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Teaching Drama in Education in the University of Ghana: My perspectives about Ghanaian indigenous games

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ABSTRACT

This proposal reveals the significance of Applied Theatre in Ghana, with special interest in Drama in Education (DIE) as a teaching tool for teachers and learners. As a teaching tool, Drama in Education places tremendous emphasis on Process, Performance and Skill oriented activities to achieve its teaching and learning goals. The dramatic experiences derived from the improvisations; creative dramatics, mime, role-play and other Ghanaian indigenous art forms such as games, symbols, proverbs, storytelling, etc. in the learning explorations expedite transformation in learners. In these dramatic developments, creativity helps to improve not only learners but society as a whole. This paper aims at exhibiting some of the games employed in various sessions with students in the University of Ghana.

Introduction/Background

Drama in Education in focus in the University of Ghana

Traditional drama has evolved over the years and its uniqueness is still recognized the world over, yet, its revolution, evolution and innovations have extended into other areas. One of such variations is known as Applied Drama/Theatre. Theatre in Education (TIE) or Drama in Education (DIE) is seen as an umbrella under which most theatre courses reside. Once these theatre courses are taught and basic processes such as acting, directing and writing etc. are embedded in all its methods, they can generally be used as tools in education and can conveniently be classified as TIE or DIE.

Drama in education as a classroom-based methodology helps to elucidate difficult themes and concepts in other subject areas in order to make learning delightful. For instance, Games can be used as the technique to explicate concepts like multiplication, division and fractions in Mathematics to learners. Storytelling as a form can also be used for teaching the history of a country by demonstrating and enacting certain roles in order to gain more understanding of the historical antecedent of the said country. I have used varied indigenous processes such as games, proverbs, symbols etc. in my teaching explorations. This is because, I have realized there are a lot of uncharted territories in our indigenous settings that must be discovered. All these processes not only help to make learning enjoyable in a classroom situation, but also help to develop skills of concentration, imagination, spontaneity, and mental flexibility which are geared toward self-discovery and

development. In an environment where self-determination and choice are exploited to the fullest, the individual's full use of his/her creative faculties helps in self-expression and personal discovery and development. It must be noted that, these skills, techniques and processes are rooted in the Drama or Theatre.

According to Siks (1977) "The ultimate purpose of drama in education is to open the learner's minds, stimulate their imaginations and language abilities and spark their enthusiasm for continued development and personal discovery" (9–10). Learners form amazing images and ideas during creative playful moments. These creative images are strategically exploited for the purpose of education, development and problem solving. The games that have been explored in this context are not seen as warmup exercises but educative inclined activities.

Problem statement

Drama in Education as a process, performance and skill-oriented strategy aims at achieving at least one or all three strategies mentioned above in every activity explored. These activities may be very prevalent; such as creative dramatics and children's theatre, or very unpopular like indigenous Ghanaian games and symbols etc. After the **skill** for each strategy is learned, the eventual target is to make an impact on the learners through the **process**. It is therefore not prudent to rehearse games and wait for performance or **product**. Games are process-oriented strategy and are played spontaneously. These games were introduced to my classes to offer my students the opportunity to explore and practice other strategies that have the capacity to enhance their intellectual, emotional, social, cultural and even physical development. The students were taught the skills of the various creative activities both realistically and symbolically. These action methods offer them the chance to willingly work playfully and use the feedbacks to achieve creative breakthroughs by analyzing each game critically. The excitement after employing these games is to offer them a deep appreciation of discovery, initiative, empowerment, and self-esteem, and many life skills.

The activities avoid mechanical ways of impacting and acquiring knowledge. The passion for interventions for my Drama in Education students, therefore, help players and learners to become initiators and transformers in a world of consciousness and enablement. A world which can transform learners and teachers alike into independent minded people who can uniquely contribute their quota to humanity in their minutest ways as possible.

Research objectives

To explore creative ways of helping learners unearth their creative, critical and analytical minds; using various indigenous Ghanaian games.

To inspire learners and teachers to transform these childhood learning tools into other aspects of their lives to achieve empowerment, independence and development.

Justification

University students as adult learners are guided to play these indigenous Ghanaian games as children would do but are motivated to find out values, life skills and other benefits that can be derived both as learners and teachers. These University students are also seen as trainees

who in turn will go to the schools to do their final year projects. In other words, they are seen as trainer of trainers. In order to find successful ways of generating more workable solutions to everyday problems, we must explore as many creative modalities as possible. These games are introduced as process and skill-oriented teaching and learning strategies, which when documented will be relevant for present and future use in academia and in practice.

Methodology

Practice as research (PaR) or Performance based Research is the method I am adopting as I explore Ghanaian indigenous games as teaching tools for students and teachers. Apart from the four games played, namely; “**Kuraya-kuraya – Dagbani**,” “**Sansakroma – Akan**,” “**Dentse Gborana – Ewe**”, The stone game, “**Anhwe Akyire**,” Do not look back game: “**Ampe**” The jumping game: and “**Kyekyekule**” the rhythmic game for the parts of the body as illustrated below in [Figure 3](#). My students have played two other games as part of the practice and warm-up; they are **Mpempe**, the daring game and **7up**; a very popular energy game for warm-up created by the students. Students say what they have learned during each of the activities.

Historical context of indigenous Ghanaian games

It has been difficult to get the history behind the various games. In the Ewe land most games are played during festive occasions. Most festivals are harvest festivals in the Ewe land. For instance yam festivals, rice festivals or the sojourn festivals. During these festivals these games are played for recreation, competition and socialization. Most of these games are played by grownups because it is after harvest that they have time to enjoy themselves. Games that are played by children have no specific occasion. It is played as and when the children want to. In recent times the festivities and the games have been turned into development-oriented activities or fund-raising activities.

According to Asiedu (2023) graduate student department of Theatre Arts University of Ghana (unpublished material), the history of most games among the Akans in Ghana are rooted in mythologies. A myth about riddles, “Abisa” or ‘Agyareko are communicational games played by both young and old, male and female that test the cognitive ability of the participant. In this riddle, the Akans believed that God was closer to man but the activities of men drew him further away from the earth to the deep skies. This was due to the consistent pounding of Fufu, a delicious Akan meal, which involves pounding cooked Cassava and Plantain. During the process the pestle hit the sky (disrupting the peace of God). This made God levitate from the earth to the firmament. The myth concludes that the Akans now enjoy their Fufu without disrupting God almighty. The Akans believe in God Almighty hence he is referred to as father or Agya. God hid the treasure he left for man; thus man had to enquire or ask “bisa”, or “go and find out from elders”- Abisa-“go and ask what father left” Agyareko. One can only know the treasure if the person enquires and understands such indigenous forms as games, idioms, proverbs, symbols etc. most riddles about games therefore test the curiosity of participants and foster their critical thinking and analytical abilities.

Brief historical backgrounds have also been included.

My perspectives about the sociocultural context of teaching these Ghanaian indigenous games

Various processes in Drama in Education are employed as educational tools to achieve development, psychologically, sociocultural and politically either directly or indirectly in many ways. Games, which were most often seen only as recreation and distraction have been identified in recent times as unique educational strategy to help children and adult learners to attain progress. This exceptional method explored in Drama in Education which is liked by both children and adult learners has the capacity to teach endurance, perseverance contentment, sincerity and other important life skills.

Games have been accepted universally as a form entertainment; however, games offer more than just distraction. Games also offer users, enlightenment, reformation, inspiration, and healing.” As a source of teaching intervention, games explored for didactic purposes and are aimed at developing both children and adults socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically. Deh (2016). Students are encouraged to relate each game to everyday life and see the values that can be derived ultimately. Children may play these games just for the fun derived from them but students playing the same games are motivated to see beyond entertainment and express vividly the educational values; such as sincerity, courage, perseverance, contentment etc.

As stated by Boal (2002) “studying and using such techniques, exercises and games help students’ imagination, relaxation, concentration, observation and alertness etc.” Each game employed in this study with my students has a unique purpose whipping up their interest and allowing each person to say how the game imparted them as individuals.

Ampe – the jumping game

This is a game for girls. A minimum of two, play this game but during competitions, eight or ten children stand facing each other, or one stands facing the rest. Amidst clapping of hands as they jump, they toss forward a leg each at a time in the process. If the two jumpers’ legs become parallel, the initiator wins and earns a point but if there is a “diagonal meeting” of the legs the opponent wins. Whoever becomes the leader plays to the end if she is not beaten. The leader must always win with parallel legs while the opponent with diagonal legs. There are numerous songs sang to support the rhythmic jumping and clapping. One must consciously study the leg movements to be a winner all the time. Ampe is a very common game in Ghana. Sometimes, a form of punishment agreed upon by both groups is meted to the losers. In playing the game with my students, both males and females played. The illustration of the games as played by my students is illustrated below in [Figure 4](#). The males won the game this time around.

Description of Sansakroma and Ampe

The stone game ‘Sansakroma’

In this game, the entire group of players are asked to squat in a circle and each of them holding a stone, as they sing the song. Each player moves his/her stone to the anti-clockwise direction. In this game also, the tempo determines the success or failure of the game. When a player misses the rhythm and has more than one stone in front of him or her, he/she is

eliminated and the game re-starts. This is continued until a winner emerges. The ability of all players to move all the stones round with the same rhythm without any hitch is the fun derived from the game. Any song can be used depending on how fast or slow the leader wants the rhythm to go. A common Ewe song usually sung is “Dentse Gborna.” My students however, sang “Kuraya-kuraya,” a song in Dagbani, a language spoken in the Northern Region of Ghana. “Sansakroma” is the song sang among Akans. The illustration of the games as played by my students is illustrated below in [Figure 1](#).

Students input and perspectives about the games played in class

Ampe, Mpe Mpe and Kuraya Kuraya – Adalba Agana Nsiiri

I was born in Tamale, my early play days spanned through those days when children played outside more often than inside the house. My childhood had a significant feminine impact because I was raised around three older sisters and their friends until I started to form friend circles of my own. They were the ones who introduced me to Ampe. As demonstrated in the visual presentation, this game has elements of teamwork and opposition; when you are eliminated, all hope is not lost. Your team mates still stand a chance to make your side emerge the winners. This obviously helped to develop my ability to work with others as a team, went a long way to boost my confidence around the opposite sex because they were always the majority, and even fostered friendships that have stood the test of time. Beyond these it has sharpened my focus and my senses because it is played to a particular tempo and rhythm, and when you miss a beat it disrupts the entire game, therefore, you need to be focused at all times. My senses were also heightened to be able to spot which way my opponent was going with their foot even before I moved mine. This only worked out well sometimes since my opponent was also anticipating my moves. My favorite lesson from this game, however, has to do with how even losing turned out to be fun. It taught me not to be a sore loser.

By the time I reached adolescence I started to spend more time playing within my boy peers from school and also in my neighborhood. I had those friends I played games like Mpe Mpe with in school, and the ones around my home that I would play games like Kuraya Kuraya with. We enjoyed playing more physical games in school because we were actively practicing sports like soccer, volley ball, track racing and gymnastics already. We were mostly preoccupied with modern mainstream sports but one indigenous game that found its way through the cracks was Mpe Mpe. I believe it was because it involved a lot of running, which we were already used to. Since the loser of the game risked being beaten up unless he was able to touch the nearest tree, it was mostly boys who got involved in the actual playing of the game although the girls were not necessarily restricted from joining the chase. The chase could easily pass for a “home run” in an American Football game. The beating involved friendly smacks on the back which occasionally gets out of hand. Even then, nobody ever got hurt playing this game. The nature of the game sought only to reveal a loser and put him through the chase. There was no winner because we would simply keep placing our palms on top of each other’s until one person got it wrong, and after he touches a tree to end the chase, we would start all over again.

This game taught me to be courageous and take risks. The chase was fun when you were amongst the chasers, and it still managed to be exciting when you were the one being chased. There was always a sense of accomplishment whenever you managed to get to a tree

before anyone got to you, making you feel like a winner even though you lost. This aspect taught me that challenges always present the opportunity to push yourself in ways you have never done before.

I was fortunate to be in touch with the culture of the people of Tamale which, even today, is still a mixture of rural and urban settlements. As a result, I played in surrounding villages that were a walking distance from where I lived and this gave me the opportunity to speak the indigenous language, Dagbani very often. I learned the ways of typical Dagombas, and blended in like I was one of them. That was not so difficult because my own hometown was just a two-hour drive away, and we (Farafara) share a lot in common with Dagombas. Being in sync with their culture kept me in touch with mine.

One of the games that we often played was Kuraya Kuraya. As the game dictates, we had to sit around in a circle and pass rocks around until someone missed their turn. Sitting in the circle kept us as a unit and fostered love and a respect for one another. Passing the rocks to the music of the song sharpened our focus and coordination, singing along to the songs helped us develop multitasking abilities, and still being part of the game by singing for the others when you got eliminated taught us great sportsmanship. The greatest benefit that I derived from the game however is something that I only discovered recently as we revisited the game. I realized that we all chose the rocks with which we started the game. Those of us who deliberately chose bad rocks to make the game more difficult had to contend with the reality that those very rocks would eventually come back to impede us. In other words, choosing a good rock will help everybody, and choosing a bad one will affect everybody negatively; so, choose wisely.

Sansakroma, Anhwɛkyire, Mpempe and Seven-up- Xorlali Ofori-Parku

Sansankroma is a game involving participants seated in a circular form, and each person holds an object which will be passed around simultaneously according to the tempo of a song being sang. Each person is expected to place his or her object in front of the next person, and that person also places it in front of the person next to him/her.

The lesson I learnt whilst playing this game is about precision. I realized that during the circulation of our objects, the tempo of the song increased. And once that happened, some people who were finding it difficult to keep up with the pace began pushing the objects placed in front of them to the next person instead of lifting and placing the object in front of the person next to them. I observed that when the object is pushed, it sometimes doesn't get to a good place for the next person to grab it early enough; this usually slows the tempo or have multiple objects in front of the person. Thus, I learnt about how to be precise in lifting the object and placing it in front of the next person. Playing this game, precision helps us not to put others in tight corners or difficult situations. Because by lifting the object and placing it precisely in front of the next person, you make it easier for him/her to also move the object to the next. But when you hit or push the object to the next, it might make the person struggle or fumble to grab the object since it wasn't placed at a exact or convenient place for the person.

Anhwɛkyire is also a game played by participants in a circular form. In this game, all participants use only one object. One person holds the object and moves around, behind every participant whilst singing in a call and response fashion. The person going round decides to place the object behind one person of choice and that person is supposed to know somehow that an object has been placed behind him/her, without looking back. But when

the object remains behind the person undetected, whoever placed it behind him/her goes round and comes back to spank the fellow for not detecting the object behind him/her.

In this game, it is a rule not to look back to detect if the stone has been placed behind you, and yet you are supposed to know somehow, so as to pick it up and run before the person comes to spank you. In view of this, I think as a participant, one has to be vigilant. One has to use his/her peripheral vision by watching action through the sides of the eyes, without turning the head. Another smartness is passing your hand at your back to check if the object has been placed behind you. And by being aware of your environment in the game, you learn to be smart in life as well. In direct relation to life, one should not dwell too much on the past but rather learn from it to avoid similar challenges. The illustration of the games as played by my students is illustrated below in [Figure 2](#).

Seven-up. This is a game also played in circle where participants bend a little and transfer energy to the person beside them; either left or right. The energy is transferred by hitting either your left or right shoulder, depending on which direction you want to go. Whoever starts this process counts from one. The next person also decides which direction to transfer the energy and counts two. Whoever receives the energy does the same and counts three until it gets to seven where the person places either his right or left hand over his head (depending on his chosen direction) and says seven-up. I learnt about focus, decisiveness and direction. The game is played in a heated tempo, and this requires a great amount of focus to keep up with the counting which confuses a lot. The next part is being decisive about which direction to send the energy to. One must therefore be focused in life in order not to follow the crowd.

Mpembe. It is a game played by placing one's palm on top of other person's. When the first person stretches out his/her palm upwards, the next person is supposed to place his hand downwards. The next person continues by placing his palm upwards, on top of the previous person's. This pattern goes on as the tempo increases with singing until someone makes a mistake by going the other way. What I learnt from this game, apart from the focus and alertness is unity. This is a game involving physical touch, like building something together. We can't achieve anything together if we are not united. And by unity, we are supposed to have a common goal. That is why when someone makes a mistake, he or she is disciplined not to lose focus on the united goal of building something together.

The stone game – Edwina Boateng

Anyone visiting an Akan community like Ashanti, Eastern, Bono and Central regions on a normal day cannot fail to be impressed by the shouts and laughter of both the young and old in these indigenous societies. He or she is likely to see men, women, children and the like squatting with their hands on the floor. Drawing nearer, he or she will hear a song beginning with “Sansakroma.” This entertaining song goes with the game which is found among all the Akan people of Ghana and by extension some of those further inland. This is how the game is played; each player has a stone in his or her hand which is passed on from one person to the other while hitting it hard on the floor to form the rhythm that accompanies the Sansakroma song. The loser is the one who fails to pick up his or her stone quickly after it has been passed on to him or her. There are several lessons one can draw from this game. They include: attentiveness, smartness, socialization, teamwork and

caution. Many people and even introverts are able to socialize with other members of the community by this game. It only requires one to be present and involving. Focus or attentiveness is a key element in every one's life for success to be achieved. When anyone loses focus, that person is prone to make mistakes or miss their target. The players are supposed to work hand in hand to ensure the cycle or chain of the game. When one fails to pass on his or her stone, the cycle breaks. That is why it is expedient for each player to play their part by quickly moving his or her stone to the other person. This will make the game smooth and exciting. Sansakroma game entreats individuals to be cautious especially with the use of the stones. Any carelessness on the part of one player will lead to hurting him or herself or another person with the stone. No wonder everyone loves to play it.

"Kuraya-kuraya" – Abeayile Somme Pierre

One thing I learnt from playing the game was the art of evolving. I learnt that one must evolve and adapt to change. This is because as the game became intense, the tempo changed and so is life. So, I learnt that it's not always good to be narrowed sometimes we should be dynamic depending on the circumstance.

Sansakroma, Anhweakyire – Arnold Annan

Participating in games such as Sansakroma, Anhweakyire and other indigenous games was the highlight of the semester for me. The games were enjoyable and thought provoking and there were real lessons to be learnt from the process. Playing these games made me consider the fact that in life, no one is guaranteed a state of permanence. So, one must make the most of the opportunity available any moment. To avoid being a victim, players must be alert and focused. You would be forced to pay a price the moment you lose concentration. Everyone

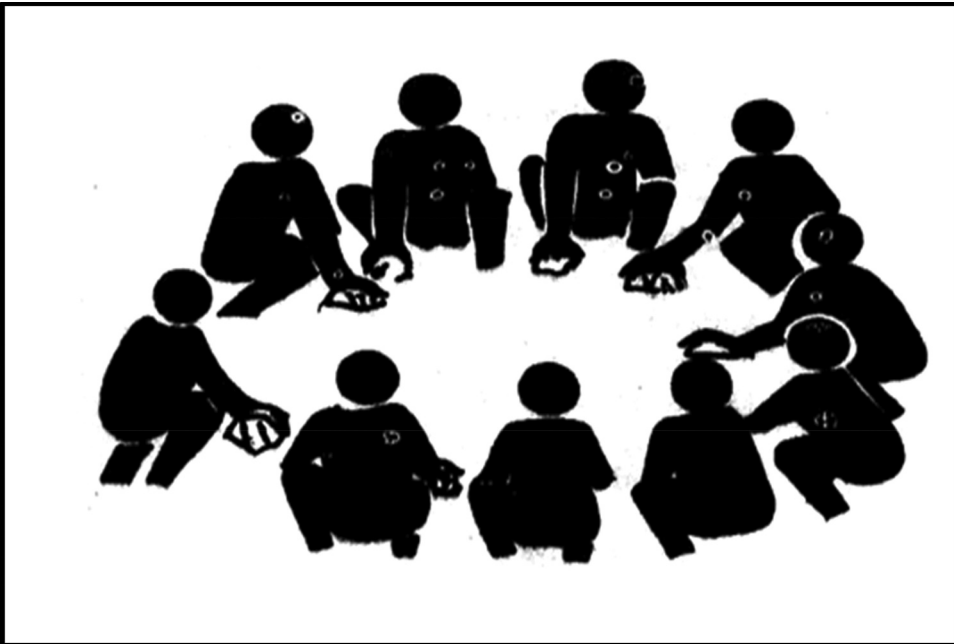


Figure 1. "Sansakroma" the stone game.

wants to win in life, therefore, being focused, sharp and attentive is your yardstick to succeed. Again, the game is entertaining so if one gets carried away by that, he or she falls. So as happy and jolly as you are while playing, you're in the same way trying not to get caught up in the mix. Some players will ultimately succeed while others will fail. When you win, the next step is to try to hold onto that position which entails finding more creative ways to always come out on top. Those on the other hand will have to learn from their

ANHWE AKYIRE

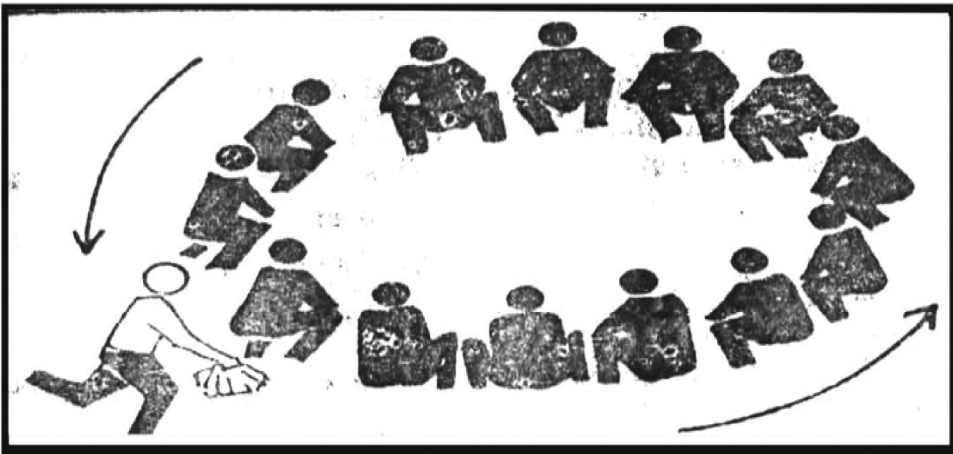


Figure 2. "Anhwe Akyire" Do not look back.

KYEKYEKULE

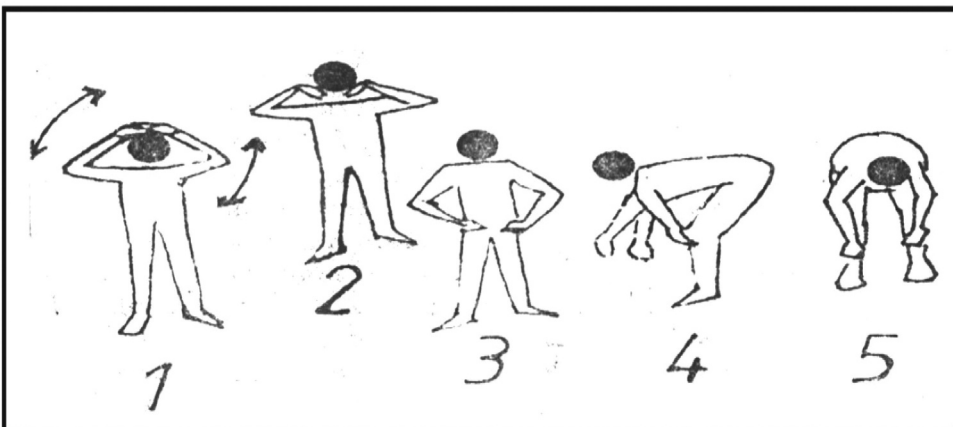


Figure 3. "Kyekyekule" the rhythm game.

AMPE (THE JUMPING GAME)

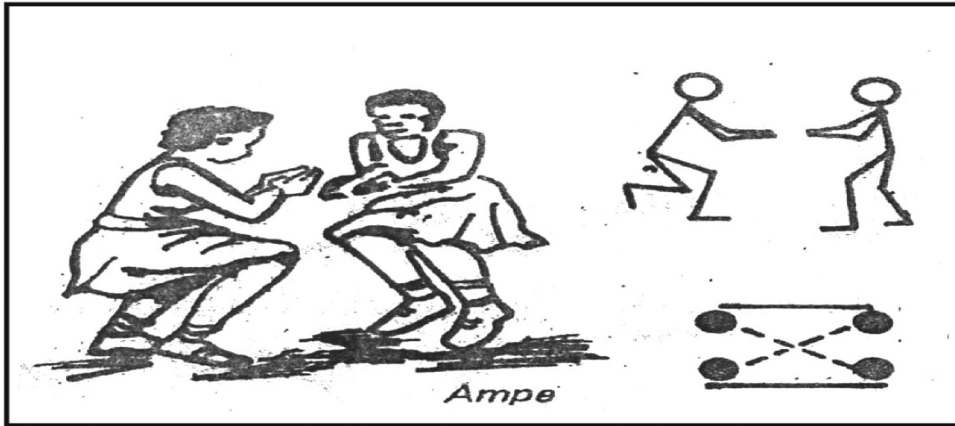


Figure 4. Ampe – the jumping game.

mistakes and keep their heads up for the next opportunity. So just as in life, losing the game is said to be a bad day and not a bad life you can always make amends and do better.

Student contributions have been included as seen above.

Below are links to videos of young people playing the games described above:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/16zZOMkdRqiQSFhcPSask8WnsCyaZvyN4/view?usp=sharing>

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1K8n8HhkDh5P2aVsMk9TjjDTpMKEx4duR/view?usp=sharing>

Conclusion

Exploring these games in my Drama in Education classes is to offer my students the opportunity to explore and practice other strategies that have the capacity to enhance their intellectual, emotional, social, cultural and even physical development. The students were guided to participate in the various creative activities both realistically and symbolically to arrive at solutions. These action methods offer them the chance to willingly work playfully and use the feedbacks to achieve creative breakthroughs by analyzing each game critically. The excitement after employing the creative arts is the appreciation of a deep sense of discovery, initiative, empowerment, and self-esteem, contentment, and many life skills.

Drama in Education has the capacity to speak on the widest range of issues using all the dramatic forms available. One can use playwriting, directing; stage and screen plays, dance and music, visual art and also penetrate in other fields. Rubin (1987) puts it right, “there are many paradigms and more than one lens through which to view our complex world” (317). Drama and its affiliate processes work together to achieve the desired goals. An eclectic approach to doing things is what I propose. This is because the arts have not been detached from our daily lives, they have made genuine inroads. Art forms such as myths, games, stories and proverbs have survived

and flourished because of their continuing relevance, adaptability and dependence on our constant use. These art forms therefore have become viable tools for education, empowerment, and inspiration.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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