

Postscript

CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS AT THE FIRST NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THEATRE SCHOLARS IN NIGERIAN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION AT THE ADENIRAN OGUNSANYA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, FROM 6TH TO 9TH MAY, 2019

Matthew M. Umukoro
Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan

Abstract

The paper is the text of the Chairman's Address at the First National Conference of Theatre Scholars and Artists in Nigerian Colleges of Education, hosted by Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Otto, Ijanikin, Lagos, from Monday the 6th to Thursday, the 9th of May, 2019. Recalling, with nostalgia, the very first National Conference hosted by the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan, in 1976, on the same subject, the paper argues that the time is now ripe for Drama to gain curricular recognition in our secondary schools, like Fine Art and Music. It hopes that this Conference would make the difference this time around, and urges all participants and stakeholders in the education industry to work hard towards the actualisation of the long-nourished dream, which will make a positive impact on the entire educational curriculum in Nigerian schools.

I am particularly delighted to participate, as Chairman, in this first National Conference of Theatre artists and scholars in Colleges of Education in Nigeria, being hosted by the famous Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Lagos, with the theme: "Theatre Education in

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Nigeria: Patterns and Prognosis". The conference is long overdue and the chosen theme is both pertinent and instructive. Over the next couple of days, scholars from different parts of the country are expected to brainstorm on the various sub-topics emanating from this theme, with a view to ascertaining the current state of curricular drama and theatre in Nigerian schools, and what the future portends. When I was approached by the organisers to chair this opening ceremony, I advised that all stakeholders in the education industry in Nigeria – teachers, students, officials of the Ministry of Education both at the state and national levels. Examining bodies such as WAEC and NECO, the National Educational Research Council (NERC), the various Educational Boards, the print and electronic media and other relevant agencies – be invited to be part of this brainstorming session which would, hopefully, stimulate the necessary dialogue for the promotion and growth of drama as a crucial academic discipline throughout the country.

By its very nature, drama has the potential of not only vivifying other subjects, but also capable of serving as a catalyst for the advancement of all other humanistic, scientific, and technological disciplines. It is my hope that most of the stakeholders are either present or effectively represented, so that the more critical post-conference discussion and follow-up action would yield positive results within the shortest possible time.

The very first National Workshop on Drama in Education was held forty-three years ago at the Conference Centre of the University of Ibadan, from 4th to 10th April 1976, and it was hosted by the Department of Theatre Arts of that University. The then Head of Department, Professor Joel Adedeji, gave the Keynote Address in which he attempted to distinguish between drama as an aspect of literary studies and drama as an independent school subject. According to him, "the drama that is taught in the school as a curricular subject has the same unique existence as Fine Art and Music, and has the same status as Literature, History or Science (Adedeji, J. A. in Umukoro, 2002:28). The case for drama as a pedagogical *method of teaching* all other subjects has been well made by scholars over the years; what continues to suffer neglect, shrouded in controversy, is the concept of drama as a *school subject* in its own right. It is an old debate which long-established universities, like Oxford and Cambridge, had engaged in, in the 1940s, and Commissions were actually constituted to take submissions on the desirability, or otherwise, of curricular drama. Through their tardiness, these older universities

eventually lost the initiative to Bristol University in 1947, where Glynne Wickham subsequently emerged as the first Professor of Drama in a British university, in 1960, at a time when Drama was still struggling to gain acceptance as a curricular subject. His Inaugural Lecture thus highlighted the need for a more favourable disposition to the discipline in the following words:

Drama, I submit, far from being no subject, is, in fact, a subject with remarkable integrating power, which can relate the ancient world to the present day, which can bring critical appraisal into direct contact with creative experiment, which can provide the artsman with a lively introduction to scientific thinking, and the scientist with as lively a reflection of his own human condition (in Hodgson [ed.], 1977:177).

The United States of America, which has had a longer tradition with theatre scholarship, established its first Department of Drama at Yale University, in 1925. Since then, the concept of drama as a curricular subject has caught on in European universities while Africa is still trailing far behind. Although the first African Department of Theatre Arts began in Nigeria as the School of Drama in 1962 (with the University of Ghana, Legon, hard on its heels), it is ironical that today, nearly 60 years down the line, Drama is yet to be recognised as a secondary school subject; yet to enjoy the same status as Music and Fine Arts. This is the crux of the matter which this Conference is designed to address.

Our primary concern is with dramatic education or educational drama or drama in education, which are all variants of the same principle of employing drama for effective educational communication. As earlier pointed out, the case for drama as a method of communication has been properly articulated over the years; the next stage is for all critical stakeholders to agree on the need to actualise the outstanding need for curricular drama. In his Inaugural Lecture, Dapo Adelugba, one of the finest professors of Theatre Arts of this generation, touched on some of the old prejudices and new challenges in regard to the discipline of Theatre Arts. He stated as follows:

Although old prejudices die hard, the experience of the second half of the 20th century has shown that theatre arts studies can be pursued with an academic rigour comparable with that in other

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disciplines. The earlier acceptance of Music and Fine Arts as academic subjects within the Creative Arts complex paved the way for the acceptance of theatre arts. But the lessons learnt from the honest and diligent efforts of conservatories of dramatic art and studios for the studies of various aspects of theatre have been carried into academia (Adelugba, 1990:1).

In clarifying the role of the performing artist in academia at a Faculty Lecture, the present speaker also touched on the eclectic nature of the twin-discipline of drama and theatre arts, in the following words.

The performing artist in academia is an eclectic scholar whose creative and intellectual activities, though rooted in the Theatre Arts Department, transcend the broad canvas of the liberal arts into the wider spectrum of education as well as the physical and social sciences (Umukoro, 2001:2).

This gives drama a pride of place in the academic curriculum, with salutary effects on all the other subjects, including the scientific and technological disciplines. Thus, I have come to the inevitable conclusion that "a massive re-education and re-orientation of all teachers (especially the non-drama teachers) has become imperative if drama will assume its anticipated status as a full-fledged curricular discipline in Nigerian schools" (Umukoro, 2002:32).

I welcome all delegates to the subsequent brainstorming sessions, devoted to the present plight and future trends of dramatic education in Nigeria. Over the next couple of days, participants from different parts of the country will examine the pattern and prognosis, the different dimensions of this sensitive matter, which is crucial to the educational advancement of our country. I hope the subject matter will be treated with all the seriousness it deserves, and with a realistic evaluation of the monumental challenges ahead. At the end of the Conference, we all should have learnt one or two things about the subject matter, and we shall depart with renewed vigour to ensure the actualisation of the dream of dramatic education in Nigeria. Let this not end as a mere talk shop; rather, let it be the needed stimulus to galvanise all stakeholders into concrete action, so that the next few years should take us to another pedestal as far as drama and theatre are concerned at the primary and secondary school levels. Subsequent national

conferences will, hopefully, be devoted to reviewing the significant progress that must have been made over the years. On this auspicious note, I have the singular honour and privilege of declaring this first national conference on educational drama in Nigeria open, while setting the ball rolling for the business sessions by the various drama experts in our colleges of education. I wish you all an enjoyable stay and hope that your deliberations will be at once most exciting and rewarding. I thank you all for your kind attention.

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