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This paper is based on a forthcoming chapter (MacBeath and Swaffield, 2013) drawing on a collaborative research and development programme for the professional development of headteachers in Ghana. Colonisation involves conflict and Ghana's colonial legacy provides a powerful backdrop to the development of schools, shaping their relationship with their communities and requiring a quality of leadership with confidence to challenge much of established thinking and practice. The chapter begins with a summary of the historical background and the post-colonial context of present day school leadership, followed by consideration of particular challenges faced by school leaders. 'Leadership for Learning', a collaborative development and research programme brought in to help headteachers address these challenges by developing their capacity, is then briefly considered.

Background and the post-colonial context of school leadership in Ghana

The first Europeans to establish a presence on land now known as Ghana were the Portuguese. They arrived in the fifteenth century, initially drawn by gold, ivory and pepper, but with the development of plantations in the new world in the sixteenth century the slave trade was established. The Portuguese remained dominant until 1642 when the Dutch took precedence, followed by a period in which other European powers including the British, Danes and Swedes vied for the power to trade with African chiefs and communities. Britain outlawed the slave trade in 1807 and became the dominant European power in the area in the second half of the nineteenth century, establishing the Gold Coast colony in 1874 following the withdrawal of the Dutch. Conflict among local peoples, particularly the Ashanti and the Fante, involved the British and a series of wars were fought over several decades. By 1902 not only the coastal region but also the central Asante area and the Northern Territories were under British control. British administration was characterised by indirect colonial rule, whereby services were controlled centrally but administered locally. Traditional chiefs retained limited power and took their instructions from British administrators. During the first half of the twentieth century there was growth in exports particularly of coffee, cocoa, timber and minerals, which helped fund the improvement of infrastructure and the development of education. By 1950 over 40 per cent of school aged children were attending school, and the Gold Coast was the most educated part of West Africa (Hallett, 1974). According to Segura (2009) the British used schools to educate intermediaries for colonisation. This was essential to the policy of indirect rule so as to impose superiority of knowledge, language and culture, and cut pupils off from their families in order to create new indigenous elites who would align themselves with the culture, values and world view of the colonizer (Antwi, 1992; McWilliam & Kwamena-Poh, 1975). Nationalist resistance to colonisation took various forms, was intensified after World War II, and in 1947 the newly formed United Gold Coast Convention called for self-government as soon as possible. Rioting, involving rural and working class people who supported the nationalist movement, broke out in 1948. Following the imprisonment of some of the leaders of the movement, boycotts, strikes

and other forms of civil disobedience followed. Eventually, on 6 March 1957 Ghana became an independent nation.

All societies are shaped by the wars and conflicts through which they live, and the transition from colonialism to independence and self-government in Ghana has not brought with it a sudden release from a colonial mindset. Nowhere is this more apparent than in education, where the post-colonial school, in many essential respects, continues to bear the imprint of its colonial legacy. Ghanaian governments have aspired to an independent nation forging its own identity, but according to Arnot (2008) have not succeeded in ‘decolonisation of the mind’ (p27).

Up until the last quarter of the 19th century, education was an informal process through which Ghanaian communities prepared the next generation. The collectivist nature of education in traditional communities, writes Antwi (1992), encompassed the total way of life of the society. Education as a shared responsibility ensured that the learning of all children was the responsibility of the community. In contrast, formal schooling introduced by missionaries and under colonial rule was essentially ‘Western’ in style: structures and the nature of the school day continue to mimic this in the layout of classrooms, with rows of seats, blackboards, textbooks and subject timetables. Starting times are inflexible, so that if school starts at 7.45 in the morning pupils who arrive late (possibly having carried out domestic chores at home and then walked many miles) tend to be punished by excluding them from lessons and making them tidy the compound. Language is also cited as a factor in marginalization and colonization. A study by Quist (2001) in Ghana and Cote d’Ivoire found that all students interviewed preferred to be taught in English, or French, and only 35 per cent could speak their native language. In Ghana also, English language has ‘cultural capital’, with many Ghanaians seeing it as the neutral language that should be used as the medium of instruction (Sefa Dei & Opini, 2008). Sefa Dei and Opini (2008, p. 479) view this privileging of a ‘foreign language’ as reinforcing cultural imperialism and neo-colonialism, and robbing students of their cultural heritage.

Since the gaining of independence from British colonial rule, education has been a high priority on the government’s agenda. In the early days of independence there was a dramatic increase in the number of primary and secondary schools, with a momentum for free universal and compulsory education. However, progress was not steady, and Kingsley (2007) claimed that by the 1980s Ghana’s education system has become dysfunctional. The Whole School Development Programme (WSD) launched in 1987 sought to promote:

- Child-centred primary practice in literacy, numeracy and problem-solving with the view to improve the quality of teaching and learning in basic school classrooms;
 - Community participation in education delivery;
 - Competencies of teaching and learning through school-based in-service training;
 - Participatory planning and resource management at school and district levels;
- and
- Improved efficiency in resource management.

Osei’s 2006 study concluded that these laudable aims could not be realised without a quality of leadership which offered teachers the support needed to implement the kind of radical and widespread change implied. Reform, he concluded, requires that teachers “thoroughly understand the rationale for reforms and are able to engage critically and productively with the key educational objectives of new policies through a solid understanding of contemporary educational theory and practice” (Osei, 2006, p. 49).

Following a 'Western' decentralised model for whole school development, principals and leadership teams are responsible for improvement in their schools, measured primarily by 'outcomes' in the form of pupils' scores on exams. However, schools sit within a nesting of agencies and authorities which support, direct, or constrain their initiative. District assemblies, local councils, and school management committees may either facilitate, or constrain, decision-making at school and classroom level. "How useful is the Anglo-Saxon model or Eurocentric model of decentralization for other communities in developing parts of the world?" asks Mfum-Mensah (2004, p. 153). He problematizes the nature of this complex devolution, designed for 'empowerment' of local community voice and agency. He identifies three levels of participation by communities in the organization and conduct of schooling. These range from local community members playing a supportive role, through a stronger advisory function, inviting 'voice' and taking account of local concerns, to more fully blown decision-making by community members extending to full community control. However, his in-depth studies of communities in the northern region of Ghana found that, rather than being a tool for empowering them, the shift in locus of control had produced "conflicts, gossip and tensions among community members" (Mfum-Mensah, 2004, p. 153). The power struggles and rivalry that emerged were, he argues, a consequence of policy makers placing responsibility on individuals with little or no experience of school management and no grounded understanding of what it means to create the conditions for learning and teaching. Hence, he concluded, "school governance may draw on conventional attitudes more than empirical fact about what promotes learning" (Mefum-Mensah, 2004, p. 153).

The establishment of school management committees (SMCs) in 2001 (Ministry of Education/Ghana Education Service, 2001) was a further step to support and oversee provision most appropriate to local needs and priorities. However, it was not until 2005 that primary school education became free as well as compulsory. Then, in 2007, reforms which had been in preparation since 2002 were launched, introducing new gender-free pathways which were intended to enhance the nation's human resources in the form of a skilled, technologically-advanced and disciplined workforce to service the growing economy. Other elements of the reform included establishing a National Teachers' Council to regulate the profession and a distance education programme to upgrade serving teachers' knowledge and skills.

Challenges faced by school leaders

Aspects of the colonial legacy contribute to the array of challenges faced by school leaders, challenges that are economic and cultural.

"Which is better, a child who doesn't go to school or one who has the chance to be taught under a tree?", asked Bannerman Mensah in 2006, in his role as Deputy Director General of the Ghana Education Service. Four years on from that speech it was claimed that while churches and community centres were used to house the growing number of children wishing to attend school, 3,947 schools were still conducted under trees (Editorial, 16th April, 2010 <http://www.afrika.no>). Whatever the physical circumstance, education in Ghana at the basic level now reaches most young people. It has expanded at a rate far exceeding the country's economic growth, although the Ministry of Manpower Youth and Employment (2002) found that 32 per cent of school leavers had no skills relevant to the world of work. Ghana, like many other African countries, is witnessing a deforestation and de-agrarianisation of rural land, and an acceleration in the migration of young people to cities. These young people often enter the informal economy, where they become vulnerable to criminal

activity. Girls and young women isolated in the city, and homeless, are subject to exploitation by night guards, by security personnel, and by a whole range of urban predators buying, or requiring, sexual favours. Children and young people are caught between two cultures, differing expectations and the push-pull of life in the community and life on the streets. Having less and less in common with their parents and the older generation, and with increasing access to television, mobile phones and the internet, they look to Western mores in preference to the traditional values of their communities. An economy that depends on a mobile, flexible and skilled workforce does not sit comfortably with traditions of collective responsibility (Arnot, 2008).

One of the major constraints which militates against girls' access and achievement particularly in the rural areas is the low presence of female teachers: (Casely-Hayford, 2007, p. 5) states that Ghana's Education Service is reluctant to post women to areas where they would be "handicapped or fall victim to local chiefs or rich farmers who wanted to take them as their second wife". Hedges (2002, p. 357) has summarized the policy of the Ghana Education Service on this as follows:

Women teachers, who make up over 30 per cent of training college graduates are not to be posted to rural areas, despite the positive impact this might have on girls' enrolment. It is a practice that recognises two Ghanaian realities: parents' fear that their daughters may lose their 'marriage market' or be put in the vulnerable position, and middle class husbands' reluctance for their wives to work in rural areas.

Thus, male teachers predominate in poor rural areas, reinforcing the view that teaching is 'man's work' and depriving girls of role models and of educated women with whom they can speak about female issues (Sefa Dei & Opini, 2008). The situation is exacerbated by male teachers discouraging female students from studying certain school subjects which could open up certain male-dominated career paths for them (Palmer, 2007).

Launching a new programme in May 2010, directed at marginalised groups, Ghana's then Vice President, John Dramani Mahama, noted that "whilst enrolment and gender parity rates have steadily improved at the lower primary level, this has not translated into increased retention of children, particularly girls and children with disabilities, in the upper primary and junior high schools" (<http://www.vso.org.uk/news/press-release/27152/>). Violations of girls' rights occurs in three main ways: abuse of fostering arrangements, forced marriage through betrothal to older men, and the migration of adolescent girls to cities in order to undertake 'head-portering' work, often due to a lack of livelihood opportunities at home (Crawford, 2010). Fostering is a consequence of extreme poverty. Parents accept the payment of a lump sum of money, or a cow, in exchange for their child's labour. These children, are often mistreated. In the case of boys, many "are forced to continue diving (to tie up or release fishing nets) for several hours a day and are often beaten. One senior official revealed that every month a child dies in the lake because of overwork, or exhaustion" (Fentiman, Hall & Bundy, 1999, p. 437). There is also a tradition of 'pawning', or debt fosterage, using children as collateral for loans, working for the creditor until the debt is repaid, giving the creditor rights over the labour of the child for the period of his, or her, indenture. The related practice of last resort of hiring out young females as mothers and carers of younger children limits women's access to, and participation in, education.

The low level of pupil achievement is also a matter of concern. While few African countries participate in international comparative assessments, Ghana ranked 47th (out of 47) in 2010 on the international benchmark in mathematics and 47th (out

of 48) in science. Testing revealed that as many as 87 per cent of Ghanaian students did not reach the low international benchmark in science and that 91 per cent did not reach it in mathematics. (<http://news.peacefmonline.com/social/200910>).

Clearly there is a need for more and better qualified teachers. However, with pupil numbers growing rapidly, the Ministry of Education has calculated that the total number of teachers needed to keep pace has been doubling every 18 years. It was estimated in 2006 that about 10 per cent of the total number of teachers (around 24,000), most of them serving in rural areas, were untrained (Osei, 2006). Engagement in upgrading of formal qualifications is, however, not attractive because the low salary levels mean that teachers often need to take on part time jobs out of school hours in order to earn extra money.

Teachers who live in cities such as the capital, Accra, find it difficult when posted to rural communities to live there without access to the internet, electricity, drinking water and basic amenities (Ghana Web, 10 February 2010). It is estimated that 10,000 teachers leave the teaching service each year, in large part due to the unpropitious conditions in which they have to work, the resultant lack of job satisfaction that accrues, and the relatively low status that they enjoy. The late payment of salaries reinforces the idea, in the eyes of teachers and the communities in which they work, that they are of low status and that their work is of little use (Hedges, 2002, p. 359). As qualified teachers leave the profession the gaps are filled by unqualified staff.

In many parts of the country, teachers have to deal not only with the expectations of the District Office, but also with those of the local community (Roberts, 2009). While the District Office has its own professional criteria, exercised to some extent at a bureaucratic distance, the eyes and ears of the local community are ever alert to potential, or real, indiscretions. Villagers know how frequently teachers are absent from the classroom. They are acutely aware of any indiscretion, excessive drinking, or sexual impropriety. Underlying this, there is often resentment about accepting a professional in the community, one who possesses an alien authority over their children and who has associated privileges, such as not being required to undertake communal village tasks, and enjoying a lifestyle which creates unfair competition with village men over access to girls and young women.

Most teachers are young men, and most are unmarried, or do not have their wives living with them (Roberts, 2009). As wage earners, they have more money at their disposal for gifts than, for example, unemployed school leavers, or young men dependent upon their relatives. Teachers usually have more privacy in their rented or free rooms, “while the school building itself is notoriously a place of assignation” (Roberts, 2009, p. 275).

‘Seduction charges’ may be brought against teachers, not necessarily because they are responsible for pregnancies, but because they are the only persons who could be expected to pay the large sums involved. Teachers may also be threatened by witchcraft-associated objects being placed on their desks and may experience action taken against themselves, or their property. They may find it difficult to buy food in the village and may, exceptionally, be thrown out of their accommodation. When conflict reaches the point at which village political authority intervenes, the first step is usually to withdraw the privilege that the village considers it extends to teachers as professionals, namely, the waiving of the obligation to perform communal labor.

What goes on in the ‘classroom’ is also often uninspiring. Dull (2004, p. 312) puts it succinctly as follows: “Maintaining student discipline through teacher-dominated methodologies and teacher discipline [is] by following standardized

procedures, maintaining orderly classrooms and pleasing supervisors”. She cites examples of the tutors’ and supervisors’ view that good practice in lesson presentation is where one never deviates from the textbook, apart from engaging in blackboard work. Art projects and other more student-centred activities are discouraged because of a belief that they may lead to indiscipline, while group work involving discussion is discouraged as it could lead to students playing, or chatting. Instead, learning by rote is promoted, partly because it facilitates conformity and order in the classroom, and partly because children have to commit much to memory in order to pass exams.

Matters are not helped by the lack of a home environment conducive to promoting study habits. Obeng’s title for her 2002 book, *Home was Uncomfortable, School was Hell*, captures through case studies the difficulties faced by children and young people in trying to balance the demands of the domestic economy with homework and home study. Very few homes have electricity for lighting. Most have kerosene lamps, which come with their own associated accidents and tragedies. Also, in describing her experience as a child she recalled that her grandmother “saw no need to give us girls her kerosene lamp to study”. Preference had to be given to the boys “whose duty it was to study well, do well in life and then look after us girls” (Obeng, 2002, p. 28).

Support for school leaders to face these challenges

Zame, Hope and Respress (2008) stated that education reform in Ghana has ignored the importance of leadership development for principals. While this statement may be rebutted by evidence of programmes in various places in the country, the vast majority of principals do accede to, and tend to remain in, their positions without the benefit of professional development. The Zame et al. survey of 224 principals in the greater Accra region reported 29 per cent of them as having some form of training, with the predominating emphasis being on what might be described as maintenance tasks. Fifty per cent of principals ranked ‘managing and organizing the school day-to-day functions’ as the primary proficiency required of a principal. Assessing pupil performance was allocated to last place out of ten competencies practised by principals in primary schools, with only 1.8 per cent citing it as current practice. While questionnaire items such as those used in arriving at this conclusion are open to differing interpretation there is, nonetheless, consistent evidence as to the primarily office-bound administrative role of the Ghanaian school principal.

Oduro (2003) described principals as performing a range of duties such as supervising the cleaning and tidying of the school campus, monitoring the hygiene of vendors who come on to the school compound, inspecting building projects, and attending to risks, injuries and illness among staff as well as pupils. Oduro (2009) has also reported that three-quarters of the principals he interviewed had little or no training and that leadership strategies tended to be largely based on trial and error. He said that many principals did not regard themselves as leaders, but as custodians of school properties and implementers of government policies. Oduro concluded there was an urgent need for intervention strategies which would equip school leaders with strategic approaches to professional development and classroom pedagogy. As Director of the Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (IEPA) at the University of Cape Coast, George Oduro was highly respected and proved instrumental in establishing a programme for headteacher capacity building in order to address the needs he and Zame et al. had identified.

The ‘Leadership for Learning’ (LfL) programme involves a team from the University of Cambridge, funded by the Commonwealth Education Trust, working

closely with the IEPA and with the support of the Ghanaian Ministry of Education and Education Service and UNICEF. The programme uses the Leadership for Learning framework developed through the international ‘Carpe Vitam’ LfL project (MacBeath and Dempster, 2008) which viewed both leadership and learning as agential activities, and incorporated Knapp, Copland, and McLaughlin’s (2003) three layers of learning – student, teacher and organisational. Five key principles operate at each of these three layers, and all are encompassed by democratic values and moral purpose. The headlines of the five principles are:

- Maintaining a focus on learning as an activity;
- Creating conditions favourable to learning as an activity;
- Creating a dialogue about the connections between leadership and learning;
- Sharing leadership;
- Fostering a shared sense of accountability.

The programme commenced on the ground in 2009 with a cadre of 15 ‘professional development leaders’ – educators carefully selected from regional offices and from the University of Cape Coast for their energy, insight and commitment. These 15 proved a vital to the whole programme. Initially they worked intensively with the Cambridge team, learning about the LfL framework and approach and, crucially, testing its applicability in the Ghanaian context. They helped plan and subsequently led a three-week residential workshop for the first cohort of 125 headteachers, drawn from all ten regions of the country. As the school leaders considered the five principles in their full detail, and in relation to all members of the school community and at all levels of learning, some long held attitudes were challenged and traditional practices questioned. The headteacher participants – all of whom had given up their holidays to attend the workshop and many who had travelled over 24 hours from their homes – worked long days and were hugely positive about the programme. Its impact was in:

- Providing a model of leadership development;
- Embedding a set of principles for learning-inspired leadership;
- Creating a collegial network of headteachers;
- Identifying the need for similar development work for those who support school leaders and monitor school improvement.

The 125 headteachers came together again nine months later for a two-week workshop to share their experiences, achievements and difficulties in developing leadership for learning practice, and to plan for sustainability. This time they were joined by their ‘Circuit Supervisors’ to whom headteachers are directly accountable, so they too experienced and became conversant with the LfL framework. Such was participants’ enthusiasm that a number of heads had shared their learning not only with their own school staff but also with heads of neighboring schools. Circuit supervisors organised sessions for other school leaders in their area. Professional Development Leaders were often invited to assist at these sessions, and meantime the PDLs and Cambridge team held shorter sessions for District, Regional and National Directors of Education, thus involving all levels of the system. The five LfL principles became a common reference point for the ongoing dialogue among headteachers, circuit supervisors and directors.

The 15 Professional Development Leaders and the initial cohort of headteachers have gained the respect of the Ministry and the Ghana Education Service, convincing policy makers to invest in the continuing development of the programme and to extend it country wide. Many more workshops have been held, involving to date over 2000 headteachers, while the five LfL principles feature in the revised Headteachers’ Handbook, produced by the Ghana Education Service as the guide for school leaders nationwide. Enthusiasm, engagement and authentic practice among the leading edge

cohort of 125 heads have been supported in three main ways. Firstly, three-day meetings were held in the north and the south of the country eighteen months after the second workshop for heads to once again engage in dialogue about LfL with each other, with their circuit supervisors, with the PDLs, and a member of the Cambridge team. Secondly, a biannual newsletter has been produced by the programme coordinator at the IEPA University of Cape Coast, sharing stories of practice, highlighting certain schools, and focusing on different aspects of the framework. Thirdly, for the last nine months they have been sent weekly SMS messages – mobile phones being the most ubiquitous and reliable communication technology across the country. A workshop for GES District Training Officers to develop their understanding of Leadership for Learning and how to promote LfL practices in their districts was planned for November 2012, but due to the national election has been postponed to early 2013.

Conclusion

Ghana is a country characterised by a diverse and inequitable distribution of resource and wealth, a consequence of population migrations, religious influence and colonial economic policy. While internal conflicts and north-south division existed prior to colonialism, the ruthless exploitation of its people exacerbated old rivalries and created new ones, further disenfranchising rural areas, particularly in the north. The impact of decentralisation policies has had a destabilising effect on communities, whose leaders, parents and community members lack experience and requisite expertise in the running of schools. There are tensions between the horizontal (collegial and capacity building) purposes of the education system and its vertical (distancing and individualistic) functions. Inflexibility in school routines, protocols and starting times creates problems for households, where children, particularly girls, are required to share in family tasks. Post-colonial practices and the reliance on external donor agencies are reflected in what is widely acknowledged as a cumbersome and inappropriate curriculum. A consequence of this is a lack of engagement by pupils, low levels of achievement and, on the parents' part, a weighing of opportunity costs to the domestic economy. When a school is located a long distance away from the community, girls are less likely than their brothers to attend. Other issues are the pull of cities and migration from north to south. These expose young people to exploitation, abuse and criminalization, often by the very individuals employed to protect them.

Such issues are deeply rooted in history and culture, and in continuing struggles to resolve the tensions between pre- and post-colonial values and forms of government. While the associated tensions will not be addressed by reforming schools alone, school education can continue to play a significant role in social and economic life as long as there is a quality of leadership whose focus is on learning at the individual pupil level, the teacher professional level, the senior management level and the inter-school level. In this regard, the Centre for Commonwealth Education's 'Leadership for Learning' initiative has been able to make a significant contribution to recasting the reach and impact of leadership, where the starting point is with a focus on learning, an environment which supports the learning of a whole community, the continuing dialogue around learning, the sharing of leadership, and a shared accountability which refers to those key enduring principles.

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See also:

<http://www.educ.cam.ac.uk:/centres/lfl>

<https://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/centres/cce/initiatives/projects/leadership/index.html>

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