the researcher) and the interviewee, rather than an "official hierarchical" positioning of the teachers at a lower level of the hierarchy. This type of adjustment was not necessary with the heads of schools, who did not demonstrate any sign of "power struggle" during our collaboration (Braun & Clarke, 2020). The heads of schools were interviewed in their office, individually.

3.11 Visual data collection tools

The visual data collected is divided into two groups: the primary data consists of children's drawings, photographs, videos taken in the classroom, and data collected during the small group roleplaying (Clark and Moss, 2001; Mertens, 2010). One of the many advantages of using visual data like drawings was the inclusion of every single child in the classroom. The drawing methods were collaborative and initiated discussion among children about their daily routine, and provided additional data, especially from children that did not participate in the small group discussions. Drawings gave a voice and opportunity to children who lack the verbal abilities to express how they perceive and experience their learning environment (Clark and Moss, 2001), especially considering that for all these children, English is not necessarily their first language. Numerous pictures were taken in the classroom, including before, during, and after the instruction time to capture all the different aspects of the daily

classroom. Additionally, some video and audio recordings were made, when appropriate, and respectful, and the recording did not distract children. Both audio and video data collected helped me to return to the midst of the classroom setting and to further capture the dynamics between all actants, even months after being physically there. It allowed me to re-live the experience with a certain degree of separation, which was useful in noticing elements that were disregarded initially. The temporal distance allowed me to identify patterns that were missed while doing the observations due to the complexity of the entangled elements that are, at all times, in constant change in the classroom practices. As a result, the analytical processes were holistic and happened with a higher consciousness due to the physical and emotional separation. (Mertens, 2010).

Secondary data consisted of government documents such as the 2019 Ghana national curriculum, news articles from various sources, archived pictures, Akan, and African proverbs. At the school level, the documents collected consisted of student exam sheets and results, student exercise notebooks, classroom posters, head of school discipline book records, and teacher's instruction books. UNICEF and UNESCO reports and Pan African frameworks were included in the secondary data collected, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), also called Children's Charter. These empirical, historical, and theoretical instruments helped to develop better knowledge about the school culture, to make sense of the routine, its dynamics, and challenges (Mertens, 2010), and to develop an 'emic perspective' (Heine, 2020) of the current learning environment.

Children's drawings

During the creative art child drawing activity that I organized children were provided with a piece of white paper and coloured pencils and they were asked to draw a teaching activity in the classroom. The first challenge I faced during this activity is that students were confused that they could draw whatever they wanted. The inquiry for children to do a task that may differ in interpretation for each student was new and confusing. Children are normally asked to copy and never create individual content. Children asked many questions and needed clarification about what they were supposed to do. Consequently, the interpretation of the instructions differed slightly from one classroom to another. In the first classroom, the assignment was interpreted by children as 'what do you see in your classroom' and the drawings were literal and the children drew single objects I had mentioned in my explanation such as a window, a board, a pen, etc. In the second classroom, the assignment was interpreted as "what does teaching look like in your classroom" which resulted in the majority of children drawing their teacher standing in front of the blackboard.

The collection of visual data also included photographs, a document with the name of the students, or a video. In terms of privacy and confidentiality, there were ethical challenges (Newton, 2009, in Mertens, 2010) as they may reveal the geographical location or some information that could be hard to disguise (Farough, 2006). For example, the colour of students' uniforms may give away the identity of the school. So, in addition to the consent letters that were given to the school management, teachers, and parents and signed, a verbal presentation of the research methods and research goals was provided at the PTA meeting and during the school morning assemblies to make sure there was broad awareness and agreement on approaches that would be used in the classroom.

The diversity of interview methods enabled me to develop a valuable sociocultural perspective about the participant's perceptions of classroom practices, the role classrooms play in learning, the learning setting or environment, children's social representation and their socialization principles and practices.

3.12 The participants

A total of twenty-two adults, including nine teachers, nine parents, four heads of school, and six children¹¹ participated in the interviews. Initially, twelve children were selected to participate but due to schedule conflicts, they were not able to step out of the classroom which reduced the number of child participants by half. The informal discussion during recess time, helped with providing additional data to make the voice of children more significant.

The parent's demographic consisted of nine full-time working parents and of them, four had an 'official' job with a company meaning they had signed a contract and paid national taxes. One parent worked as an engineer, one as a clerk in an insurance company, the third one in a finance company, and the fourth one as a government officer in one of the education district offices. The other five parents worked in the "informal sector" meaning that they have an independent status. Among them, one worked as a cleaner in an office building, one worked as a cook and sold her food from a street food stand, she rents, one worked as a seamstress, and two worked as 'traders' the name given to people who sell packaged goods, accessories, or clothing on street¹².

The selection of parents consisted of the parents of the students that teacher initially selected to participate in group discussions. Parents who were asked to sign consent forms for their children to participate in the study were also given the option to participate and nine agreed to participate.

The rationale for selecting children between the age of six to eight years old was based on two elements. The first one was to give a voice to this age group of children who had been excluded from educational research in Ghana (Wolf, et al., 2018). The second was due to my professional expertise in working with and teaching children that age in multicultural settings over the past two decades.

¹¹ Although many others commented informally through discussions during recess time

¹² Often, these vendors are observed carrying their goods on their heads and they often work at locations where there are long traffic light intervals.

The selection of children who participated in the small group discussions was organized by their respective classroom teachers and based on criteria we discussed together. The criteria were to select the same number of boys and girls, and to also select children that demonstrated academic diversity embodied in the classrooms (Creswell, 2014).

The gender distribution among the participants was the following: 2/9 parents were men, 1/9 teachers was a man, 2/4 head of schools were men, and 4/8 children were boys. The number of participants is illustrated in the table 4 below.

Table 4 Sample size of participants

Parents	Total 9	Teach-ers	Total 9	Head of school (HoS)	Total 4	Students Total 8	Gender + Age
P1	Father - educator	T1	woman RS1*1	HoS 1	Man GS1	St 1	Boy 7
P2	Mother- hairdresser	T2	Woman GS1*2	HoS 2	Wom -an GS2	St 2	Boy 8
P3	Mother- seamstress	T3	Woman Ps1	HoS 3	Man RS2	St 3	Boy 6
P4	Mother- trader	T4	Woman Ps1	HoS 4	Man GS1 13	St 4	Boy 7
P5	Mother- caterer	T5	Woman Ps1			St 5	Girl 8
P6	Mother- GES*3 Officer	T6	Woman GS1			St 6	Girl 8
P7	Mother- clerk at insurance company	T7	Woman GS1			St 7	Girl 8
P8	Mother- trader	T8	Woman GS1			St 8	Girl 7
P9	Father- finance officer	T9	Man RS 2			Many more in informal discussions	Both Different grades

1 RS-rural school, *2 GS-government public school,

*3 GES-Government Education Service

3.13 Sampling of schools

The selection of the schools was made to include public schools, private schools, urban schools, and rural schools. In Ghana, the management of public schools is done at the district level (UNICEF, 2019). I selected a District in Accra, the capital city, that had maximum

¹³ The second year I conducted observation in the school.

variation sampling (Braun, et al., 2017) and that encompassed a large urban demographic diversity that offered a fair representation of the larger population (Mertens, 2010). However, the selection of schools was made by the Education District Officer with whom I discussed the following criteria: At a minimum, I preferred to study at least two schools, preferably one or more considered a high-performing school and one or more considered performing at a lower level. I also asked to study schools in a good, upcoming neighbourhood and similar schools in a less desirable neighbourhood (Patton, 2002). The idea was eventually to select at least four schools. The district officer first selected the two best schools in one predominant neighbourhood but within the first two months of starting the data collection, the school options broadened and became more representative of the larger population and aligned with my initial criteria.

The selection of the private and rural schools was different because the authorization to access them was attached to ongoing projects of two different non-profit organizations. The selection of schools had already been completed by the non-profit organizations (NGOs). One NGO conducted children protection and capacity-building teacher training in the greater Accra region which resulted in a wide and diverse selection of schools. Most schools were located within 25 km of the center of Accra. The other NGO worked with rural communities that produce shea butter in the Tamale region of northern Ghana. Besides one school which was in Tamale city, the other three were located in remote areas an hour outside of the city. Due to the overall number of rural schools that exist, the rural school options were much more limited and as a result, data collection from these schools was also more limited, allowing my research to make some generalizations about school settings and practices (Seidman, et al., 2017), but the greater emphasis was given to urban schools due to the abundance of data and a larger number of diverse schools made available for this research.

3.14 Authorization procedures

For a researcher who is not affiliated with an NGO or a local university, visiting a classroom in a public school in Ghana requires an authorization letter signed by the Director of the Education District Office and one other high-level member of his/her office at the district level where the school is located. Therefore, I wrote a letter (see Appendix B) which includes an introduction of the researcher, a description of the study, and its methodology. The letter had to be signed and officially stamped by a variety of District officers. Once obtaining the signed stamped letter from the school district, observations could start at the schools. Afterward, monthly meetings were required with the designated district officer for the purposes of reporting on the progress of the school observations. The human resources (HR) officer of the Department of Education at the District office was the person in charge of my supervision, the person who selected the schools where I could undertake my research, and they introduced me to the head of every school, I visited. Incidentally, this HR officer was formerly a head of school and a teacher. In the role of the HR focal point, you are the one person that parents, teachers, heads of schools, and other district officers go to if there are any problems or inquiries about any aspects of school life. Therefore, everybody knows the HR person and the HR person knows everyone.

Another particularity in Ghana is that before observations could be conducted, it was necessary for the HR officer to personally introduce me to the head of every school, and we had an initial meeting together with each head of school. In this in-person meeting, I had to explain the background and purpose of the research, and my own professional experience in the field of education.

3.15 The research assistant

I, the researcher, recognized the importance of ensuring that my approach was culturally and contextually appropriate when conducting my fieldwork in Ghana. During one of my initial meetings with the HR officer, I requested the possibility of working with a Ghanaian research assistant to assist me with my data collection and fieldwork. This was to ensure that language barriers did not inhibit communication among myself and all actants and to ensure that my research approach was sensitive to the cultural context.

The HR officer provided me with the phone number of a University of Ghana student who was collecting data for her bachelor's degree project in psychology. After an initial meeting, she agreed to assist me in my fieldwork, and her contribution proved essential in making sense of the different cultures of the participants. With her experience of working in the field previously and her understanding of my research, she was able to provide invaluable assistance in translating information when actants spoke in a local language and interpreting cultural implications that I may have missed.

Having a local Ghanaian research assistant by my side during interviews and observations allowed me to have critical conversations with participants and cross-check data with someone who had a deep understanding of the Ghanaian perspectives on children and education. This enabled me to avoid making assumptions and to develop a better understanding of the cultural context of my research.

Data analysis in this qualitative study uses a flexible analytical approach influenced by Braun and Clarke's notion of flexibility (2020). Flexibility is essential in making sense of the data as the data collection and analytical processes are initiated, evolving, and ever-changing (Mertens, 2010, Braun & Clarke, 2020). This flexible approach enables the researcher to identify patterns and seek underlying significance before developing deeper meaning in their interpretation.

3.16 Thematic analysis

For the analysis of the data collected in this study, a thematic analysis approach was chosen due to its alignment with flexibility in analyzing narrative material and people's behavior through the meaning of material practices. According to Beetz (2016), this approach allows for a descriptive and interpretive perspective that identifies relevant themes in the data. As stated by Mertens (2010), data analysis is an ongoing and emerging progression, and capturing empirical accounts of intangible things was challenging. Therefore, the thematic analysis helped to interpret what is beyond the descriptive aspect of the data (Magure & Delahunt, 2017). Braun & Clarke's (2019) levels of themes help to move beyond the semantic aspect and analyze the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations that shape the data.

Also, the thematic analytical approach used is informed by the researcher's interpretation of the relationship between the data and the world, which is inspired by social constructionist and postcolonial theories. This epistemological stance challenges the notion of a direct causal relationship between the data and the world, instead recognizing that our understanding of the world is mediated through our symbolic systems and material constraints. As such, this approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the complex interactions between the participants and their environment.

Also, the thematic analytical approach is informed by how I, the researcher, interpret the relationship between the data and the world. The worldview is inspired by social constructionist epistemological assumptions (Harper, 2012), and sociomaterial lenses, including postcolonial theories. This means that the perception in this thesis of the 'real world' is not to see it 'as direct caused by it' (Timberlake, 2015) or a true image, but rather situating the world our interpretation (Hruby, 2001). We make sense of the world by meditating (Moro, 2015) or translating (Latour, 2005) our symbolic systems and the material world that shapes our everyday experiences.

The six-steps framework

The thematic analysis was developed following the six-step framework of Braun & Clarke (2006) because, as Maguire & Delahunt (2017) suggest, 'it offers such a clear and usable framework for doing thematic analyses. However, it is important to mention that the steps are not linear (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Additionally, the coding process of Saldaña (2015) inspired step two of the six steps of Braun & Clarke's framework. The six steps are the following:

1. Familiarization oneself with the data.
2. Generating codes.
3. Searching for themes through transcription.
4. Reviewing potential themes.
5. Refining, defining, and naming themes.
6. Producing the report.

1. Familiarization oneself with the data: One of the first steps in the thematic analysis approach used in this study was familiarizing myself with the data. After collecting the data, I transcribed the majority of it to become familiar with its content. The transcription process was a major first step in capturing interesting and relevant aspects about the data, especially considering the variety of data tools used. Initially, transcribing the audio recordings enabled me to hear what I had observed without distraction and to search for patterns and possible themes that illustrated further my observations notes and the ongoing literature review. Additionally, transcribing the audio was useful in hearing things I may have missed during the observations.

During the observations, the visual aspects were at times distracting, by children's behaviours, them talking, or other actions. The digital transcription process allowed for the identification of recurring words, expressions, patterns, or utterances and to make certain concepts visible. These initial themes were later compared with the field notes, serving symmetrically in developing a deeper analytical perspective of recurring observed matters. Although the videos taken were not transcribed, for technical reasons, I watched them

numerous times, organized and re-organized them. Eventually, the organization of the data became a systemized extensive list of codes developed in the transcription process. This step enabled me to begin the process of identifying patterns and themes within the data.

As a result, and as shown below, the coding processes were organized into three stages: the first step (Figure 2 Streamlined codes-to-theory model by Saldaña) was to develop an initial list of keywords (codes, in fig, 2), which were identified in the literature. In this first coding step, many definitions were attached as a note to the code. One of the advantages of using the application MAXQDA is the ability to attach notes to identified codes, as well as any underlined or selected text. The second stage started when the initial list became too long and consisted of categorizing the codes (as in fig.2) and creating a list of subcodes (Saldaña, 2016). At all stages, the grouping was connected to the research questions and changed every time the research questions were refined. At that stage, the different categories were organized by colours (fig.5). This colouring of the codes was very useful as I am a visual learner and help me to process them at a deeper level. At the third stage, potential themes or what Saldaña calls category (fig., 2) were identified. The third and final stage was too concise the themes and reflect upon their alignment with the thesis research questions, the unit of analysis and the thesis statements or assertions (Saldaña, 2016). Once this process was done, the themes could be interpreted, and the data presented.

2. Generating codes: The coding process was inspired by Saldaña's streamlined codes-to-theory model below in Fig. 2 (2016) and was completed using MAXQDA, a qualitative analytical software (Mertens, 2010). As a result, and as shown below, the coding processes were organized into three stages: the first step (Figure 2) was to develop an initial list of codes, which were identified in the literature. In this first coding step, many definitions were attached as a note to the code. One of the advantages of using the application MAXQDA is the ability to attach notes to identified codes, as well as any underlined or selected text. The second stage started when the initial list became too long and consisted of categorizing the codes (as in Fig. 2) and creating a list of subcodes (Saldaña, 2016). At all stages, the grouping was connected to the research questions and changed every time the research questions were refined (and vice versa). At that stage, the different categories were organized by colours (see Fig. 5 below). This colouring of the codes was very useful for a visual learner and

helped me to process them at a deeper level. In the third stage, potential themes or what Saldaña calls category (fig., 2) were identified. The third and final stage was to concise the themes and reflect upon their alignment with the thesis research questions, the unit of analysis, and the thesis statements or assertions (Saldaña, 2016). Once this process was done, the themes could be interpreted, and the data presented.

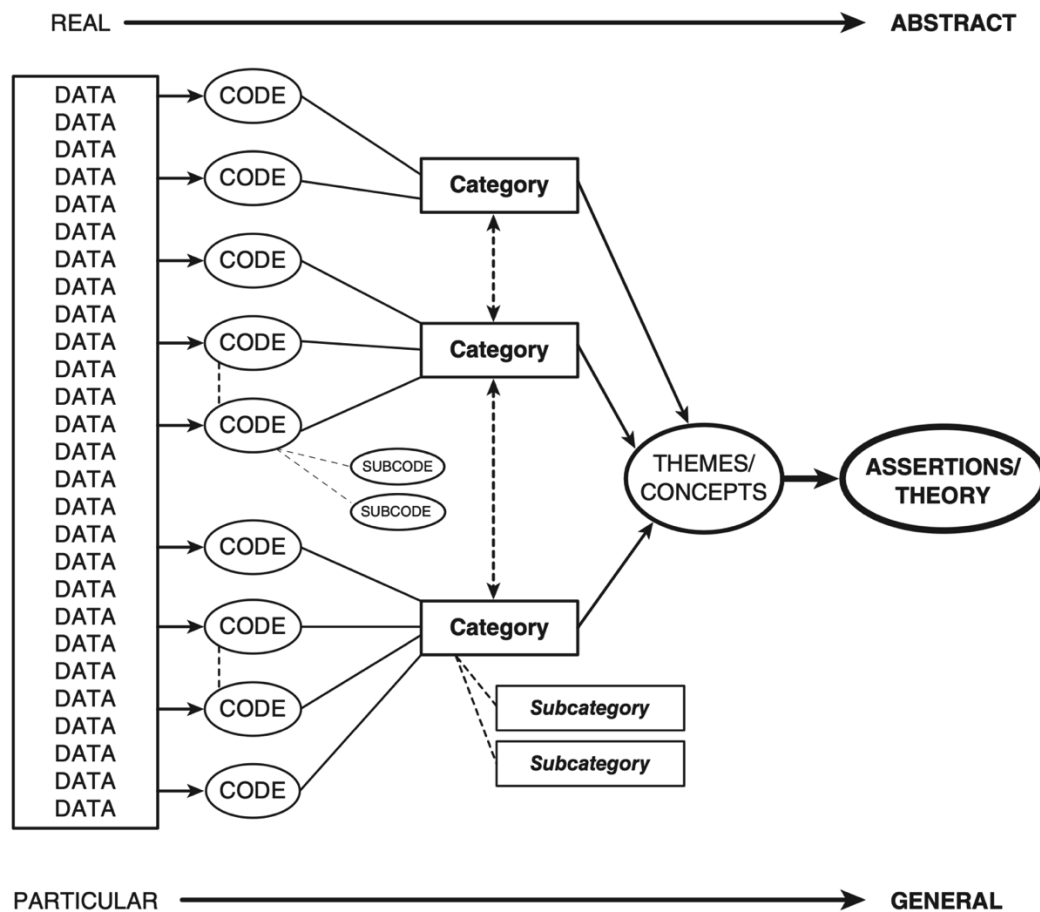


Figure 2 Streamlined codes-to-theory model by Saldaña

Saldaña’s streamlined codes-to-theory model is an effective process as it is basic yet effective and aligns with the use of the MAXQDA application and with a thematic analysis approach (2016).

As a result, and as shown below, the coding processes were organized into three stages: the first step (Figure 2) was to develop an initial list of codes (keywords, in table 5), which were identified in the literature. In this first coding step, many definitions were attached as a note

to the code. One of the advantages of using the application MAXQDA is the ability to attach notes to identified codes, as well as any underlined or selected text. The second stage started when the initial list became too long and consisted of categorizing the codes (as in Fig. 2) and creating a list of subcodes (Saldaña, 2016). At all stages, the grouping was connected to the research questions and changed every time the research questions were refined (and vice versa). At that stage, the different categories were organized by colors (see Table 5 below). This coloring of the codes was very useful for a visual learner and helped me to process them at a deeper level. In the third stage, potential themes or what Saldaña calls category (Fig.,2) were identified. The third and final stage was to concise the themes and reflect upon their alignment with the thesis research questions, the unit of analysis, and the thesis statements or assertions (Saldaña, 2016). Once this process was done, the themes could be interpreted, and the data presented.

Table 5 Coding using MAXQDA

Code System	Code System
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊖ nuanced PERCEPTION ⊖ socialization ⊖ religious ⊖ participation ⊖ Dignity ⊖ traditional vs formal ⊖ anthropological ⊖ corporeal practices ⊖ enculturation ⊖ subjectivity ⊖ institutional and personal development ⊖ Theories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊖ Social-learning theory emphasizes social situations as the cont <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊖ cultural-historical theory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊖ MARX <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊖ Leontiev 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊖ generation/kinship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊖ child/chidhood ⊖ Edu.def.knowledge,learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊖ Communication-laguage-symbols- ⊖ pedagogy-formal-informal ⊖ problem with edu ⊖ Teachers ⊖ discourse/policies/global/local <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊖ AU/African view ⊖ UN/International > Chapter-Writing ⊖ Historical <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊖ Indigenous/pre-colonial ⊖ colonial ⊖ Industrial change ⊖ postcolonial ⊖ decolonizing philosophy ⊖ 21st -African edu ⊖ culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊖ Artifacts/tools ⊖ cultural psycho+ edu ⊖ economic ⊖ religion ⊖ traditions ⊖ Psychological <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊖ Values ⊖ socialization ⊖ respect ⊖ behavior ⊖ discipline ⊖ theorists <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊖ A.N.T +Post A.N.T. ⊖ constructivism ⊖ C.H.A.T

3. Generating initial themes: The organization and sorting of the data into meaningful groups, or codes (Campbell et al., 2015), led to the emergence of initial themes. This process was ongoing throughout the entire analytical process and was initially represented in a diagram (see list below). Also, mind maps were produced at different points and throughout the analysis (Mertens, 2010). Through this process, the identification of meanings beyond the concepts began, and relationships emerged (Braun & Clarke, 2019). List of initial themes:

Setting

Resources

Historical periods

Perception of learning

Actors

Social representation

4. Review of the themes: The review of themes continued to focus on developing a context-based perspective of all actants and identifying their relationality (Braun & Clarke, 2020). This approach helped to identify coherent patterning in the data (Campbell et al., 2017). Additionally, a review of the entire data set was conducted to examine the variety of actants shaping social and organizational phenomena and subsequently influencing children's agency. This allowed us to assess further the frequency supporting the themes, ensuring their validity.

5. The defining of the themes: This interpretation was refined through the constant comparison of data and the literature, which involved returning to the literature to check how the identified themes compared to existing knowledge in the field (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The aim of this comparison was to ensure that the interpretation was grounded in the data and was not simply a reflection of pre-existing assumptions or biases (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Additionally, the interpretation was presented to other peer researchers in the field, who provided feedback and suggestions for improvement (Mertens, 2010).

Finally, a messy interpretation was used to draw conclusions about the research questions and to develop recommendations for practice and future research. The process of interpretation was crucial in making sense of the data and in generating insights that contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field.

6. The production of a report: Presenting a clear, concise, respectful, and relevant account (Campbell et al., 2015) of the everyday life stories of the participants was the last step. Therefore, I re-read fieldnotes, and transcripts, re-listened to audio, and re-watched videos, to write 'a compelling argument that addresses the research questions' (Campbell et al.,


2015). This writing was developed to go beyond being descriptive and be a deep interpretation of the relationality of themes.

Furthermore, the thematic analysis is a hybrid of inductive approaches and interpretative phenomenological (IPA) (Braun & Clarke, 2019) and of underlying philosophical perspective. An inductive approach enables to development of the analysis of the data processed 'from the bottom-up'. When I tried to identify themes, and I looked for patterns, I considered the meaning the data conveyed, what people shared, and what people did. I considered the environment, the different actors, and the different institutions' children live in. I do not separate, nor I divide, nor I set side to side any of the entities, tangible or intangible, natural, or material, human or nonhuman, that make the ecology in which the social phenomena I explore is situated. Not the other way around, I did not try to fit the data to pre-existing theoretical frameworks.

Also, the analysis is interpretative phenomenological (IPA) as some of its focus is to make sense of the participant's everyday life experiences (Smith et al., 2009). How the participant perceived learning and its materiality was significant in developing a deeper understanding.

It is important to note that the thematic analysis approach used in this study is not just a mechanical process of coding and categorizing data, but rather a reflexive and iterative process that involves ongoing interpretation and re-evaluation of the data (Braun & Clark, 2019). The researcher's subjective perspective and reflexivity are critical in shaping the analysis and the interpretations made. It is also essential to consider the limitations and potential biases that may have influenced the analysis, such as the researcher's positionality, prior assumptions, and potential power dynamics in the research process (see limitations, below). Therefore, the findings presented in this study should be interpreted within the context of these potential limitations and reflexive considerations.

As Braun & Clarke explained, the data analysis can never end, as the process is ever evolving and emerging as new entanglements take the researcher in different directions (2019). Therefore, I deliberately stopped the analysis once I could clearly answer my research questions, illustrated with a great variety of theoretical approaches how children's agency and when I felt as I had reached a deeper level of analysis. However, my thinking is forever

ready to re-think everything when a certain redundancy occurs in my understanding. (Braun and Clark, 2022) Nevertheless, I also was aware that my positionality was never neutral (Chilisa et al., 2012). According to Saldaña (2015), the root of qualitative analysis is to ensure that the reader can hear what the researcher heard and see what the researcher saw. Thus, these perspectives align with Dweninmmen, , Akan's symbol of humility¹⁴.

3.17 The limitations

As a white researcher conducting qualitative ethnographic observations and interviews in an Africa context within the education sector, there are inherent limitations and power dynamics that must be acknowledged (Serpell, 1993, Chilisa, 2018). These include potential biases, cultural differences, and language barriers that may affect data collection and interpretation. However, to overcome these limitations, I worked closely with a research assistant who had extensive knowledge of the local culture and language. This collaboration allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the data collected and helped to address power imbalances in the research process. The research assistant, who is a Ghanaian student at the University of Ghana, played a crucial role in overcoming some of these limitations, as her own study was conducted, before mine, in the same school context. Her presence and perspective provided valuable insight into the cultural and social norms of the school community, which helped to address the potential biases and limitations that may arise from my positionality as a white researcher conducting research in a Ghanaian education context.

Another limitation, related to my positionality, is the issue of power dynamics, which can affect the ability to access certain groups or individuals (Bartlett, 2010). As a foreign researcher, there is the potential for being viewed as an outsider, and for participants to be hesitant in sharing their experiences and perspectives due to concerns about cultural differences or power imbalances (Serpell, 1993, Bartlett, 2010). To overcome power dynamics, I utilized a collaborative approach in which participants were active co-producers of knowledge rather than passive subjects of study (Chilisa & Bagele, 2019). I involved them in the research process by seeking their input on research questions, methods, and data

¹⁴ The Akan symbol introduced at the beginning of the chapter.

interpretation. This approach helped to ensure that their perspectives and experiences were accurately represented in the research findings. In addition, I also implemented reflexivity (Braun & Clarke, 2020), a critical self-awareness of the researcher's role in the research process. I continuously questioned my own positionality as a white researcher and how that may have influenced the research process and findings (Serpell, 1993).

From a postcolonial perspective, considering scholars such as Smith (1999), Spivak (1988), and Mohanty (1991), it would not be considered appropriate for a European researcher like me to voice recommendations or to suggest changes to be made about the Ghanaian context. Such a perspective would be perpetuating the legacy of colonialism. As I argue in my thesis, perpetuating colonial legacies through research is precisely what I condemn. Instead, in alignment with their perspective, I advocate for a more collaborative and participatory approach to research that centers the voices and perspectives of local communities and works towards more equitable learning systems.

Furthermore, I also ensured that participants had informed consent and that their privacy and confidentiality were protected throughout the research process (see appendix, 3). I explained the purpose of the study and the implications of their participation, and they were given the option to decline or withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Overall, by implementing a collaborative approach, reflexivity, informed consent, and confidentiality, I aimed to address power dynamics and ensure that the research was conducted ethically and respectfully with all participants.

Finally, as a European researcher investigating a context where colonial legacies and power structures still have an impact on the education system and the experiences of participants, I addressed the limitations and made a conscious effort to work collaboratively with the teachers, parents, and children, engaged in reflexive practices and be fully aware of my own biases and assumptions (Chilisa & Bagele, 2019). As both argue it is important to incorporate indigenous knowledge into research and prioritize local perspectives and experiences.

Overall, by being aware of the power dynamics at play in the research process and actively working to overcome my own biases and limitations, I was able to conduct a more meaningful

and respectful ethnographic study of Ghanaian children's agency and socialization practices. As Catherine Odora Hoppers notes, incorporating indigenous knowledge systems into research and education is essential for creating more equitable learning practices.

As a researcher trained in systems informed by and conveying Euro-centric discourses, there was a risk of imposing cultural biases and assumptions onto the data while conducting research in Ghana. I overcame this limitation by working closely with a research assistant who had a nuanced understanding of the cultural context and by being receptive to the perspectives of teachers, parents, and children. Additionally, my two decades of experience working with marginalized groups of children in the Global South informed my approach to the study. By being aware of and working to overcome my own biases and limitations, I was able to conduct a respectful ethnographic study of Ghanaian children's agency and socialization practices.

In conclusion, as Dweninmmen symbol implies, strength of mind, body, and soul, wisdom, humility, and learning, were deeply embedded in my reflexivity and served as an important reminder of the values cherished within the context. These principles also informed my approach to researching the Ghanaian context and in developing a new perspective on children's agency. By embodying the principles of humility and learning represented by Dweninmmen, I have recognized my own limitations and worked to overcome them by engaging with Ghanaian scholars and community members. This approach has led to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the cultural nuances and meanings of Dweninmmen, while also highlighting the importance of centering the perspectives of local scholars and community members in research. Going forward, it is essential to continue applying the principles represented by the Adinkra symbol Dweninmmen in research and other endeavours, to ensure a more respectful and accurate representation of Ghanaian culture.

Chapter 4 Data Presentation



Adinkrahene ¹⁵

Greatness, charisma, and leadership

Dzokoto, (2018)

4.1 Overview

This chapter presents the data collected with empirical evidence (Clark & Braun, 2020) from second and third-grade Ghanaian public-school classrooms. The data findings help identify the impact of a social phenomenon, an everyday practice, by untangling its heterogeneous elements. The ontological belief is that these heterogeneous elements are emergent, entangled, and create intra-actions (Barad, 2005), and their relationality shape children's agency (Kumpulainen, 2019). Some of the intangible taken-for-granted classroom practices become visible through this analytical process (Sørensen, 2009, Fenwick, 2009, Iannaccone, 2013, Cattaruzza, 2021, Kumpulainen & Kajaama, 2020). The data is presented as a story accompanied with analytical reflections, replicating the practice of storytelling with embedded morals by elders (Falola, 2000, Funteh, 2015, Le Guerin, 1975). The data is organized in a way to reflect the rhythm of the children's daily routine (Corsaro, 2015) and to

¹⁵ Adinkra symbol: literally meaning "Chief of the adinkra symbols" for the "Adinkra King" The three concentric circles, one within another, represent the three attributes that were believed to be important for a leader; greatness, charisma, and leadership. The symbol has played an inspiring and important role for the other symbols.

illustrate how the socialization practices in the classroom setting are made of complex entanglements of heterogeneous elements, actants, whose assemblages (Edwards, 2010) are relational (Barad, 2005, Latour, 2005, Kumpulainen, 2019) as all actants have equal agential effects that ultimately shape children's agency (Pickering, 2015).

The data's interpretation is done in three steps. First, a situated sociomaterial phenomenon is described. Second, the actants involved in the intra-actions are identified. Third, the performance of this relationality, created by the intra-actions of the actants involved, are determined, and supported by theories. The goal is to identify the sequential patterns of learning activities, the complex processes that create relations and dynamics between all the actants involved, the origins of the shared beliefs and ideologies about child socialization practices, and ultimately, to analyse how in each situated phenomenon, children's agency is shaped. Within the sociomaterial space (Sørensen, 2013), explicit attention is given to the performance of the various actants (Latour, 2005) when they connect.

The story is an interpretation of empirical patterns that make an ordinary school day of four Ghanaian children, Ama, Esi, Kofi, and Yao¹⁶, and of their teachers¹⁷ and parents. The characters in the story (children, teachers, and parents) do not represent specific individuals or participants and are not the ones photographed¹⁸. Each character is a compilation, a collective, a representation of the many children and adults who were observed and interviewed in repeated situations¹⁹. The characters' socio-economic status, marital status,

¹⁶ The names of all characters in the story are fictional.

¹⁷ Including head of school and other school officials if any in the situation presented

¹⁸ They are made up characters built representing an assemblage of joint representation, as they were collective figures.

¹⁹ As Chilisa emphasized, the individual entities are not the important subject for an indigenous methodology, but the collective aspect and what is representative of the community (2010). In indigenous methodologies, there is often a strong emphasis on community, interconnectedness, and collective well-being. The approach values the knowledge, perspectives, and experiences of the community as a whole, rather than prioritizing individualistic viewpoints. This perspective recognizes that decisions, actions, and outcomes should be considered in relation to the community's needs, values, and goals.

religious backgrounds, and geographical locations are mentioned when relevant. The story starts with children's morning routines prior to school to illustrate how some of the socialization practices and norms crossed boundaries (Iannaccone & Marsico, 2013) between the home and school. The criteria of analysis used to select the sociomaterial phenomena incorporated in the story were the relationality of the actants that were recurring and followed a pattern. Relationality was identified from classroom observations, interviews, informal discussions, role-playing, and children's drawings. While some anecdotes included in the story illustrate unique or controversial incidents, most of the content are representative of routine situations. All social phenomenon described in this chapter address the following research questions:

RQ-1 How do indigenous knowledge, colonialism, and the sociomateriality of the classroom shape children's agency in grades 2 & 3 Ghanaian public schools?

RQ-2 What are the sociocultural factors limiting children's everyday learning experiences and active participation?

RQ-3 How can a classroom setting facilitate a better learning environment and foster children's development of contextually appropriate skills, attitudes, and knowledge?

By shifting the focus to the collective, indigenous methodologies aim to promote inclusivity, collaboration, and sustainability. They seek to foster a sense of unity, shared responsibility, and respect for the diverse voices within a community. This approach acknowledges that individual actions and experiences are shaped and influenced by the larger social, cultural, and historical contexts in which they are embedded.

4.2 A school day: Before heading to school

The four children, Kofi²⁰, Esi²¹, Ama²² and Yao²³, begin their day before dawn²⁴. Schools start at 7:30 AM and some of the children have much to do before the school bell rings²⁵. Esi, who lives in a traditional mud hut in the province of Tamale²⁶, starts her morning routine with various chores such as fetching water for the family, just like many other girls of her age²⁷ living in her community. Kofi's morning routine includes bathing and doing homework. In absence of homework, his father requires him to read passages from the bible as mentioned during an interview with Kofi's father, "My three children wake up at 5:30 AM, they must take a bath, they need to do some more homework or some reading before school, sometimes we pray and read the bible together. I am a Presbyterian and discipline is important and so waking up early is part of it".

Ama starts her day later because her family's maid prepares her breakfast and gets her school uniform ready, and she is not required to do any chores at home. Both her parents both work in government agencies and do not believe that their children doing chores is the best use of their time. "We prefer if she does schoolwork" shared her mother during an interview²⁸.

The children's morning routines are significantly different and illustrate how actants like children's age, gender, socioeconomic status, religious beliefs, and cultural backgrounds shape their agency.

²⁰ A fictional name of Akan origin given for boys born on a Friday.

²¹ A fictional name of Akan origin given to girls born on a Sunday.

²² A fictional name of Akan origin given to girls born on a Thursday.

²³ A fictional name of Akan origin given to boys born on a Saturday.

²⁴ During interviews most parents and teachers mentioned waking up before dawn

²⁵ The bell has been replaced in GS4, GS5, GS7 by drumming (military style drumming) and by a loud electronic sound in GS3.

²⁶ Fetching water can take up to 70 minutes each day and is a chore for girls, as young as five but mostly from eight years of age, and women are responsible for it. (SOS children, 2018).

²⁷ Girls who are also eight years old (like Esi) or older.

²⁸ Semis-structured interviews, October 23, 2019

Esi's family lives a comparatively traditional life²⁹ like indigenous people's lives as described in various literature on indigenous societies (Falola, 2000, Funteh, 2015 and Morrison, 2001). Effectively, Esi is an active member in her community reflecting the indigenous communal principles (Falola, 2000, Hinton, 2015), which is a form of organized learning (Ayayi, 2001). For Esi, the notion of time is relational, as the past rituals continue to inform today's socialization practices (Latour, 2005).

The same relationality applies to Kofi's morning routine, described by his father as "it is our culture". This could be interpreted as routines that have been organized for generations in their family, and these religious obligations and rituals are situated in another historical era - the colonial era. As (Hinton et al., 2015) explained in their study, during colonial times, children's positioning and social representation became subordinated by adults who applied strict discipline. Esi has a higher degree of freedom than Kofi because she can do her chores among friends, and she is not controlled or supervised by an adult, which is the case for Kofi. Even though Esi's morning chores are physically demanding, she is in charge and is independent. Her parents trust (and expect) her to be responsible and do her tasks on her own. Kofi is told what to by an adult who is in control. Kofi's father emphasized that they were 'Presbyterians', which upon reflection with my research assistant I understood why he emphasized this point. She explained that Presbyterian is 'a branch of Christian religion and people who are Presbyterians are very strict, the most disciplinarian of all (parents). They cane a lot.'" reflecting colonial practices (Morrison, 2014, Woolman, 2001). Therefore, children's agencies are shaped based on historical practices that have been carried forward into these morning routines. For example, children have a higher agency when the practice is historically indigenous than when it is situated in the colonial era. The spatial arrangement of the morning routine also has an effect on their agencies. Esi navigates in a natural environment with her friends making her experience joyful, as per her own narrative. In the

²⁹ Compared to Ama, and Kofi who live in Accra and Ayo who live in the city center of Tamale. Esi's rural life was observed to be more traditional as her community lives in mud huts located in a circle where the rest of her extended family lives together.

same discussion, Kofi shared that he was not happy when he was home, thus reflecting the oppressive environment controlled by his father.

Christianity was introduced during the colonial era as a socialization practice by ex-slaves who were made missionaries and who had endured the harshest corporal punishments (Woolman, 2001). Initially, Christianity was imposed by repetitive readings of the bible through authoritarian disciplinary methods (Woolman, 2001). Authoritarian discipline is informed by western principles with the perception that children need guidance and control (Morrison, 2001, Toshalis, 2010). Therefore, the cultural reference Kofi's father made about discipline is relational to practices introduced 500 years ago and they continue to inform socialization practices today.

From a postcolonial perspective, Kofi's father disciplining his children reflects a western view that children (Boakye-Boaten, 2010) aren't independent members of the society and need discipline, protection, and are to be positioned as subordinates (Hinton et al., 2015, Oppong-Twum-Danso, 2008, Woolman, 2001).

Another actant that shapes children's agency is 'the people' who either inform activities, are involved in the activities or are just present during the activities. Esi does the same chores as her friends, and they all do it together to help and contribute to their community. According to Corsaro, activities conducted among peer culture can give children, like Esi, a sense of belonging, an empowered social position (Shizha and Makuva, 2017). For Kofi, his chores are controlled and supervised by an adult with the ultimate authority, positioning him as a 'subordinate' (Toshalis, 2010) or what Agbenyega et al., call a colonized body' (2016). These differences reinforce Hinton et al., (2015)'s point about the importance of decolonizing social spaces and to develop new perspectives on how the social assemblages and the dynamics they create shape children's agency, or what Prout calls 'the sociology of bodies' (2000).

4.3 The way to school

None of our four protagonists live close to their schools. They all must take some mode of transportation except for Esi, whose parents can't afford any type of motorized transportation despite them working full-time³⁰. Therefore, Esi is required to walk a long distance to reach her school. When I asked her how she felt about walking to school she said 'I like it, I walk with my friends'. Ama and Yao shared the same comments in our group discussion, as they both share private modes of transportation with their siblings and friends. On the other hand, Kofi shared "It's not fun, I don't like trotro, it's crowded"³¹ when asked about his commute to school. Kofi is seven and his mother is considering sending him to school alone in another year's time. "When he is eight, he comes to school alone" she added during her interview.

When I asked Ama about her route to school, she said "it's fun, my sister and my two friends are with me in my car we can play". For Ama, the ride to school is one of the few chances she must play. Her father explained that "She is smart, but she likes to play too much! So, sometimes I run out of time before diner, so we wake up early and she must finish her homework". In fact, Ama's father's attitude towards play is how an increasing number of parents in Ghana (Wolf, 2018) feel as they do not value play and prefer their children to focus their time mastering literacy and numeracy by doing homework (Wolf, 2018). Based on interviews conducted with the head of a private school and a few teachers³², this attitude towards play was common. "Parents expect their children to learn how to read and write by the time they are five years of age" added one teacher. Another teacher said, "parents

³⁰ Her father farms their land and her mother processes Shea Butter for a company that sells 'fair trade' organic Shea Butter to a globally known brand.

³¹ A 'trotro' is a little van, originally a "Ga" 'tro' meaning small money, which became 'trotro' a cheap means of transportation. The modes of public transportation in Ghana are limited. Privately-owned 'trotros' and motorbikes are some of the cheapest options for families like Kofi's as they cannot afford to rent a car or purchase a car. Kofi's family is among the 20 million Ghanaians who take a trotro every day for an average of 3 hours.

³² T1 & T2, in addition of spontaneous discussions

underestimate the benefits of play for young children” and the head of school mentioned “parents have lots of pressure to enroll their children in a good school. They tell us that they do not enroll their children in a private school for them to play”.

These social phenomena reveal a few important points; the location of the schools far from home, the peer culture, children reaching 8 years of age, and the high value given to homework at the opposite of play and how the perception differ between adults and children.

The playground and classrooms’ observations and children’s views expressed during group discussions demonstrated the importance of peer culture (Corsaro, 2015). Parent’s perceptions indicated the importance of homework and literacy, which included reading the bible.

As identified in the literature by Epstein, the geo-location³³ of schools create a social phenomenon that dates to western historical and spatial arrangements (2019). As Ayayi’s studies revealed, a few centuries ago in Europe, a group of religious monks intentionally located the very first primary schools outside the community to ensure the indoctrination of students by limiting their interactions with their community (1961). Today in urban settings like Accra, schools are getting closer to the community due to the rapid urban growth and development (Ady-Gyamfi, 2016). However, the location of schools pushes everyone including children, teachers, and parents to rely on technology (cars, shoes, bus, or motorbike) that has a monetary component attached to it. Therefore, many parents reported that costs have become a larger barrier for the youngest children to access learning³⁴ (UNICEF, 2019, interview T1)³⁵. From a postcolonial theoretical perspective, schools’ locations³⁵ is a colonial legacy that divides communities and isolates children from the daily routines of the community (Kwaw, 2016, Morrison, 2010, Funteh, 2015, Salifu, 2013,

³³ The location of the school is one of the main factors impacting children’s access to quality learning (Adu-Gyamfi, 2016, Subedi, 2008), especially for children like the siblings of Esi who can’t afford transportation and who are too young to walk.

³⁴ Also, many teachers reported the financial and time related difficulties to access their school daily (P8, T6 and T8 interviews)

³⁵ As well as the concept of school.

Nombuso, 2008). Additionally, the observations and interviews revealed that the division of children is growing due to disparities in the quality of schools. According to some parents³⁶, the schools closer to their homes are not as good hence parents choose to travel further for better schools, which is the case for Kofi. His mother shared, “It is a little bit complicated to reach the school from the house, but I would do anything for him to be here, it is the best school”³⁶. Effectively, as the district officer mentioned during one of our monthly conversations, schools are rated between ‘A’ and ‘C’ (‘A’ being the best schools and ‘C’ schools are not perceived as good schools as ‘A’ ones) another aspect that separates children further from their community.

The distance or separation between the school and home has created invisible boundaries, which have relational characteristics that demonstrate how social spaces shape the social positioning of children, and as a result their agency. At home, Esi has the position of being the older sister and is given responsibilities and wider boundaries to navigate³⁷. She has a freedom of movement, what Latour calls ‘spatial freedom’ (2005), that extends to her walking to school. This social space is inseparable from the responsibilities she is given. These responsibilities are cultural norms that mimic transgenerational traditions (Adu-Gyamfi, 2013, Beetz, 2016) that are historically located in the indigenous or pre-colonial era. Therefore, space and time are relational as they are continuous and tie today’s practices to historical ones, which continue to have effects on practices and thus can’t be separated. However, as the next section (p.133) illustrates, her status changes when she crosses the school’s social boundaries, and changes again when she enters the classroom boundaries (Iannaccone, 2013). Her agential status changes as she crosses each boundary.

Although these four children come from different socio-economic and religious backgrounds, they are all expected to perform certain culturally informed socialization duties that are age-appropriate³⁸, including routines that start very early in the morning, and must be completed

³⁶ P3, P5 & P7 (mother quotes) interviews

³⁷ Esi can be far away from the house to go fetch the water or walk to school that her younger siblings are not allowed to do.

³⁸ Seven to eight years of age is an age where a child can start to perform physical chores and must study hard.

in time for school. All the heterogeneous elements³⁹ that make up the morning routine are entangled, inseparable, create relational dynamics that are historical, spatial, or material and which inform, impact, and shape one another. The morning routine described may seem different for the different children, but they all stress out social patterns or ‘a patterned material semiotic web of practices’ (Law, 2019), which the school culture has created over time with its tight scheduling, location, access, and rating system.

4.4 Students’ chores before assembly

For students like Kofi who arrive at school early, the morning routine includes ‘school chores’ that are distributed among students from grade three to senior grades⁴⁰. Boys and girls have different chores to do for example, the girls fill up the water dispensers in front of all the classrooms (fig. 0.2), sweep inside and outside the classrooms (fig 0.3, fig 0.4). Boys ‘recycle’⁴¹ (fig.0.6) by taking the trash out of their classrooms to a designated area, which is often an empty space located behind the school. In Esi, Ama, and Yao’s schools, recycling consists of emptying the trash in an abandoned grassy area, while at Kofi’s school, the trash is emptied into an outdoor oven (fig. 0.7). In both cases, the boys eventually burn all the trash. “We have fun” Kofi mentions, “because I am with the older boys, and they light the oven on fire when it is full”. While students like Kofi enjoy having responsibilities in school, some parents do not believe that children doing chores at school is necessary. “For girls like Ama” stated her HoS⁴² during an interview “school discipline and rules are difficult because these children have

³⁹ The six elements of a situated social phenomenon according to Murriss (2019) are: people (parents, children, siblings, friends, drivers), space (location of school, traffic flow, distance from home to school), things (buses, cars, shoes to walk drums, cleaning and learning supply), time (time allocation for traveling and time of school schedule), history (socioeconomic background of parents, culture of best school enrolment, access to a school, school cleaning ritual, expected time of arrival to school) and the dynamics (stress of reaching school on time, for parents who have to take public transportation and for children who have chores to do, or walk a long way to school).

⁴⁰ Parent (P3) interview, 11, November 2019

⁴¹ The brackets underline the fact that what is called recycling is not technically recycling in the sense that the trash is sorted out but all burn in one goes together. The recycling part is its physical disappearance.

⁴² Head of school (HoS1) interview, 19 October 2018

servants at home who do everything for them. Their parents do not like that the school asks their children to participate in doing chores. I even had parents asking why their children are required to do some chores, they are people paid to do that work.” She concluded, “It is part of our discipline at school to participate in chores”.

From my fieldnotes that were compiled, the following statement was 43: “Most children are out of the classroom mostly, roaming around, some doing chores, the school compound looks chaotic as children come and go from all corners and all classrooms. Yet, there is something relaxing, and joyful about it, like a happy organized communal chaos. Everyone seems to know what they should be doing, where they should go, as they all seem to have a mission. The children are mixing with different age groups, playing games; soccer with a ball made of crushed paper and tape, some girls play hand tapping games, others run around, and some are sitting under a tree. There is a different feeling about this, a different dynamic to the school during these times. I am not sure what it is yet, I am trying to figure it out”.

According to Funteh, such communal organization, where everyone has an attributed role that contributes to the well-being of the community, are historical indigenous practices (2015). The girls and boys have their chores, and everyone is free to move and run around the school ground. Children have high agency because they are independent despite having chores to do since they do them with friends. They can negotiate their individual roles and organization among themselves, and hence are owning the process. Although they are taught to do the chores, they have the social space (Lefebvre, 1991) to do it on their own terms and time, and in their own ways. In a group discussion children reported that they like doing chores because they are helping their teachers and their community⁴⁴.

Their comments demonstrate that they understand how a community works effectively and are willing to contribute to their community. They did not perceive chores as unnecessary for

⁴³ The following account was taken from my field notes and is a compilation of many notes taken over a few weeks, mostly written while seated in one of the corners of the courtyard observing the morning routine.

⁴⁴ Group discussion conducted 25/11/2019 with six grade 2 children.

learning or 'part of the discipline' as per some parents' and head of school's views. They believed the chores to be an essential part of socializing children. Children's accounts reflected a sense of belonging rather than an obligation, a separation, or an imposition. These children demonstrated that at the age of six, seven, and eight, they can understand and describe the importance of their daily routines for their community and enjoy owning their activities. From a sociomaterial and indigenous perspective, children's development thrives when they are active agents in their learning and their environment (Kumpulainen & Kajaama, 2019, Matengu, 2019, Falola, 2000). If the children's accounts have indigenous relationality, the head of school's views about "discipline" has historical relations to colonial practices.

Also, the parents' perspectives were based on their socioeconomic statuses. Parents from the higher socioeconomic groups expressed that learning is not about doing chores. The belief that practical skills are not appropriate learning compared to academic learning can also be interpreted as a colonial legacy. As the literature emphasized, there was formal and informal learning during the colonial era (Shiza & Makuza, 2010, Morrison, 2001, Woolman, 2001), formal learning being the more valuable practice. To ensure acculturation, colonial practices included discriminating against practical skills and terming them as 'barbaric (Chilisa & Bagele, 2019 Hinton, 2015, Matengu, 2019) or 'primitive' (Shiza & Makuvaza, 2017, Subedi, & Daza, 2008). This could explain why some of the parents perceived chores as lowering the social status of their children. On the contrary, children viewed chores as empowering⁴⁵. These differing perspectives reflect children's developmental stage as their learning is social (Bandura, 1989), seek approval (Erikson, 1958), and most importantly are empowered by their peer culture (Corsaro, 2015). The different contradicting perspectives affect children's agency as adults miss to understand their perspectives and developmental stage. As per child development theories, the communal experience children experience when doing chores among peers demonstrates that indigenous societies understood the different developmental stages of children who have varying physical and cognitive abilities. As all literature about indigenous learning practices revealed, indigenous perspectives about

⁴⁵ Group discussion with six second graders conducted on 12/09/2019.

children and their socialization practices encourage children to be active and responsible citizens.

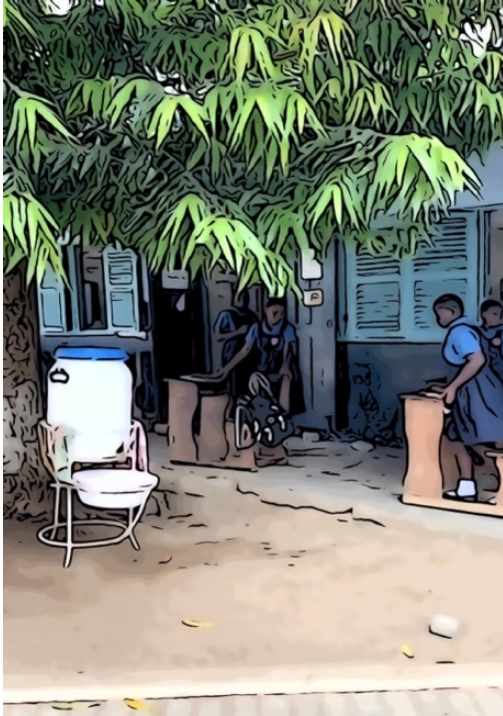


Figure 3 Water dispensers Figure 4 Girls sweep, boys don't.



Figure 5 Girls sweeping playground Figure 6 Boys recycling trash.

From a sociomaterial perspective, the morning routine before assembly demonstrates how historical indigenous practices entangled with the colonial division of learning created hybrid socialization practices at the schools. The untangling of the historical actants also provides the rationale behind participants' perspectives and helps situate the development of spatial arrangements and practices over time. Children's spatial freedom (Latour, 2005) helps shape their agency outside of the classroom. The next point (1.4) will help situate how the spatial arrangements and its relationality shape children's agency in different ways and illustrates how children's spatial freedom is curtailed and their agency reduced when a space is colonized (Kapoor & Edwards, 2010).

4.5 The assembly

A typical day at a public school begins at 7:30 AM with the morning assembly. Everyone is called to assembly either by playing a loud percussion instrument (in Esi's and Yao's school) or by ringing a bell over loudspeakers (at Ama and Kofi's school). The dynamics change as soon as the call-to-assembly sound waves spread throughout the school ground, the dynamic changes. In a systematic manner, students come hurrying from every corner of the school yard and join their classmates in forming two perfect straight lines per class. The students line up in grade-wise chronological order. At Yao's school, senior students are tasked with lining up the younger children. They conduct this task with authority, in a military manner⁴⁶, for example, by tapping the younger children until they are in a perfect line thus mimicking their teachers' disciplinary methods. During the first upbeat marching song, teachers are very actively lining up their students⁴⁷ by moving them a few more centimeters to the right, left, forward or backward until they are perfectly aligned with no body parts sticking out of place. Teachers do not hesitate to use their canes to tap body parts that are out of the line⁴⁸.

⁴⁶ Shoulders straight, arms down, facing the flag, standing behind their classmate perfectly aligned to their bodies.

⁴⁷ One third of teachers

⁴⁸ Such caning incidences were observed during every assembly I assisted. The teachers who carry a cane say during interviews that they carry it, so students are scared, but they do not use it. However, during the observations, the ones who carry one, use it. At least during assembly.

Meanwhile, a band of four to six senior students play western instruments like the brass, snare drums⁴⁹, cymbals, trumpets, and sporadically, in some schools during special occasions, the traditional Ghanaian drums (Fig. 0.10). Another assembly line practice requires students to extend their arms forward and touch the shoulders of the student in front of them. This helps the students create a somewhat equal space between students standing in front of them and behind them. The students are required to maintain this position, sing along with the songs, and recite the pledge of allegiance and prayers⁵⁰. Generally, between six and ten short verses are recited in a syncopated⁵¹ rhythm and last on average between 20 and 40 minutes.

It was disturbing to observe the assembly because without any hesitation the teachers would cane students if they were out of line. These teachers were also under pressure to perfectly line up the twenty classes of children within a short time because the head of school would perceive children out of line as the teacher's inability to control the students⁵². From a child development perspective, standing still is very challenging for children, especially the younger ones who struggle with focusing for long periods and tend to lose concentration easily (Gaertner et al., 2008).

From the point of assembly announcement with loud sounds, the dynamic becomes oppressive, and children have lower agency, thus reflecting colonial legacies (Geltner, 2012). The assembly dynamics are strict because of the expected precision, order, and time constraints. The music is mostly western military marching rhythms that guides all the

⁴⁹ Snare drums are originally military marching band instruments.

⁵⁰ One of the verses often heard is: We are the sheep of his pasture, encouraged to follow, be followers, you are here. Bless the Lord who brought you back. No words for the ones we lost. Let's be happy to be here, oh Lord! Children feel blessed to be here today.' Psalm 100 is a thanksgiving praise from the book of psalms. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%20100&version>.

⁵¹ A rhythm that is typical of military offbeat to help soldiers move faster (NPR, 2014)

⁵² HoS1 interview "some teachers can't even have their students line up correctly".

assembly activities⁵³. The positioning of the children's bodies⁵⁴ are described by Agbenyega et al., as 'colonized bodies' (, 2016). They look identical in the same uniforms with short gender-neutral haircuts (Figure 7) positioned in perfect lines ⁵⁵.

However, the assembly practice is a mix of different traditional Ghanaian practices. There is a hierarchy of age where senior students are given the authority to line up younger children. The senior students were also being physically overpowering towards the younger students by mimicking the teachers' use of cane to threaten or re-enforce rules. This behavior can be attributed to a colonial legacy mixed with the peer culture of indigenous societies where older children assist younger ones. Yet, the peer culture has also been colonized and used to discipline peers rather than empower them by demonstrating positive behavior.

On few occasions⁵⁶, three and four-year-old children were physically disciplined by the senior students, even though such young children are unable to fully understand how to position their bodies to line up correctly and continue standing straight for an extended period. Children that young are still learning the kinesthetics dimensions of the world (Gardner, 1983). This is an example of how the peer culture has been colonized by using corporal punishment⁵⁷ because traditionally older peers demonstrated practices to the younger ones through repetition and scaffolding until they were able to use the new skills independently (Funteh, 2015, Mantegu, 2019).

The assembly processes and their sociomateriality positioned the children as subordinates (Hinton et al., 2015), passive actors, and 'colonized bodies' (2016) as stated by Agbenyega et al. The observations reveal the agential forces that a loud sound creates and how it

⁵³ The assembly routine was the same in all schools regardless of their location (rural or urban), its socioeconomic location, size of student's bodies or space and type of terrain available.

⁵⁴ Of all actors including teachers and head of schools

⁵⁵ It is hard to recognize boys and girls in the assembly. Lines. Only a close-up can differentiate them as girls wear earrings and skirts instead of shorts.

⁵⁶ GS4 and GRS1

⁵⁷ As light and little it is applied, a small tap has authoritarian meanings.

transforms the spatial dynamics from a community-based space, indigenous in nature, where children have a high agency, to a colonial, oppressive and restrictive atmosphere controlling children's agency (Toshalis, 2010, Gudyana, 2014).

The way Prout describes the school pictures from British primary schools in the 1950s could also apply to a picture I took during my field observation of a public Ghanaian school in 2019, thus, illustrating the colonial relationality that shapes.



Figure 7 Assembly lines

"The school photograph of the 1950s none the less continues to offer us a redolent image of childhood: still wearing the badge of school membership, with a uniform body, hair brushed and newly washed face, the child poses, its stilled body presenting us, quite literally, with a picture of the school (ed) child: of a body tamed, ordered and controlled." (Prout, 2015).

Effectively, Prout’s description mirrors my picture that shows the positioning of children during the morning assembly in Ghanaian public schools. It is as if the children were frozen in time of the colonial “marker of child identity’. (Prout, 2000). Children's bodies are not passive agents, like empty recipients, but the subject of social power as childhood experiences of what the social reality is created through this embodiment process as 'the body is the outcome of social forces and relations” (Prout, 2015).

This brings us to another conflicting perception about corporal punishments to discipline children. The embodiment of the assembly ritual is not viewed as a problematic practice but rather a normal process (Csordas, 2019 in Prout). But these practices are based on colonial principles of the body is a medium of oppressive discipline and socialization norms and thus the temporality of the colonized identity of schooled children (Agbenyega et al., 2016) has been carried through embodiment. The ethnographic data enable us to empirically capture how colonial embodiment shapes children’s daily practices today and consequently their agency.



Figure 8 Morning assembly

What the pictures miss to capture is how quiet and absent children are during the assembly, as if the loud, repetitive rhythm, and the rising sun with its heat, were putting them in a

meditative and robotic mode. Fig.0.9 shows students facing the flag of Ghana, which is raised daily, and reciting the pledge of allegiance. Both practices symbolize colonialism. A few children mentioned during discussions that they feel sleepy and find it challenging to remain standing during these routines.

The band announces the end of assembly with the customary marching song that plays until all the students have marched back to their classrooms - all done in a well-orchestrated manner. The youngest students start marching at the sound of the first notes in perfect harmony. They all march like soldiers during official western ceremonies, their arms perfectly synchronized going up and down, their knees synchronized that rise as high as 90 degrees. This short activity is quite a contrast to the dynamics of the children when they are walking freely before the assembly.

As students march back to their classrooms, in some schools, teachers chat for a few more minutes either formally if some matters need to be addressed or casually in smaller groups. In one of the schools (GS1) the teachers gather to form a prayer circle while holding hands. One of them leads the prayers out loud which they all recite in unison with their heads bowed down. Teachers walk back about fifteen minutes later average⁵⁸ to join the students in the classrooms. By then the students have already unpacked their school bags and are settled in. A select few are reading independently but unfortunately most of the students do not have a book to read in the classroom. In the absence of books and teacher supervision, the children become playful and loud, which can be heard from outside of almost every classroom. The students are often running around squabbling over erasers and rulers as they snatch them from one another. The rest of the students use this time to copy homework from their peers before the teacher arrives and notices that their incomplete homework. This unstructured transition is quite different from the highly organized and orchestrated assembly. The contrast between the students' behavior during this time and during the assembly is

⁵⁸ Time recorded from numerous observations including one time when it took 45 minutes for teachers to reach their classrooms. (8:25 AM the teacher just walked in the classroom. Recorded observation on 12/19/2019).

noteworthy. Children have spatial freedom to socialize with one another until the teacher arrives in the classroom.

The morning transition routine for the teachers entering the classrooms were not as organized, strict, or authoritarian as the assembly. However, in both cases, the students are expected to greet their teacher and not vice versa. One private school teacher explained to me that “adults don’t bother saying hello to children, but children are expected to say hello, it’s the culture”. Literature reviews describe deep anchored cultural and traditional values about age hierarchy where the younger person is expected to greet their elders as a form of respect (Bartman, 2002, Oppong-Twun-Danso, 2010, Woolman, 2001). However, if the age hierarchy is historically connected to the indigenous era, the unidirectional aspect of it mentioned by the teacher above is not. The observations revealed that when teachers enter the classroom after the students or cross paths with them, teachers do not greet them nor acknowledge their individual presence. For the many researchers, who addressed the unidirectionality of social interactions, this behavior was a reference to the indigenous age hierarchy (Boakye-Boaten, 2010, Le Guerinel, 1980, Manful, 2010, Subedi, 2008). However, nowhere in the literature about indigenous socialization practices has power struggles been mentioned (Latour, 2005). Therefore, there is an additional aspect of social interaction the adult represents and projects a certain authority and power over children.

As a result, the dynamics created are oppressive to the agency of children, positioning children as subordinate subjects (Oppong-Twun-Danso, 2008). The authoritative dynamics are culturally situated in colonial practices. Although, it was observed that the HoS, who has the highest authority, greeted students as one collective unit. Therefore, the classroom transition could be interpreted as less important event that may explain the lack of greeting by the teachers and the lack of coherence between them. There is an emphasis on the assembly that is the main actant and sets the dynamics in the morning. The sociomateriality of the assembly serves as an announcement to the start of the instruction day rather than a transition into the classrooms. The HoS is analogous to a village elder, whose teaching practices are traditionally of higher importance than those of other adults in a community -

the teachers representing these other adults in the schools. Other major actants involved are the band instruments that set the rituals in motion at the start and end of the assembly.

4.6 The instruction processes.

The classroom and the transfer of knowledge from a sociomaterial perspective has multiple actants. These different actants share the same purpose - transfer of knowledge to the students, but they have varying degrees of agency. This creates a certain hierarchy that is explained below through different scenarios that reflect the agency of each actant.

Phase one⁵⁹: The body position and spatial arrangement:

The normative instructional routine starts with the teachers reaching for the instructional materials, consisting of a physical book or a digital version on their cell phone, from their desks. Then, they make their way to the blackboard and start writing up the instructions. They have their backs turned to the students while they are writing the lesson plans on the board. As a result, students have a partial view on what is being written on the board due to the body positioning of the teacher.

The short process called phase one of the instruction, for analytical purposes in this thesis⁴³, has a mechanical dynamic to it as the teacher is doing something automatically, in a repetitive way, without having to think of the action. This empirical observation was explained by teachers during informal discussions that ‘they do what they observed (other teachers do) during their in-service training⁶⁰’. Another teacher mentioned that she did not go to any teacher education school and said, “I do what my teachers did, when I was a child and at university”. In both cases, the structural forces of the social phenomena, the ministerial organization of in-service training and the national education system are entangled with the traditional principles of sameness. Funteh (2015) explained in his study that traditional

⁶⁰ The in-service-training consists of a one-year observation period teachers are required to do by the ministry of education before they become certified.

societies shared the same ontological beliefs which is 'sameness'. According to him and other scholars, traditional societies ensured the transmission of cultural knowledge from one generation to the next by replicating the same skills and practices (2015, Owenian, 2013, Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2020). Nevertheless, the historical entanglements are made of different periods, on one hand the indigenous principles of sameness, and on the other, the colonial practice of one teacher writing on the board) and current practices (teachers' contemporary training) are entangled together in today's teacher practices where they either mimic what other teachers do or teach as per their own learnt practices. From the observations, these entanglements create mechanical dynamics and a distant spatial positioning that lacks verbal interactions.

From a postcolonial lens, these instructional methods reflect western instructional methods (Pence, 2011, Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2020). The western methods have also been called instructivist (Papert, 1980, Johnson, 2005) - a teacher-centered process (Paracka, 1975, Subedi, 2008, Kwaw, 2016). Meanwhile, students are seated passively and positioned as subordinate subjects (Hinton et al., 2015) while the teachers continue to write the lesson plan in silence⁶¹.

Interestingly, the students illustrated the positioning of the teachers when they were asked to role-play their teachers' teaching. The students asked for my pen, which they took in one hand, and then they were standing with their backs to us (me, the assistant, and the other students sitting on a bench) and writing on the blackboard, pretending to be the teacher, and we were being the students. This serves as empirical evidence of their shared normative beliefs of what teaching is and of their own positions as students.

The role-playing was slightly guided by us as the children would stand still pretending to write on the board without saying much. When we asked them to show what else the teachers did while teaching, their next actions consisted of holding their pen as if it were a cane, shaking it in the air while uttering the following: "be quiet", "If you do not listen, I'll beat you", "Be quiet". The children's role-play and their choice of verbal narratives aligned with the findings

⁶¹ Collected from numerous repetitions on the field notes from observations.

identified in the audio and video recordings of teachers in the classroom. Effectively, the audio recordings helped us identify verbal exchanges between the teachers and the students that were about disciplining. These two tools, the role play, and audio recordings helped in obtaining empirical evidence about the importance of the blackboard and notebooks two material artifacts that have agential importance in transferring content knowledge.

Phase two: The material

At the end of phase one, teachers ask one (sometimes two) female student⁶² to distribute the students' notebooks. The teachers keep these notebooks at the back of the classroom in piles⁶³ (see fig. 14, p.157), organized by subject. For example, one pile has the math classroom work notebooks, and another pile has the math homework notebooks (fig. 14, p. 157). Students are not permitted to touch the piles or take any notebooks unless the teacher asks them to distribute them⁶⁴. This process takes on average fifteen minutes due to large classroom sizes (Ama's class fifty-four students, Kofi's class fifty-two, Yao's fifty-three, and Esi's twenty-eight- see table 4). As a result, by the time the last students get their notebooks, the students who received their notebooks first have already copied the lesson from the blackboard into their notebooks (phase two activity for students). While students receive their notebooks, teachers settle down at their desks and quietly organize the piles of notebooks that need to be marked. Teachers start marking the notebooks (phase two for teachers) during the first lesson of the day with the homework notebooks that students bring back from home every morning⁶⁵. Once students have their notebooks, phase two of instruction or students' learning activity begins.

⁶² I never observed a teacher asking a boy to do this job.

⁶³ The older classrooms have locked cabinets which are being replaced by open shelves. In two of the schools observed the locked cabinets, as well as the classrooms, were built during the colonial period (data collected during discussions with the district officer) (see fig.15).

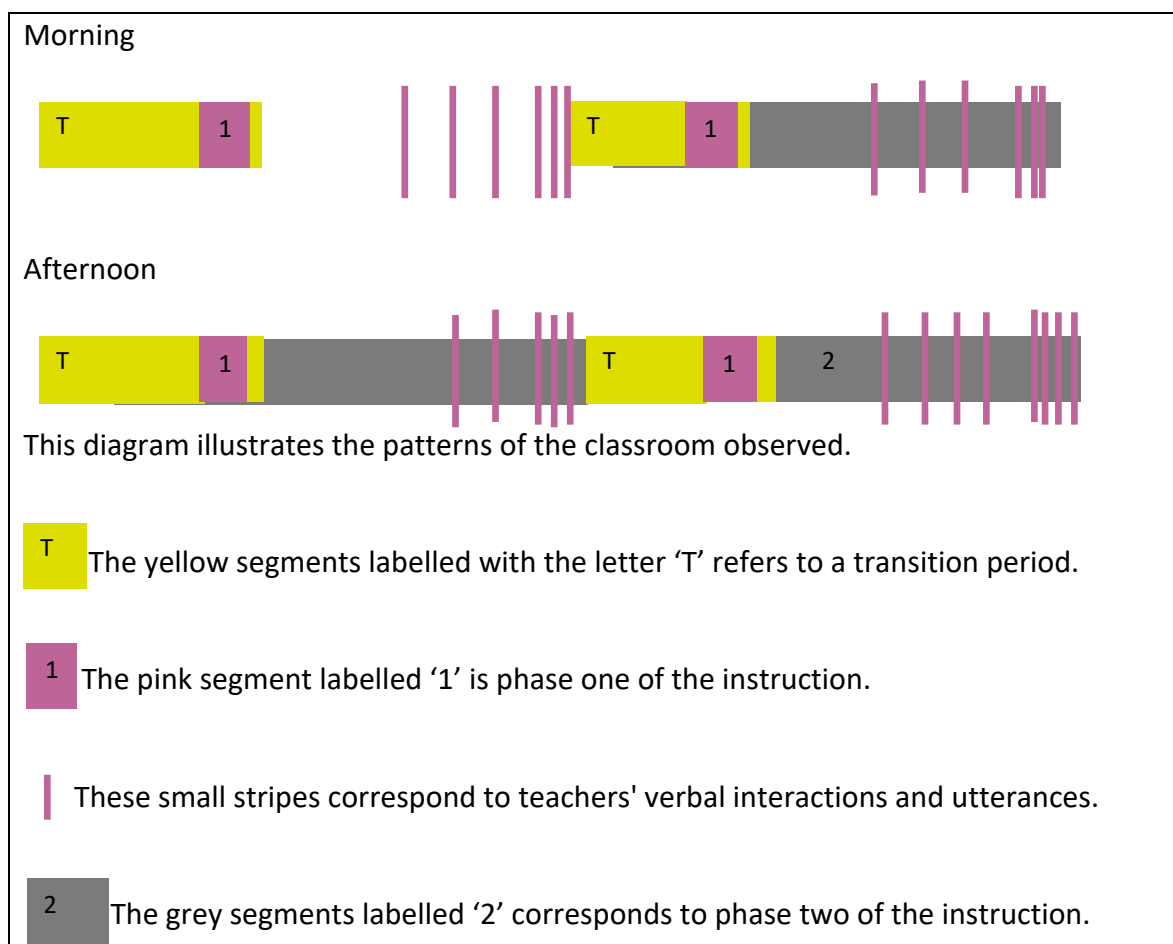
⁶⁴ This rule seems to be unspoken, yet students only access their notebooks upon approval of the teachers.

⁶⁵ Then, for every other lesson, teachers mark the notebooks from the previous lesson.

Phase two of classroom instruction, according to the data collected in interviews, is perceived as 'the learning activity'⁶⁶. This phase consists of the students copying the full content from the blackboard into their notebooks. The observations revealed that the first ten minutes are quiet because the students are focusing on copying from the blackboard as explained by these students. However, as more and more students finish copying the lesson, the classroom starts to get noisy. I could guess the stage of the lesson by listening to the noise level when standing outside the classroom. Using all this information I drew a diagram of the daily patterns of a classroom as seen in table 6 below.

⁶⁶ Multiple teachers and parents during informal discussions

Table 6 Daily time patterns



The table 6 above was developed using my handwritten field notes, participatory observations, the audio and video recordings, and my filed observations reflections. The yellow segments represent the transition time of children’s and teachers’ arrival and settling in the classroom, the distribution of the notebooks after phase one of instruction, and free time. There were minimal social interactions observed between the teachers and students during this time. The pink segments labeled #1 correspond to teachers’ knowledge transmission, including writing the lesson on the board, and verbally interacting with students like explaining the lesson procedures and disciplinary utterances. The short pink segments are specific to the teacher’s verbal interventions during phase two of instruction and consist mostly of behavior-related utterances such as ‘be quiet,’ ‘sit down’, or threats for not listening (table 7). The grey segments represent phase two when students copy the information from the board into their notebooks. This activity was allocated the largest amount of time.

The thickness of each segment represents the average time allocated to the different categories throughout a typical day in a classroom. These time allocations were based on recurring routines as observed throughout the data collection processes.

Developing a diagram of the time allocation and their patterns of a typical day in a classroom allowed us to analyse the degree of agency of the various actants present in each instruction phase and process. While a more detailed discussion is presented in the next chapter five (p.150), the initial process of analysis suggests that the main actants of knowledge transmission are not the teachers, as stated by previous research (Adu-Gyamfi, 2016, Freire, 1970, Paracka, 1975, Subedi, 2008, Wolf, 2018,) but the blackboard and notebooks. These are the two main actants that regulate the daily pattern, inform student behavior, and limit the agency of all the humans involved, especially of children.

4.7 Verbal communication

An advantage of ethnographic methods, particularly observations, is that they allow the researcher to make visible certain dynamics and patterns of the classrooms that may have been overlooked previously (Kumpulainen & Kajaama, 2019, Braun & Clark 2019). From recurrent observations, supported by audio recordings and videos, not only the type of utterances of teachers was identified, but also the rhythms created by the repetitive verbal exchanges. With time spent in the classroom observing, the utterances of teachers, the noise level, and mode of communication patterns emerged and became predictable and inseparable from the space-time allocation of the activities. The unidirectionality of verbal exchanges, from teachers directed to students, mentioned in previous research were confirmed from the data collected (Gudyana, 2014, Kwaw, 2016, Agbemiase, 2009, Agbenyega, 20016, Oppong-Twun-Danso, 2010). Additionally, the type and patterns of the unidirectional dynamics were also noted. The children are quiet most of the day due to the unidirectional interaction, but they do talk among themselves constantly throughout the day. They only become quiet when the teacher asks them to be. This point corresponds to the pink barres on table 7 (below). The children expressing themselves actively and being engaged in conversations among themselves is a representation of the peer culture (Corsaro,

2015) of indigenous societies (Morrison, 2001). Children are not in a position of 'social isolation' as per Sørensen who identifies this as an indicator when children have limited interactions (2014). Culturally, the unidirectional nature of interaction is not only accepted (Toshalis, 2010 Bartman, 2002, Agbenyega, 2016) but is expected (2010) as Oppong-Twum-Danso found in her research.

From a sociomaterial perspective, how teachers (or any other adult) perceive or expects verbal interactions between children and adults is an example of a hybrid social norm. Historically the current perceptions and expectations refer to the traditional age hierarchy established by indigenous societies yet amalgamated with authoritarian methods introduced by colonial education practices. Their amalgamation produced an authoritarian dynamic between teachers (or any adults, according to interviews) and children. The authoritarian dynamics introduced with classroom practices, which were the same for the parents of the current students, crossed boundaries (Iannaccone & Marsico, 2013) and became the social norms that guide family's verbal interactions (Agbemiase, 2009, Adu-Gyamfi, 2016). The parent participants⁶⁷ expressed their preference for an authoritarian verbal exchange at home that brought some nuances to this concept.

During an interview, which was a focus group discussion with 3 mothers, they started teasing each other when one mother stated 'parents' cane with their mouth'⁶⁸. Another reacted by saying 'me, I am Ewe, she's Ga, you see they're Ga, Ewe people's when you ask of the Ewe, they'll tell you they can cane you aaaa"¹¹⁴. When I asked what the difference was, she said "culture I guess" but one of the other mothers added "no, it's not culture that is how it is, it's like Ewe people's house when you do what they ask, they will discipline you. Everyone in that family would beat you" at this point the Ewe mother added "it's discipline". The third mother intervened and added "they're tribe differences but some homes, they don't beat but others they beat, but while they're one tribe so is like that do different things in their homes". At the end of the conversation one of the mothers concluded their 'tribal discussion' by saying she

⁶⁷ P1, P2, P3, P4... STI, many dates This quote refers to the tribal background of the parents.

⁶⁸ P4, P5, P6, FGD, 05 December 2019.

prefers to threaten her children verbally which she explained “is like to cane with your mouth”. The other two answered with a typical Ghanaian sound “inhin” which means they approved, and the discussion moved on.

The parents’ conversation illustrates two aspects norms of verbal interactions. One reflects the multicultural and historically representation in Ghana, and the other the choice of words. One mother explains this latter point as ‘cane with your mouth’. In his research, Harber found authoritarian social exchanges to be a way to control children (Agbenyega, 2013), which positions them as subordinate actors in their social spaces when shared with an adult - a colonial legacy (Adu-Gyamfi, 2016).

Also, their discussion demonstrates different historical and spatial interactions (Barad, 2005, Murriss, 2019) yet having similar dynamics. First, the mothers made a distinction about their tribal affiliation that illustrates people’s behavior and thinking being shaped by multi-culture and diversity. This distinction was justified later in a discussion about transgenerational matter “it is a parents’ duty, as my parents did”⁶⁹. Here there is an entanglement of a sameness ontology often associated with indigenous societies (Matengu, 2019), and a reference of what parents’ duties are today.

The notion of time here is relational and refers to something continuous and ongoing rather than situating the norms as ‘then’ and ‘now’ - i.e., something was done before but is not done anymore (Latour, 2005).

Table 7 Teachers' utterances

Procedural	Warnings
Quiet. Be quiet. Keep quiet. Who opened their mouth? Who are those talking? Who is talking?	I’ll beat you. I’ll cane you. I’ll punish you. I will cane the whole class. 3x taping of the cane on desk

⁶⁹ P4, P5, P6, FGD, 05 December 2019.

<p>Silence. No talking, no moving. What is the talking for? When you talk, I see you. What is the talking for?</p> <p>Did I asked you to talk? I don't want to hear any noise and do not call my name.</p> <p>Hey, I want the room quiet.</p> <p>Sit down. Look at the board and seat well. Sit up right. sit well.</p> <p>Hurry up. Let's move on. Eiillle.</p> <p>Heads down.</p> <p>Neat, neat, write straight and neat.</p>	<p>Shame on you. Shame, shame, shame.</p> <p>If you don't keep quiet. I'll beat you. If you do not keep quiet, I 'll cane you.</p> <p>Is it how you disgrace me?</p> <p>Some children are playing around.</p> <p>I will erase the board. (Threat to end the lesson before everyone is done)</p>
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There were two types of verbal interactions in the classroom (table 7). The first one is categorized as procedural (Russel & Dillon, 2016), which has the purpose of providing directions to students, and the second category is warnings and utterances that threaten children about punishment⁷⁰ if they do not behave⁷¹. Even though one verbal interaction intends to make students do something and the other one encourages them not to do something, they are both disciplinarian and shape children's agency as they create an interdependency (Gfeller, 2020).

The teachers' utterances vary in tone and decibels depending on the classroom's noise level (Rantala et al., 2015) and the instruction timing, which are interdependent. It is important to make explicit that these two aspects are inseparable because the context of what's happening in the classroom needs to be understood when teachers are observed to be shouting out loud. Effectively, teachers must shout to carry over the ambient noise (Rantala et al., 2015) and students' voices. Most of the time, the shouting is loud and consists of the procedural utterances mentioned in table 7 above. Once students quiet down, the teacher's voice comes down again. However, if the teacher next door is taking more time to silence

⁷⁰ According to parents and head of school interviews

⁷¹ P6, P7, P9 and T3, T5 in ID at various times

students, the quieter class can hear the noise⁷². Also, if other classes are transitioning to another class, have gymnastics outdoors, or have a free period and are hanging out or playing in the playground, the teacher must speak even louder for the students to hear. During the rainy season, the teacher's voice again needs to be louder so students can hear despite the noises of the rain, thunder, and the clapping of the shutters that have lost their locks long ago. As Morrison mentioned, which the district officer confirmed, some of the existing schools were built during the colonial era and new ones replicated the same designs (2001). However, at the time they were built, fewer students attended (Woolman, 2001) hence the noise level may not have been an issue.

Repeated observations and spending long periods of time in the classroom enabled us to identify certain rhythms and 'resonance space' as Sørensen mentioned in her study (2009). Initially, I was unfamiliar with some of the noises but there was communal knowledge about them (Sørensen, 2009). For example, Ama and Esi's teachers hit their desks with their cane three times in a quick and sharp manner, which creates a very loud and notable sound⁷³, to communicate to the students that the teacher is aware of the chaos and that the cane is nearby and ready to be used. Students quiet down instantly when they hear this sound. However, this is short-lived, and teachers end up repeating these sounds without even raising their heads when they are marking notebooks. The above data reflect the diverse voices, noises, and perspectives, what Ligorio calls 'dialogical learning' that exist within the classroom, and the spaces they create, or in this case, restrict, for dialogue and collaboration (2012).

⁷² Field notes recurrent at the beginning of the field and much less toward then end. I could deduct that I became used a higher noise level over time.

⁷³ After I became familiar with the noise made by the cane hitting the desk, I heard it when listened again previous audio recordings. At the end of the field work, I could hear coming out of classrooms while walking around school ground.

4.8 The written instruction

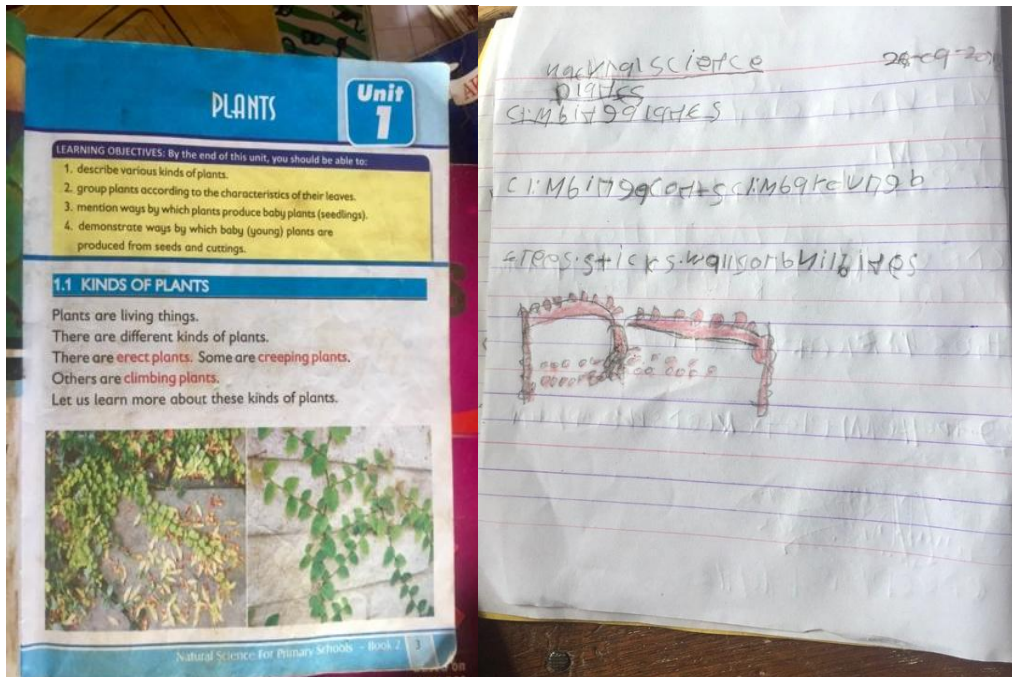


Figure 9 Notebook with copied lesson.

Figure 10 Teachers' instruction book

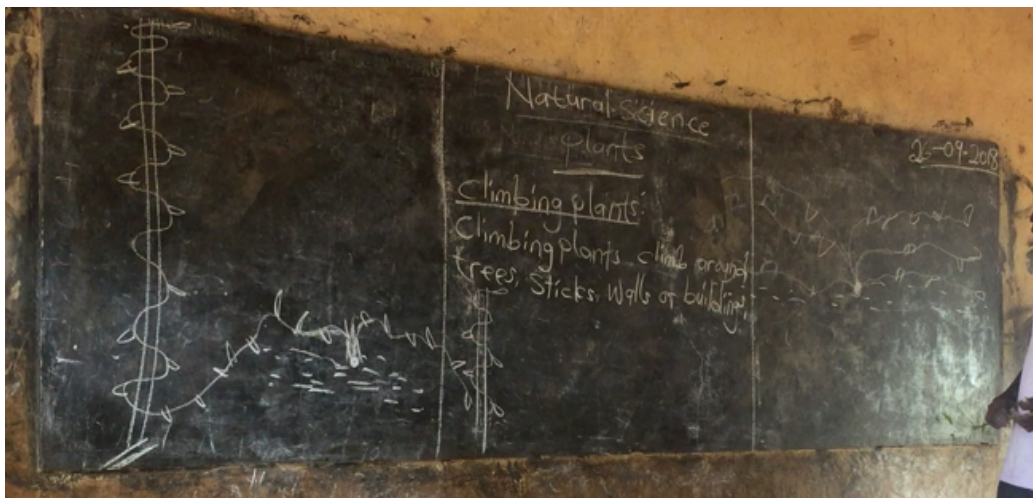


Figure 11 Copied lesson on the blackboard.

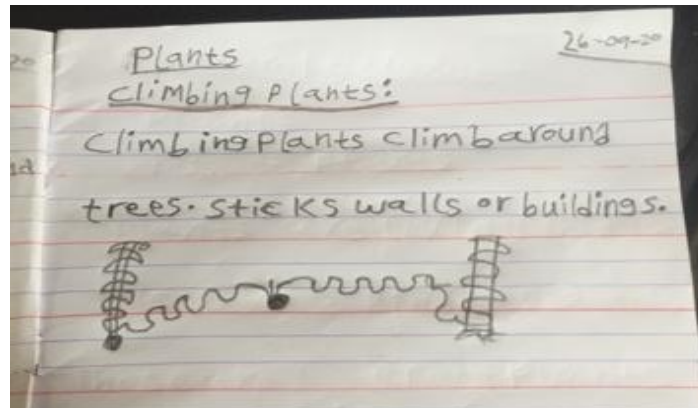


Figure 12 Copied lesson from another student.

During phase two, second and third graders face challenges as novice writers. Students need to copy the lesson content, underline the title with a ruler, and include general information like the name, date⁷⁴, etc. into their notebooks. Children write and copy verbatim i.e., everything they see on the board - no more and no less. This activity creates extra work for students and takes time and has little educational purpose or relevance. From a child development perspective, lower-grade students are still developing their fine motor skills hence drawing lines with rulers can be physically challenging and time-consuming. Additionally, homework is assigned for each lesson, which means that students must copy from the blackboard and follow this process twice for each lesson and repeat this four times a day for four lessons.

One of the reasons for teachers requiring students to write every single detail on every page is to make their grading easier. Teachers do not have to keep referring to the front cover of the notebooks when marking the children's work⁷⁵. But the repeated writing is challenging especially for the second graders and some third graders who are still novices at handwriting. There is excessive focus on the handwritten details and layout on the notebook pages rather than on the comprehension and vocabulary of the text copied.

⁷⁴ The name was not necessary in that class, only the date.

⁷⁵ From the observations and considering the number of notebooks to grade, this short cut saves lots of time to teachers.

The notebook pictures show that many novice readers and writers struggle with distinguishing the beginning and end of words. This is especially true for the student featured in figure 14 (p. 154) Some of the alphabets are difficult to read for example the 'p' resembles a 'g', and the 'u' resembles a 'v'⁷⁶. The expression "Chew, pour, pass, and forget" is quite applicable to the three pictures and the repetitive copying that Ghanaians⁷⁷, the media, as well as the participants of this study, used to describe the current pedagogy in the classroom (Quansah & Asamoah, 2019). The pedagogy and instruction in English are colonial legacies (Adu-Gyamfi, 2016, Quansah & Asamoah, 2019) that focus on teaching literacy rather than practical skills (Harber, 2017).

The teachers encounter two challenges during phase two of instruction; one is keeping the class quiet, and the other is having time to mark all the notebooks. The teachers are faced with the first challenge within five to ten minutes of a class by when a good proportion of the students are done copying the lesson. They start becoming noisy and distracting other classmates out of boredom since there is no task to keep them busy and engaged. Only about two to five students have books to read thus the noise level starts to increase that leads to the teacher hitting the cane on the desk. Since the teachers are also under pressure to complete marking all the notebooks, they implement 'the catcher' practice to keep managing the classroom.

The catcher

We asked six second grade students⁷⁸ about classroom activities they liked the most and ones they liked the least. One female student mentioned that her least favorite activity was when a boy was assigned as the catcher. I asked her what a catcher was upon which they all started laughing hard because I did not know what a catcher was⁷⁹. They explained that when the teacher is busy marking notebooks, one student is asked to stand before the blackboard and

⁷⁶ To only name a few of the many issues the text reveals

⁷⁷ Including the Minister of Education (October 2018) during a meeting at the World Bank.

⁷⁸ 2nd graders 2nd GD not used informal.

⁷⁹ A point the assistant researcher discussed with me after the interview.

watch over her classmates to report misbehavior. This student is expected to 'catch' students misbehaving⁸⁰ and say the students' names out loud or write their names on the board (figure 13, below).

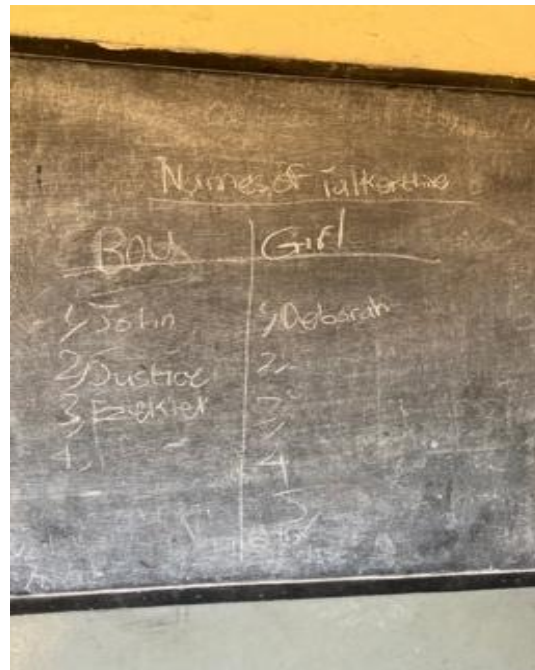


Figure 13 Names of students from catcher

The 'catcher' is a controversial practice that is a hybrid of indigenous and colonial norms creating oppressive dynamics amongst the children. The perception and positioning of children in relation to their social representation by the teachers are controversial. On the one hand, teachers perceive children⁸¹ as 'immature, unable to decide (Adu-Gyamfi, 2016, Boakye, 2010) or to have their voices and opinions' which reflects a western perspective about children according to Qvortrup, (1993) and Nsamenang (2010). On the other hand, children are asked to oversee their peers⁸², reflecting the indigenous and traditional peer culture (Kwaw, 2015), but to report on them so the teacher can punish them (Ayayi, 1961).

⁸⁰ Misbehaving according to them includes talking, moving around the classroom, not paying attention, or making noise.

⁸¹ This data was collected in the literature and the interviews with parents, head of school and the teachers, children especially at that age (6 years old) and until they are 13 or 14 years of age.

⁸² T2 II individual interview, 12 January 2019

Traditionally, the peer culture encouraged children to empower each other to help one another (Nsamenang, 2010), and not to report them for punishment to an adult. As described by Nsamenang (2010), indigenous socialization practices foster self-education for children from an early age through ‘participative learning processes’ within the peer cultures, where the children collaborate and do not work against one another.

Therefore the ‘catcher’ practice reflects the desperation of the teachers in finding a solution that allows them to finish marking the large piles of notebooks. It demonstrates a conflicted perception about children that is created from entanglements of different traditional norms. As a result, the sociomaterial positioning of children is a hybrid social representation that creates a negative dynamic in their peer culture.

4.9 The notebook



Figure 14 New storage unit Figure 15 Old storage unit

The two figures illustrate the large volume of notebooks teachers’ grade, store and manage in different shelves. The first picture, Fig. 14, shows the newer open shelving storage area with numerous shelving. This new shelf was only in the ‘A’ type schools in Accra. In figure 15, the older storage units were in some of the ‘C’ schools’ and consist of a large deep closet with three shelves. These older shelves were originally made during the colonial era, and they have locks that the teachers were using, and there weren't enough shelves to contain all the work

of the growing number of students per class (Agbemiase, 2009, Adu-Gyamfi, 2016). These types of storage indicates that the materialization of learning, a colonial legacy (Epstein, 2019), continues to create spatial arrangements, and more specifically temporal and systematic organization issues for the teachers. The organization of the notebooks is entirely the responsibility of the teachers, as students are not allowed to touch them without authorization. The observations demonstrated that this colonial legacy impacts the space-time aspect of teacher practices as they spend a large amount of time organizing, distributing, and locating the notebooks. This overwhelming task was observed a few times. In one instance, a couple of notebooks went missing and were later found to be misplaced in the wrong pile. The teacher spent the entire marking time looking for these notebooks⁸³ while the students sat at their desks waiting for their notebooks to do their work. This example illustrates the reliance of learning processes on material and the complex entanglements of the notebooks' agency. A large number of notebooks (Table 8 below) is a growing and challenging problem as the number of students continues to increase (Nsamenang, 2010, Oppong-Twum-Danso, 2010).

Table 8 Daily number of notebooks to be processed

Classrooms	# Of period daily	# Of students	Total # of notebooks handled each daily per teacher
Kofi's	4	52	208
Ama's	4	54	216
Yao's	4	53	212
Esi's	4	28	112
Local language	4	90	360

The daily median is 187 per teacher.

Table # 8 above shows that daily a teacher marks an average of 187 notebooks. The notebook is perceived to be an 'essential' material object in the learning culture as mentioned by adult

⁸³ In one case, the teacher was observed searching for a couple of notebooks for 40 minutes. The math notebooks were misplaced in the science pile.

participants⁸⁴ during interviews. Parents routinely check their children's homework notebooks. One of the head teachers reported that in poor schools ('C' schools) "parents do not care about the education of their children and do not check them, but in our school⁸⁵, parents care". One father from an 'A' school mentioned during an interview "I read their homework every night, and I make sure my children learn and know their lessons before supper". This aligns with the perception that parents give importance to literacy skills and practices, as was mentioned earlier (p.146).

From a sociomaterial perspective, notebooks symbolize teachers and parents' responsibility and accountability⁸⁶. Therefore, marking and double-checking the notebooks is an important and stressful job. The notebooks are also relevant and necessary for the students to prepare for the multiple-choice exam questions that are based on the information contained in the notebooks⁸⁷. Public schools have two examinations a year that last one week⁸⁸. In the week prior to the exam week, teachers re-check and mark again each page of every notebook to ensure the students have written down the correct information.

As a result, the number of notebooks each teacher must organize and manage daily is overwhelming and requires a large amount of time that otherwise could have been, spent supporting the students. During informal discussions, several teachers shared being under a lot of pressure to mark the homework as they know parents will check them⁸⁹ the notebook has high agency from a sociomaterial perspective because it connects the family to the classroom learning (Iannaccone & Marsico, 2013, Iannaccone, 2017), thus becoming one of

⁸⁴ P5, P7, T3, T5 & HoS 1

⁸⁵ A parent from an 'A' school, GS1

⁸⁶ The same is true for the head of schools, and district inspectors.

⁸⁷ The district officers rely on the information in the notebook as well as they are the ones to develop the multiple-choice exam questions.

⁸⁸ No instructions are given during that week. Teachers and students check that notebooks have correct information and make changes if necessary.

⁸⁹ Furthermore, the head of school and district inspectors come sporadically and spot-check the notebooks. Teachers mentioned it happens regularly, but I did not observe any inspection in eighteen months of observing the various classroom. Also, parents do check their children's homework.

the main actants in transfer of knowledge. Historically, this artifact is a colonial legacy that replaces the indigenous storytelling practices and the different tools tribes used to transfer knowledge such as the planting or harvesting of plants. The information contained in the notebooks symbolizes 'formal learning' and is a holder of knowledge. The value of notebooks is analogous to the value of religious holy scripts⁹⁰. However, the notebook is of no use and can't hold any information or be shared across boundaries or provide guidance for examinations unless notes are appropriately copied from the blackboard.

4.10 The blackboard

The learning revolves around the blackboard that has been criticized by many scholars and advocated against in the 2019 Ghana national curriculum. Yet it holds true in every classroom in the Ghanaian public-schools. Until something is written on the blackboard, students have no work to do and there is nothing to learn. Until every student has copied the whole content from the blackboard (phase two), the teacher can't start the lesson. The blackboard serves as the primary actant in transmitting knowledge. If the blackboard is blank, no learning happens and if the blackboard is taken away, which was the case during the COVID pandemic, learning comes to a total pause (Hugues, 2020).

The observations revealed that the spatial arrangement of every classroom is centered around the blackboard and requires the most attention from the teachers and students. As Epstein explains, the classroom's setting has not changed since colonial times. The classroom spatial setup consists of rows of desks that have been lined up perfectly to face the blackboard. A few schools had adequate space available with large classrooms and a low number of students, yet all the student desks are positioned close to one another. If the student desks are too distant from the blackboard, students can't read well, which inhibits learning. Hence the desks are aggregated close to the front of the classroom near the blackboard. The literature provides some photos of the first missionaries who were sent to educate indigenous Ghanaian societies where the children are lined up in a similar manner

⁹⁰ The notebooks were introduced at the same time as the bible.

facing a blackboard (see fig. 16). The same setup was observed even when teachers conducted their lessons outside i.e., they move the blackboard outside and seat the students facing the blackboard.



Figure 16 Teaching in the shade.

Reforms in 2019 required teachers to rotate students' desks but prior to that no one questioned the spatial arrangement. Students' desks were turned so they could face each other to promote constructivist pedagogy and a collaborative work environment. Many points emerged with this change in the classroom spatial arrangement. Teachers demonstrated full participation and willingness to apply these changes even though one teacher shared "it is difficult for students to see and copy what is on the board now, but I must do it"⁹¹. In this statement the teacher is informed by a structural agency of reform rather than her own preference.

The main problem with the new spatial arrangement is that the blackboard was still the primary actant in transferring knowledge that hindered the children's ability to learn due to their new positioning. Many students could only partially view the blackboard as their views

⁹¹ Discussion with T3, 19 September 2022

were blocked by their classmates, and so they had to reposition their bodies, sometimes move a little further back from the classmates in front of them, to be able to read what was written on the blackboard (figure 18).



Figure 17 Students must step over desks. Figure 18 Student twisting to see B.B.

In Figure 17, a girl must walk on her desk to get in and out of her seat as did the other students seated against the wall on both sides of the classroom. The new positioning of the desks was very disruptive, created many disciplinary issues and changed the classroom dynamics. Students were stepping on each other's notebooks, getting frustrated about their views being blocked by other students, all of which resulted in arguments among the students. Parents started to report their children having neck pains and teachers began to worry about increasing disciplinary issues. The spatial re-arrangement changed the agency of the various material objects in the classroom creating tensions (Sørensen, 2009) among them compared to the 'material flow' when students faced the blackboard.

4.11 Perception of school

Accessing quality education in Ghana is challenging as emphasized by Lemaire (2013) in her study and reiterated during our interviews. Adu-Gyamfi adds that this is partially due to the

perception Ghanaians have about 'education' (2016). One rural teacher shared that a major challenge for children like Esi is to access learning on a market day⁹², as is the case for many children whose parents are farmers or selling local products in local markets on market days. Esi's teacher ⁹³ added that "On market day, many students are absent, and I can't teach because if I do, the students that are absent fall behind, and it is not fair for the ones who are in class either if I do not teach (them)". Later during the interview, he added that "many parents don't value education much. They do not see how it helps the family to send their children to school when they could be home helping them earn money, and many (youth) when they finish school (if they stay in the community) don't have jobs anyway and, they do not like it (youth) but (they) end up working with their family".

This statement is interesting for two reasons. One, it informs us about the perception of learning and more specifically, how the opportunity to learn from practical skills like selling something is perceived as irrelevant learning. Second, it demonstrates how learning is divided between 'formal' and 'informal' (Bangwayo, 2010, Mooney, 2013, Harber, 2017)⁹⁴. Esi's teacher's comments are in line with what Bangwayo argues in his study about how the division of learning shaped 'individuals' cultural attitudes and discriminated against any learning 'outside of school-based formal education' (2010). The division is a colonial legacy (Shiza & Makuza, 2017) and according to Morrison (2001), the colonizers imposed their western practices and principles without understanding that indigenous societies already had well-established learning systems in place. The indoctrination methods discriminated against any type of learning that occurred outside of a classroom (Adu-Gyamfi, 2016, Adekunle, 2000, Boakye-Boaten, 2010, Carmody, 2017, Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019, Funteh, 2015, Falola, 2002, Nsamenang, 1993, Shiza & Makuva, 2017) like selling goods at a market. In her studies on

⁹² The teacher added that it was the same challenge during harvest season when parents needed their child's labour.

⁹³ T6 the sixth teacher interviewed, and one of the two male teachers Interview September 19, 2018.

⁹⁴ The same references apply to concepts of education and settings. The concepts of formal and informal have been since then extend to many disciplines and concept. The term formal has a connotation of being the one way, the only way, a division that is discriminatory against anything that is not according to the certain rules established.

early childhood education, Wolf extended this phenomenon to play (Wolf, 2018) that explains Ama's father comment "Sometimes it is difficult for Ama to have her work finished. She is smart but she likes to play too much". In an interview the head of a private school mentioned "play is misunderstood; parents think it is a waste of time. Parents ask me for homework, the children are four years old. We organize parents' information nights and explain to them the value of play for young children". The same argument was identified in Wolf's studies with the 33 parents she interviewed in urban educational settings (2018). In her study, this knowledge was shared by teachers who worked in private schools in Accra.

Interestingly, teachers in private schools were aware of the benefits of play and 'informal' learning, which was not the case for public school teachers. From the information gathered during discussions and interviews with public school teachers, their knowledge about education was from being students themselves at public schools and through teacher trainings and in-service observations. Their teaching practices are based on the sameness ontology - an ontology attributed to indigenous societies. Therefore, the public-school teachers repeat the way they were taught and try their best to support children in their learning. Yet, this is a controversial ontological approach because it does not connect the learning in class to the experiences or knowledge acquired from outside the classroom i.e., from the community. The ontological sameness reproduces a social phenomenon situated in colonial legacies demonstrating a hybridization of various principles. According to Latour's (2005) theoretical hierarchy, the historical agency is relational rather than conventional, as it is continuous and structural. Indigenous principles inform repeated practices, which involve the repetition of an aggregation of individuals as teachers replicate what other teachers do.

4.12 End of chapter reflection

From a child development perspective, and to some extent a social constructivist perspective, children aged 6-8 years old are at a developmental stage where their thinking (Piaget, 1954) and learning are constructed through social interactions within their cultural environment (Vygotsky, 1978). It is an age when children seek adult approval, start to understand the fairness of being an equally active participant in their community (Erickson, 1981), learn from

modelled behavior, and observe (Bandura, 1977) from scaffolded practices (Vygotsky, 1978). One significant factor is that children tend to repeat behaviors that have positive outcomes, as highlighted by Skinner (1938). The conflict identified from the data collected suggests that the current colonial practices where children are socialized through punishment results in recurring behavior, according to Skinner, even though they may eventually stop (1938). This problem identified during the interviews and confirmed by literature reviews is that punishment as a method of socializing is a colonial legacy that has been appropriated as a Ghanaian cultural norm. Another thing that became clear during the interviews, but omitted by previous research, is that the origin and effect of punishment as a socialization method were unknown to the adult participants in this study.

The data presented here is an empirical account that demonstrates how children's experience in the classroom is shaped by the sociomateriality of its social space (Lefebvre, 1991), which includes its location, spatial arrangement, the material available, instruction methods, discipline methods, peer culture, and temporality created by all these different sociomaterial actants.

However, conflicts were identified from the data collected and suggest that the current colonial practices where children are socialized through punishment result in recurring behavior, even though they may eventually stop (Skinner, 1938). The problem identified during the interviews and confirmed by literature reviews is that punishment as a method of socializing is a colonial legacy that has been appropriated as a Ghanaian cultural norm. What became clear during the interviews that the literature missed to convey is that the origin and effect of punishment as a socialization method was unknown to all the adult participants of this study.

The data presented here is an empirical account that demonstrates how children's experience in the classroom is shaped by the materiality of the classroom setting, which includes its location, spatial arrangement, the material available, instruction methods, discipline methods, peer culture, and temporality created by all these different sociomaterial actants (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Latour, 2005; Sørensen, 2009). The study's theoretical

implications emphasize the importance of considering how material things construct ideological messages and shape people's thinking and behavior (Latour & Laws, 2016; Sørensen & Fenwick, 2016).

The data presented cannot be concluded without addressing the semiotics of the Adinkra symbol, which is featured at the beginning of this chapter⁹⁵. The Adinkra symbols are related to the sociomaterial perspectives developed in this thesis as the symbol represents morals and the forgotten past of oppression, such as colonialism (Dzokoto, 1975). Yet these symbols are commonly used in everyday life⁹⁶. From ethnographic observations, Adinkra symbols continue to be popular and are used to decorate pottery, other artifacts, paintings, and as prints on fabric. People mention the symbols in their original language, Twi. Adinkra symbols are an important representation of all Ghanaian cultures - Ewe's mother used them, an Ashanti mother and a Fante father referred to them as "our culture"⁹⁷.

This generalization reflects two things. First, there is solidarity amongst all Ghanaian cultures, which according to Ezeanya-Esiobu, is the result of Ghanaians unifying to survive and overcome the imposition of Western norms (2019). This aligns with Dzoboto's perspective that the word adinkra is associated with the meaning of 'farewell' or 'goodbye' in the Twi language. As per literature reviews, they have Bono origins, named after King 'Adinkra' of the Bono tribe, and became symbols of resistance against the British colonial rules (Dzoboto, 1975). Their patterns and meanings have survived the colonial imposition, adapted to more contemporary practices like funerals, holding on to the meaning of 'farewell' yet in situating them to new social phenomena. Clothing with traditional prints like the Adinkra symbols are worn on Fridays as a current practice, including in the schools. This reflects the extent of hybridity that was identified in the learning practices. Also, the stories shared by the teachers

⁹⁵ As a matter of fact, at the beginning of every chapter

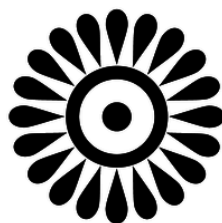
⁹⁶ During the observations, and the interviews people often refer to them, always in Twi.

⁹⁷ P3, P5, P7 during interviews and commonly used in informal discussion among my Ghanaian colleagues who used them to sum up the meaning of what they tried to convey in English.

about the Friday clothing were demonstrative of the hybridity of practices, historically and materially relational, shaping people's thinking and behavior ⁹⁸ today.

⁹⁸ Teachers were always very happy to share with me the story behind the traditional clothing they wore on Friday. The stories varied from the choice of the print, always symbolic of something cultural and so traditional, the same for the colour, or the origin sometimes being from another generation and passed along the next one or two. The historical background of the many stories traditional clothing was certainly very different from the history the daily uniforms would tell.

Chapter 5 Discussion



MAKO

Mako nyinaa mpatu mmere⁹⁹

Inequality and uneven development

Dzokoto, (2018)

5.1 Overview

This chapter is a critical discussion of the key findings generated from deep analytical processing of the key themes identified in the literature review, during the classroom observations, and the interview methods. The aim of the discussion is to answer the three research questions and to elaborate upon the key themes: the sociomateriality of the classroom and its six elements that shape children's agency: space, time, dynamics, things, people, and history and to address the aim of the research:

The three research questions (RQ) are the following:

RQ-1 How do indigenous knowledge, colonialism, and the sociomateriality of the classroom shape children's agency in grades 2 & 3 Ghanaian public schools?

⁹⁹ Adinkra symbol: Mako literally means 'All peppers (presumably from the same branch) do not ripen simultaneously. In Akan 'mmere' means 'time change', so the advantage you have today may not last.

The proverb advises the 'greater ones to help and support the less fortunate with the implicit understanding that fortunes could reverse so that they would also need someone's help.

RQ-2 What are the sociocultural factors limiting children's everyday learning experience and active participation?

RQ-3 How can a classroom setting facilitate a better learning environment and foster children's development of contextually appropriate skills, attitudes, and knowledge?

5.2 The summary of key findings

This study has uncovered several significant findings related to the complexity of the sociomaterial factors and assemblages that contribute to classroom practices and shape children's agency in the everyday learning experience. The data gathered from the historical retrospective in chapter two (p.44) revealed the significant role played by colonialism, one of the primary actants in this study, in shaping the learning culture (Yeboah, 2015), environment (Morrison, 2012), socialization practices and norms and outcomes (Adu-Gyamfi, 2013), as well as the perception and agency of children (Agbenyega, 2011, Adu-Gyamfi, 2016). The sociomaterial analysis of the data gathered from interviews and observations demonstrates that the amalgamation of colonial and indigenous principles created complex and ongoing relational entanglements that continue to shape classroom dynamics (Epstein, 2019). Specifically, together the findings suggest that this relationality has changed the perception of spatial learning arrangements, materials used, and organization of socialization practices and principles in the classroom. The data indicate that understanding the sociomateriality of the assemblages and their ongoing relationality is essential to comprehending the complexity of classroom practices. Overall, this study's findings highlight the importance of considering the sociomaterial aspects of classroom practices in shaping children's agency.

Situating children's agency

The findings as revealed through interviews and observations, have identified a recurring issue in the literature and observed in current classrooms: the shift of children's agency from active learners in pre-colonial times (Paracka, 1975) to passive students in the classroom setting (Chilisa & Bagele, 2019, Adu-Gyamfi, et al., 2016, Epstein, 2019). The pictures

captured during the observations show that children spend most of their time sitting and learning passively from a script written on the blackboard. As evidenced in table 6, the daily routine of students centers around the blackboard. This learning phenomenon is called 'Pour, Chew, Pass and Forget' pedagogy in the literature and is mentioned in interviews (Quansah, 2019, UNICEF, 2019, World Bank, 2018). These findings suggest that the data collection tools used in this study effectively capture the complexity of the sociomaterial assemblages in shaping classroom practices and highlight the persistent issue of passive learning. Future research and policy interventions must focus on promoting active learning and empowering children's agency in the classroom setting. This study's findings underscore the urgency of reimagining the classroom as an active learning space considering sociomaterial aspects of classroom practices.

The data collected from interviews with adults were essential in revealing the colonial perspective of children as passive learners in the classroom, a perception that continues to shape today's adults' perception of children. The interviews further showed how non-human things are entangled within the social phenomena of children's daily life experiences. The observations, on the other hand, provided a nuanced understanding of children's agency in the classroom setting. They revealed that both indigenous and colonial principles and practices are reproduced through a complexity of entanglements that create hybrid norms. These hybrid norms are referred to as Ghanaian cultural norms, yet the study participants were not aware of the hybridity and colonial principles and practices that shape their daily routines. Together, the findings from the interviews and observations suggest that the sociomaterial assemblages that make up the classroom practices are complex and multifaceted, shaped by historical and ongoing entanglements of indigenous and colonial perspectives.

The interviews with adults were essential to illustrate a point made by Qvurtrop et al., about the perception of children's agency as 'a subordinate status in relation to adults' rather than an individual competence (2009) that shapes and is shaped by the agencies of non-human things (Beetz, 2016) that are entangled within the social phenomena of their daily life experiences. Observations in this study revealed a hybrid version of indigenous and colonial

perspectives that shape classroom practices. The complexity of entanglements that create hybrid norms was reproduced through both indigenous and colonial principles and practices. These hybrid norms, called Ghanaian cultural norms by participants, were shaped by ongoing and emergent processes that make up classroom dynamics. Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of understanding the ongoing sociomaterial assemblages that shape classroom practices and children's agency in their everyday learning experiences.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of using both interviews and observations as complementary data collection tools to gain a comprehensive understanding of complex social phenomena. The interviews with adults revealed the continued influence of Western perspectives on the perception of children's agency, while the observations brought nuance to the perception of children as a hybrid of indigenous and colonial perspectives. Through this hybridity, the study shows how indigenous and colonial principles and practices are entangled and reproduced to create Ghanaian cultural norms. This highlights the need for a post-humanist approach that acknowledges the agency of non-human things and the entanglement of various socio-material factors and assemblies in shaping social phenomena. By adopting such an approach, I can better understand and address the complex issues children face in the classroom setting.

However, this study highlights the importance of incorporating post-humanist perspectives to explore the entanglements between children, non-human entities, and sociomaterial assemblies in their daily life experiences. Through a combination of interviews and observations, I identified the complex hybridity of indigenous and colonial perspectives (Paracka, 1975) that shape Ghanaian cultural norms around children. Our findings suggest that a post-humanist approach can provide a more nuanced understanding of children's agency and socialization in Ghana, beyond the limitations of western-centric perspectives. By acknowledging the entanglements of children with non-human entities and sociomaterial assemblies, I can develop a more comprehensive understanding of childhood experiences and socialization in diverse cultural contexts.

Based on historical accounts of the literature and classroom observations, it was found that the appropriation of Western-Eurocentric practices happened progressively over the 487 years of colonization. It started when learning became materialized by colonizers who introduced the concept of a classroom setting (Agbenyega, 2011). A classroom environment isolates children (Nyerere, 1967) from the everyday social life of the community and shapes the community's daily routine. The appropriation of the materialization of learning due to imposed western practices results in today's material artifacts like the classroom, books, and notebooks being embedded in the perception of learning. As the observations suggested, the number of schools, classrooms, books, and materials available is not satisfying the growing children population and increasing demand. With the colonization of learning, learning became inseparable from the classroom setting, and create financial issues. As a result, the literature suggests that the materialization of learning through the imposition of Western practices has resulted in financial issues for Ghanaian communities (Salifu, 2013).

Based on a sociomaterial analysis that gives equal agency to all actants, human and more-than-human (Kumpulainen, 2019), and data collected from observations using video recordings, it was found that the blackboard and notebooks are two of the main actants in the transmission of knowledge. These actants receive the most attention from all human actors, and they regulate the classroom patterns and its temporality. The blackboard has a temporary role in transmitting information, while the notebooks are the knowledge keepers containing information necessary for exams. Notebooks also serve as cross-boundary informants for the heads of school, district officers, and parents. However, observations during the COVID-19 pandemic suggest that when blackboards and notebooks are not available, teaching and learning are interrupted. These findings have financial implications as the cost of providing and maintaining these actants can be a significant burden on already struggling educational systems (Agbenyega, 2008).

The findings, based on the sociomaterial analysis, which gave equal agency to all actants, human and more-than-human (Kumpulainen, 2019), and from the data collected in the classroom ethnographic observations using video recordings, suggest that the blackboard and the notebooks are two of the main actants in the transmission of knowledge.

Reductionist, no. These actants receive the most attention from all human actors, and they regulate the classroom patterns and their temporality. As presented in table 7 in the previous chapter (p. 149, the daily routine depends on the performance of the blackboard as it informs students about what to do, when to do it, and how they should do it. Although both, the blackboard and the notebook performance varied, changed frequently, and their agency has different roles. Although the blackboard has a temporary role in transmitting information, notebooks are the knowledge keepers. They play the role of cross-boundary informants for the heads of the school, the district officers, and the parents. Also, they keep information necessary for exams. The observations during the COVID-19 pandemic further suggest that when blackboards and notebooks are not available, teaching and learning are interrupted (Hugues, 2021).

The classroom observations during phase two of instruction (p.133) suggested that children spent lots of time doing 'nothing.' Yet, this 'nothingness' perspective must overcome a Eurocentric perspective (Epstein, 2019), which has a biased tendency to perceive a non-structured time allocation as 'nothingness.' More to offer than what is considered in this thesis. From a Baradian's perspective, the dynamics, and forces of this 'nothingness' involve more than learning from the blackboard, than anticipated, as it involves children's learning within the relationship and the intra-actions of the peers (Corsaro, 2015) and the context. Corsaro added that "children's recognition of the transformative power of play is an important element of peer culture" (2015). Therefore, more attention must be paid to the interactions and behavior of children during the spatial value of the organic 'peer culture' and its temporality. This point is emphasized by Ligorio's work (2012) on dialogical learning which highlights the importance of creating inclusive and collaborative learning spaces that foster meaningful dialogue and support the development of diverse perspectives and voices. She argues that creating a safe and supportive learning environment is essential for promoting productive dialogues that can lead to meaningful learning outcomes (2012).

The findings from the child development theories explain how this space provided children with opportunities to learn about different social practices, how to negotiate power relations, and how to develop a sense of self in relation to others (Corsaro, 2015).

Hybrid practices

Observations on the school grounds and interviews with parents revealed that children's daily routine accounts for some degree of indigenous 'communal' principles that persist. The degree and extent of these principles and practices vary both at home and within the school. Before assembly at school, the school ground reflects historical indigenous practices, such as assigning children roles that contribute to the community's well-being (Corsaro, 2015, Cheney et al., 2017) The activities rely on peer culture, and the adults are distant, allowing children to do things on their own terms, time, and ways, reflecting indigenous ways of life and communal organization (Matengu, 2019,). In a group discussion, children reported that they enjoy doing chores because they are helping their teachers and their community. Although some degree of freedom is observed in the classroom during phase two, when teachers are busy marking, this time is usually short and dependent on the teachers. Nevertheless, the empirical evidence of peer culture-based practices provides an opportunity to enhance children's agency. Moreover, it highlights the importance of recognizing, valuing, and incorporating these practices into school policies and practices to harness their potential benefits further.


The literature review in chapter two discusses the traditional learning practices of pre-colonial societies. The review highlights how learning practices were not separated from everyday life in these societies (Falola, 2000, Owosu, 2005, Morrison, 2001, Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2020), and children learned skills by observing, practicing, and scaffolding new knowledge upon their prior ones until they mastered meaning and applicable skills (Agbemiase, 2009). These traditional learning practices were embedded in the community and relied heavily on the transmission of knowledge through peer culture and, to less extent, from elders (Nombuso, 2008). This approach to learning was holistic and integrated, with knowledge and skills gained through everyday activities and rituals (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2020). The findings from the group discussions with children in this study echo the value given to the peer culture, as children report their happiness. However, the current classroom setting in Ghana is mostly disconnected from the everyday life of the community, with theoretical knowledge of child

development and aligned mainly on instructivist methods called culturally “chew & pour” meaning copied verbatim isolated from practical application. The findings from post-colonial literature also suggest that the discrimination against traditional learning practices in the colonial period has led to the omission of their value by policymakers, educators, and parents (Epstein, 2020, Hinton et al., 2019). Therefore, it is important to consider the value of traditional learning practices, such as those found in indigenous societies, and incorporate them into current educational practices.

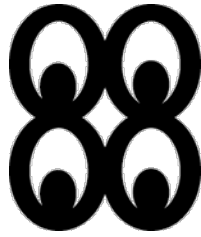
The interview data also revealed that many adult participants lacked awareness of the division of learning created because of colonial discriminatory discourses and were not familiar with indigenous knowledge and its continued relevance and efficiency in modern times. In fact, the findings suggested that many participants viewed the colonial model of knowledge transmission and the English "one size fits all" curriculum as the only appropriate and preferred method of education. This suggests that the assimilation of the colonial educational model as the sole learning setting has become so deeply ingrained in Ghanaian society that many individuals are unaware of the existence and value of alternative approaches to learning and education.

The findings from the observations identified the oppressive dynamic created by the hybridization of indigenous principles with colonial disciplinary practices. The entanglements of the indigenous principle that requires children to demonstrate their utmost respect to adults with the colonial, authoritarian disciplinary method create conflict and impact children's agency. The main actant of children's socialization practices has become the colonial material artifact, the cane. Moreover, as reported by Geltner (2012), and interviews with parents' participants the caning of children, along with other colonial practices introduced with the classroom concept, has crossed boundaries (Iannaccone & Marsico, 2013) in family and community settings and has become part of Ghanaian cultural norms over time. Therefore, the materialization of learning has undesirable consequences on the learning culture, people's perception of learning, and the social representation of children in their socialization processes, positioning them, according to Agbenyega et al., as “colonized bodies” (2016).

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the current learning environment in Ghanaian public schools observed has a significant impact on children's agency. The colonial-inspired model of education, which separates learning from everyday life and emphasizes rote memorization of western knowledge, has resulted in a neglect of the value of contextual knowledge and cultural practices. As a result, children's agency in their own learning has been undermined, and they have become passive recipients of knowledge rather than active participants in their own learning process. The oppressive dynamics created by the amalgamation of indigenous and colonial principles and practices, such as using the cane as a disciplinary method, further diminishes children's agency and reinforces colonial power structures. However, the findings also suggest that there is potential for the recognition and revitalization of indigenous knowledge and practices, particularly through the value of peer culture and learning, which has been observed to provide children with opportunities for self-expression, negotiation, and identity development. Therefore, to support children's agency in their own learning, and to develop child-centered practices, it is important to consider the value of indigenous knowledge and practices, as well as the potential of peer culture and learning, in the design and implementation of educational policies and practices such as the reform.

The Adinkra symbol  Mako introduced at the beginning of this chapter, conveys an important message that connects the many findings in this chapter. Mako talks about the temporal nature of advantage and the importance of helping others. The proverbial meaning of the symbol suggests that even though one may be in a position of advantage today, it may not necessarily last forever. Therefore, it is crucial for those who are in a position of power or privilege to extend a helping hand to those who are less fortunate. This implies that everyone should be willing to lend a helping hand when needed, as fortunes can easily reverse, and those who once had an advantage may eventually find themselves in a less advantageous position. This message has implications for the way individuals and communities interact with one another, highlighting the importance of social support and a sense of community. By embracing the principles embodied by the Mako symbol, individuals and communities can work together to create a more equitable and just society, where everyone has access to the resources they need to thrive.

Chapter 6 Conclusion



Mate Masie100

Wisdom, Knowledge, and Prudence

Dzokoto, (2018)

6.1 Overview

The classroom is a complex sociomaterial space that shapes children's agency and educational experiences. This thesis draws upon several theoretical perspectives to explore the sociomateriality of the classroom, what Latour calls, a world made up of "concatenations of mediators," (2005). While the use of multiple theories may initially seem overwhelming to readers, this approach reflects a progressive and evolving understanding that reveals unexpected similarities with indigenous knowledge (Mosweunyane, 2013). These similarities include Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development, which emphasizes the importance of mediated processes, Montessori's emphasis on educational influence diffused throughout all surroundings, Orłowski's investigation of multiple sociomaterial assemblages in organizations, Kapoor et al.'s consideration of multiple locations and intersections of knowledge production, and Russell and Dillon's emphasis on the centrality of indigenous knowledge in promoting social justice, spiritual connection, and the recognition of non-human entities (2016).

¹⁰⁰ Adinkra symbol meaning "I understand". Understanding means wisdom and knowledge, but it also represents the prudence of taking into consideration what another person has said.

The sociomaterial perspective, especially when viewed through postcolonial lenses, provided me with the tools to take a critical look at the classroom practices and identify the intricate web of forces and practices that oppress and limit children's agency. This perspective highlights the importance of indigenous knowledge (Epstein, 2019) in shaping everyday experiences and promoting critical learning, as seen in pre-colonial societies in Ghana. By reuniting material culture (Kirchoff, 2009) with the notion of agency, the sociomaterial perspective offers a nuanced understanding of the dynamics that shape children's development and learning.

The research shows that colonialism and contemporary globalization ideologies have promoted "the disempowerment of African indigeneity and knowledge" (Shizha, 2006, Epstein, 2019) by imposing a uniformized, economic, and individualist-centered knowledge (Hinton et al., 2015), which over time, has silenced African knowledge systems and pedagogical practices into academic institutions (Kapoor & Shizha, 2010), limiting children's agency (Adu-Gyamfi, 2016). The postcolonial theoretical perspectives, which take a critical approach to the construction of knowledge in current classrooms, demonstrated how learning practices, perception of knowledge, and knowledge have been westernized and discriminatory against any indigenous knowledge but also limit children's agency and position them as colonized bodies (Agbenyega et al., 2016). Also, what postcolonial, critical scholars emphasize is the rethinking and reconstituting of indigenous knowledge, including the voices of children through a decolonization process.

However, if the ethnographic tools confirmed this positioning of children, the negative effects of western practice on the holistic development of children, I believe that as a western researcher myself, I should not voice my academic opinion on this matter. By doing so, I would encourage the change of a system, a perception that is not mine, a colonizing process, I wish to avoid. I share knowledge that scholars from the Global South developed about the ideology of decolonization of knowledge and do not think it is my place, nor my right, to tell Ghanaian educators what they should do. The ethnographic tools showed me one thing which was that children are at the center of the community. If the classrooms have become hybrid and globalized social spaces, I am certain that Ghanaian proverb of Sankofa, can inform them

better. What is important to take from this thesis is the knowledge developed about the relationality through which “pedagogy is enacted and emplaced” (Russell & Dillon, 2016).

The ethnographic tools like the observations on the school grounds and interviews with parents revealed that there is some degree of indigenous ‘communal’ principles still present in the daily routine of the children. These principles varied in both home and within the school. The children are assigned roles that contribute to the community's well-being and have high agency in negotiating their roles and organization. These activities reflect indigenous ways of life and communal organization (Matengu, 2017). It is important to recognize and value these practices and the potential benefits of incorporating them into school policies and practices.

This thesis encourages the necessity to redefine classroom reality epistemologically. This idea inspired by Kant, who propose- that "objects must conform to our cognition" (Kant, as cited in Beetz, 16) instead of assuming that "all cognition must conform to objects." In the context of this study, this means recognizing that the reality of the classroom is not an objective truth but is constructed through the perceptions, beliefs, and experiences of those who inhabit it. By acknowledging the influence of sociomateriality and power dynamics on classroom practices, policy makers and educators can begin to challenge dominant Westernized perspectives (Kapoor & Edwards (2010) and open new possibilities for decolonizing knowledge and promoting critical learning.

This research contributes new knowledge at a timely moment when educational reforms create tensions for child-centered classroom practices. It highlights the under-researched concept of children’s agency, which has been taken for granted, depriving children of equal and respectful social status. It is important to recognize the unequal power relations between generations and how the classroom can be organized to diminish this dynamic inequity. Current education institutions limit children's ability to develop critical thinking by muting their voices and silencing them in their own learning environment. The traditional indigenous communal care system in many Ghanaian communities can provide a model for child-

centered practices. The concept of children's agency remains inadequately theorized, but this study focuses on it as the outcome of the analysis process.

In conclusion, while new materialist approaches have foregrounded the importance of materiality in shaping agency, there are still areas that are underrepresented in these approaches, such as the processes through which racialized bodies come to matter and their link with post- and de-colonial theories, as well as with critical race studies. To fully explore the complexity of children's agency, it is important to expand the attention given to children, their bodies, and their ancestral connections beyond the colonial childhood ideologies and integrate critical race, migration studies, and post- and de-colonial theories with new materialist approaches. It is important to recognize the significance of symbols, stories, and cultural traditions in shaping children's agency and social construction, which in turn shape cultural norms. By expanding our understanding of the matters and materials that shape children's agency, I can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the heterogeneous complexity of elements that impact their learning and development. The *Matie Masie Adinkra* symbol, which emphasizes the importance of communication and listening skills in passing along oral stories and culture, serves as a reminder of the relationality behind symbols and their significance in shaping children's agency.

6.2 Contribution

The study contributes to enhancing the learning experience of children in Ghana by examining the materiality of the learning environment. The research highlights the importance of understanding the sociomaterial perspective in current classroom practices and its impact on shaping children's agency (Iannaccone, 2013, Kumpulainen, & Kajaama, 2020). One of the main contributions of the study is the development of a spatial approach that overcomes the dominant human-centered perspectives and draws a comparison between indigenous and colonial knowledge and practices. This approach enables the identification of the complexities of different actants involved in learning practices and how they create dynamics and forces that shape children's agency.

The sociomaterial perspective on the Ghanaian context, from a Global North view, is innovative and reconceives learning and situates children's agency. From a Global South and postcolonial perspective, a sociomaterial approach brings back respect to indigenous knowledge that indigenous societies implemented 600 years ago. Western scholars have discriminated against this perspective as they misunderstood their values (Ezeaunya-Esiobu, 2019), and the study seeks to bridge the gap in considering the materiality of the learning environment. The research identifies the importance of recognizing the significance of symbols, stories, and cultural traditions (Yeboah, 2015) in shaping children's agency and their social construction. Overall, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the heterogeneous complexity of elements that impact children's learning and development and highlights the need for a more equitable and sociomaterial approach to education.

In conclusion, the study serves as a valuable contribution to the field of education, particularly in Ghana, by providing a new perspective that considers the materiality of the learning environment. The research highlights the importance of adopting a sociomaterial approach that considers the complex entanglements between different actants involved in learning practices and their impact on shaping children's agency. The study also emphasizes the need for a more culturally sensitive approach to education that recognizes the significance of symbols, stories, and cultural traditions in shaping children's agency and social construction. Overall, the study is a step towards a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence children's learning and development and the role that materiality plays in shaping their agency.

6.3 Implications

The study has significant implications for education policies and practices in Ghana and beyond. By highlighting the importance of a sociomaterial approach, the research provides insights into creating a more equitable and inclusive education system. The study's findings can inform the development of curricula that recognize the significance of cultural traditions and stories in shaping children's agency and social construction. The research also has

implications for teacher training, highlighting the need for educators to be aware of the impact of materiality on children's learning and development.

Furthermore, the study has important implications for decolonizing education (Kapoor & Edwards, 2010). The hybrid classroom norms that have emerged in Ghana reflect the colonial legacy that perpetuates discrimination against real-life learning within the community. By recognizing the significance of indigenous knowledge and practices, the research challenges the dominance of Western perspectives in education and promotes a more inclusive approach (Chilis & Bagele, 2019). To decolonize and contextualize learning practices, policymakers, and teachers must understand how significantly sociocultural factors impact the materiality of the classroom and create dynamics that are ongoing and always evolving. The study highlights the need to bridge the gap between indigenous and colonial knowledge and practices to create a more culturally sensitive approach to education. Overall, the study contributes to ongoing efforts to decolonize education by acknowledging the significance of cultural diversity and materiality in shaping children's agency and learning.

Furthermore, the study's theoretical implications emphasize the importance of considering how material things construct ideological messages, meanings, and shape people's thinking and behavior. A sociomaterial lens highlights the relational reality of the classroom as a complex entanglement of heterogeneous elements, including material artifacts introduced during the colonial era and human actors in the classroom. A postcolonial lens reveals the cultural hybridity of the classroom norms that have also crossed boundaries into social norms accepted in both family and community settings (Iannaccone & Marsico, 2013). Therefore, to enable children to become active learners, policymakers and teachers must study and understand classroom practices from a 3D perspective that considers the sociocultural, sociomaterial, and postcolonial factors that impact learning and development.

The study's findings indicate that implementing a social constructivist pedagogy in Ghana faces many sociocultural and sociomaterial challenges that policymakers and teachers must address to make it applicable in the classroom. The hybrid classroom norms that have emerged in Ghana reflect the colonial legacy that perpetuates discrimination against real-life

learning within the community (Twun-Danso, 2012). To decolonize and contextualize learning practices, policymakers and teachers must understand how significantly sociocultural factors impact the materiality of the classroom and create dynamics that are ongoing and always evolving.

Furthermore, the study's theoretical implications emphasize the importance of considering how material things construct ideological messages and shape people's thinking and behavior (Iannaccone, 2017, Latour, 2005, Russell & Dillon, 2016). A sociomaterial lens highlights the relational reality (Barad, 2007) of the classroom as a complex entanglement of heterogeneous elements, including material artifacts introduced during the colonial era and human actors in the classroom (Söderstrom, 2016). A postcolonial lens reveals the cultural hybridity of the classroom norms (Kapoor & Edwards, 2010) that have also crossed boundaries into social norms accepted in both family and community settings (Iannaccone & Marsico, 2013). Therefore, to enable children to become active learners, policymakers and teachers must study and understand classroom practices from a 3D perspective that considers the sociocultural, sociomaterial, and postcolonial factors that impact learning and development.

6.4 Concluding remarks

To conclude, this thesis demonstrates the importance of incorporating indigenous, pre-colonial knowledge into classroom practices, educational research, and policy processes. By doing so, I can develop a more contextual and practical approach to children's agential development than the present Eurocentric economic-based discourses (Epstein, 2019). This study also highlights the relevance of the Akan wisdom and its Adinkra symbols as a source of life lessons applicable to different social spaces. Ultimately, we must continue to learn from the past to inform and better the future of all Ghanaian children, in a way that supports them to thrive in their national cultural setting and for their economic benefit. Therefore, it is imperative to move towards a more child-centered pedagogy and to shape the skills and thinking of young Ghanaians in a way that supports their growth and development. As the Akan proverb says, "A child who washes his hands well eats with the elders." Let us take this

wisdom to heart and ensure that we are providing the best possible learning experiences for



our children. Sankofa ¹⁰¹ “Se wo were fi na wosan kofa a yenkyiri”¹⁰¹. The wisdom of learning from the past to build the future.

The concept of "SANKOFA" is particularly relevant here, which means "go back and fetch it" in Akan language, reminding us to look back at our past and learn from it to create a better future. The Sankofa symbol reminds us of the importance of reflecting on the past to move forward with greater understanding and purpose. Incorporating indigenous knowledge and cultural perspectives into educational practices and policies can provide a more comprehensive and relevant approach to supporting the development of children's agency and learning. It is essential to recognize the value and importance of diverse cultural knowledge and practices in shaping educational systems and promoting equity and inclusivity in the Ghanaian context. By embracing the wisdom and traditions of the past and integrating them with modern approaches to education, we can create a more holistic and effective learning environment for all children.

¹⁰¹ Literally means ‘it is not too taboo to go back to what you forgot’.

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Appendixes

Appendix A Memorandum of understanding



**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK
UNIVERSITY OF GHANA**

P. O. Box LG 419, LEGON - ACCRA TEL: 233-513051/52/ 500300 Ext. 3289
E-mail: socialwk@ug.edu.gh

Our Ref No:.....

Memorandum of Understanding

Between

Dr. Frimpong-Manso Kwabena,
Senior Lecturer

On behalf of the
Social Work Department
The University of Ghana (UGH)

Accra, Ghana

And

Sibylle Newman
PhD Candidate and Principal Researcher

On behalf of
the University of Neuchâtel (UNINE)
Neuchâtel, Switzerland

“The cultural and historical drivers of the educational norms in Ghanaian government schools”

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) sets the terms and understanding between the GES representative/University of Ghana, Dr. Frimpong-Manso and Sibylle Newman (hereinafter called “the parties”). The parties have come together to establish a collaborative research relationship based on the attached Research Protocol developed by Mrs. Newman. The Research Protocol has detailed information concerning the research including purpose and scope, methodology, location, ethical guidelines and responsibilities of all research participants.

1. The purpose of the MOU is to ensure that all procedures are respectful of children’s rights and their dignity and to provide protection and safety to all research participants, and the researcher.
2. The parties agree to cooperate and work together to undertake research data collection, to implement agreed upon procedures, and to prepare reports as referenced in the protocol.
3. On days the research will take place, both parties will communicate regularly on the whereabouts of the principal researchers as well as on the progress and findings as described in details in the protocol.
- 4.

We, the undersigned have read and agree with this MOU and the attached research protocol and all its procedures. Further, we have reviewed the proposed research and approve it.

By: Mrs. Sibylle Newman

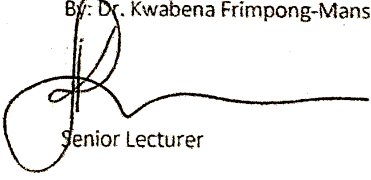

Principal Researcher

At the University of Neuchâtel

+233 (0) 552520414

Sibylle.newman@unine.ch

By: Dr. Kwabena Frimpong-Manso


Senior Lecturer

University of Ghana

+233 (0) 24390 8246

kfrimpong-manso@ug.edu.gh

Date:

3. On days the research will take place, both parties will communicate regularly on the whereabouts of the principal researchers as well as on the progress and findings as described in details in the protocol.
4. All parties agree that if any misconduct were to be observed or reported during the data collection, the researcher will report to the appropriate school authority (Protocol # 7.6).

We, the undersigned have read and agree with this MOU and the attached research protocol and all its procedures. Further, we have reviewed the proposed research and approve it.

By: Mrs. Sibylle Newman



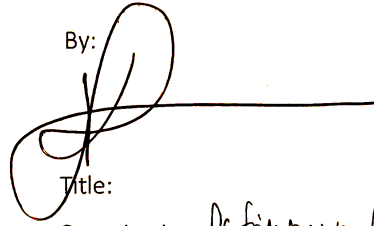
Principal Researcher

At the University of Neuchâtel

+233 (0) 552520414

Sibylle.newman@unine.ch

By:



Title:

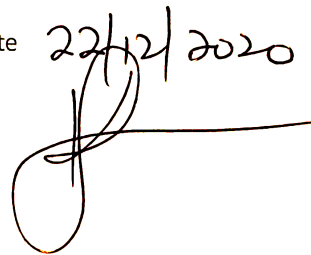
Organization: Dr. Frimpong-Mansa

+233 (0) 24390 8246

kfmanso@ug.edu.gh

Date: 22/12/2020

Date 22/12/2020



Appendix B Parental consent form

Child's name

Date

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

Mr. Larbi, the human officer at the district education office granted access to Sibylle Newman who will conduct her research in your child's school and classroom. For any concerns or questions, Mr. Larbi can be reached at 0244826894 or can be visited at any time in the education office.

Research Consent

For all primary students participating in the research titled 'Cultural and historical drivers of the educational norms in Ghanaian schools'

The research is conducted by Sibylle Newman, principal researcher, and Ph.D. candidate at the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland. For any questions, please contact me at 0552520414.

The purpose of the research

The purpose of this Ph.D. research is to better understand the cultural and historical background of school practices in Ghana. I will conduct classrooms observations to develop knowledge about the daily routines, interactions, and activities of teachers and students and analyse all data to write a Ph.D. thesis. The collection of children's voices is important in the study, and informal group discussions and activities such as drawings are chosen to ensure child-friendly methods. Also, I will do interviews with parents and educators to collect everyone's perspectives, expectations, and historical beliefs about school norms. You are welcome to volunteer and be one of the parent participants.

You received two copies, please keep one to ensure you always have this information and all phone numbers available. Sign one copy and return it to your child's teacher.

Selection and participation

All children will be given an equal opportunity to participate and to not participate. The selection will include an equal number of girls and boys and will be done by the classroom teachers. Also, at any time during the study, you can decide to withdraw your child from the research, no motive necessary.

Procedures

All activities are designed to be child friendly, protect your child from any harm or distress. The group discussions will take place in the classroom or within the school ground, depending on the classroom teachers' preference and availability. Group activities will be composed of a minimum of 3 children and a maximum of 6. The drawing activities will include all children and will take place during one creative art period. During the group discussions, two people approved by the education district office will be present to ensure that children are not left alone with one adult to avoid any child protection issues such as power struggles. Children will be reminded verbally that they do not have to answer any questions, can decide not to do the activities. If anything is said or done that makes them feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, or sad, they are free to stop participating at any time. No questions ask.

Confidentiality

All information will be kept confidential, anonymous, and accessed by the researcher. The personal information collected will be kept in a digital application that requires a password and fingerprints. The data will be used for analysis and presentation purposes. All names and locations will be changed.

Recording

Some of the collected data will be recorded by means of pictures, videos, and audio recordings. Also, field notes will be handwritten during the classroom observations.

Duration of observations

The school observations will last four months. I will be visiting multiple schools and may not attend your child's school every day. When I am in your child's classroom, I will spend the whole day conducting observations unless I am asked to visit another class. The duration of the group discussions will depend on the time allocated by the teachers. However, they will not take time away or impede your child's learning time.

Incentives

Your child will not be provided any payment or goods for taking part in the research.

Risks and discomforts

There is a slight risk that your child shares some personal or confidential information by chance or may feel uncomfortable talking and sharing some of the research topics. Of course, I do not wish this to happen, and your child will be respected if she/he wishes not to answer or talk about any topics or activities taking place in the classroom. I will verbally remind your child before any group discussion that she/he is not obligated to answer or talk about anything that is uncomfortable, shameful, or sad. I respect their feelings and they can tell me 'Skip' or 'stop' at any time. The activity will end whenever they want. Your child may choose to tell you about the group discussions or not and is not required to share with you and I will respect your child's privacy.

Benefits

There will be no immediate and direct benefit to your child or to you. Your child's participation is likely to help to develop new knowledge about the school culture and to inform educators and policymakers in the hope of a better future for education institutions.

Agreements

These ethical procedures are mandatory for academic research undertaken by Swiss SSP institutions. All research requires its participants or the legal guardian to explicitly agree to be interviewed or observed and be aware of how the information collected will be used. It is also mandatory to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation. Also, this consent form is aligned with the Ghana University ethics review committee (GHS-ERC, 2018) and WHO guidelines (WHO ERC, 2018).

Please read the information below, write your initial (e.g., Sibylle Newman = SN) in front of each sentence if you agree, sign the form at the bottom to certify that you understand and agree to these conditions above. You can mark X if you disagree with some statement. By signing this form, with my initial on each statement, I agree to the following:

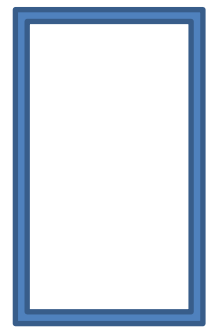
	I freely consent for my child to take part in this research, and I understand that she/he can change her/his mind and stop the process at any time
	I agree for my child to be quoted directly considering that all names are not published, and pseudonyms are used
	I am aware some material will be recorded, and a transcript will be produced and analysed
	I understand that the researchers may publish documents such as academic papers, policy papers, or news articles
	I can request to review the notes, transcripts, or other data collected during the research pertaining to my child participation to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality
	I am conscious that any other person assisting with the interview process will sign a confidentiality agreement to protect our identity and the content of the interview and group discussions
	I don't expect to receive any benefit or payment for my child's participation

	I understand that I can ask any questions I might have, and that I am free to contact the researcher with any concerns I may have in the future.
	I am certified that any variation of the conditions above will not occur without my further explicit approval
	I would like to participate as a parent participant to the study

Thank you in advance if you offer the voluntary participation of your child in the research project described above.

Legal guardian' Name/ or witness _____ Date _____
 Phone number _____ Signature _____

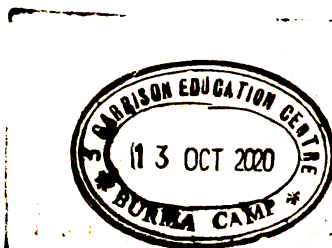
In case the legal guardian is illiterate:
 A witness will read the consent form to the legal guardian of the potential participant, and time should be given to ask questions.



Thumbprint
 If you have any concerns or further questions you can also contact directly:
 Mr. Larbi, the district education officer, at +233 (0) 244826894
 Or the thesis supervisor Antonio Iannaccone
 by email @ antonio.iannaccone@unine.ch

Appendix C District office authorization

Sibylle Newman
Primary Researcher
Cantonments
Accra, Ghana



Accra, August, 2019

Dear Education District Officer,

As requested, I am sharing further information about the focus, purpose and methodology of my PhD research which is being developed with my PhD advisor, Dr. Antonio Iannaccone (Antonio.iannaccone@unine.ch) at the Department of Educational Psychology at the Université of Neuchâtel in Switzerland.

My research focuses on the cultural norms and values of Ghanaians' schools learning and teaching of young children, the age of six to eight years old, and in the Ghanaian context. I conduct school observations to collect data in order to develop a better understanding about what is happening in schools' settings and the classrooms. The purpose of my observations is to better understand the cultural characteristics of the educational and social settings where the learning takes place and how the social interactions influence their learning.

The purpose of my research is to gain greater understanding on how context, culture, material (objects, space, settings), social interactions impact the cognitive development or learning of children in Early Childhood settings.

To ensure the ethical aspect of collecting personal data, the privacy and confidentiality of every single participant will be respected. Consequently, names and locations will be changed. All observations' notes, pictures or videos will be kept on a safe application which requires finger print identification. Consent letters with the purpose of the study and parental authorization will be discussed and signed by all participants prior any data is collected. Also, all participants be told that they can withdraw from participating in the study at any time and without any justifications.

For any further information, I can be contacted at the following email address: sibyllenewman@yahoo.com or by phone and WhatsApp at +233 (0) 552520414.

I am very much looking forward to learn from your local context and from all the parents I will be collaborating with during my field work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "S. Newman".

Sibylle Newman, B.A., Med
Educational Researcher
PhD Candidate

Appendix D Questionnaires

Children's questionnaire

Date: _____ Name _____

Age: ____ Gender: F__ M__ # of siblings

How old are they? Their gender?

Do you attend the same school?

Before I ask you many questions, do you have any to ask me?

How do you like school? What is the best thing about school?

Did you have a choice of schools?

What is your favorite thing to do in school? Favorite subject?

Do you like to read? what is your favorite activity?

What do you think of the teaching in your children's school ?

What do you like about it?

How do you describe the role of a teacher?

Is it different from the role of parents?

Are children different from adults? What is the role of children?

How do you define discipline? What is an example of good behavior?

What is bad behavior? Is there anything else we did not discuss that you would like to share with me?

Do you have any questions you would like to ask at this point?

Parents' questionnaire

Date: _____ Name _____

Age: 20-30__ 30-40__ 40-50__ more__ Gender: F__ M__

Status: Married. Divorced. Single. Do you work?

How many children do you have? How old are they? Gender?

Do you all come to the same school?

Before I ask you many questions, do you have any to ask me?

Did you have a choice of schools? How did you choose the school?

Other, explain, please...

What is your definition of quality education? is it different from learning?

In Ghana, what would you say the goal of education is? If different from your previous answer, please explain.

What do you think of the teaching in your children's school?

What do you like about it? How do you describe the role of a teacher?

Is it different from the role of parents?

How do you define children? What is the role of children?

How do you define discipline and give me an example of good behavior?

What is bad behavior? Is there anything else we did not discuss that you would like to

share with me?

Do you have any questions you would like to ask at this point?

Appendix 3D Teachers' Questionnaire

Date: _____ Name _____

Age: 20-30__ 30-40__ 40-50__ more__ Gender: F__ M__

For how many years have you been a teacher _____ For how long in this school?_

Before I ask you many questions, do you have any to ask me?

Have you work in another school system?

Which teacher college did you attend?

Other, explain, please?

Do you have children yourself? ___ # of children you have: ____ Their age:
____#

Girls_____ # of Boys_____

What is your definition of quality education? is it different from learning?

In Ghana, what would you say the goal of education is?

If different from your previous answer, please explain.

Do you like teaching? What do you like about it?

What is your role as a teacher? Or how do you describe the role of a teacher?

Is it different from the role of parents?

How do you define discipline?

What is an example of good behavior?

What is bad behavior? Is there anything else we did not discuss that you would
like to

share with me?

Do you have any questions you would like to ask at this point?

Appendix E Children's drawings



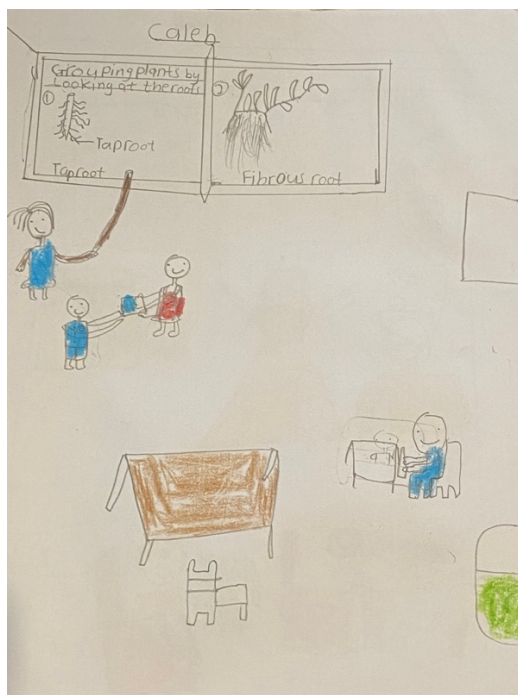
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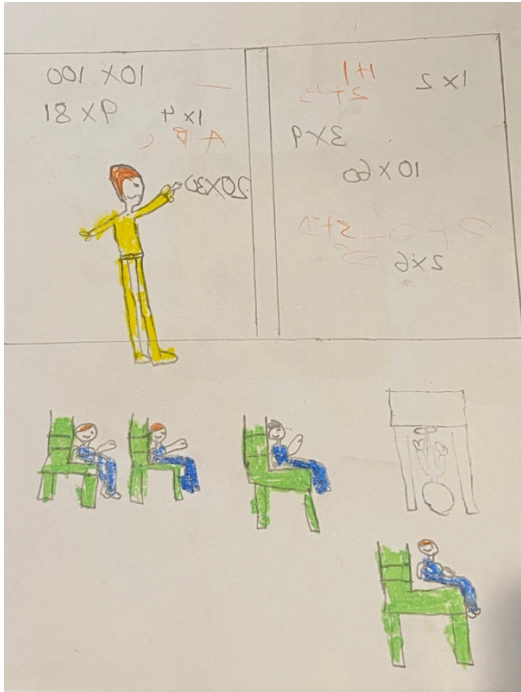
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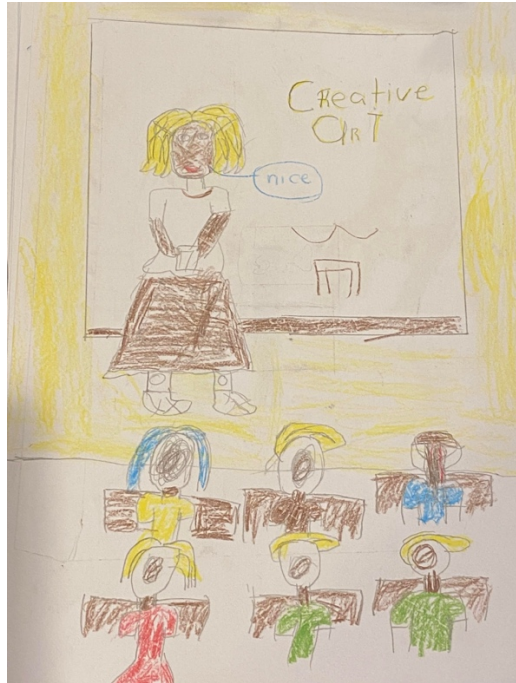
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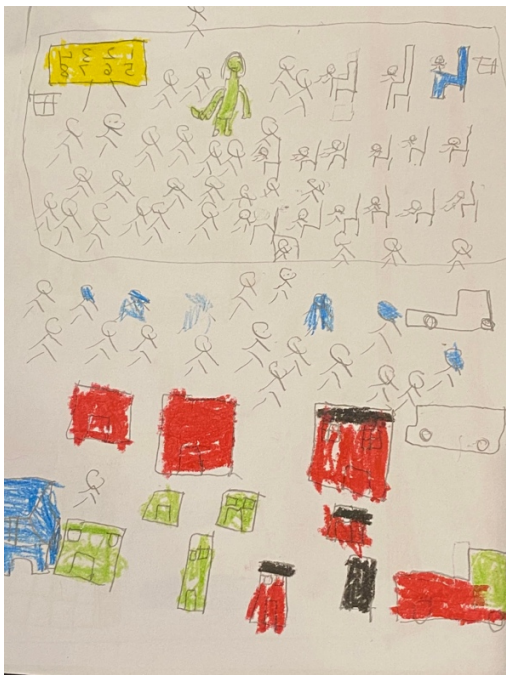
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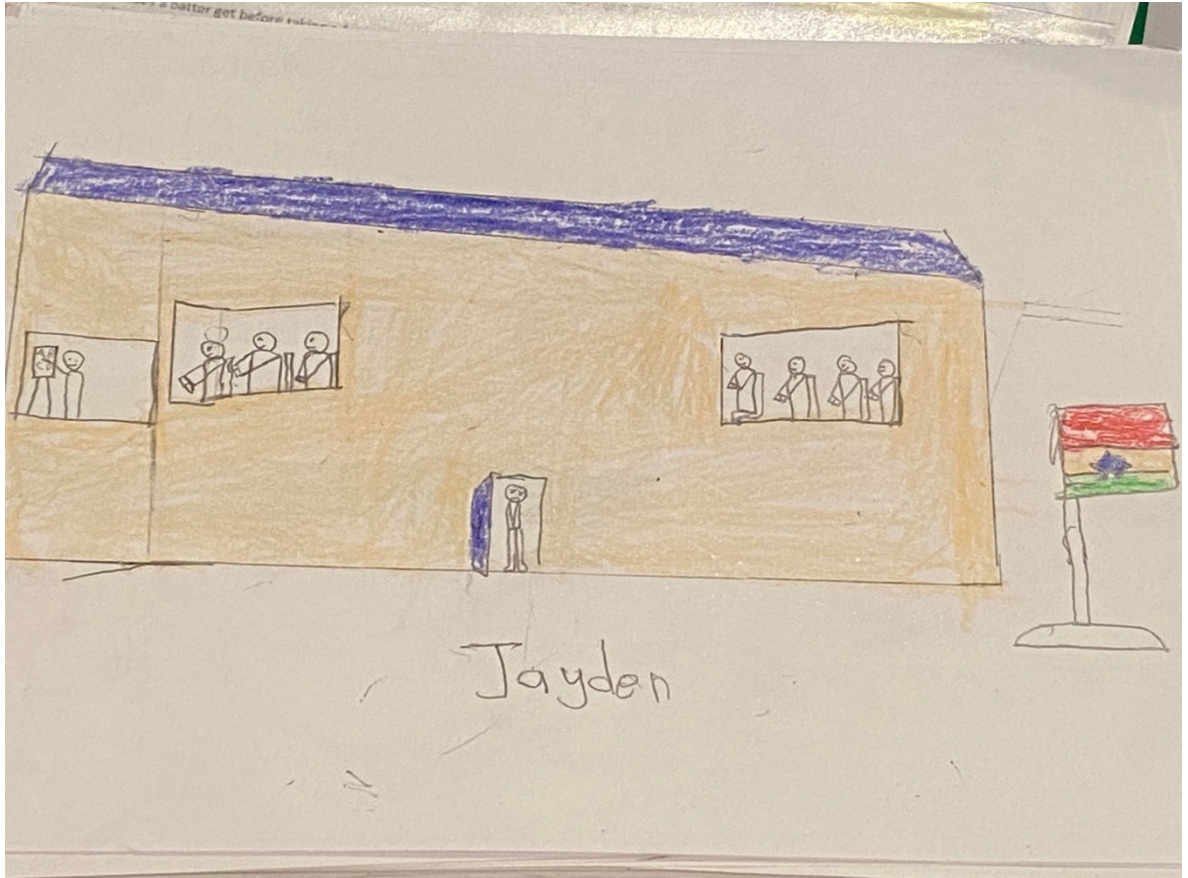
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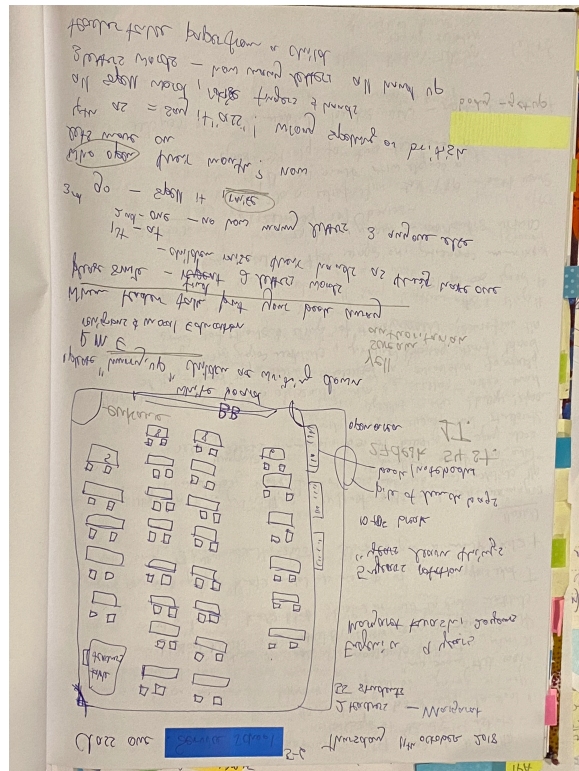


#8



#9

Appendix F Fieldnotes



Appendix G Transcripts

Teacher T3 informal discussions

St.1 GOOD behavior is something? (0.3) if (.) you pay.
attention in class, that is good behavior↑ And bad behavior is when they are talking↓ and
you are °also↓ ?°talking°↓

St.2 When the teacher is talking and also you are also.
ta::lking ↓

St.4 [that's bad behavior↓]

St.3 Good behavior is something that if hh someone a
good behavior is something if someone is talking Or.hh not
doing anything to you:: .hh and the person beat you and (.)
.hh you you beat °the: m euh and hmm° a good behavior
Sib [is that good behavior↑]

St.4 I said if someone beat you↓ you HAVe to forgive them
not to beat the person back↓ and bad behavior is something that if someone is short with
you (.) you too you start the person and you cry to the person

St 5 ° <good behavior is (0.2) euh (.) if (.) if somebody
Insult ↓> (0.3) euh__

St. 3 [AND↑]

St.5 [°and°↑]

St.2 [HEY↓:::]]

St. 4 >if someone insult you<↑

St. 3 °< good behavior is when the teacher is talking↑ >you
have to keep quiet<↓ And #bad behavior# ((coughs and other laugh)) and bad behavior
is↑ somebody beats (.)
>and then< you and↑ >also<↓ you are gone beat the person↓

St. 5 Good behavior is (.)↓ >you are seating down = you
are seat down and someone needs you and someone snap and you (loose) the page
and you forgive = call = report to

the teacher <(.) so the teacher can punish him = and = the ba↑:d behavior is if you are studying and someone ru:n to bea↑t you↓ (.) >then you beat the person back< and you start the two to fight = if↑ the headmaster sees you he'll punish both of you↓

St. 6 <GO↑od behavior is (.) when someone does you something but its not you doing something and bad behavior

St. 2 [and bad behavior is↑]

Transcript: T2 interview

Learning environment and perception of learning

Q. The new consideration of child participation in the new curriculum recommends that children should ask questions and [talk more]

- 1 T2. [and] ↓> should explore the environment (0.5) >you see the who::le thing> (0.5) >the new curriculum< (0.5) > itself < (0.5) is something like(,) u::mm (0.6) going By (,) (0.4) by
- 3 the Montessori↓ (0.7) kind of education↓ mo:::re(0.2) teaching and learning material
- 4 (0.5) more activities↓ (0.5) than maybe↑ <more than writing or working> (0.2) children
- 5 have to explore more (.07) but↑ (0.5) we don't have the facilities () even our rooms↓
- 6 don't permit us to do that kind of (0.4) °work° (0.3) and↓ you were telling us when we go.
- 7 to the class, our classes we should (.) arrange the ((stops to greet someone crossing the courtyard and talk out loud in Twi for 1.32 minutes))

When I first transcribed the interview, my first reaction was to think that T2 did not answer my question at all. Then, I thought maybe I did not make it explicit that my take on participation reflects the children's right aspect to participation focusing on the verbal participation of students, which includes the voice of children of all ages taking their perspectives into account in the teaching/learning.

Nevertheless, this analysis was revisited after I spent time transcribing other observations and reflections from the field. Consequently, T2's answer when she heard 'participation' reflects the three following points:

1. TT's interpretation of 'participation' and the copy paste of such interpretation
2. T2' personal background understanding of new pedagogical tool? Method?
3. T2's teaching environmental or material limitations of implementing new pedagogy

4. Student centered rather than teacher centered.

1. The TT interpretation of participation was limited or focused on the physicality of the participation rather than the verbal participation. The trainers took a couple of examples on how to incorporate and implement participation and TT2 answer reflect these two points. One is on the gathering students into group to facilitate collaborative work or physically. locate students together for group participation. Produce a one poster type of work with the participation of all students.

we don't have the facilities () even our rooms ↓ don't permit us to do that kind of (0.4) °work° (0.3). The material chosen to introduce new participatory practices are paper and reorganization of the desks.

What does that tell us about the different level of interpretation.

At the macro level the ministry of education is applying recommendation from UN stakeholders on children right to participation, active student-centered activities. At a national level, the ministry developed a curriculum that emphasize the history of Ghana and combined subject to have a curriculum that steps away from subject oriented to concept oriented.

At the GES level, which not only includes the district level and school level (micro level) but also the practical implementation of new perspectives, new practical skills, the concept of participation and student-centered is different.

At the district level, GES was asked to train teachers to increase students' participation and shift the teaching and learning to students centered. However, without much guidance on what that meant in the classroom, how new teaching method could be then reported during inspection and examination, without much allocated budget for material or infrastructures especially in the classroom, the interpretation of participatory by the GES trainers is reflected in T2' statement.

Consequently, the participation aspect mainly focused on the physical and material characteristic rather than verbal. During the training, participation was associated with poster paper and grouping of desks. Teachers were taught how to implement

participatory activities, and literally were asked to do an activity themselves. They were divided into smaller groups and were given a blank poster piece of paper, big pens. Then, they were told that students' desk should be grouped to promote group activities.

Trainers could have chosen to recycle containers from home such as juice box, plastics cups, or plastics forks and conduct a math or science experiment, but they chose paper and writing. The material they know, and which is associated with learning. Recycling or bringing something from home, the community or using something practical which would require thinking outside of the everyday practices is limited.

children must explore more (.07)

Also, teachers were told that they can take natural resources from their surroundings to explore material like leaves for sciences. The week after the training, T6, brought some leaves from palm tree arouse her house and two other different trees. Students could see them.

Notes from observations: (Obs. 1)

Teacher centered activity rather than student centered. Teacher tells them what to do rather than ask them to reflect and come up with their own student.

As a result, T2's answer reflects the teacher's perception of pedagogy and perception of learning.

Montessori kind of education, more teaching and learning materials, more activities, then maybe writing or working

The teacher associates' activities required in the new curriculum and using materials to be a Montessori type of teaching rather than a government school type. This distinction reveals that the teacher does not associate participatory approaches to her type of school. The teacher has knowledge of such pedagogy, of its principles but has dissociates to the type of teaching from working which she associates with writing.

She makes a clear distinction between activity-based learning and writing which she associates with working. Furthermore, she says working rather than learning which reflect a Christian philosophical proverb 'who works hard, will do well or go far' (ref.)

Observations

Third, third to put this talk into context, the interview above took place during the week after the teachers' training introducing the new curriculum. At the training to encouraged teachers to do activity-based teaching, all teachers were given a few large poster papers and were told to group students and conduct participatory activities.

My addition to Jefferson

"kk" noise made from a back movement of the mouth like a cracking noise.

/heeee/ long exclamation type of high intonation often heard in Ghana when disagree or surprised

Transcript: Head of school (HoS) interview

sib [0:00:29] how you define childhood or a child.

HoS [0:00:37] a child is supposedly to be between 00 years to 19 years.

sib [0:01:00] when you think of childhood is it the same period of time? or you think of a different concept."

HoS [0:01:20] ? right from age 0 the mother or the parents take care of the child through learning out to walk, and to speak, at that time the child is attached to the parents, when the child starts going to school at 3 years of age, then the child is taken away for a period of time, but it is still the childhood process, which is 4 yes. but still, attach to parents. teenage age to 19 are also attached to parents but not too much they have some form of independence but still fall in childhood process because parents are still responsible and tell them what to do. they are taking their decisions into account.

sib these little children they have they own mind?

HoS [0:04:04] zero to three years, every human has some sense of maturity some level of maturity, at the end of the three years, they act on instinct. their instinct, parents are able to answer them, the child would cry, why are you crying maybe something is wrong, so mommy knows maybe he spoiled his nappies or maybe he is sick. but can't say i am sick, you know because of the instinct, the mother would take the temperature right and all that. that is, it. they act of instinct, so they have some sense of maturity. From age 4 to 11 at that time they can speak, once they can speak, they can tell what worries them, so parents can understand and love them for who they are the way that way. so, they also have a sense of maturity because of the speaking and the exchange. then from 13 they are teenagers, and they are a little exposed to their environment. a teenager in Ghana for one can decide to get food to eat if she is hungry either in the house or not if she feels is hungry if there is anything to eat. at that age they can decide certain things for themselves. can get food. and teenagers also, it may not be appropriate, parents can shift that, some make at that age, lots of friends and the parents are not happy with the type of friends, so parents are able to shift who they friends are and to ensure they do not fall victims of these peer pressure.

sib [0:07:28] so parents until they children are nineteen, they will listen to their parents, still have an influence?

HoS after normally in Ghana, senior High school to enter uni, at that time they have to take care of themselves parents are not responsible, only certain things, can give them advice, the children can take it or leave, and it is a time when the advice can be seen.

sib [0:09:22]

HoS certain obedience, respect, child to be disciplined, sib [0:09:36] an example of respect.

HoS [0:09:44] regards to respect, gets up in the morning, says good morning to both parents, the child is not propped to do some house chores, it is disrespect.

sib [0:10:48] so it is not discipline.

HoS [0:10:53] there are a two-way affair, the child knows what to do at home, you are self-disciplined to do what you are supposed to do at home. in the school situation, children come they know the rules and regulations. Enter the school year, put your bag down, and ensure your classroom is swept, the windows are cleaned, your compound is cleaned, you ensure these things are set, you ensure there is water, or you fetch water in whatever container is filled and all the things that you do without being taught. then that it is when you are being disciplined

sib [0:11:48] so obedience? is it an expectation from parents.

HoS [0:11:54] yesterday PTA meeting, so I observed over five-six weeks, the children were very respectful, so I told parents the children are very respectful, parents started clapping, it was the first time, they know but now it has been voiced it was voiceless before. so so, it is an obligation parents expect to see from their kids, if they see alone fine if someone else say it is good.

sib [0:13:37] if kids are respectful do you think it is a parent or teacher thing?

HoS [0:13:41] this is also a two way, yes, the school has its way, we go rigidly about our rules and regulations, anyway you turned, and there are some punishments for you. at home we do not see but sometimes instead of punishment it is rather advices. the dishes are not set, the tv is on, you shout a little, why you did not do it. no punishment has gone for the child. but when you come to the school level, you come to school, you don't clean your compound, you come to assembly, you see your dirty compound, and that is where the other side of it you are punished for not doing that and that is the different way versus home.

sib [0:15:21] how do you know who to punish and the level of punishment?

HoS well, yes you have many students, at the school level we have the various classes, so we look at the class and we look at the work you can do, class 1 -2 -3 do not sweep their classrooms, we do not expect them to sweep their classroom. We have some people who do that of them, so they do not have so much to do. class one punishment as it where, would not be there, what punishment we may give to kids of that nature. fighting with one another, they come to school, and they peer fight into people's bags, they take somebody's pencil and use it because they need it, and stuff like that. when that happen there are some forms of punishments. sometimes we advise them not to do it again, so if we have two kids one enters the fight i call both. the one who started you say sorry and ask the other one if he accepts. there are peace and they go. From upper primary to JhS, they are a little bit older, so of course, we believe they know what they are doing, then of course we must punish you. the punishment varies, picking litter after a break period, sweeping, emptying the bin into the main bin, and sometimes we make them walk around the compound and sing. They sing songs that will embarrass them to sing in front of the other.so here we have not talked about caning, because corporal punishment is out, of our system. there is no way we would use the cane on our child. even sometimes leaves, we ask them to clean all the dirty dots on the leaves, we may take 40 to 50 minutes of his time while his colleagues are having fun, but not as a distraction child.

Transcript: HoS1 interview. Jefferson version

- 2 sib [0:00:29] how do you define childhood, or a child
- 3 HoS [0:00:37] MMM a child[↑] i::s supposedly:: to be:: betwee::n >the ages of zero zero< at zero: years[↓] to[↑] (.) UMM (0.4) >19 years[↑] °a child°
- 4 sib [0:01:00] When you think of childhood is it the same period of time? or you think of a different process or concept"
- 5 HoS [0:01:20] with the childhood[↑]right from (.) age zero years (0.3) the mo[↑]ther >or[↑] (.) the parents take care of (.) >the child at the age< from zero years through (0.4) euhh (0.4) learning (.) >out to walk learning (.) how to speak[↑] and all that[↓] this time the child is (.) atta::ched (.) >to the parent<[↓] (word) (0.4) the child, starts going, to school[↑] these days in Ghana (.) at 3 year of a:ge (.) zero three[↓] three years, there is this creche[↓] (.) the chi:ld can the:n, be taken, away from parent, for a period of time[↓] (.) age that three years[↓] but it is still[↑] being the childhood process, (.) the child, gets to (.) KG level, (0.4) four years(.) and its sti::ll a >little< but still (.) >a little away from parents (.) BUT[↑]>at the end of the day he stays with parents[↓] still attached to parents (0.5) Ummm (.) teenage[↓] (.) age 13[↓] (.) >to 19< [↓] (.) are also::, (.) attached to pa:[↑]rents, (.) but[↑] not too much, >they they they they< have some form, of independence[↓] (.) YES[↓] >they have some form of independence, becau:se they are (.) >teenagers< but they still fa::ll (.) between the childhood, process[↓] becau:se the:se ages, pa:rents (.) parents, as it were, (0.4) tell them what to do[↓] parents are still re:sponsible, (.) for them[↓] (.) in wha::t[↑] e:ver:-decision:ns they make (.) SO, the childhood process (.) starts from zero yea::rs to (.) nineteen years [↓]
- 6 Sib Do you think young children have a mind of their own?
- 7 HoS [0:04:04] YES[↓] ze:ro to three year[↑] WELL (0.3) eve:ry human being[↓] as born[↓] (0.4) and (0.4) eve:ry hu:man has[↑] some >sense of matu:rity[↓] some le:vel[↑] of maturity (0.5)

>at that (word) that age, zero, to three years↓ (0.2) they a:ct on instinct so:: (.) euhh per
 their instincts ↑ that they sho:w- paren:ts a"re able to:- (.) >answer them<↓ (0.4) >age
 zero to three<↓ the child would cry↓ WHY↑ are you crying↑ >then of course there is
 something wr:ong<↓ (.) they would have soi::led his nappy↓ and he is >uncomfortable<↑
 he cries↓ mo:mmy (,) know there is something wrong↓ (.) if the child is sick↓ can't say(,)
 I am sick↓ (.) you know↓ but↑ (.) because of the instinct↑ would tell the mo:ther (,) grab
 the temperature rise ↑ and stu:ff↓like that ↓ so::↑ °that is (.) they act on in:stin::ct°↓ So
 (.) they have some sense (,) of maturity↓ (0.4) AGE↑ four ↑(,) to: say:: >eleven< age
 fou:r(,) to: say:: (.) >eleven< (.) >age four to eleven (.) this time↓ they can speak↓ SO once
 they can speak↓ they can say :what wo:rries (.) them↓ (.) and by so doing↑ parents are
 also↓ able to: (.) >understand them< ↓ and help them↓ (.) situate ↓ (04.) so they also
 have >a sense (.) a level< (.) of maturity↓ (.) because of the speaking↑ and the exchange↓
 THEN (,) from (.) thirtee:n (,) they:: °like° I said↓ they a::re >teenagers<
 and they: a:re (.) a little expo:sed (,) to their environment↓ (0.5) a
 teenager: (.) in Ghana for one can >decide to get food to eat< if he or she
 is hungry↓ whether: or not food is in the house or not↓ >may find
 something to eat↓ if she or he is hangry ↓there is anything to eat has a
 sense of maturity,. at that age they can deci:::de >certain things for
 themselves< ↓

