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Developing Leadership for Learning in Ghana: opportunities and challenges

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Abstract

A current major initiative of the Centre for Commonwealth Education at the University of Cambridge is a collaboration with the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, aimed at improving the quality of pedagogy in Ghanaian basic schools through learning-centred school leadership. Headteachers throughout the country are participating in a programme devised and facilitated by fifteen Ghanaian educators known as Professional Development Leaders, who have been prepared for this role by working with colleagues at the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, first at a workshop in Ghana and then at a summer school in Cambridge. The work takes as its theoretical framework the Leadership for Learning principles and framework developed through the Carpe Vitam Leadership for Learning project. In the early stages of the initiative it was essential to ascertain the current situation and to consider the context in which the development was to take place. This paper reports the Professional Development Leaders' perceptions of the opportunities and challenges for developing Leadership for Learning in Ghanaian basic schools.

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Introduction

The paper explores the connections between leadership and learning in one West African country, Ghana, raising the question as to whether key principles developed in other more privileged contexts 'travel' and may provide the foundation for systemic change and school improvement.

It draws on continuing work with schools in Ghana under the aegis of The Centre for Commonwealth Education (CCE) at the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. The Ghana initiative is one of a number of inter-related programmes, all concerned with facets of pedagogy and leadership. In Ghana the programme takes the form of a partnership between the universities of Cambridge and Cape Coast, together with the Ministry of Education and The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), aimed at supporting headteachers in improving the quality of pedagogy and professional development in their schools. The need to build leadership capacity among headteachers in Ghana and the lack of leadership preparation have been identified as key issues in improving education (Oduro 2008; Zame et al., 2008).

This research and development work takes as its theoretical framework the Leadership for Learning (LfL) principles developed in the course of a three year project - *Leadership for Learning: Carpe Vitam*, involving 24 schools in seven countries (five in Europe, the USA and Australia) (MacBeath and Dempster, 2009). In introducing the five principles for practice in a Ghanaian context the purpose was to understand how these principles might apply, and be adapted, in a wide range of rural and urban schools and diverse communities.

The research employed a variety of quantitative and qualitative approaches - school visits, questionnaires, one-to-one interviews, individual writing, and group activities which identified opportunities and challenges encountered in developing leadership and pedagogy in Ghanaian basic schools.

1. The Centre for Commonwealth Education and Leadership for Learning principles

The Centre for Commonwealth Education (CCE) was established within the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge in 2008, financially supported by the Commonwealth Education Trust (CET). The Centre is committed to work with national policy-makers, school leaders and academics within the countries of the Commonwealth to enhance policy and practice in classrooms, schools, networks and other policy arenas, informed by research and encouraging inquiry and strategic development appropriate for locally-based needs and priorities. A primary aim is to develop synergy among leadership, pedagogy, and initial and continuing teacher education - the three strands of the Centre's programme.

The five Leadership for Learning principles expressed at a general level are:

- A focus on learning
- An environment for learning
- A learning dialogue
- Shared leadership
- Mutual accountability

As such they may appear relatively uncontentious but gain meaning as terms such as 'learning', 'environment', 'dialogue' and 'leadership' are discussed and problematised.

In a school with 80 or more children in a class, with few if any material resources what does it mean for there to be a focus on learning? What does an environment for learning look like when there are no classrooms? What role does leadership play in creating and maintaining a dialogue around pupil and professional learning? What does mutual accountability mean in schools where advisers/inspectors (circuit supervisors) conduct reviews and report to the local district office? In what ways could a Cambridge-based team act as critical friends to these schools and encourage the development of a home-grown network of critical friends?

2. The cultural context of Ghana

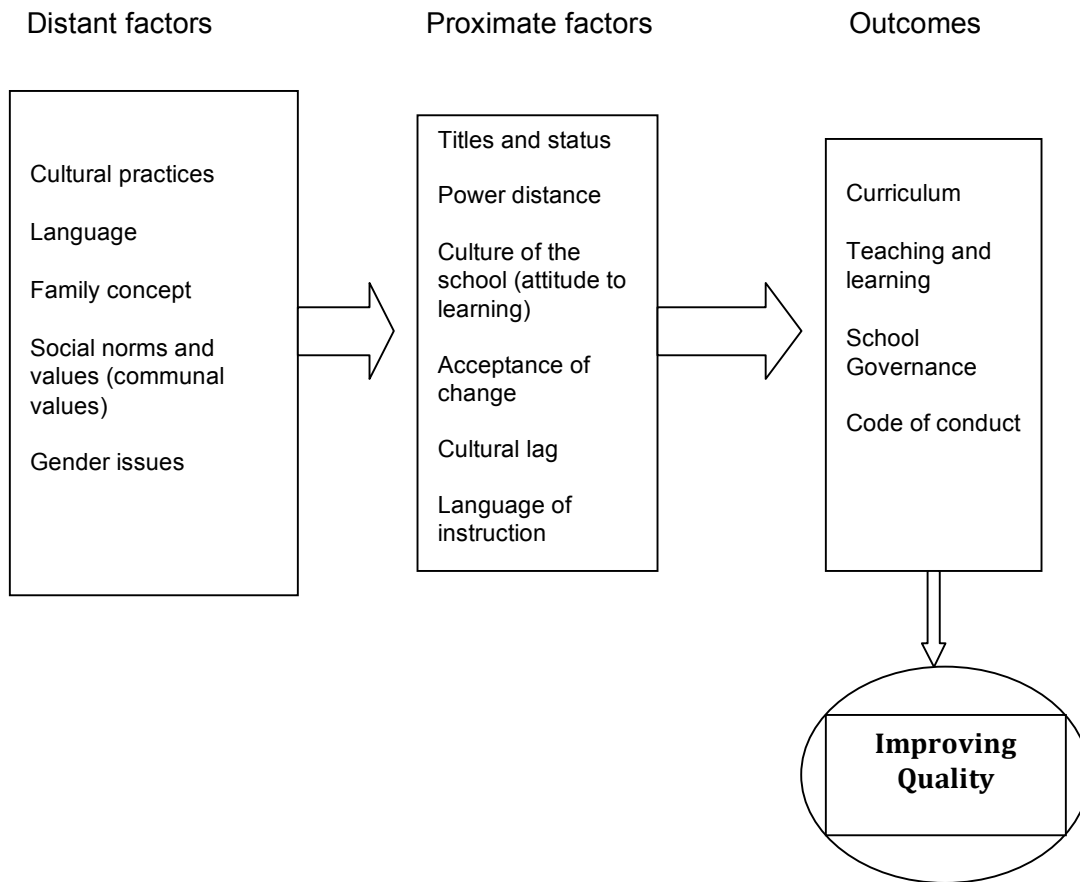
Ghana, known as the Gold Coast until its independence in 1957 - the first Sub-Saharan African nation to gain that status— is widely regarded as one of the most politically stable of African countries and ranks high among sub-Saharan countries with respect to governance, accountability and civil society. Despite its huge natural resources (and recent discovery of oil) just over a quarter of the population live below the international poverty line of US\$1.25 a day.

The country, with a population nearing 23 million, is divided into 10 administrative regions, subdivided into a total of 138 districts, the latter the administrative locus for management of schools. Although it is estimated that over 80% of Ghanaian children attend school, that still leaves half a million children who do not, or cannot, go to school because of lack of school buildings and resources. Ghana's diverse cultural values tend to pose challenges to educational policy formulation and implementation. Educational plans, especially regarding curriculum design and development are often caught up in debates that have deep cultural roots. These debates raise questions as to what the mission and role of Ghanaian schools should be. While intellectual development has always been at the core of educational policy making in the country, traditionalists have always laid emphasis on character development since 'good behavior' forms an integral part of Ghanaian culture.

There is also the issue of language. There are more than 50 languages and dialects spoken in Ghana. The greatest challenge facing policy makers is how to maintain national cohesion through language policy for schools in the country. Basic level education in Ghana comprises 11 years, made up of: 2 years of Kindergarten, 6 years of Primary School, 3 years of Junior High School (JHS). The medium of instruction in Kindergarten and Lower Primary is a Ghanaian language and English, where necessary. From Primary Four onwards English replaces the Ghanaian language as the medium of instruction, and the Ghanaian language is treated as another subject on the timetable. The leadership challenge for schools is how to balance the teaching of local language with English since schools generally lack teachers with knowledge of the vernacular.

A number of other related issues include the learning culture of teachers and pupils, attitudes to learning, a 'fear of sharing', acceptance of change and more deeply embedded cultural practices and ethnic issues that influence conceptions of learning. Improving and sustaining the quality of basic education is high on the policy agenda of the Ministry of Education (MOE) seeking to improve the quality of teaching and learning for enhanced pupil achievement (Ministry of Education, 2004). Achieving this, however, depends on the extent to which educational leaders are able to have an impact on the cultural environment within which their schools operate. As illustrated in figure 1, two main perspectives of the cultural environment are critical. These are distant and proximate cultural factors that influence leadership, teaching and learning outcomes in schools.

Fig. 1: The cultural environment of Ghanaian schools.



In developing headteachers, cultural practices weigh heavily on the way things are done in schools. As Stolp (1994) has stated 'leaders who are interested in changing their school culture should first try to understand the existing culture'. The culture of the community influences behavior in schools, between schools and within the whole education system. Furthermore, it determines what is deemed an acceptable code of conduct in schools. This impacts directly on learning and teaching processes and on school governance. An emphasis on learning-centred leadership has to take into account a cultural lag which is the time within which change becomes acceptable. It has also to confront the gender issues. A news report (Modern Ghana News, 2009) put the gender parity ratio at 1:0.70 (boys:girls) but this figure varies considerably by region, urban and rural, south and north. In the northern sector of the country, in spite of measures put in place by government to promote girls' education, the question of how to attract and retain girls in school is most acute.

3. The Political Context

In Ghana, it is not easy to draw a sharp line between the influence of the cultural and political milieu in matters of school leadership. In terms of 'tumi' (*power and authority*), politics are embedded in the country's cultural values and practices. While a high value is placed on the 'tumi' of leadership, the practice of 'tumi' by leaders is more political. Leadership practices in the country are therefore characterised by high power distance between the leader and those who are led. Kondor attributes this to the traditional belief that those who ascend to leadership positions have special relations with the ancestors and are therefore 'given divine authority to lead others' (Kondor, 1993 in Oduro, 2003:197).

This political context provides a frame for our understanding of the power dynamics of educational leadership in Ghana: the institutional relations perspective and the individual position perspective.

The Institutional Relations Perspective (IRP):

The IRP refers to the power dynamics that characterise the relations between the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Ghana Education Service (GES). The MOE is the political sector responsible for enacting educational policies within the context of the ruling party's manifesto. In contrast, the GES comprises technocrats who are mandated by law to implement educational policies. While the MOE places political interest high in matters of educational policy-making, the GES is expected to adopt a professional (non-partisan) approach to educational policy implementation. In practice, however, the exercise of political power by the MOE has often undermined the non-partisan orientation of the GES in terms of decision-making. Changes in government often change existing educational policy and attempts by directors at the GES to act professionally often lead to punitive transfers. This trend adversely affects the GES's quality education implementation strategies because officers are often careful not to lose their jobs.

Individual Position Perspective (IPP)

Headteachers tend to exercise authority and power over others in the school. The situation becomes critical where the headteacher, in addition to being a school head, is also a traditional chief. Few teachers would be bold enough to question decisions that they find inimical to professional practice. A further ingredient is the power relations between the school and external agents known as circuit supervisors (CS). The circuit supervisor is required by the GES to provide professional support to school heads and teachers and also to ensure school accountability. Yet most of them limit their supervisory roles to accountability-focused inspection. As such they exercise power and authority over teachers and headteachers to the extent that their relations with schools are often marked by tensions and even hatred. Focus on accountability tends to kill initiative among teachers and headteachers and thereby affects the quality of teaching and learning.

As the political context permeates every aspect of decision-making within the MOE and the GES power politics have to be understood and taken into account in any attempt to build leadership for learning capacity in Ghanaian schools. Gaining support from the MOE and the GES requires skills in tactful lobbying backed by trust-building and the willingness to make the gatekeepers feel a sense of recognition and importance. Indeed, the 'trick' lies with personal contacts and the willingness to make these bodies feel they own the initiative.

4. The programme to date

The programme for basic school headteachers in Ghana originated in the CCE colloquium in Singapore in September 2008. Although there were related antecedents to that gathering, it was in Singapore that the Director of the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (IEPA) at the University of Cape Coast proposed that the CCE should support a national professional development programme for headteachers in basic schools in Ghana. The proposal was accepted in principle, and on return to Ghana the Director of IEPA initiated discussions with key stakeholders including the University of Cape Coast's Academic Board, the Directors of the Ghana Educational Service, the Association of Basic School Headteachers, the Ghana National Association of Teachers and the (then) Ministry of Education, Science and Sports. Through these discussions three key aims were identified:

1. To strengthen the leadership capacity of basic school headteachers in Ghana
2. To improve the quality of learning through school/classroom leadership

3. To influence policy makers to make leadership development a condition for appointing basic school headteachers

In January 2009 a team of three from the CCE visited Cape Coast to establish contact with key people and organisations, to begin familiarisation with the Ghanaian context, and to plan the programme in more detail with the partners in Ghana. During this week meetings were held with a range of people including the Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Coast; senior policy makers at the Ghana Education Service; a district director; and the Program Office of education at UNICEF. The purpose of these meetings was to establish contact with key people, to seek their advice and to strengthen understanding of and support for the proposed programme. Visits were also made to four schools, including one several miles from the nearest main road and where some classes were held outside and in the local chapel due to lack of classroom accommodation, and another where one class was composed of 101 children.

Guiding principles of the work of the CCE include capacity building and sustainability, which in the Ghana programme for headteachers are addressed in part by the decision to prepare a cadre of local educators to lead the programme nationally. These 15 'Professional Development Leaders' (PDLs) were selected by the Director of IEPA, and included a practising headteacher, district officials working for the ministry, teacher educators and university lecturers. They were invited to participate on the basis of their knowledge and understanding of Ghanaian schools and educational issues, their expertise in professional development, and their commitment to the values and aims of the programme. The second visit of the Cambridge team, in May 2009, concentrated on working with the PDLs for an intensive three days in a workshop with the following objectives:

- To meet and work with PDLs, introducing them to the five Leadership for Learning Principles and testing those principles against school practice in Ghana
- To identify key issues, constraints and opportunities, in implementing the Leadership for Learning programme
- To model the leadership of professional development activities and for the PDLs to experience many active and collaborative approaches to learning
- To begin the process of data gathering through a questionnaire and interviews with the PD leaders
- To plan for a follow-up Summer Leadership Academy in Cambridge

A key feature of the workshop was the modeling of an interactive approach to learning, employing strategies that the PDLs could subsequently use with headteachers. During these three days the Professional Development Leaders began their familiarisation with the five LfL principles, all the time being encouraged to adopt a critical appraisal of their applicability to the Ghanaian context. This was continued after the workshop through reading and writing, each participant writing a reflective paper focused on the opportunities and challenges for development posed by the five principles.

The preparation of the PDLs and planning for the first stage of the headteacher programme was continued in Cambridge for ten days in June/July. The summer school programme included opportunities for the PDLs progressively to assume more responsibility for planning and leading sessions, both taking their own learning forward as well as preparing for their later work with headteachers. Built in to the sessions were opportunities for feedback from their colleagues and members of the Cambridge team. Sessions led by other Faculty members demonstrated interactive approaches to learning mathematics and science that do not require material resources and can be used for teaching large groups. During visits to

local primary schools there were opportunities to observe Leadership for Learning principles in practice and to test these in discussion with headteachers and staff.

The Professional Development Leaders then returned to consideration of the LfL principles, analysing the synthesis of the essays they had written, and prioritising opportunities and challenges for each principle. Teasing out and testing the principles in practice was the focus of papers written following the summer school, subsequently submitted for assessment leading to the Cambridge award of Certificate of Further Professional Studies (CFPS).

In August 125 headteachers from all over Ghana came together for the three week workshop led by the PDLs with support from the Cambridge team. The focus was on the improvement of pedagogy and professional development through a quality of leadership framed by the five Leadership for Learning principles.

In November a two day workshop was held for the circuit supervisors of the headteachers who had met in August. Whilst very positively received it was agreed that two days was too short, and so plans are currently being developed to include circuit supervisors in the second stage of the headteacher programme which will take place in the Easter holidays 2010.

5. Methodology

The professional development programme for Ghanaian headteachers that is the context for this paper is characterised by an interweaving of development and research. The programme has been adopted and is supported by the Ghana Education Service because of its perceived potential for making a tangible and relatively immediate impact on leadership and learning in basic schools throughout the country. It is most definitely not construed as a source of research data for academics to gather and use in any detached manner, nor is it a programme characterised by initial research with the promise that this will lead to intervention in the future. Rather, whilst the programme is based on previous research (MacBeath and Dempster, 2009), the focus for participants and the vast majority of stakeholders is development, and the complementary research elements are integrated into the development work. For the few of us for whom the development and research are of equal priority, the research informs the development work in Ghana as well as feeding the knowledge base of the CCE and contributing to the wider research community.

While the research draws on concepts, theoretical frameworks and instruments developed in other contexts (MacBeath and Dempster, 2009; James et al., 2007) it neither tests hypotheses nor makes direct comparisons. Instead the emphasis is on understanding and exploring the applicability of a conceptualisation of 'Leadership for Learning' in the context of basic schools in Ghana. The immediate practical applicability of this quest for understanding is how to strengthen the capacity of basic school headteachers in Ghana to improve the quality of learning through school and classroom leadership. It also informs discussions that have already started, initiated by the Commonwealth Education Trust and the Commonwealth Secretariat responding to calls from the Commonwealth Ministers, about extending the Leadership for Learning work to other countries.

Research that aims to develop understanding is always problematic to some degree, and especially so when research is undertaken in cultures very different from that of the researchers. Of the four authors of this paper, two of us are 'outsiders', never having even visited Ghana before the commencement of this programme. The other two of us are 'insiders' - Ghanaians living there and working in education. However, the insider/outsider categorisation is not a simple dichotomy. The two 'outsiders' both have some previous experience of sub-Saharan African countries, while the two 'insiders' have both traveled extensively and lived outside Africa. And if the notion of 'insider/outsider' is extended to

consider the phenomenon under consideration, and the research subjects whose perspectives are sought, the situation becomes even more complex. The two 'outsider' (by nationality) researchers have an 'insider' understanding of the LfL framework and principles since they were central to their formulation, and through many years of similar experiences are in tune with the role and perspective of professional development leaders. One of the Ghanaian 'insiders' is also one of the 15 Professional Development Leaders while the other initiated the LfL programme in Ghana.

Exploring the issue of insider/outsider perspectives in relation to encounters with other cultures, David Bridges (2008) argues that neither is superior, but that it is possible to develop understanding of people and views rooted in different contexts through listening with empathetic imagination and imagination, a process that comes to fruition through collaboration, trust and openness to challenge.

The main data source for this paper are the 15 Professional Development Leaders, and a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods were used sequentially and iteratively. The data reported here were gathered over a period of three months:

- | | |
|---------|--|
| May 09 | Questionnaire

Individual interviews exploring and elaborating on questionnaire responses |
| June 09 | Individual writing reflecting on the opportunities and challenges for developing LfL principles in Ghanaian basic schools

Group consideration of analysis of individual writing, with summaries of opportunities and challenges recorded on flipcharts and subjected to further critical discussion |
| July 09 | Completion of CFPS, including revision of the LfL opportunities and challenges and reflections on using the LfL principles as a lens for observing practice in primary schools in England. |

Taken together this produced a substantial body of quantitative and qualitative data to be analysed. The qualitative data included fifteen hours of recorded one-to-one interviews, written accounts of opportunities and challenges, flipchart summaries and individual written reflections on the application of principles. The quantitative data derived from the questionnaire with its two axes of perceived practice and perceived importance, produced priority categories for both axes and a gap index illustrating the distance between what was perceived as happening and what ought to be happening. The elaboration through interview of the quantitative data help to problematise the numbers and provided more fine grained insights into the questionnaire responses.

6. The findings

Analysis of questionnaire responses provided the basis for further interrogation of interview data, identifying the key themes which were then summarised and fed back to participants for respondent validation and further elaboration. Ten salient themes emerged.

(i) The context of school leadership

The first and foremost theme is an understanding of the parameters within which headteachers and teachers work and try to reconcile the demands of 'the system' and the wish to embed moral and educational principles. As their interviews, writing and workshop discussion reveal, latitude for change and agency in school leadership has to be seen:

- a) in the policy context and the parameters of their work set by the Ghana Education Service and the Ministry
- b) in the traditions and expectations of teachers as to the role and authority of the head
- c) in the expectations of pupils, parents and community of what a headteacher 'is' and what he/she should be doing and not doing.

One PD Leader described relationship between teachers and headteachers as marked more by conflict and counter accusations than by collegial discourse. By tradition maintaining privacy and secrecy is seen as enhancing heads' status and mystique. While leadership vision was described as 'crucial' this was accompanied by the caveat that there was 'little he can do with his own vision' as vision was described as the province of district directorates with supervisors policing what was to be taught. Communicating one's own vision to his or her staff was seen as an isolated occurrence, but located in a context where headteacher-staff communication in general was a significantly underdeveloped aspect of school life.

The relatively low level of heads' qualifications in basic schools means they lack the knowledge, the know-how and the confidence to exercise a more transformation role with their staff. The ambition of the Ghana Education Service to appoint heads who have degrees is a long term goal.

(ii) Parents and community

Encouraging parents to send their children to school was, in one school visited, both the priority of the headteacher but also one of the most time-consuming aspects of his job. Not all parents support their children going to school, sometimes preferring them to be at home working or to share in the domestic economy including child care. Having the appropriate clothing and footwear, long distances to school coupled with resistance by recalcitrant children can conspire to take the line of line resistance. A PD leader exemplified this in the following statement:

"At the extreme end of our district by the lakes some children have to fend for themselves by fishing at night then walk five to seven miles before coming to school."

The School Feeding Programme, is however an incentive which encourages attendance. Nonetheless, generalisations about parents may be misleading as there are many parents who are also highly ambitious for their children and who not only encourage school attendance but also ask for extra tuition for their children.

(iii) A culture of prescription and competition

Policy, it is claimed, pushes schools to compete on a highly unequal playing field. But competition also creates obstacles to collaboration among schools in both a geographical and cultural sense. In a highly competitive environment sharing is neither a practical proposition in many rural areas nor culturally compelling as it may be perceived either as giving away valued knowledge, eroding autonomy or judged to be an inherent weakness. Inter-school exchange is made even less likely by the privatisation of practice within schools. Teachers, it is said, are reluctant to let others into their classrooms for fear of criticism.

(iv) An overloaded and irrelevant curriculum

There is apparently little connection between what and how children learn in school and the informal learning that takes place in home, peer group and community. What is valued is what takes place in the classroom and through the formal curriculum while the knowledge (and misconceptions) that children have of the world remain largely hidden and devalued. The example was given of children for whom fishing and agriculture are a way of life while their school diet is one of studying the classics.

What is decided in Accra (the capital of Ghana) and relevant to schools there does not necessarily apply in other areas, yet, as it was said, all teachers work within a tight 'straitjacket', allowing them little 'wiggle room' to depart from what is mandated by the Ministry.

(v) Assessment

Summative assessment drives the curriculum, the learning of children and the priorities of teachers and school leaders. Formative assessment (or assessment for learning) is inhibited by a number of factors:

- a) the overwhelming emphasis on examination results and pressure on teachers to demonstrate that they have faithfully covered the curriculum
- b) the fact that pupils' results influence the grading of school which in turn reflects on teachers
- c) teachers' lack of understanding and expertise regarding assessment
- d) the failure of teachers to inform pupils of criteria by which they will be assessed
- e) pressure on headteachers from the high stakes nature of exams, leaving little or no room for experimentation or innovation

(vi) Classroom interaction

A number of factors conspire together to make classroom interaction a highly teacher-directed process casting pupils in the role of consumers and respondents. It is teachers who ask the questions (to which they already know the answers) and, it is claimed, inappropriate for students to ask questions or to give feedback. This is explained by:

- a) a culture in which questioning may be seen as undermining of the teacher's authority and direction
- b) size of classes which may often exceed 80 pupils with the need for two teachers, one to keep control while the other teaches
- c) lack of professional development for many teachers in questioning and thinking skills or in alternative approaches to pedagogy
- d) expectations and inhibitions of children as to theirs and their teachers' roles

While observation of classes revealed some examples of children in groups it appeared to be more of a seating arrangement than genuine group work in which children talk to one another, help one another and engage in shared problem solving.

(vii) Pupils as learners

Purposes and objectives or a road map for learning appear to be rarely articulated by teachers or a focus for discussion with pupils. Even schemes of work, said one PD Leader, are not known to pupils. Without a view of overall goals it is said that pupils just 'walk into new concepts' without a grasp of why they are being taught and what their relationship is to prior or future knowledge acquisition. There is typically a lack of opportunity for pupils to express their learning difficulties, for teachers to become aware of these and address them, particularly in large classes where the question 'Do you all understand?' is unlikely to meet with individual dissent. Slow learners are described as 'dragged along' while gifted learners, it was said, are held back by the slow pace of whole class lesson. In this respect facility with language is a key inhibitor of children's willingness of ability to contribute.

(viii) Naming and shaming

Shaming pupils such as standing in a corner or with hands in the air was observed as well as threats of caning. One interviewee spoke of there being 'a whip in every classroom', and another of mistakes in spelling being met with a caning. Canes were also used for maths, seen as most important subject in the curriculum. 'Children will come to school late to miss

maths and avoid the cane' commented one of the PD Leaders interviewed. School itself was described by one interviewee as a punishment with children 'forced' or bribed to go a feeding programme or by other incentives.

Punishments also extended, it was said, to those trainee teachers who were seen as inadequate.

(ix) Questions of status

Respect for one's elders has deeply embedded in Ghanaian cultural roots while reverence for age means not questioning authority no matter of how ill-informed or unjust that authority might be. The story was told of a pupil who had researched a topic on the internet and shared his new found knowledge in class, only for this to be dismissed by the teacher for whom his own lack of similar knowledge was a clear threat.

Hofstede's concept of 'power distance' is highly relevant to Ghanaian schools. A large distance between the authority of the head, and the teacher and in turn between teacher and pupil inhibits the free flow of ideas and serves to perpetuate inadequate or bad practice. Heads who would seek to learn from their staff or teachers or who open themselves to learning from their colleagues or their pupils would be seen as weak or inadequate. The headteacher's status is affirmed and preserved by maintaining a distance from teachers, symbolically behind his or her office desk and by not being seen to fraternize with staff.

(x) Change

'Inflexible' is a word that was used to describe teachers. What has always been in done in a certain way is hard to change without counter evidence to show that it makes the teacher's life any easier, makes pupils better behaved or increases the school's measured success. While pre-service education for teachers introduces them to more progressive pedagogies, PD Leaders say that they are quickly disabused by serving teachers tell them to forget those ideas.

7. Meeting the challenges of change

These ten issues together with summaries and extracts of the papers written by the PDLs were fed back to them. The PDLs discussed them in small groups, anticipating issues that might arise with engaging headteachers in a programme of professional development, recording their findings on a flipchart with key issues placed on a continuum from challenges to opportunities. The headline concerns, developed in more detail in a paper for the PDLs entitled *The Challenges of Change* were:

- *Remuneration* Given poor salaries and the need to travel some distance to a workshop, it was seen as inevitable that headteachers would want some form of recompense.
- *Expectations and motivations* The wide range of expectations and levels of engagement, perceptions of cost-benefits and unfamiliarity with interactive methods were seen as potential hazards.
- *Prior learning and prior experience* Headteachers' prior experience would include the futility experienced in previous seminars and workshops.
- *Differing knowledge, experience and qualification* Differential qualifications of heads and varying knowledge of contemporary issues could leave some either struggling or frustrated by the level of the discourse.

- *Language and cultural background* Overcoming the potential cultural barriers would require sensitivity and understanding while meanings and frames of reference could not be simply taken for granted or assumed.
- *Intervention fatigue* Many of those who will attend the workshop have seen it all before and may be sceptical, suffering from innovation overload and workshop fatigue.
- *Workshop resourcing* Participants would require a high level of appropriate resourcing - books, handouts, reference materials, projection facilities, writing areas, and an environment conducive to adult learning and dialogue.
- *Sustainability* What would prevent this programme being a 'one day wonder?' as long term support would entail infrastructures, resourcing and funding as well as remuneration.
- *Teacher commitment* Headteachers have to encourage teachers' commitment in a situation where some come to school late, or not all, and do not invest the time and energy to make it a stimulating experience for their pupils.
- *Morale* A number of issues conspire to affect the morale of headteachers, especially if their efforts go unrecognized. The pride in being a teacher that once existed is not as it was and the task is less fulfilling, especially in rural schools.
- *Leadership* A focus by heads only on what is happening in their own schools and a lack of wider perspective will need to be addressed if these participants are to overcome the insular view of what is relevant and applicable to their own unique situations.
- *Commitment at system level* The Ministry, the GES, the District Officers all need to share a commitment to the programme and to the principles of leadership for learning.
- *Transfer and application* The ability to transfer knowledge and apply what has been learned in the complex situations that heads would meet in their schools would be a common challenge for all headteachers in differing degrees. Lack of follow-up, feedback and evaluation strategies in previous programmes will have created a mindset so that heads would need to be constantly helped to make the link back to their varied contexts.

Enter the headteachers

In the event very few of these concerns were realised. The three week workshop for 125 headteachers drawn from the ten regions of the country and held in Ghana in August/September exceeded everyone's expectations and was evaluated very positively. This was due in part to the careful selection of participants by the District Offices, in part the expertise of the PDLs in leading the workshops and in part due to the nature of activities which engaged heads in issues that they saw as stimulating and relevant to their work. The workshop provided the opportunity to explore further the opportunities and challenges of developing Leadership for Learning in Ghana, this time from the headteachers' perspective. The next section summarises issues raised by the headteachers, issues that resonate with, expand and extend the points made by the Professional Development Leaders.

8. Issues of context, attitude and sustainability

The context of school leadership

Transparency is a term that has come into usage in a European context to denote the opening up of practice, thinking and decision making. In no country is that accomplished by simple mandate or persuasion given the traditional closed door nature of teaching and learning and management of schools. In Ghana the dilemma is writ large. Knowledge is seen as a source of power; the sharing of learning experiences may diminish what is yours and has neither been encouraged nor institutionalised among Ghanaian teachers. By virtue of his/her title, the headteacher is perceived as the leading intermediary between the school and the community and between the school and the education office, in a sense a liaison officer interpreting and implementing policy in the light of local circumstances.

If loosening the grip on the reins of power, inviting teacher, parental and pupil leadership, is to be realised, the headteacher has to grapple with a closely interlocking and self reinforcing set of perceptions and expectations in order to communicate his/her vision and 'carry staff along'. The notion of the headteacher as a 'lead learner', modeling behaviour for his/her staff and pupils requires a huge reservoir of self confidence and humility, a recognition that change is a long term prospect with inevitable setbacks on the way.

There are also far reaching implications in respect of parents and community, not only through the agency of the Parents Teacher Association (PTA) but by persuading all parents that they have a role to play in their children's learning, behavior and motivation.

While anticipating a positive response from their staff, heads were apprehensive as to the support of the District Education Office and circuit supervisors, given that professional development initiatives in the country have largely been top-down with headteachers at the receiving end. It was therefore seen as paramount that circuit supervisors be included in the programme and that the Ministry and GES be appraised of, and involved in, the thrust of development.

Attitudes to change

However strong the commitment to the task and however resilient in the face of the challenges, meeting and dealing with change relies to a large degree on the acceptance of all stakeholders and slow pace of change, frustrating when nothing immediate happens to disturb the inertia. A heavy workload and the limited support of some parents also militate against the best laid plans. In the light of these challenges some heads were reluctant to risk applying what they had learned, worried about being blamed if things did not go as expected. Follow-up, feedback, monitoring and support strategies were all seen as critical in sustaining and encouraging heads to take forward what they had learned.

A central constraint is limited funding. Although the government provides a capitation grant of 4.5 Ghana cedis (approximately £2.05) per child, the amount is inadequate to meet the logistics required to achieve learning targets set by the school. Moreover, headteacher commitment is least rewarded by the system as their responsibility allowance is only one Ghana cedi (GhC1.00) - equivalent to approximately 50 pence.

Assessment and self evaluation

Pressures of assessment and exams were further inhibitions on creating a learning culture given teachers' preoccupation with end-of-term testing. Formative assessment is driven out by summative assessment as test performance is the major criterion used by the MOE and the GES in determining a successful school. The headteachers saw this as narrowing the mission of the school and the need for a quality of leadership which would help assessment practices to encompass all aspects of the child's development - heart, hand and head. Equipping teachers and pupils with self-evaluation skills and embedding these in the school's

day-to-day practice would, it was suggested, help to promote a holistic assessment of pupil learning.

Working within, and trying to rise above, these challenges, the headteachers said they did have the moral obligation to ensure that teachers used teaching time judiciously, and to create the space and make the time for dialogue, the conditions for learning and a focus on learning despite the least promising of circumstances. As Bassett and Frankel (2002) have observed in their study of communication, many heads do not seem to understand that to lead requires that they listen and that this holds the key to distribution, delegation or sharing of leadership.

Language plays an important role in the nature of the professional dialogue and the part it plays in the teacher's repertoire within the classroom. One of the leadership challenges identified was how to embed the 'right' language in the classroom, one that promotes the learning and self efficacy of pupils as well as ensuring that TLMs (teaching and learning materials) reflect an active, critical, learner-centred approach.

Professional learning

For the headteachers, also known as school transformational leaders (STLs), enhancing professional learning among teachers was an ongoing priority. The Ministry of Education had put in place a distance education programme in 2005 to provide untrained teachers in the country with the opportunity to study for a diploma in basic education. Yet, this was, in the view of the heads, insufficient without a strong emphasis on professional learning for practising teachers. It was proposed that this take the form of teachers observing learners, recording observations and using these to inform decisions for teaching and learning strategies. Headteachers also believed it important to encourage teachers to undertake further studies, to listen to news, to read texts and to engage in regular supervision and feedback as critical aspects in their own professional development.

Sustainability

Headteachers' concern as to the programme's sustainability rests on a view of there being strong and coherent linkage between the heads and their teachers, the school and the district office, circuit supervisors, the school and the community and all other stakeholders. Networking and dialogue at all levels was deemed critical together with administrative support (infrastructure, resourcing and funding) from both Ghana-wide and district offices. Follow-up activities, including monitoring and continuous contact with PDLs were also seen as essential to the sustainability of the program. Extending the Ghanaian communal culture to the school context could ensure that teambuilding and learning cultures were established on firm ground.

After an intensive three weeks at the Professional Development Centre, away from their schools and families, sustaining the enthusiasm and commitment to change could, however, easily dissipate on return to the immediate challenges of their schools. Some follow up visits to schools in November revealed a continuing commitment, in less than propitious circumstances, but underlining again some of the key long term issues remaining.

In summary

The five Leadership for Learning principles have been embraced by the Professional Development Leaders and by the headteachers. Their response to and engagement with the principles are strong indications that the principles do in fact 'travel'. The principles appear to provide a memorable and powerful framework for advancing leadership for learning, and there are both opportunities and challenges for developing LfL in Ghanaian basic schools.

Leadership for Learning has from the outset insisted that it is not a 'project'. It is neither a short term intervention nor a research initiative for the benefit of academic publication. Its inspiration came from within Ghana and its programme aims resonated with the Ministry, the Education Service and UNICEF, who are committed allies. The insider/outsider perspectives and reciprocity of teamwork are key to its continued progress, underwritten by the Commonwealth Education Trust. The commitment of the PDLs, the enthusiasm of the headteachers and the first cohort of circuit supervisors are laying the ground work for a slow but powerful process of capacity building across the country.

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