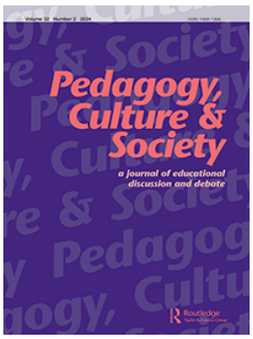

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# Enacting culturally responsive pedagogy for rural schooling in Ghana: A school-community-based enquiry

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**ABSTRACT**

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) has become an emerging strategy for improving low-income communities' educational outcomes. This school – community-based ethnographic case study investigates CRP strategies for improving education outcomes in a Ghanaian rural Basic School. The data collection included student assignments, focus group discussions, teachers' reflective essays, interviews, and field observations in a Ghanaian Basic School and its community. Using CRP theorisation and Bourdieu's socio-cultural theory, a thematic analysis of qualitative data found that the participating rural students' aspirations and school success priorities were heavily shaped by their immediate environment, embedded cultural capital and significant social others – especially their families and teachers. Teachers' cultural capital, including: 1) socio-cultural knowledge of their learners' background, 2) development of local cultural competencies and 3) forging school-home collaborative cultures facilitated rural schooling success. Therefore, the study argues for a grassroots approach to teacher development and a school-community collaborative approach to learning through a greater harnessing of home cultural capital as a critical strategy for re-positioning CRP for improved education outcomes for rural children in Ghana.

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Culturally responsive pedagogy; cultural capital; socio-cultural sensitivity; rural schooling success; sustainable rural futures

## Introduction

The issues of low education outcomes and rural-urban inequality in educational opportunities are significant social justice problems visible in many countries across the globe In the context of Ghana, comparing educational outcomes and job prospects, rural children are two times worse off than their urban counterparts, who are contending with low employment opportunities, low productivity, high poverty and high out-migration, (Ghana 2018). Several approaches have been

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explored to engage the issue of schooling success, especially for the vulnerable, disadvantaged and case-based learners, including rural learners (Guenther et al. 2019). This paper examines the new approaches to unlocking schooling success in greater detail from the standpoint of a rural education setting in sub-Saharan Africa.

Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) is an emerging strategy for improving education outcomes and their relevance for historically marginalised communities (Castagno and Brayboy 2008). Ghanaian scholars (Akyeampong 2017; Yevudey 2017) have also argued that mainstream curricula and pedagogies must adequately address students' diverse learning needs, local relevance to different geolocation contexts and the growing multi-ethnicity. Among others, diversified work-related skills requirement occasioned by the intensification of technology, migration and globalisation has dictated a new wave of need for the education sector. In response to this need, since 2019, ongoing education reforms have led to the enactment of a new curriculum framework for the Ghanaian Basic Education sector. The Change and Sustainability framework curriculum seeks to link Ghanaian classrooms to learners' lifeworlds and community needs.

Historically, it is one thing designing and establishing new curriculum and yet another thing carrying the intentions of the curriculum as designed during implementation. Thus, the expected challenge is how teachers can implement the current curriculum in culturally attentive ways to inspire rural children's schooling success. Therefore, this study investigated CRP as a strategy to improve learning outcomes in Ghana. Specifically, the study focused on rural children's educational aspirations and home cultural assets. To understand how teachers' socio-cultural knowledge of their learners' home background shaped their pedagogy the following research questions were generated:

(1) How does a rural community's background impact children's learning?
(2) What socio-cultural factors shape children's educational aspirations in rural communities in Ghana?
(3) How do teachers' socio-cultural consciousness about their learners' backgrounds shape their pedagogies?

Thus, the study offers a timely analysis to inform the ongoing implementation of Ghana's new Basic Education curriculum on using culturally responsive pedagogy to improve education outcomes and relevance for rural Ghanaian communities.

Bourdieu's (1986) theorises habitus – place and culture – as critical in shaping the cultural capital of social groups, and thus individual action. Bourdieu points out the interconnectedness between the external factors of habitus in their primary and secondary forms. External habitus includes social structures such as family, class, ethnic identity, school and the embedded cultural values that shape individual dispositions. Internal dispositions include individuals' aptitudes, skills, beliefs and practices inculcated through their immersion within the external habitus (Mills 2008). Also, primary habitus constitutes factors that shape individuals during their formative years, while secondary habitus refers to what individuals learn and practice later. The crust of Bourdieu's habitus and cultural capital conceptualisation grounding this study is the intricate interconnections between society and individual aspirations. After all, formal schooling is central to providing nuance to any possible gap by nurturing learners to meet community aspirations.

Each habitus and its induced socio-graphic and biographic antecedents – historical legacies, values, actions, knowledge and practices – endow their social group with some resources (Bourdieu 1986). Bourdieu termed this 'cultural capital'. However, cultural capital differs across social groups creating inequalities based on socioeconomic status, ethnicity, geolocation, and history. The unequal affirmation of cultural capital in school widens the social inequality between minoritised and dominant groups while creating a gap between learners' homes and schools to reproduce poor education outcomes (Bourdieu 1998). Bourdieu termed this as cultural reproduction thus:

> The formal school system maintains the pre-existing order, that is, the gap between pupils endowed with unequal amounts of cultural capital … by a series of selection operations; the system separates the holders of inherited cultural capital from those who lack it. With the differences in aptitude being inseparable from social differences according to inherited capital, the system thus tends to maintain pre-existing social differences.

Bourdieu has been criticised for his reproductive view of schooling as being too simplistic and latently deterministic (Croce 2015). But Mills (2008) argues that Bourdieu's theory also reveals a transformative strand which critics have overlooked:

> In the context of schooling, 'linking pedagogy to social change, connecting critical learning to the experiences and histories that students bring to the classroom, and engaging the space of schooling as a site of contestation, resistance and possibility' can lead to such transformation (Mills 2008, 87).

CRP is advocated as a strategy to bridge home and school cultures to advance schooling that ensures all students: 1) achieve academic success, 2) advance their community cultural heritage while gaining access to dominant practices, and 3) understand and critique existing social injustice perpetuated by dominant cultures (Ladson-Billings 1995). According to Villegas and Lucas' (Villegas and Lucas 2002), advancing CRP requires teachers who:

> … (a) are socio-culturally conscious, (b) have to affirm views of students from diverse backgrounds, (c) see themselves as responsible for and capable of bringing about change to make schools more equitable, … (e) know about the lives of their students, and (f) design instruction that builds on what their students already know, while stretching them beyond the familiar. (20)

Teachers' ability to exhibit culturally responsive etiquettes begins with the inculcation of diverse cultural capital transcending students' home and school cultures (Villegas and Lucas 2002). The school is a crucial arena of equalisation and amalgamation, accumulating and deploying cultural capital for students' learning success (Oyefuga 2020). Therefore, cultural capital theorisation is used in this study to elevate the fundamental role of schooling as a transformative arena in leveraging learners' home cultural assets and scholastic aptitude for social mobility (Yosso 2006; Zipin et al. 2015).

Africa Indigenous Knowledge analysts, Emeagwali and Dei (2014), Nsamenang (2010) and Nukunya (2016) contextualise cultural capital to encompass extended African families collectively and guided participatory approaches to learning. These Indigenous African scholars have argued that the strengths in the knowledge of how indigenous African communities have survived and successfully raised their children are crucial cultural wealth for enacting culturally sustaining schooling that meets local and global learning

needs. Therefore, focusing on the cultural capital associated with indigenous rural communities and their influence on children's learning outcomes is critical to transforming rural education for sustainable futures. Thus, the theorisation of the present study seems practical and reasonable using this route of enquiry for engaging the CRP discussions.

Growing evidence from national education longitudinal studies (Ashtiani and Feliciano 2018; Oyefuga 2020) indicates that cultural capital predicts students' learning aspirations and outcomes. Oyefuga's (2020) study of American students found that females and dominant groups of white students were advantaged in social capital and thus had higher aspirations for attaining, and usually attained, higher educational outcomes compared to males and black American communities.

Also, the kind of aspirations inculcated by individuals, families and the community and their alignment is another crucial impetus for enacting Culturally Responsive Rural Schooling. Guenther et al. (2019) and Arbiol, Gura and Cece (Arbiol et al. 2020) studied rural/indigenous education aspirations in Australia and the Philippines respectively and found that dominant narrative in education policy literature framed educational aspirations and outcomes in those settings around literacy, numeracy, retention, transition to higher education and transition to jobs, while another set of literature recognised that there is a need to frame educational aspiration and outcomes around equity, health and well-being, aspirations, participation, identities, and relationships in tune with rural remote and indigenous communities, where attachment to family and country (land) is paramount (Guenther et al. 2019).

Literature has identified that an individual's inculcated educational aspiration strongly predicts educational outcomes (Guenther et al. 2019; Homel and Ryan 2014; Zipin et al. 2015). Drawing on longitudinal survey data of Australian youth regarding aspirations at age 15 to complete Year 12 and post-school study, Homel and Ryan (2014) found that educational outcomes were substantially influenced by individual students' aspirations to complete school and transition to higher learning and work opportunities. Homel and Ryan (2014) also found a significant interaction between individual aspiration and academic performance.

Family aspiration is also central in shaping individual, community and school cultural capital and practices that drive students' aspirations and success (Ashtiani and Feliciano 2018; Oyefuga 2020). Literature on social capital, including identified home cultural capital, encompassing strong family relationships – children-parents, peer-to-peer, children's extended family and children – community relationships, as well as family size, skills, time, experiences, knowledge, histories, aspirations, axiology, socio-economic status (SES), mentors and family-school participation have significant impacts on children's educational aspiration and school success in indigenous and low-income communities.

The ensuing nuances suggest that what constitutes educational aspirations and outcomes, or school success are very fluid and highly contextual, inducing different meanings across different milieus (Zipin et al. 2015). Zipin et al. (2015) thus delignated three logics of aspiration that are dominant in research on young people and their families to include:

> . . . a doxastic logic, grounded in populist–ideological mediations; and a habituated logic grounded in biographic–historical legacies and embodied as habitus. A less tangible third 'logic' is also theorized: emergent senses of future potential, grounded in lived cultures, which hold possibility for imagining and pursuing alternative futures. (227)

Therefore, this study's approach to education aspiration against schooling outcomes or school success transcends individual, family, policy and historical imperative. From the Ghanaian Basic Education context, educational aspirations or school success entails all children, between the ages of 4 and 17, in its Universal Basic Education system to enter, remain and complete school up to at least Grade 12, then transition to tertiary education and vocational training or other life-long learning opportunities, or the world of work. To enable the individual to participate in local and global development processes (Ghana 2018).

## Methodology

This school-community based study was designed as a part of a bigger ethnographic case study of a local Basic school, its community and local government district's educational enactment and lived experiences. This study micro-focusing on students and their families, and teachers' lived experiences about children' learning in the local multi-ethnic rural Basic School and its community (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). The study built on a participatory enquiry within the framework of the chosen design. The researchers collaborated with teachers and their students as co-researchers and participants in a school-community-based enquiry. The teacher and student co-researchers assumed full participant observers in their community, complemented by the lead authors who played a partial participant observer role in stretching the study towards an ethnographic study (Swadener, Kabiru, and Njenga 1997). The choice was justified because the study proceeded on the assumption that the social world is relative and best understood from the point of view of the individuals directly involved in it. However, the amalgamation of individual subject interpretations of educational reality within a given community produces locally applied knowledge that can improve local education (Creswell and Gattermann 2021).

The site where the study was conducted is Ghana's Asunafo North district. The Asunafo North is one of the 216 administrative districts in Ghana. Data for the present study was collected from October through December 2019. A cluster and purposive sampling methods were employed to select one predominantly rural and ethnically diverse rural, remote community (Bryman 2012). The accessible population and information-rich participant groups in this study are detailed as follows.

### *Student participants*

20 sixth-grade students, between the ages of 10 and 15, from eight different ethnic backgrounds and their families participated in this study via one main take-home assignment. All parents/guardians of Grade 6 students were invited to join their children in a meeting facilitated by the school's PTA chairman. At the meeting, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and the role of the students and their families. Attendees were given time to confer with their Grade 6 child, and together with the child decide their participation. All parents/guardians and their children at the meeting agreed to participate in the study. Parents signed a consent form, and the children gave their consent by writing their names on a take-home assignment worksheet.

A researcher designed a take-home assignment worksheet, attached with parents' consent forms, and distributed it to 30 attending Grade 6 pupils and their parents. The assignment invited the students and their families to make ethnographic contributions of home biographies, aspirations, experiences, cultural capital, and funds of knowledge, with the support of parents or guardians at home. The task invited students to draw pictures depicting their future aspirations and to document examples relating to important household values, skills, history, and knowledge. They were also asked to identify significant people to their learning success. The task was planned to take about 40 minutes, and students and their families had three days to work on and return the completed worksheets. Twenty-six students completed and submitted the assignment. The submitted worksheets were grouped by gender indicated on the worksheet. Ten were selected from each group for analysis. The data from the students' assignments was jointly analysed and discussed by the research team. Including students' perspectives resonates with Nsamenang's (2010) African indigenous epistemic that sees children as necessary participants in any knowledge-creation process, not mere consumers of knowledge.

### *Teacher-researchers*

An incidental sampling method, based on interest, was used to select four teachers from the study school as both participants and co-researchers. The School Principal facilitated a staff meeting to explain our study's purpose. Eighteen attending teachers were invited to express interest in participation, and nine volunteered. These were grouped according to their level of Basic School teaching: Kindergarten (KG), Primary (PS) and Junior High School (JHS). A further clustering, based on gender and minority-dominant ethnic balance, was then used to select two males and two females. Two were from the dominant Akan culture, and two were from minority ethnic backgrounds, representing kindergarten (1), primary school (2) and Junior High School (1) levels. The incidental sampling enhanced the quality of the data collections (Bryman 2012). The gender, ethnic and grade level plurality was to elicit diverse experiences. The four teacher-researchers, together with us (the lead researchers) constituted the research team.

The teachers participated in the research team's meetings, the design and analysis of the student's assignment, focus group discussion (FGD) and made a collaborative household visit. These activities culminated with the four teacher-researchers and the lead researchers collaboratively planning and conducting a peer classroom teaching and observation to integrate local knowledge into the teachers' pedagogy. This finished with the participating teacher writing a reflective essay about how their participation in the study had influenced their pedagogy in a culturally responsive way. Also, the teachers contributed data through the research team's discussions and a focus group discussion that elicited teachers' ethnographic views about their students and their community. Including teacher-researchers was integral to sustaining and advancing any positive changes from the research, focusing on culturally responsive pedagogies (Daniels-Mayes 2016).

### The school principal

The School Principal (SP) of the community's only Basic School was purposively selected for a one-hour interview. This selection was informed by the expectation that the principal was well-positioned to provide relevant information on the key issues relating to school – community relationships. The SP's interview guide explored school culture, teachers' cultural capacity and practices, and contextual challenges to learning.

### Household participants

Two households, referred to as Case-families, were selected for the research team's site visit. During our meeting with parents of the Grade 6 pupils at the school premises, four people present expressed interest, and two of the four, who appeared to be the heads of their homes, were selected for the home visits. In each home visit, the research team spent some four hours observing and engaging the families in informal conversations to document the household fund of knowledge and elicit further explanations regarding the children's home assignment via fieldnotes. Also, a one-hour formal Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted with the adult family members. Household adult members shared their experiences with the school, their histories and how they supported their children's learning. The lead researchers audio recorded the interviews, while the teacher-researchers listened and took relevant notes. Thus, five adults from Case family 1 and two from Case family 2 contributed data via FGD. Additionally, twenty households that were sites for student-participants ethnographic study via the student assignment were also indirectly recruited. Thus at least 20 parents/guardians contributed data via the students' assignments. Twenty-two (22) households and 27 adult family members participated in this study. Nsamenang (2010) argues that learning in the African family context is collective, involving the combined roles of all family members; therefore, households provide a more comprehensive view of children's learning in their home contexts.

The FGDs and the interview were conducted in the local Akan language to remove any possible language barrier and elicit vernacular meanings of lived experiences. The audio-recorded interview was digitally stored and later translated and transcribed simultaneously into text for analysis.

### Observation and fieldnotes

We observed whether the community's environmental and cultural settings supported children's learning. Also, four classroom observations were conducted, including a collaborative classroom observation involving the research team observing one formal teaching day involving the Grade 6 class. In this collaborative, 45-minute peer classroom observation, one of the four teacher-researchers was the class instructor. At the same time, the other three and we (the two lead researchers) observed and documented vital teaching and learning experiences via field notes. In total, 48 participants were recruited for this study.

## Data analysis and presentation

A summative write-up was used to analyse the data from the students' assignments and teachers' reflective essays. The critical focus of summative analysis focused on extracting the essential text regarding context, personal experience, significant social others, aspiration, family values and human thoughts (Rapport 2010). According to Rapport (2010, 270–272), the summative analysis method is a group collaborative analytic technique used to embrace research subjects by involving teams of co-researchers joining with the researcher in the analysic process to enhance data context, representation, replicability, and presentation. Therefore, the analysis was done and discussed jointly with the participating teacher co-researchers. The research team's discussions about the implications of the students' documented experiences on teachers' strategies were then documented in interview notes as part of the teachers' group discussion data.

The audio-recorded data sets from FGD with the Teacher-researchers and the Case-families were translated and transcribed into systematised texts to facilitate coding. Two teacher-researchers with native backgrounds in the Akan language participated in the data analysis processes. Using the linguistic and cultural expertise of the native Akan teachers helped to maintain the intended meanings of the data. The uniform textual data was then inductively coded using triangulation, theming and descriptive approaches. Words, phrases, and sentences were assigned to describe subjects, activities, events, interactions, cultural capital, practices, and behaviours in the data transcripts to capture the real meanings of the issues and the subjects in data to allow synthesising concepts to emerge to answer the research questions (Bryman 2012). Students' drawings were also used to elucidate student aspirations (Bagnoli 2009).

The study data reporting approach uses qualitative text to project the emergent themes, focusing on participating groups rather than individual participants' lived experiences in tandem with the social constructivist approach to this study (Creswell and Gattermann 2021).

This study focused on sound ethics, informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, navigating the study limitations to achieve credible results (Bryman 2012). Ethical approval for our study were sought from relevant institutional, national and local authorities. Ethical approval for the broader study (of which this study is part) was given by the Human Ethics Research Committee, University of South Australia, Adelaide where the lead researcher is affiliated (dated 7 May 2019, referenced ID 201,943). In the research country, approvals were sought from relevant Ghana Education Service regional and district offices. At the Community level, oral approval was given by the traditional council of the study community. With its focus on cultural responsivity, the study was carried out within the acceptable cultural norms of the research community.

## Findings and discussion

### *The community's background impacting children's learning*

This section details the study community's rural background, including their embedded contextual challenges and cultural capital impacting children's learning and aspiration.

The study community is in a low-income rural forested belt of Ghana. The community is rich in natural resources, including arable land, water resources and sites with tourism potential. The study community is multi-ethnic due to the migration of tenant farmers from the northern regions to the middle belt of Ghana, seeking escape from water scarcity driven by climate change and the spread of desertification. The community's population comprised 65% Akan (the indigenes) and 35% various minority groups (migrant farming families). About 75% of the population were Christian, and 25% were Muslim (Guenther et al. 2019).

The community's multi-ethnicity also extends to its local Basic School. The total student population of 382 pupils for the 2019/2020 academic year come from 10 different ethnic backgrounds and two main religions – Christianity (86%) and Islam (14%). Similarly, teachers belonged to nine ethnic groups. Some 30% and 45% of the students and teachers were from ethnic minority backgrounds. Among the students from ethnic minorities, only one in four had a match in teacher-student ethnic/linguistic background. There was, thus, a teacher-student cultural mismatch that had implications for achieving culturally responsive learning experiences for the non-Akan minority of students. However, ethnic diversity also offered opportunities for children to inculcate rich and diverse cultural assets.

The study community is endowed with rich cultural capital, countering its contextual challenges to promote sustainable ways of caring for children and supporting their learning. The endowment has implications for the educational aspirations and approaches crucial in shaping young children's learning. The study community highly value children in its social structure and learning. A grandmother from Case-family-1 explained:

> Children are blessings from Nyankopong [the supernatural], cultural heritage, and the greatest family asset. The birth of a child gives meaning to our belief in the connection between ancestors, the living, and the future. (Case-families discussion)

## An elder from case-family-1 also added

> Children are reincarnated ancestors born with inherent abilities. We see children as masters of their learning who must be allowed to freely explore and bring out the best in them. (Case-families discussion)

The community demonstrated high expectations for children's learning. The case-families household discussions elicited that families wanted their children to acquire competencies in their home language which they viewed as sacred to maintaining their identity and preserving their oral traditions, as well as being the means of learning. The community viewed the acquisition of traditionally valued skills as important as formal school competencies. Generally, the community's approach to children's learning placed a high value on children and their learning abilities, with high expectations for their learning. These views resonate with Bourdieu's (1986) internal disposition that children attend school with cultural assets that can drive school success is affirmed.

Also, the study community had resilient social institutions organised along well-structured levels of authority, promoting responsive values and practices to drive resilient

relationships, inclusion, and resourcefulness, promoting children's well-being and learning (Fieldnotes). At the apex was the traditional council, the custodian of customs and traditions, and the focal point of local mobilisation (Fieldnotes). At the base was the extended family providing a collectivist approach to child-rearing. A typical household in the community hosts an extended family offering a social buffer, diverse skills activities, and instructors for children's learning. For example, in Case-family-1, all the adult family members collectively train and impart to their children the requisite values and skills. The family was also bonded by collective ownership of farmlands, cocoa farms and houses, administered for the benefit of each child. Also, all the adult members possessed diverse skills, including agriculture, commerce, basketry, making local soap from cocoa pods and locally processed food. The student participants' assignments corroborated these family-diverse learning opportunities. In explaining how children experienced diverse learning at home, the grandmother from Case-family-1 explained:

> My children [and grandchildren] assist me in running my kenkey business and prepare the family meals … They (children) also know how to do farm work and prepare food. My little granddaughter is taking after her mother's hairdressing skills … she can also harvest cassava when we go to the farm (Case-families Discussion).

Also, a participating teacher affirmed the significance of the extended family system to children's learning in the community thus:

> All family members in the study community collectively contribute resources, time and expertise towards their children's learning. The family guide children to learn requisite home, livelihood and social skills activities by participating in family activities, community rituals, children play, and explorative intimacy with the natural environment (Teachers' discussion).

The extended family and its compound housing system in the research community provided a robust social buffer, diverse skills, and a natural laboratory for children's learning. According to Nsamenang (2010), child-rearing in the African indigenous context is constructively socially constructed and pluralistic, involving the combined roles of the local community and family members playing complementary roles to prime children to emerge and not just to decree. Therefore, enacting culturally responsive rural schooling success requires that families are made central stakeholders in children's school learning through collaborative and trusting relationships with the teachers to integrate local content into the school curriculum better and extend schooling to learners' homes.

The study examined the participating students' ethnographic views about values, attitudes and behaviours in their community that can help them achieve their educational aspirations. Student participants documented reverence for God, respect, obedience, handwork, teamwork, and resilience as crucial to achieving their educational aspirations (Students' Assignment). The student's views on what makes a successful learner were thus greatly influenced by the core values and practices in the community. Also, the student participants documented the extended family and the community values of collective care, neighbourliness, we-feeling, unity in diversity, and rich social activities as some of the things they like most about their community and families (Students' Assignment). Therefore, home cultural assets were crucial to promoting rural children's learning aspirations and success when affirmed by school.

Students' experiences regarding social groups crucial to achieving their educational aspirations were elicited via the completion of relational maps. Student participants were asked to identify four groups each that were most important 1) to their learning success in general, 2) in assisting their schoolwork at home, 3) in assisting in their learning of home skills, and as well as 4) their role models. The results identified parents, teachers, older siblings and peers, uncles and aunts as the most significant social others. Older siblings were identified as the group that best assisted young children's school learning at home. However, the students mentioned mothers, grandmothers, senior female siblings and aunts and nieces as the most significant groups who best assisted children's informal learning activity at home, an indication of women's crucial role in children's learning (Students' Assignment). The role of the community's families and women's approaches to child-nurturing were thus identified as crucial to children's learning success, which teachers must acknowledge and utilise to improve students learning in school. Importantly, students mentioned teachers as their number one role models. The significance of the teachers for children is thus a crucial resource that teachers can leverage to build a trustful relationship to inspire students' learning success.

From the ensuing data, the students in the study school possessed rich cultural assets with diverse prior learning, including innate skills, oral traditions, and psychomotor skills in agriculture, environmental management, and creative arts. Additionally, students' rich social and life worlds developed effective skills, including collaboration, collectiveness, respect and caring, which were also crucial in linking to cultural capital that can scaffold school learning if affirmed. The data suggest that inspiring rural children's higher learning success requires teachers to appreciate the significance of:

(1) home cultural assets to indigenous children's learning, hence the need for teachers to build local cultural competencies better to integrate learners' home cultural assets into classroom learning.
(2) the extended family system, especially women and older siblings in indigenous rural children's learning.
(3) Teachers' role as models to rural children's learning aspirations.
(4) Drawing on students' ethnographic images of their community.
(5) Forging trust-filled relationships with their students' families

This section examines how the study's rural community's contextual challenges impacted on children's learning aspirations and success and teachers' strategies in mitigating the challenges to give the children a fair and experiential learning experience.

The student-participants aspirations were elicited via drawings as part of the student assignment to examine how the study community's rural context shaped children's learning aspirations. The students documented nursing, teaching, medicine, professional driving, security services, professional footballer, banking, and priesthood in the order of significance [frequency] as their career aspirations. Their depictions were limited to the occupations they often encountered as children tend to mimic what they see in their environment. The teachers' efforts to inspire these rural students' higher learning aspirations were constrained by low levels of grant funding, the lack of ICT equipment and the scarcity of highly educated community role models, among other contextual factors. The lack of interment and grant funding limited the

opportunity for the teachers to better expose their students to diverse career opportunities beyond the communities via audio-visual, online learning and industrial sites. Students' educational aspirations were thus shaped by their immediate socioeconomic and physical environment, consistent with Bourdieu's (1986) socio-cultural theory on habitus and cultural capital.

### *Navigating the challenges inducing low learning aspirations in rural children*

Teachers' social-cultural sensitivity to their learners' backgrounds, as evident in their practices, was elicited. The participating teachers were identified to be resourceful, forging partnerships within and beyond the school community to mitigate the contextual challenges adversely impacting their students' learning. The participating teacher co-researchers explained:

> In the past, when we [teachers] gave out homework, some students failed to complete them because there needed to be an educated person in the family to assist them. So as a strategy, we decided to form after-school learning groups to facilitate children's learning during weekends and school vacations. The students have been grouped based on their homes' proximity and ages. In each group, we have mixed students across grade levels so that the younger ones can benefit from the tutelage of their senior colleagues in the upper grades in their homework (Teachers' Group Discussion).

> We (the school) had lobbied for a private ICT centre in the district capital for two days slots per academic term (13 weeks) where we take the students to practical ICT lessons. We e have been included in an ICT Mobile Learning Van project. The ICT Mobile Learning Vans stocked with computers visit beneficiary underserved schools to give ICT lessons (Teachers' Group Discussion).

Awareness of low education attainment among adult family members in the community, the participating teachers leveraged the traditional role older siblings play in younger children's home learning to fill the gap in children reading at home. The younger generation in the community was comparatively more educated than the adult population due to the Government of Ghana's introduction of free education up to grade 12 in 2017. Therefore, teachers in the study school utilised older children as partners and co-instructors to support after-school gate learning of the younger children. Similarly, in studying child-rearing, Swadener, Kabiru, and Njenga (1997) identified the important role of older siblings in traditional caregiving, suggesting the need for teachers to identify, motivate and boost the capacity of older siblings to support the school learning of the younger siblings at home. The participating staff also advanced collaborative cultures beyond the community to mitigate the problem of paucity of educated family members and professionals as role models for the children in the rural study community by connecting the children to successful, educated people in the district. Also, the teachers were resourceful in forging collaboration with the private sector to give their students a digital learning experience and stretch their students' aspirations to global opportunities. Therefore, teachers successfully mimicked Comber (2021) and Gouwens and Henderson's (Gouwens and Henderson 2021) teachers in low-income rural community who did not use low socio-economic status as a lazy excuse to reproduce educational deficit.

### *Developing teachers cultural competences*

This section details how the study school staff built local cultural competencies to advance CRP. The participating staff understood the need to build their professional and cultural capacities as a scaffold to advancing CRP. A participating teacher opined, 'We need to understand the culture of the local community to better respond to our learners' learning needs' (Teachers; Reflective Essay). The school Principal commented:

> I organise regular in-service training for my staff. We have invited the community leaders to speak to my teachers about the community's culture and how to better relate to the community (Interview).

Sharing his experiences of building local cultural competencies, a non-native Akan teacher explained:

> When I was posted here, I could barely speak the Akan language. But as a class teacher, I must teach the Akan language as part of the subject areas. So, I made a conscious effort to learn the Akan language by interacting with the locals. My colleague teachers were also supportive in giving me lessons in the Akan (Twi) language. Having done these consistently for about three years, I became proficient in the Akan language (Teachers' Group Discussion).

Teachers wrote reflective essays on how their research participants in this study contributed to developing their cultural responsivity. Sharing their learning experiences, the participating teacher-researchers wrote:

> I learned from the family visit that the extended family system is crucial to children's education and well-being in this community. Hence, I must actively involve the extended family in the school. The in-depth of knowledge demonstrated by the community's participants during the community meeting and the home visits show the worth cultural assets possessed by this community (Teacher Reflective Essays).

> I appreciate that school-community collaboration brings about critical dialogue, knowledge, and a healing process that reinvigorates stakeholders' recommitment to educational improvement and responsive school practices. Going forward, collaborative research and community engagements will be regular features in my practice (Teachers' Reflective Essay).

Therefore, the school staff were innovative learners and collaborators leveraging their comparative strengths and local cultural experts and resources to build cultural capacities. The staff participation in collaborative school-community learning influenced their professional practices in culturally responsive ways.

### *Raising rural children's learning aspirations*

This section details the participating school staff's strategies for raising their student's learning aspirations and success in this low-income rural multi-ethnic community.

The participating teachers leveraged the high confidence that their students and the community have reposed in them as worthy role models to inspire children's school success. A participating teacher explained:

> Children and families in this community see us [teachers] as role models, so we live exemplary lives . . . we practice what we preach. We strive to lead high moral and behavioural standards for our students to emulate and succeed in school (Teachers' Group Discussion).

Also, the participating teachers enacted diverse ways of measuring and rewarding students' learning success. For example:

> The school's daily activities were characterised by active participation and competition among students. Students were divided into four groups for cleaning and competition purposes. Students competed for points awarded for punctuality, school attendance, environmental and personal hygiene, sports and games, quizzes, arts and culture (including singing, dancing, cultural play and craft making), among others, based on set standards. The groups were ranked, and awards were given every Friday afternoon. Students' performances in end-of-term examinations were also ranked and publicly rewarded (Fieldnotes).

Also, the participating teachers strived to integrate the community's collectivist approach and their traditionally valued skills into their classroom practices. During the collaborative peer classroom lesson, I observed that:

> The teacher instructors deployed classroom management strategies that mimicked the diversity in the community. There was round table group seating that took into consideration the gender, ethnic and religious mix of the class. The teacher used slogans and local songs conveying messages of hope, abilities and success as a starter to arouse students' curiosity and learning confidence. Also, the teacher used a participatory approach to elicit students' diverse home experiences. The teacher allowed the students to express themselves freely using their local language when they faced difficulties articulating specific thoughts in English. However, the official medium of instruction in the school was English (Fieldnotes).

The staff, therefore, understood their position as the number one role model for the children in the study community. They leveraged the high expectation and confidence attributed to them to raise their students' learning aspirations. By setting and guiding students' high moral and behavioural standards, the teachers were able to reduce the high incidences of school dropout, absenteeism and teenage pregnancies that had previously been common in the community. Also, the staff used an amalgam of fair competition, meritocracy, teamwork and a reward system as strategies to nurture students' aspirations. The school staff extended learning success from test results and speaking of the colonial language to affirm their pupils' home-valued skills. The teachers recognised all facets of children's achievements, including learners' academic, cultural, social, health, environmental and artistic achievements, to create a competitive and aspirational schooling environment. The school's culture reflected their local community's educational approach: that children learned best when they were allowed to take the initiative freely, and their efforts were appreciated and rewarded. The staff practices resonated with Daniels-Mayes (2016) and Yosso's (2006) views that teachers' ability to raise low-income children's learning aspirations is dependent on what students perceive of them, being demanding and inspiring of learning success and bringing learners' home cultural wealth into school.

The findings of the study's rural children's learning aspirations revealed that the student's career aspirations were shaped by their immediate community and school district environment and their embedded cultural capital, resonating with Bourdieu's (1986) habitus and cultural capital conceptualisations of education. The students' local environment and the people students regularly encountered were the significant factors shaping the participating students' learning aspirations in this low-income rural community. Therefore, what children experienced within their immediate school, home, community, and local district environment was significant in shaping their educational

aspirations and success, as also found by Arbiol, Gura, and Cece (Arbiol et al. 2020) in the Australian indigenous schooling context. The students' documented career aspirations further showed that they were less exposed to the vast global learning and employment opportunities due to the poor ICT infrastructure, insufficient grant funding and insufficient family financial support limiting school excursions and industrial visits, and family holiday visits. Navigating these contextual challenges in the study community's rural context requires teachers who eschew deficit and forge collaborative cultures to mobilise local resources to advance culturally responsive schooling success, as argued by Comber (2021) and Gouwens and Henderson (2021).

Also, the significance of social others to the participating rural children's learning and their possessed cultural capital and ethnographic images of their community were fundamental to their higher learning aspiration and success. The participating students' significant social others affirmed the crucial traditional role of the family as the primary caregiver and educator of children, resonating with Bourdieu's primary habitus. Instructively, teachers emerged as the number one role models for the students, pointing to the central role of teachers in rural children's learning success. The positive image teachers enjoyed in this rural community was a crucial social capital for building trusting family – teacher relationships to drive students' learning success. Social capital analysts, including Field Ashtiani and Feliciano (2018) and Oyefuga (2020), believe the family-school relationship is a crucial determinant of minoritised children's learning success. The participating teachers demonstrated awareness of the confidence placed in them by their learners and the community. The teachers reciprocated by leading exemplary lives to guide students' behavioural development for higher academic success. This resonates with Daniels-Mayes' (Daniels-Mayes 2016) observation that children's trust and belief in people supporting their learning are fundamental to their success, especially in minoritised communities.

The community's cultural background revealed that its ethnic diversity presented affordances in promoting CRP. The study identified that teacher-student cultural mismatch presented a challenge to culturally responsive learning experiences. The non-Akan minority students were learning the dominant Akan local language, the only local language taught in the school alongside English, thus depriving these minoritised students of the affirmation of their mother tongues in school. As Villegas and Lucas (2002) argued, schools in culturally diverse communities often provide few opportunities for responsive learning experiences to students when teachers' and students' cultural backgrounds diverge.

The teacher-student home language mismatch is a structural challenge in the Ghanaian Basic school system created by the weak teacher management system. The available data indicates that about 20% of teachers are placed in schools where they need to be proficient in the local language. In contrast, several vacancies may exist in their native communities as most trained teachers resisted rural postings (World Bank 2018). The cultural mismatch is accentuated by the increasingly multi-ethnic classroom contexts that are occasioned by poor farming families migrating from the north to the south of Ghana (Opoku-Amankwa 2009; Yevudey 2017). The teacher-student cultural mismatch in Ghana ignites Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) concern about the cultural reproduction of schooling self-perpetuating if deliberate strategies are not adopted to embrace ethnic minoritised cultures. Therefore, as a medium to long-term strategy, teacher recruitment in

Ghana needs to adopt grassroots approaches to align the linguistic backgrounds of teachers and students universally. Also, teacher professional development must build teachers' local cultural competencies to promote CRP. Ghanaian teachers also need to adopt Yosso's (2006) cultural wealth critical theory lens by bringing learners' ethnically diverse cultural assets into school and using their pedagogies to stretch learners' home cultural assets into global learning opportunities.

The study found evidence of the positive impact of the teachers' development of local cultural competencies in advancing culturally responsive pedagogy. The participating staff leveraged and blended their strengths to mutually build cultural and professional capacities. The staff also tapped into the school's local community's cultural capital to build relationships and cultural capacities to leverage their students' ethnic and cultural diversity to promote more profound learning experiences. Therefore, as a short-term strategy, teachers' continuous professional development in Ghanaian Basic Schools must adopt school-community collaborative learning approaches that contribute to:

> Staff development in the critical culture of schooling gives way to teachers who analyse and contemplate the power of each other's ideas. Thus, the new critical culture of school takes on the form of a real learning community, where knowledge is produced first-hand rather than developed based on other research conducted with different students in different contexts. (Kincheloe, McLaren, and Monzó 2018, 241).

Teachers' professional development in cultural competencies transforms teachers' capacities and commitment to implement equitable ways to promote students' learning excellence (Colton and Langer 2016).

The study's rural community cultural capital findings revealed a wealth of cultural assets scaffolding children's learning and well-being. The community has retained its resilient traditional social institutions like the chieftaincy and extended family system amidst social change. These institutions sustained cultural values of respect, inclusion, belonging, collectiveness, democratic participation, unity in diversity and hospitality, and offered social bonding and linking capital that the local school could harness to enact a pedagogy of belonging and inclusiveness. The study's community extended family collective caring offered a social buffer for children's well-being. At the same time, its diverse skills and instructors provided children with diverse learning experiences to scaffold schooling learning.

Therefore, whereas their low-income status limited the school and its local community, they possessed alternative forms of capital – their rich cultural capital teachers leveraged to promote children's learning. The participating teachers were socio-culturally conscious, tapping into the school community's rich cultural capital to promote CRP. The community's rich cultural capital and affirmation in school resonated with Oyefuga's (2020) bonding and linking social capital as a crucial determinant of minoritised students' school success.

The families in the study community aspired for their children to become local and global citizens. The community saw school success as family-school collaboration in raising the younger generation to be competent in their local culture and 21-century skills, and able to contribute to community sustainability. They aspired to raising a younger generation who were innovative, creative, collaborative, and able to attract investment into their community to create sustainable jobs (Ghana 2018).

Therefore, raising aspirational and successful learners in such a rural low-income community requires teachers to adopt CRP strategies that create in the younger generation a sense of place – belongingness and global citizenship. The participating school staff enacted these culturally responsive strategies by connecting their learners' lives and learning. The staff inspired learners' confidence and higher aspirations and forged collaborative cultures to rally community support to overcome the limits created by rural isolation, the lack of ICT infrastructure and low grant funding for industrial visits to give their learners fair exposure to global learning opportunities. The staff shared in the community's view that home-based valued skills were just as important as academic outcomes in literacy, numeracy and transition to higher education and jobs in the community. Therefore, the staff deplored diverse ways of measuring and rewarding students' learning success by transcending academic skills to raise both local and global learners in rural spaces. The staff, therefore, brought community cultural wealth into the school to counter dominant Westernised school practices and recrafted a culturally responsive narrative of school success. The staff practices mimicked Yosso's (2006) delineation of community cultural wealth as a critical race theory that challenges the traditional interpretations of a cultural capital narrative of schooling in socially marginalised communities as places of cultural poverty and elevates them as an arena of rich cultural assets worth infusing into school cultures towards transformed schooling for socially justice communities.

## Concluding thoughts and implications for school practice

In general, the study community and its local Basic School case calls for an enactment of CRP in Ghanaian Basic Schools through a balance in the development and utilisation of family, community and school cultural capital domains to drive learning improvements in Ghanaian rural Basic Schools. Therefore, to successfully implement the Ghanaian Basic Education curriculum, teacher training and professional development need to attune to the significance of home cultural capital. Additionally, multicultural literacies and school-community partnerships could be tapped into the rich cultural assets Ghanaian rural children bring to school. Teachers' pedagogies must meet students' diverse learning needs in the growing Ghanaian multi-ethnic classroom context.

This study concludes that teachers' socio-cultural sensitivity to rural learners' background, including their rich cultural assets, and teachers' development of local cultural competencies drives teachers' pedagogies in culturally responsive ways, including forging collaborative cultures to leverage, share, sustain and celebrate leaners' home and school cultural capital in ways that advance aspirational rural schooling success.

Therefore, this study, 'Culturally Responsive Rural Schooling Success explains the possibilities for improving the learning experiences and outcomes for Ghanaian rural children by bringing learners' cultural assets into school while stretching learners' aspirations into new possibilities to raise both a locally and globally competent and competitive younger generation.

The study thus recommends the development of more culturally responsive teachers for children in rural Ghanaian communities through grassroots teacher training and professional development programmes. Further ethnographic research into how teachers

build local cultural competencies to advance the pedagogy of place-based strategies for community sustainability in a rural context is needed.

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