

Integrating an oral literature pedagogical model into the Nigerian school system: The Freirean imperative

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Abstract

Advancement in life requires knowledge and understanding of the environment, knowledge systems and ethno-historical antecedents of one's culture. Education and knowledge acquisition is therefore concerned with the study of being or ontology. Africans and those interested in African studies therefore need knowledge of African world view and cosmology which is encapsulated in the Oral narratives of African peoples. There is, as such, a need to educate African children at an early age to recognize the importance of African culture and to maintain and propagate it. This paper therefore focuses on an examination of the relevance of Paulo Freire's popular education pedagogical model with a view to determine how it can aid or enhance acquisition of knowledge about Africa and Africans. It argues that the pedagogical model emphasizes liberation which will ensure the freedom of the African psyche from dependency on Eurocentric paradigms for interpreting reality to enable Africans acquire and emphasize knowledge about African languages, environment and culture. The paper therefore concludes that integrating African Oral literature into the school system, the Kenyan style, as a core curriculum will go a long way in enhancing the teaching of African knowledge systems which will not only ensure the liberation of our enslaved mentalities but will, as well, invigorate studies in African culture and environment necessary for the sustenance of African identity and personality.

Keywords: Integration, pedagogy, Oral literature, popular education, liberation, cultural education, African knowledge systems and African languages.

1. Introduction

In my paper titled *Orality, Literacy and Pedagogical implications in traditional African societies: the Bakor experience in Cross River State* (Ganyi 2014a), I advocated for the adoption of a pedagogical model based on the content of African Oral literature as the best approach for the impartation of African knowledge systems to African children in our educational institutions because the present educational policy focuses on the acquisition of literacy skills to the detriment of cultural knowledge about African traditional life and philosophy. In *The Word as Event in Oral Discourse: The Meaning and importance of Story Telling Performance Contexts in Bakor Society* (Ganyi 2014b) ^[12], I again demonstrated how the performance context can become an active discourse forum in the hands of an accomplished artist that enhances participatory discourse to enliven action and the portrayal of prescribed norms and behavioral patterns in traditional society. And in my recent paper on proverbial lore (Ganyi 2015b) ^[12], I argued for the proper view and analysis of Oral literature particularly proverbs, not as fossils but as dynamic and contemporary artistic endeavors that are relevant to modern society. My position here is that instead of erroneously emphasizing the view of oral narratives' obsolescence, we should shift grounds and focus instead on their relevance to modern society and how they contribute to the moderation of ethical standards even in today's globalized context. My reasons for the emphasis on contemporaneity are obvious; that in today's technologically driven world, the impact of technological advancement on traditional forms of education and cultural sustenance is so devastating that our traditional modes of perception of the environment and cosmic

belief systems or philosophy are seriously endangered through gradual erosion giving way to a literacy dominated and oriented universe that cares little or not at all for African values, morality and ethics.

What I aim at in this paper therefore, is a synthesis of these postulations and an advocacy for the integration of an oral literature based pedagogical method of knowledge impartation based on the Freirean model of popular education pedagogy. The intention here is to espouse a positive view and analysis of oral literature through the introduction of Oral literature into the Nigerian school system that will adequately cater for the implantation and impartation of African knowledge to younger generations to sustain an African identity and personality profile that is currently in danger of extinction. This is borne out of the fact that in Nigeria today, very few institutions emphasize the study of African Oral literature while at the primary and secondary levels, there is currently; no attempt whatsoever to introduce young pupils to their own literatures and culture. Even the age-old method of story-telling at the primary levels that used to generate interest in young pupils while exposing them to their own traditional ways of life have now been expunged from the school curriculum and replaced with what is now known as social studies that is again teacher oriented and de-emphasizes participant interaction that is peculiar to oral or story-telling performance contexts. What is prevalent today is a teacher- oriented pedagogy where the teacher feeds the pupils who become silent receivers of doctored messages as against modern day advocacy for an educational emphasis on participatory methods which develop the pupils' critical sense and liberates their potential for criticism and dialogue to contribute to their own knowledge of

their environment. The result is that Nigerian children today, particularly in urban environments, know next to nothing about their traditional environment and culture, talk less of traditional etiquette. Even at the higher or tertiary school levels, many students come face to face with oral literature for the first time when they are lucky to gain admission. In the University of Calabar, Nigeria, for instance, where a sustained Oral literature program exists and students in the Faculties of Arts, Education and Law are “privileged” to offer Oral literature as a course, many find it strange and incomprehensible while the sensitive and perceptive ones are dismayed that such a course as Oral literature exists. Many therefore ask why they were not earlier exposed to the discipline, at least, at secondary level. Even when they immediately see the usefulness of Oral literature in all spheres of their lives, their earlier up-bringing and grounding in literacy skills and Western paradigms of perception of the universe prevents them from immediately comprehending the concept and essence of Oral literature. They are more at home with what is written, not what is imparted orally.

The lack of emphasis on Oral literature as a major means of instruction on African knowledge systems has therefore necessitated this attempt to examine the usefulness of the Freirean popular education pedagogical model to see how it can be adopted and adapted into the Nigerian school system to sustain a fusion of Oral literature into the syllabus of every discipline for instruction on African knowledge systems. The Humanities and Social Sciences will perhaps find no difficulty in this but I daresay even the Sciences can easily achieve the same goal because there is a framework of African philosophy of Science based on the concept of “Ntu-ology” or the universal oneness of man and nature which translates to the African philosophy of “Ubuntu” or collective existence. (See Asar Imhotep: 2012) ^[21].

One therefore has at the background of all these, the usefulness of Oral literature because it easily lends itself for address to emergent societal issues even in today’s globalized contexts of literacy and technological advancement. Technology will, indeed, be brought to the service of Oral literature as contextual performances can now be recorded and played back in classroom environments in the attempt to facilitate positive societal growth and ethical rejuvenation. Such performance contexts can be seen to foster interaction and societal cohesion therefore integrating Oral literature into the Nigerian school system will provide adequate teaching and learning contexts of interaction that will enable teachers impart African knowledge to younger generations. Younger generations will also be better disposed to the diversity of their cultural heritage which will help them develop positive attitudes to their cultural values and attempt to stem extreme bastardization.

In the infusion of Oral literature as a pedagogical model into the Nigerian school system, the Kenyan example is very pertinent and invaluable. Here Oral literature in Kiswahili has been integrated into the Kenyan school system and though wrought with initial difficulties of inadequate instructional materials and student/teacher attitude to the discipline, the attempt still holds promise for the inculcation of the right cultural attitude in Kenyan pupils that can enhance the spirit of patriotism in up-coming generations of Kenyan children. (See Koross C. Rachel: 2014) ^[23]. The Kenyan experiment, it is believed by government, will adequately “aid the propagation and preservation of indigenous culture... which will allow

people to develop their talent and at the same time contribute to the development of the creative industry.” (Jacob Kaimenyi: 2013) ^[22].

The usefulness of the oral literature based pedagogical model to be implemented under the aegis of the Freirean popular education pedagogical model is therefore, succinctly captured in Henry Giroux’s summation about the Freirean concept in which Giroux states that

Any pedagogy that calls itself Freirean must acknowledge this key principle that our current knowledge is contingent on particular historical contexts and political forces. For example, each classroom will be affected by the different experiences students bring to the class, the resources made available for classroom use, the relation of governance bearing down on teacher-student relations, the authority exercised by administrations regarding the boundaries of teacher autonomy, and the theoretical and political discourses used by teachers to read and frame their responses to the diverse historical, economic, and cultural forces informing classroom dialogue.

Adopting an oral performance interactive context will allow students to bring their knowledge and experiences of their cultural environments to bear on classroom discussions which can result in the comprehension of reality and collective provision of solutions to complex existential problems peculiar to their African environment.

The Relevance of Oral Literature in the School System

I. Mirambo (2006) ^[24] emphasizes the relevance of Oral literature to the Sukuma people of Tanzania when he posits that it re-enforces their culture and ways of life while enhancing growth as defined by societal expectations. Oral literature therefore embodies the totality of a particular community’s cultural values, cosmic beliefs, philosophy and history. Asangba Reginald also opines that

1. Before the advent of Europeans every existing African community had its own means of education. Like the Kasena, the world view of most communities is inextricably woven into the fiber of their oral traditions. Kasena oral traditions express beliefs, values, ideas and other socio-cultural negotiations that depict their philosophy of life...oral traditions embody the sense of time, place and identity of the Kasena [and I’d add all Africans] in this multi-cultural world. The ways and manner to practice good hygiene and conserve the environment is embedded in proverbs, whereas the code of conduct and several other social negotiations are carried in folktales and puzzles. However, in the wake of globalization and its attendants such as Christianity, formal education and rural-urban migration...the role and purpose of Kasena [and African] oral traditions have taken a down turn. Ngalim Banfega, in his own stead adds that
2. ...stories and proverbs are metaphors to guide moral choice and self-examination. They are mirrors for seeing things in a particular way. They serve as pedagogic devices [and are] a significant tool for teaching values that guide children’s concrete behavior in society.
3. However, this rich African cultural heritage is very often subsumed in favor of an emphasis on Western literacy over and above traditional knowledge acquisition making

Emevwo A. Biakolo (1999) ^[4] to re-iterate that the two modes of expression ie oral and written are simply

4. Cognate concepts in the field of verbal communication... [which] embodied a change in the psychological pre-conditions of the act and process of communication. In other words, it resulted in alterations in the organization and operation of the human consciousness.

The argument here is that literacy has not and does not endow the West or Europeans with any position of superiority over Africans and African cultures that emphasize orality as a predominant mode of expression. Ruth Finnegan (2007) ^[9] therefore aptly asserts that the erroneous conception of Orality as inferior to literacy in artistic creation and realization is untenable because even Homer's epics are universally acclaimed as great artistic works. She further observes that poetry and drama genres of literature thrive more on performance and oral rendition than when read in isolation. She finally concludes that

Those socialized in the Western educational tradition are so accustomed to associate the written word with print that we tend to forget that the mere fact of writing does not necessarily involve the type of detachment and relatively impersonal mode of transmission that we often(perhaps wrongly) connect with printing.(p 90).

These postulations underlie the invaluable position oral literature occupies in the lives of African peoples and the need for its integration into the formal educational system to enhance the teaching of African values which, as at now, is on the low ebb. This is because Africa still emphasizes Orality as a prevalent mode of education and perception of the environment and only a negligible proportion of the African population have acquired western literacy and values while the rural majority still depend on Orality as the major means for address to the younger generations and the entire African world.

In furtherance of the argument, Jean and John Comaroff (1993) ^[8] have also observed that early anthropologists believed that

Modernizing social forces and material forms would have the universal effect of eroding local cultural differences. [However] conquered and colonized societies were not made over in the European image and instead, maintained their own identities. Despite colonizers attempts to give the local people European values and ideals, this was largely unsuccessful as the locals often continued with their own traditions, beliefs and ways of understanding the world. Therefore it is evident that the world has not been reduced to sameness, but instead remains plural with many cultural variations.

This strong postulation exactly underlies the argument of this paper; that if African people cannot be completely made over to shed their oral heritage despite "assimilation," to become literate all at once; and if Africans must continue to maintain an identity and personality as Africans, as it seems inevitable, and which identity is enshrined in the African philosophy of "Ubuntu" or communal consciousness foisted on and sustained by Orality which emphasizes inter personal interaction; then Africans must develop a pedagogical model suitable for the maintenance of that identity and based on Oral literature which

as at now, it seems, sustains African modes of expression, African values and African philosophy that is peculiar and integral to the African environment. The advantages of this are numerous and can be identified to include among others, enablement of Africans, particularly younger generations, to acknowledge and accept the positive content of their own culture and identity as Africans. This will, in turn inculcate in them, a sense of patriotism and nationhood that will help them assess their own contributions to our democratic experiment and to the global economic system while developing a sense of national pride in the Nigerian nation.

It is also central to the concerns of this paper that the present Nigerian educational system emphasizes formal literacy education over and above education in traditional African values which only furthers the erosion of African culture. This is precisely why John Pepper-Clark (1965) referred to the educated African or elitist Africans as "a reed in the tide," tossed about without any foothold on a culture of his own. He is neither African nor European.

Pearl Hunt (2007) ^[20] on his part argues that the content of the discourses of western epistemologies "reveal the subtle dominance of western culture and western misunderstanding of the African," while Stephen Hicks (2004) ^[19] caps it up by asserting that the modern concept of education is NOT to "train a child's cognitive capacity for reason in order to produce an adult capable of functioning independently in the world," but rather "to take an essentially indeterminate being and give it a social identity,[therefore] the language to be used is that which will create a human being sensitive to its racial, sexual and class identity." Hicks therefore concludes that in Africa today

...our current social context however, is characterized by oppression that benefits whites, males and the rich at the expense of everyone else.

Today, formal education emphasizes teaching that fits out the individual for competition and survival in a modern capitalist market economy that de-emphasizes culture and common values education in favor of material wealth acquisition at the expense of ethics and respect for the human person. The formal education curriculum therefore centers on acquisition of knowledge and academic examination skills to the utter neglect of socio-cultural and historical goals of education which aim at giving "an indeterminate being a social identity" that raises his consciousness about his being within his socio-cultural environment and his contributions towards the upliftment of that environment. This explains the level of corruption in the Nigerian society today. We fish but we do not replenish. Furthermore, Oral literature enables us to look backwards and try to gain knowledge of the diversity and plurality of the African continent. This knowledge will enhance a more positive image and self-confidence in what is uniquely African and enables us to better understand and tolerate one another as we realize that our diversity can in fact be a source of strength. Particularly, in Nigeria, knowledge of our diversity, through knowledge of the oral narratives of our different ethnic communities, will enable us to tolerate one another and understand how to interact and integrate our cultural differences for positive gains. A. C. Okafor (2004) ^[28] therefore argues that Oral literature is a vital requirement in our educational system

...because Oral literature is common among various African communities, it is the best approach for instilling relevant citizenship competencies.

On her part, Koross C. Rachel opines that the appreciation of different cultures through Oral literature

...enables us to effectively deal with our problems by learning from other cultures. Secondly, it promotes the inherent worth of each person and interest in the well-being of the society.

One recognizes therefore, that these goals must be clearly articulated or outlined in a curriculum that emphasizes the inculcation of African values in our educational system. The curriculum must be made to focus on traits that uplift cultural achievement of ethical and moral standards while upholding the African concept of communal existence which Orality demands and upholds in communicative discourse. Asar Imhotep (2012) ^[21] points out the whole motive of a culture based curriculum development exercise when he argues that it

...is about developing a centralized methodology and framework for recognizing phenomena, demonstrating the relationship between and categorizing these relationships in a way that can be used as a pedagogical tool in all stages of learning...in African/African-American based learning institutions...In other words, this is about education and education, as well as curriculum development are cultural phenomena. We aim, not to simply “infuse” culture into the curriculum, but to make our culture THE curriculum.

This cultural curriculum, if properly co-ordinated under the Freirean popular education pedagogical model and sustained by our oral narratives will as well address the weaknesses of our students in ethical value-judgment. The curriculum will therefore address such issues as

- a) Patriotism, national dignity and interests
- b) Cultural diversity and consciousness of identity
- c) Awareness of traditional African cultures
- d) Development of national consciousness or spirit of nationalism
- e) Development of linguistic and ecological awareness
- f) Respect for others based on age or seniority
- g) Respect for corporate existence and/or identity
- h) Development of a sense of social responsibility
- i) Development of a sense of environmental protection
- j) Emphasis on a conscious effort at learning about one's nation, history and ethnic differences
- k) Inculcation of a sense of social justice, civil rights and obligations
- l) Obedience of state laws and statutes and
- m) Development of a democratic sense in the nation.

These will then be built into modules that will be integrated into the syllabuses and spread across the entire school system from primary to tertiary levels to invigorate the study of oral narratives and knowledge systems. In all of these, however, one is constantly aware that the biggest and most challenging obstacle to address is the question of language on which cultural education depends.

The Role and Relevance of Language in an Oral Literature Based Pedagogical Model

In the advocacy for introduction of an Oral literature based pedagogical model that will ensure that African knowledge systems are adequately captured in our educational curriculum, one must recognize the role language has to play in the set up. This is very important because the vogue in Nigeria today is to dispatch children off to formal schooling at a very tender age usually as soon as the child can recognize others. The child is at once plunged into a system that emphasizes acquisition of literacy skills and learning literary concepts and western modes of perception. Hardly does the child have an opportunity to be immersed in and educated in his/her own traditional mother tongue precepts and cultural values. The result is that the child learns western ways and becomes versed in western seasons with a corresponding lack of knowledge about Africa and African or Nigerian seasons. Yet we are all aware that language is the pivot around which all cultural knowledge revolves and so acquisition of a foreign language at this early stage also implies acquisition of a foreign conception of values and ethics. Asar Imhotep therefore avers that

1. ...it is a people's language that crystalizes the organization of the structures of the universe and a people's educational structure is reflective of how they see the universe. A people's language is its soul and character. The ideas behind the words used in association with certain phenomena can tell you a lot about how they see themselves in relation to said phenomena[and their relationship to others in the universe they inhabit]... All of these philosophies are imbedded in the language and it is our perception of the environment around us, channeled through our language and culture, which shapes our behavior and attitudes towards that environment and the life inside of it.
2. This has also led Ericka Albaugh (2009) ^[1] to observe that When we think of a child's first exposure to formal education, most of us do not consider the language he/she will hear when taught. We assume it will be a language that the child understands. [Therefore], historically,...governments have had no qualms about plunging children into an unfamiliar linguistic environment and expecting them to absorb a new language through immersion. This is the traditional European model, where a common language used in education was intended to bind disparate groups speaking numerous languages into a cohesive national unit.

Incidentally, this is the European bequeathal to African states and, until recently, has hardly been questioned by African states in the formulation of educational policies. But we are not now intent on forcing unity on our disparate groups; rather we speak of “unity in diversity”, which means a recognition of our distinctness and corresponding recognition of what each group can offer the other and the world is a better option for global advancement. This way no culture will be decimated. The West must therefore jettison the idea of decimation which they set out to achieve in the disguise of bringing “civilization” to primitive peoples and, instead, heed Jean and John Comaroff's postulation that the world will remain plural with many cultural variations. In this diversity, the relevant questions to ask are: Does the western concept of a unitary world favor or benefit

Africa?; and Is it adequate for Africa and Africans as a race to lose her identity and culture?

The argument in favor of an alien language as a national language because of our diverse linguistic heritage, does not therefore, hold water. Linguistic diversity can be a source of unity and strength if properly channeled because it is said that actions speak louder than words therefore I have argued in another paper that our festivals and other such cultural performances can be made to communicate cultural messages that will bring about unity and cohesiveness (see Ganyi: 2015a). An alien language will continue to fit out African children in “borrowed robes” that never really fit, which also accounts for our inability, in Nigeria, to understand and tolerate one another. The slogan “unity in diversity” will only become relevant when we start to teach Nigerian and African children our traditional ways of life and our culture beginning with our traditional languages that carry the culture as noted by Imhotep. The more we continue to produce younger generations of Nigerians and African children steeped in Western culture and values, the more the drift and the wider remains the gap between tolerance and understanding of one another because we lack the basic knowledge of systems that emphasize collectivism as against individualism.

With this in mind, perhaps it will be more appropriate to beat a retreat to the 1920/21 Phelps/Stokes commission recommendations for education in colonial territories which succinctly specified that

...every people have an inherent right to their native tongue [therefore] tribal languages should be used in the lower elementary standards or grades...a lingua franca of African origin should be introduced in the middle classes of the school if the area is occupied by large native groups speaking diverse languages.

Unfortunately even this recommendation is not feasible in Nigeria today because political exigency and attitudinal barriers have prevented the training of mother tongue teachers to man schools at the local levels. If this were possible, it would enhance the re-introduction of storytelling into the lower grade curriculum to enhance the re-education of Nigerian children into their traditional cultural environment. The Freirean concept of popular education pedagogy would then be useful at the higher or tertiary level where it will enhance the teaching of Oral literature to build on the foundations laid at the lower levels. Emphasizing the importance of language in cultural assertion Abdul Karim Bangura posits that

African languages shall therefore, be at the centre of developing our knowledge sites. Language, as Amilcar Cabral rightly pointed out, is at the centre of articulating a people’s culture. He also stated that African liberation would have been impossible without African people resorting to their cultures to resist domination...It is because language has remained an “unresolved issue” in African development that present day education has remained an alien system.

Oral Literature and the Freirean Concept of Popular Education Pedagogy

Asar Imhotep (2012) quotes Cicero as asserting that

...there is very little that is more important for any people to know than their history, culture, traditions and language; for without such knowledge one remains naked and defenseless before the world

This is exactly what Africa and Africans are to the world today, “naked and defenseless” and open to intellectual and even physical occupation by other cultural philosophies and peoples, yet Africa has a lot in terms of philosophy and world view to offer the world. Talking about this, Imhotep, in enunciating the concept of (NTU-OLGY) as a framework for advancing the organization of Africana studies opines that

In order for Ntu-ology to be part of the cultural reality of [Africa] and African-American people, it must be the core curriculum in our educational institutions. The core curriculum is a program of studies in which a number of courses are unified by and subordinated to a central theme.

My advocacy therefore, is for Oral literature to be introduced as a core curriculum using the Freirean concept of popular education pedagogy as a base. This will enable Oral literature to be taught in all disciplines under the central theme AFRICAN CULTURAL STUDIES, to cater for the teaching of African knowledge systems at all levels of our educational system.

Emphasizing the necessity for cultural studies for African and African-American peoples as a means of raising identity consciousness, Dr. Amos Wilson asserts that

...culture is a social machine, a power grid or system. It is a holistic system which is composed of a number of sub-systems which are organically related to each other...Culture is simply the way by which a population solves its problems and meets the challenges of its environment.

Therefore knowledge of African values embedded in our Oral literatures will aid the Nigerian and African population “solve its problems and meet the challenges of its environment.”

In espousing the Freirean concept of popular education pedagogy one notes Lee Haring’s (2008) postulation that

Psychology and Oral literature studies, as communities, have been lost to each other because cognitive science, concentrating on its chosen region of the individual’s mind-body, turned away from the communicative interaction of persons. Oral literature studies, like anthropology, chose to overlook the cognitive study of language.[However],bringing the fields back together will provide a theory of expressive culture and help explain creativity.

It is therefore, for this reason specifically that Olson and Bruner (1996) ^[29] aver that since cultures differ and there exist a variety of approaches to pedagogy; within this cultural diversity,

...we need an anthropology of pedagogy...we need much more knowledge about the relation between folk

psychology and folk pedagogy in different settings and different historical periods.

Having come out of a long period of political colonization, African states should now struggle to come out of ideological, educational, and economic colonization. Africans, and particularly Nigerians, need a new educational policy and a new concept of pedagogy that will enhance the articulation of a unique identity and position Africa towards positive contributions to global advancement. In this sphere, Nydia Gonzalez (2007) ^[17] asserts that

Pedagogy, as a social phenomenon, is conditioned by sociological, historical and political or economic experiences of a community that identifies the need for a particular kind of pedagogical model that best serves their aim for education.

If, therefore, Africans desire an identity and personality, then a pedagogical model that will free them from the shackles of imperialism and neo-colonialism is necessary and desirable. The model has to be unique and based on the African concept of collective existence and must cater for the impartation of knowledge about African culture and knowledge systems. Let us now examine the tenets and relevance of the Freirean concept of popular education pedagogy to see if it has the potential for sustenance of a core curriculum on the content of Oral literature study.

The Freirean concept of popular education is attractive because it addresses itself to pedagogy of liberation. It is also attractive in the light of the knowledge that the pedagogy of western formal education, with its emphasis on literacy, starts by discrediting and eroding vestiges of African culture and attempting to replace these with Western values and modes of perception. The process therefore de-Africanizes the African. To attempt to re-Africanize him, we must focus on the content of Oral literature and integrate this into the syllabuses of all disciplines of our tertiary institutions as a core curriculum and this can best be achieved through the popular education model which attempts to solidify the Africanisms in us by sensitizing us to our cultural responsibilities. In expounding the popular education pedagogical model, Paulo Freire (2000) ^[10] denounced traditional or formal education which he saw as an instrument of oppression because it emphasizes the role of the teacher as a representative of the ideological institution that develops the pedagogical model for the infusion of her ideologies into the minds of the oppressed recipients. In this model therefore, the perpetrator of the ideology is the power that dictates what the recipient hears and receives. The pedagogical model in our educational system in Nigeria today does not allow for participatory interaction, which is what Western powers, through their neo-colonial policies, fed and are still feeding African states with. The African recipient is as such, only a captive, passive, receptive and silent beneficiary, not determinant of what he wants to eat. He is fed by the ideologue who utilizes the school system as the state apparatus for the propagation and sustenance of his ideology.

To Freire, therefore, western traditional education will naturally play down popular education which is sustained by Orality and Oral narratives that contain the seeds of our ontology and cosmology. Oral literature within the popular education pedagogical model is desirable because it projects

the participatory mode of communication and interactive discourse which sharpens the critical instincts of the participators and releases the potentials of the participants to benefit from the interaction. Teaching African children African value systems through Oral literature and the popular education model has the potential to liberate their minds from the slavery of western concepts to focus on African values hitherto discredited as primitive and backward. From this perspective pedagogy connects learning to social change that can challenge people and students to critically examine their conditions and initiate positive action towards bettering their lot in life.

The participatory potential of Oral performance contexts approximates to the popular pedagogical method which Freire informs us is

...a problem solving concept of education as an instrument for liberation that involves a new relationship between teacher and student. The new relationship is one in which both teacher and student learn and teach[each other] simultaneously, mediated by a world in which reality is neither fixed nor comprised of separate pieces.

It is therefore, to prevent this sharpening of the critical instinct and prepare the African for silent acquiescence that western formal education is modeled to abhor and prevent by discouraging any form of participatory interaction. In Oral literature, particularly in dilemma tales, as in popular education, the interactive performance context enhances comprehension of reality which requires learners and teachers to identify the problem and collectively work towards eliminating same for the enhancement of societal growth. This way both student and teacher sharpen their intellect and instincts. Western formal education, on the other hand, condemned Oral literature and African values and implanted alien values that broke down when faced with peculiar African problems emanating from a unique African environment. As a counterpoint to the western world-view, the African world of Oral literature is a universe of Orality which sees the world as a unified entity and all the creatures interacting at different levels of existence for the enhancement of cohesion and societal harmony. The universe of Oral literature confronts the learning child with dilemmas at childhood to which the child responds by generating, according to Gonzalez, (2007) ^[17]

...a process of searching and unmasking (reality) which informs him and which does not evade the complexity of the practice itself but places science at the service of the practice.

Oral literature, like the popular education pedagogical model, emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge in a pleasant atmosphere. The centrality of oral performances is aesthetics on which all performances thrive. Without beauty or pleasantness of performance, there is no Oral literature. Aesthetically rendered performances, therefore, enhance the impartation and reception of cognitive experience.

Oral literature hinges on performer/audience interactive relationship which encourages interpersonal understanding. This also approximates to the Freirean concept of dialogic action as an instrument for liberation which bears out the importance of dialogue in the pedagogy of liberation and supports the utilization of Oral literature as a base for educating

young Africans on an awareness of the need for a conscious attempt to imbibe African values and identity. The African continent requires this type of pedagogy for African development as a mass mobilization strategy for the liberation of Africa and Africans from century's old Western dominated educational philosophies.

Paulo Freire informs us that the oppressive class prefers formal education to popular because any advocacy for a pedagogical model that is perceived to be able to raise the consciousness of people towards liberation will be resisted, played down or completely discredited. He warns that

...it would be naïve for us to hope that the dominant classes, for whom school is perceived as an institution that serves to perpetuate their system and secure their power, would adopt a critical, consciousness raising methodology that unmasks their limits. For them to do so would be the same as digging their own graves.

As proof of its efficacy or potency, it is pertinent to point out that the experiment of the popular education pedagogical model, with its base as critical pedagogy was tested and worked effectively in South Africa when members of the radical Leftist Teachers League of South Africa employed it with a focus on non-racialism in Cape Town schools and prisons.

Acknowledging the legacy of Paulo Freire to the educational sector, Henry A. Giroux (2010) ^[15] asserts that the popular education pedagogical model within which Freire espoused critical pedagogy is

The educational movement guided by both passion and principle to help students develop a consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, empower the imagination, connect knowledge and truth to power, and learn to read both the word and the world as part of a broader struggle for agency, justice and democracy...His example is more important now than ever before with institutions of public and higher education increasingly under siege by a host of neoliberal and conservative forces, it is imperative for educators to acknowledge Freire's understanding of the empowering and democratic potential of education;[in particular cultural education.]

The advocacy in this paper therefore, is for Oral literature conferences to provide the fora for an in-depth examination of what the school curricula of African educational institutions contain and evaluate same along with the popular education pedagogical model based on available cultural data from different communities with the view to drawing up a pedagogical model that will emphasize the impartation of African cultural values and knowledge systems to African children in our school system. The development of an Oral literature based pedagogical model will raise the consciousness of young generations of Nigerian in particular and African children generally towards identifying their values to yield truths about our existence in our environment and articulate our contributions to the universal growth of humanity. Africa has a lot to offer to the world as is exemplified in the philosophical concepts of "Ubuntu" and "Ntu-ology." Let us now exploit these endowments for our growth and not continue to abandon posterity at the mercy of Western pedagogues who benefit

from the continuous linkage of peripheral states to the centre and will never free us from the clutches of cultural and economic neo-colonialism and imperialism. We need to start now to enunciate African communal humanism and democratic ideologies as embedded in the concept of Oral literature itself in keeping with African culture and identity. We must encourage our children to appreciate the aesthetic depth of Oral literature manifest in the deep insight it offers into the power of imagination, high sensibility and profound poetic depth.

Tait Coles finally submits that critical pedagogy, which is a function of the popular education pedagogical model is the only way to achieve freedom of consciousness which will encourage students to determine and discover who they are and to understand that no system should define them; but should rather give them the skills, knowledge, and beliefs necessary to set the agenda for themselves. He therefore posits that

Critical pedagogy is the only way to achieve this...[because] it's a continuous moral project that enables young people to develop a social awareness of freedom. This pedagogy connects classroom learning with the experiences, histories and resources that every student brings to their school. It enables students to understand that with knowledge comes power; the power that can enable young people to do something differently in their moment in time and take positive and constructive action.

It will enable African and Nigerian students to fully understand and appreciate that they are first and foremost Africans who should be proud of their culture and identity and make them struggle to contribute their own unique quota, as Africans, to global advancement, racial collaboration and universal reconstruction.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this writer asserts that the quest for development and advancement of human civilizations has never been the prerogative of one race or nation in the universe. Every race or people has, therefore, attempted at a certain period of their evolution, to develop modes of perception and philosophical principles that try to grapple with basic existential problems within their environment and to further their growth as a race. However, some races, due to unfortunate historical antecedents have been exposed to experiences that have tended to retard rather than quicken their march towards technological, educational and economic advancement. Despite these experiences, no race or people ever remain stagnant. What is permanent, it is said is change therefore what is required of a people is not to remain in perpetual lamentation over their supposed misfortunes but to gather themselves, reassess their position vis a vis prevalent conditions and modalities for continued existence as an independent entity and reposition themselves in the march towards progress and development as a people with an identity. African people must, therefore, not continue to wallow in the throes of their colonial experience but must see the experience as an existential challenge and lesson to strengthen their resolve to give to the world what is uniquely African. The Chinese, the Americans, the Indians, the Russians and the English and several other races of the world had their challenges and have claimed identities peculiar to their ecological environments and conditioned by their historical experiences. Africans should build on their own

philosophy of “Ubuntu” or communal existence and offer a unique identity to the world.

This is the perspective from which this paper examines the position of Oral literature in the lives of Africans as a veritable means of maintaining an African identity leading to the advocacy for the adoption of the Freirean popular education pedagogical model as a possible method for raising and asserting this African identity and personality through the infusion and integration of Oral literature into our school system as a core curriculum to enhance the education of younger generations of Africans on African culture and values. The paper asserts that African liberation from neo-colonial and imperialist domination is still on-going and cannot be attained completely within the current Western oriented formal education system alone but should be accomplished through concerted effort at cultural education of Africans committed to a deliberate process of Africanization. It concludes that unless there is this effort to achieve liberation Africans will continue to live under the throes of Western values which many Eurocentric Africans today still perceive to be sophisticated civilization that is superior to African values. The lack of cultural knowledge of one’s own culture, as Cicero aptly pointed out long ago, leaves Africans “naked and defenseless before the world” which opens Africa up as virgin land for other cultures to farm on. Cicero’s postulation remains as a charge to all Africans to develop ways of teaching their children their culture, language and philosophy so they can sustain and assert an African identity in the emergent global world order. Dr. Amos Wilson (1998) ^[31] therefore, finally asserts that

1. A culture must meet the needs and solve the problems of a people or be transformed or risk being destroyed. You don’t claim a culture just because it’s “African.” African culture have [sic] been distorted by oppression and so was our capacity to appropriately organize information. Ultimately our educational problems MUST be solved through cultural transformation, And Vincent Collaso (2011) concurs that
2. It is our duty to tell our children about our heroes and ‘sheroes’...What we must do is to teach, train, encourage and educate our children to be better than their station in life.

I’d simply add that now is the time or else it’ll be too late and the best way is to provide the right orientation inherent in the messages contained in our Oral narratives.

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