

Ebenezer Kwame Asime

(Middle and High School Theatre Teacher, Lincoln Community School, Ghana)

ebenezerasime@gmail.com / +233270319412

Bio

My name is Ebenezer Kwame Asime, a Middle and High School Theatre Teacher. I have ten (10) years of experience teaching and directing theatre in international schools. I teach IGCSE Drama, MYP Theatre, DP Theatre, and Theory of Knowledge. I am also an IB Examiner for DP Theatre and Theory of Knowledge. My pedagogical focus on play-based, service, and collaborative learning shapes my approach to raising self-assured, expressive, and socially conscious young adults. As an educator, I am committed to experiential and service learning, particularly in my role as a certified Duke of Edinburgh Awards Supervisor and Assessor. Since 2019, I have directed five noteworthy whole-school musical productions, including *The Marriage of Anansewaa* (2019), *The Legend of Aku Sika* (2021), *Once on This Island* (2022), *The Prince of Egypt* (2023), and *High School Musical* (2024).

‘We Are All In This Together’: Building Communities of Practice in School Communities Through Theatre Productions.

Introduction

It is common to see many schools explicitly or implicitly include the word 'community' or related words in their vision, mission, or value statements. The names of some schools even include 'community'. Like my current school, Lincoln Community School (LCS) in Ghana, where I teach Middle and High School Theatre. As captured in the name of the school, the concept of community is at the heart of the school, as evidenced in part of its mission statement, “When we connect, we thrive” (Lincoln Community School, n.d.). Many schools attempt to put the concept of community into practice through various approaches, including sports events, school assemblies, and theatre productions. In this article, I discuss how theatre productions can be used by school authorities to promote community building. Underpinned by the concept of Communities of Practice (CoP), I argue that theatre productions intentionally bring different people together to work towards a common goal. To support my discussion, I refer to my most recent directed production, *High School Musical* (2024), at Lincoln Community School. If you are familiar with this musical, you will see where the first part of the title for this article is coming from. For the purposes of this article, theatre productions also include musical productions.

Theatre productions are one of such (bi)annual events in many international schools, offered as an extra-curricular programme. The Theatre unit mostly spearheads the productions in schools that offer Theatre as a subject. In schools that do not offer Theatre as an academic subject, the After-School Activities (ASA), Extra-Curricular, or School Events unit will likely coordinate the production. In some other schools, the Language Department facilitates such theatre productions. There are several reasons why schools invest in such theatre productions, including promoting holistic education, talent development, and serving as a means of marketing the school. In International Baccalaureate (IB) schools, such as Lincoln Community School, theatre productions also serve as avenues for Diploma students to fulfil their Creativity, Activity, Service (CAS) requirements. In schools that offer theatre as a subject, theatre productions provide an opportunity for theatre students to apply the theories and concepts studied in class. In the many

school theatre productions I have directed, I assign leadership roles to my Diploma theatre students. Roles such as stage manager, acting coach, and technical director help the students understand theatre production in practice, which they can apply in completing their various coursework components, especially the Collaborative Theatre Project, Solo Theatre Piece, and Production Proposal components of the IB Diploma Theatre course. The focus of this essay, however, is on establishing how theatre productions serve as a community of practice within school communities.

Literature of Community of Practice

Etienne Wenger-Trayner, Beverly Wenger-Trayner, Phil Reid, and Claude Bruderlein (2023: 66) define communities of practice (CoP) as “a sustained learning partnership among [a group of people] who are ready to interact regularly over time to get better, collectively and individually, at a practice they share”. Though not a prescribed characteristic, Wenger-Trayner et al. (2023) note the need for intentionality in the formation of CoP. While a group of people can dwell in a specific environment and be referred to as a community, they must share a common interest and be actively involved in working together on that interest to be considered a CoP. Wenger-Trayner et al. (2023) highlight three key characteristics in identifying a CoP: the domain, the community, and the practice. The domain defines the shared interest of the group. For example, a group of people interested in a particular Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), a group of people expressing a common interest in preserving an identified indigenous practice, or a group of people with a shared interest in producing a theatre production. Beyond having a shared interest, there must be a “sense of mutual engagement” (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2023: 13) among the group. To be identified as a community, which is the second key characteristic of a CoP, the group must be committed to the group's interest, know each other's strengths and weaknesses, and be supportive of one another. The third characteristic, practice, requires that the group be actively engaged in practice, not just idle. Wenger-Trayner et al. (2023: 14) argue that “it is important that members of a community of practice be active practitioners who will benefit from the community in their own work and who can try out in practice what the community comes up with”. The practice must be connected to their shared interest and aimed at addressing real-world issues.

The above breakdown of a CoP can be aligned to a theatre production, as the enterprise of putting up a theatre production satisfies all three key characteristics. A theatre production brings together a group of people, including actors, designers, directors, musicians (singers and instrumentalists), dancers, and theatre technicians. Their domain is their shared interest in the art and business of theatre. The nature of theatre production requires collaboration among the members, trusting and mutually supporting one another. “In my experience directing school theatre productions, I have learned that a successful production is not guaranteed from the start or even midway through rehearsals. For any production I have directed, what keeps me going is my ability as a director to trust the people I work with, trust the place, and trust the process.” (Asime, 2025). By its collaborative nature, a theatre production is produced by a community, even if it's a solo performance. Behind that solo performer on stage are many other collaborators. This community actively engages in the practice of putting up a performance by committing to scheduled rehearsal sessions, drawing on each other's expertise while addressing real challenges faced during rehearsals and performances.

LCS’ Production of High School Musical

In a school setting, theatre productions will require different departments, including academic, administrative, and supporting, to come together and work towards a common goal: putting on a production. The art department, often consisting of theatre, visual art, music, and dance, the design (digital and product), department, the ASA or co-curricular unit, the facilities support team, the security outfit, the catering department (mostly with boarding schools), the administration office, and parents will be required to assist with different aspects of the production. This coming together also occurs among students who participate in the production. In some instances, other professional service providers (such as lighting companies, sound companies, and food vendors) are contracted to assist in the production.

The production of *High School Musical* at Lincoln Community brought together a production team of about 70 people (staff and students). The majority of the team were students from Grades 3 to 11 who played different roles, including actors, dancers, band, backstage hands, and

directors. There was a band directed by the Middle and High School Music Teacher, supported by three other staff members and students. An external voice coach was contracted to assist the band with the students' singing. The MakerSpaces and Service Learning Assistant headed the costume and makeup crew. The school's IT team coordinated sound and lighting with support from an external lighting design company, which provided the necessary lighting equipment. An external set and props designer was contracted, who worked with the student set and props crew. An external choreographer was also contracted, who worked with a Grade 11 student as the Dance director, choreographing all the dances for the production. As the director of the production, I was assisted by two Grade 11 students in the capacities of Stage Manager and Acting Coach.

There was also active engagement with the Physical and Health Education department, as their spaces were used for rehearsals and the final performances. The School's facilities and Security teams were equally engaged throughout the production process. The facilities team assisted with setting up for rehearsals and the final performances, while the Security team coordinated the entry of all external service providers throughout the production and on performance days. The school's advancement and communication team equally assisted with facilitating communication with service providers and advertising the production outside of the school. The school nurses were equally involved, especially in the last weeks of the production and the performance nights, providing first aid when necessary. Parents were equally actively involved in the production, with weekly rehearsal schedules shared with them. Additionally, some parents whose children were in the production offered to supervise weekend rehearsals. One parent donated a set of pom poms that the cheerleaders used. The Secondary Principal's office oversaw the production, assisting with budgeting and procurement needs. The above breakdown of the production team paints the picture of a community comprised of different units working together towards a common goal.

LCS' Production of *High School Musical* as a Community of Practice

While being confined by the walls of a school brings different people together to form a community, a community of practice requires intentionality that extends beyond a school's

mission, vision, or value statements. It is this intentionality that puts collaboration into action, helps promote school spirit, and engenders a sense of belonging. With the production of *High School Musical*, I observed the close collaboration that happened among different departments and people in the school. I observed how staff worked closely with students. For example, it is unlikely to see students actively working together with the facilities team in a school setting. However, in the production of LCS' *High School Musical*, this was made possible with students in the set and prop team working together with the school's carpentry unit. Students in the costume and make-up team also actively worked with the school's MakerSpace unit on costumes and accessories for the production. This engagement did not happen by accident, but rather required a planned effort and framework, much like a theatre production, to make it happen.

While spaces like school assemblies, other gatherings, or even recess times can bring students from different grades together, this engagement can be limited to sections within the school, as most students tend to hang out with their grade mates or people they are already familiar with. What then happens is the unintended consequence of sectionalism, which can undermine a school's attempt to promote a whole-school community. Theatre productions in schools, however, can foster community engagement anchored on social equality, solidarity, and togetherness. During the production of *High School Musical* at LCS, I observed how a close bond of friendship formed between a Grade 10 student and a Grade 6 student, who, before participating in the production as cast members, had never spoken to each other. And this friendship has been kept a year after the production, with the two becoming 'besties'. As these students were in different sections of the school, the Middle School and High School, with both sections having different schedules, including school assemblies and recess times, it was likely that they would never have spoken to each other throughout their stay at the school.

I worked closely with various individuals from different departments within the school. Most notably, I worked with the school's Facilities and IT departments, which helped me understand and appreciate firsthand what these departments do, more so than I could have from attending the usual whole-school staff meetings. And this understanding was mutual, as they equally had the opportunity to understand what goes into theatre productions. I recall that on the opening night, a member of the IT team, who was assisting backstage with lapel mics, mentioned that although he

attends theatre performances, he had never known how much work goes into putting up a production, and was glad he could be part of this one. In addition, at one point during the production, the school counsellor, who was also a member of the band, mentioned that he sensed a buzz of ‘communitiness’ across the school. Again, I recall that in the lead-up to the opening night, a production meeting was held to discuss and finalise preparations. The Secondary Principal chaired the meeting. Other members present at the meeting were the Deputy Secondary Principal, the Head of IT, the Head of School Communication and Advancement, the Head of Security, the Head School Nurse, the Head of the Facilities Department, the Arts Department Learning Leader who was also the Band Director for the production, and myself as the director for the production. Truly, ‘we were all in the production together’, brought together by a shared purpose. The meeting was a practical manifestation of the school’s commitment to community, reflecting the belief that “the more we do together, the more we achieve.” (Lincoln Community School, n.d.)

Conclusion

At the core of the workings of communities of practice is active, collaborative learning, which involves everyone. In a community of practice, no one is left out, and there is little to no room for passivity. At a time when many school curricula are promoting global citizenship, “communities of practice are an ideal vehicle for developing strategic capabilities” (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2023: 18). From experience with directing *High School Musical* at LCS and other school theatre productions, I conclude that theatre productions offer a pragmatic framework for the making of communities of practice, which schools can take advantage of champion community building. The process of theatre production is like a market square where people from different walks of life come to buy and sell. But even more than a market square, in a theatre production, various people are brought together by a common passion, working intentionally together and resolved to support one another while addressing their challenges one day at a time.

References

- Asime, E. (2025, May 21). *Theatre directing is an act of faith...* LinkedIn. Retrieved June 29, 2025, from https://www.linkedin.com/posts/ebenezer-asime-m-ed-mfa-ba-a084b416b_tis-anniversary-production-the-prince-of-activity-7330992620996923392-F_6h?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAACH5e6gBbVT_-JKru4gHOv8GQhLXLiK_eHM
- Lincoln Community School. (n.d.). *Mission, Vision & Values*. Retrieved June 28, 2025, from <https://www.lincoln.edu.gh/about-us/vision-and-mission/>
- Wenger-Trayner, E., Wenger-Trayner, B., Reid, P., & Bruderlein, C. (2023). *Communities of practice within and across organisations: A guidebook*.