

I Am WT Podcast: Ep 2 w/ Dr. Enyonam Osei-Hwere – Transcription

[MUSIC INTRO]

[BRAE FOUST]

Good morning, or good afternoon, good evening, wherever you're listening to your podcasts. Welcome to I Am WT, the home to all things that are true to WT. I am Brae Foust along with my co-host, the queen here at I Am WT.

[TEARANEE' LOCKHART]

I am Tearanee' Lockhart.

[BRAE FOUST]

You didn't win?

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

Very good.

[TEARANEE' LOCKHART]

I didn't win but I tried.

[BRAE FOUST]

Girl, I voted for you, and all that happened....

[TEARANEE' LOCKHART]

It's okay.

[BRAE FOUST]

You're always going to be the queen here at I Am WT.

[TEARANEE' LOCKHART]

Thank you.

[BRAE FOUST]

And our guest today, the one, the only, Dr. Enyonam Osei-Hwere. So, how you doing this morning?

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

I am doing fantastic.

[BRAE FOUST]

Fantastic.

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

Thank you for having me.

[BRAE FOUST]

It's an absolute pleasure. Thank you for joining us, for sure. So, I want to get right into it. I'm excited to dive into today's podcast and talk to you about the study abroad and more but first could you give the listeners some of your history and background like where you were born, where you grew up, and your education?

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

Great. So I'm from Ghana, I was born in Ghana, and I spent maybe – not maybe – twenty-four years in Ghana. I went through elementary and university in Ghana, so my bachelor's is called Publishing Studies. It's an equivalent of graphic design in the United States. And then once I graduated after my undergrad, I worked for two years then I was invited by Ohio University to come and do my graduate program, my master's in international affairs. So, I came. I came to Ohio, small town Athens, Ohio, probably the size of Canyon [TX]. The school is a pretty big school. It's a 28,000 [enrollment] campus but in a very small town. Pretty, pretty little town, lots of trees; hills; beautiful fall colors. It's how I ended up in the U.S.; to go to school.

[TEARANEE' LOCKHART]

So, what made you come over to WT? To come from one small town to another small town?

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

One of the biggest selling points for me about WT is the community. I remember vividly – it's been fifteen years but I remember vividly flying in for my faculty interview and looking down. I always sit in the window – I have to sit in the window seat on a plane. So, I looked down and was thinking "yeah...no...".

*Laughter

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

It was just brown. It was all brown. And I just told you guys about Athens, Ohio, and all the trees and the hills, and so this place was flat and brown. So, I'm thinking now that if something is in your destiny, if it's in your destiny to be in a place, I believe God works it out. And so, I came for my interview, and everyone I met was the most gracious, kind, genuine person. That sold me. That was it. It wasn't how it looked. It wasn't the money. It was the people. The people made a huge impact on me. And it felt like home to me, because in Ghana, people are very hospitable, kind, generous. This place felt exactly like that.

[BRAE FOUST]

Ohio definitely has all the mountains – not mountains – trees and all that stuff, but one thing I always love about the Texas Panhandle is that we always have a great sunrise and sunset

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

Yes.

[BRAE FOUST]

A lot of people don't ever get to look at it due to trees and everything blocking their view.

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

Right.

[BRAE FOUST]

I always love when people come by and say it's flat here but the sunrise/ sunsets are a beautiful thing.

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

Yes. Yes.

[BRAE FOUST]

So, I wanted to get into you childhood life, or your childhood growing up in Ghana, West Africa. I want to discuss with you, what are some things growing up there that are different from things around here. Something that a lot of people might know about but have never experienced living in Ghana, West Africa. Could you go in a little in depth about that?

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

The biggest thing for me is playing outside with all the kids in the neighborhood. I have a young boy, twelve-year-old, and these days kids stay in a lot with devices and I'm not used to that.

*Laughter

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

You know, we literally went outside and played all day with all the kids in the neighborhood so that's something I vividly remember. I grew up in the city, in the capitol of Ghana, so I speak five Ghanaian languages. The ability to do that, that's amazing. And when you play with other people who speak other languages when you are little, it's easy to learn languages like that. So, that's another thing. In Ghana, your parents are not your only parents. Every adult is your parent, you know.

*Laughter

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

And so, as a child, if you're out there messing around, someone who is an adult is going to parent you.

[BRAE FOUST]

A true neighbored.

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

And parent you hard. So that's another thing I remember growing up, but I think that's what makes it one of my favorite places. Not just because I'm from there, I just feel really comfortable when I'm in Ghana.

[TEARANEE' LOCKHART]

That's something that I kinda relate to. I think it kinda stopped with my generation, going outside, playing with – when I lived in the apartment complex, all the kids would all come outside and play.

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

Yes.

[TEARANEE' LOCKHART]

Now my little brother, he's twelve, and he does not go outside, ever.

[BRAE FOUST]

I was the same way growing up in the 90s. In my neighborhood, we will always playing baseball with the neighborhood kids, and playing with the water sprinklers. Water sprinklers were fun.

[TEARANEE' LOCKHART]

Water sprinklers and slip-n-slides.

[BRAE FOUST]

Slip-n-slides were always fun.

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

Exactly. Well, I was gonna say, and it wasn't necessarily like defined play. You just made it up. You know, whatever you found, you played with. Whatever the circumstances were, you turned it into play. And it didn't have to be a defined something that you were playing with.

[BRAE FOUST]

I absolutely agree.

[TEARANEE' LOCKHART and BRAE FOUST]

For sure.

[TEARANEE' LOCKHART]

So, when I was looking up on you a little bit, it seemed like you really had a heart for children and advocacy, especially when it comes to African youth. So, why is that so important to you?

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

So, as someone who grew up on the continent, I think my path was defined by a lot of people who advocated for me, a lot of people who created opportunities for me and opened doors for me. And so, I always remembered. And, one of the things that informs my life is the idea of paying it forward. The idea of when someone is good to you, someone takes care of you, you pay it forward and take care of somebody else and help somebody else and open doors for other people. I always take that into account. When I have opportunities, I want to extend that to other people. One of the things that happened to me when I moved to the United States was my graduated advisor inviting me to travel with her to South Africa. That was my first exposure to another African country that I wasn't from. Even though I'm from the continent, I had traveled to Europe and even to the United States twice, but I had never gone to any African country. And so, she invited me. We wrote a paper together and the paper was accepted for a world summit in South Africa, so she invited me to go. At the time, I was a broke graduate student. There was just no way I could afford that trip. She organized for the trip to be paid for and I went to South Africa. When I went to South Africa, I was so moved by that country and everything they've been through, but their attitude was always that of gratitude. Grateful attitudes regardless of what had happened to them. That really changed my perspective about things because you know, I thought "wow, they went through all that and they are still grateful". And I said to my professor that day at the conference, "when I become a professor, I want to do this, I want to take students back to the continent". And we go to South Africa to reach out to people. They're really proud...Africans. You know, and they're not looking for handouts, they're just open to opportunities and that's what speaks to me.

[BRAE FOUST]

I like that. Are you excited to go back to West [South] Africa for your study abroad trip?

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

Yes, definitely, definitely, and Tearanee' is on my team and I'm really excited. We have a large team. I'm a little bit terrified, but I think we'll be okay. Yeah, we very excited to go back to South Africa and work with nonprofit organizations. We're working with two of them, and then a *creche*, or a daycare, if you translate it into American. We're working on a variety of projects. We're doing a website, we're building community gardens for the safehouses for the women. We're creating videos for the website. We're doing a mural with Jon Revett, *the* Jon Revett. We're giving away books, lots of brand new books. Children's books. You know, Tearanee' referred to my passion for children, I think literacy is such an amazing opportunity to transform people's lives, to transform children's lives. So, we've always taken books. It's the first time we're taking brand new books. Another special thing about the books is that they each have a handwritten message from someone in our community. That is....

[BRAE FOUST]

That is unspeakable for sure.

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

That is amazing. So yeah, we are definitely really really excited to go back.

[BRAE FOUST]

I'm excited for you. Unfortunately, I won't be able to make that trip but I hope ya'll are going to have a safe and fun trip as well. Alright folks, we are going to take a little break before we get on to further discussion with Dr. Enyonam Osei-Hwere. You are listening to I Am WT.

[OUTRO MUSIC]

[DR. WALTER WENDLER]

Donors to West Texas A & M University give more than their material support. They devote time, expertise, and commitment. WT would not be what it is today without individuals dedicated to our forward progress.

[INTRO MUSIC]

[BRAE FOUST]

Welcome back ladies and gentlemen, to I Am WT. I am Brae Foust here again with –

[TEARANEE' LOCKHART]

Tearanee' Lockhart.

[BRAE FOUST]

Like I said, ya'll have been excited for travel to South Africa for study abroad. What specifically for you, Dr. O, are you the most excited about? Just like one specific thing.

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

I'm very excited to introduce my students to South Africa. I...I don't think they understand how beautiful this place is. I don't think they will expect what they will get exposed to once we land in South Africa. Cape Town, which is where we're going, is one of the most beautiful places in my opinion, and I've had privilege and the blessing of traveling all over the world, but it's one of my favorite places to go. It's just stunning. There's ocean. There's wildlife. There's great food. Lots of attractions. We go on a safari. My students are just really excited and I cannot wait for them to see it. To me, that is the biggest thing is watching their reaction to a country they've never been to. And sometimes a country they have different perceptions about based on how the media covers Africa. You know, how people see it is very different from the reality of it.

[TEARANEE' LOCKHART]

Okay, so, what are you hoping students get from this service-based learning trip?

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

Oh, my hope, and I pray about this every day, is that when my students leave South Africa, that they recognize the needs that they were exposed to, and went over to help right here in our community. Because the thing is, we're human beings. We're not different when it comes to challenges. You know, right here, there are kids in Title I schools that don't have access to books. Right here. In the United States. In our community. There are kids that are going home hungry every night from schools because their families don't have enough food. So, the challenges that we go to South Africa to help with, we also have those challenges in our community. And so my biggest hope is that when my students come back, that they also recognize those challenges here and invest their time and their resources into [the] community who is also facing those same challenges. You don't have to get on a plane to change the world. You can change it right in your back yard.

[BRAE FOUST]

I like that a lot. So, moving a little bit back over to the West, over here, you were recently named the Magister Optimus winner. Yeah! So, could you tell us your experience, the overall feeling you had when you were selected as this year's Magister Optimus?

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

So, first of all, I had no idea I was going to be nominated.

*Laughter

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

Dr. Drumheller. I blame Dr. Drumheller.

*Laughter

[BRAE FOUST]

She just throw your name in?

*Laughter

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

She's the one that nominated me. Dr. Drumheller is the Associate Dean of the Sybil B. Harrington Fine Arts and Humanities College and also my department head, and I've known her for a very long time. When I started here, she took me under her wings, and mentored me. And so, she and I go way back, but she's the one that nominated me, and I was really surprised. I....awards are not....I know people say this a lot, but when I'm doing my job, I'm not doing it because I'm anticipating an award, or thinking I'm winning an award. But it's not a bad thing to be recognized. It's a very motivating thing, to me at least. Like when I was named Magister Optimus, it really motivated me. I've been here fifteen years, and I'm working much harder now than I worked when I first started, which is usually the opposite, you know. The longer you're somewhere, you know, the less people do. And I work much harder now, and to be recognized,

was really encouraging for me, and I'm so grateful because that's not a small thing to be named *THE BEST* on a campus of so many talented, amazing teachers. That is a big deal, to me, and so I'm very grateful for the opportunity. I'm going to keep doing what I've always done, and do the best, you know, bring the best effort. I'm not the best teacher on this campus, but you would be hard-pressed to find someone who would work harder than I would.

[BRAE FOUST]

Well, you're definitely one of my personal favorites here at WT.

[TEARANEE' LOCKHART]

Yes, we love you Dr. O.

*Laughter

[BRAE FOUST]

Absolutely.

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

Thank you.

[TEARANEE' LOCKHART]

So, I guess our last question for you is, what does WT mean to you?

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

WT means home. WT means family. WT means community. I...I feel at home here. It's been fifteen years. In the beginning I didn't think it would be fifteen years. I thought, let me get my foot in the door and see, you know. And I'm still here.

*Laughter

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

Based on things I've done in the last several years, I don't think I'm going anywhere. We're here to stay. It's a lovely place to raise your child. The campus has given me so many opportunities to work with different people of all different backgrounds. To engage with students, like you Brae and Tearanee' in my classes, it's just been an amazing opportunity for me and I'm so grateful that I was offered a job here fifteen years ago.

[TEARANEE' LOCKHART]

We're grateful that someone like you decided to give their time to this community because you're definitely a pillar in the WT community.

[BRAE FOUST]

And absolutely, for me, it's an absolute pleasure talking to you, especially last year, last fall I was in a little bit of a bundle trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my life, and when I decided to come back to school for a second bachelor's, you were the very first face that I saw here to discuss classes and all that stuff. You were my first advisor before I got moved to Dr. Garcia. So, definitely when it comes to you, you definitely have a place in my heart and I will always never forget.

So, before we go, I wanted to ask you, since you were talking about children's books, what's your favorite children's book that you grew up reading?

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

So, when I was little – I don't know if you are familiar with the Anansi tales? They are African books, and Anansi in Ghanaian is *the spider*. He had so many tales. It's similar to like the Dr. Seuss series but based on a spider, and I remember reading those books when I was little, and what is interesting is Anne Medlock in Art, Theatre, and Dance [Department], just donated books, brand new books for us to take to South Africa, and she specifically picked Ghanaian books. And I saw all those books that I had read when I was little....

*Laughter

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

...the Anansi books, and so I actually told her "Do you think it would be okay for me to keep these?" just as a joke. I'm really going to take them to kids.

*Laughter

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

But yeah, those were my favorite books. I wasn't really exposed to foreign books because of cost, and so a lot of what I read are the Anansi series. Yeah.

[BRAE FOUST]

Well, I like that. I like that. Tearanee' do you got anything else?

[TEARANEE' LOCKHART]

Not that I can think of?

[BRAE FOUST]

I've enjoyed our time this morning.

[TEARANEE' LOCKHART]

I have, too.

[DR. OSEI-HWERE]

Me, too. Thank you so much for having me.

[BRAE FOUST]

It was an absolute pleasure having you here, for sure.

*Laughter

[BRAE FOUST]

Thank you, guys and gals, for listening to I Am WT. We will see you guys next time.

[MUSIC OUTRO]