M U S T E R

Multi-Site Teacher Education Research Project

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Discussion Paper

13

The Importance of
Posting in Becoming a
Teacher in Ghana

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Multi-Site Teacher Education Research Project (MUSTER)

MUSTER is a collaborative research project co-ordinated from the Centre for International Education at the University of Sussex Institute of Education. It has been developed in partnership with:

- The Institute of Education, University of Cape Coast, Ghana.
- The Institute of Education, The National University of Lesotho.
- The Centre for Educational Research and Training, University of Malawi.
- The Faculty of Education, University of Durban-Westville, South Africa.
- The School of Education, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine's Campus, Trinidad.

MUSTER is focused on generating new understandings of teacher education before, during and after the point of initial qualification as a teacher. Its concerns include exploring how new teachers are identified and selected for training programmes, how they acquire the skills they need to teach effectively, and how they experience training and induction into the teaching profession. The research includes analytical concerns with the structure and organisation of teacher education, the form and substance of teacher education curriculum, the identity, roles and cultural experience of trainee teachers, and the costs and probable benefits of different types of initial teacher training.

MUSTER is designed to provide opportunities to build research and evaluation capacity in teacher education in developing countries through active engagement with the research process from design, through data collection, to analysis and joint publication. Principal researchers lead teams in each country and are supported by three Sussex faculty and three graduate researchers.

This series of discussion papers has been created to provide an early opportunity to share output from sub-studies generated within MUSTER for comment and constructive criticism. Each paper takes a theme within or across countries and offers a view of work in progress.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

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FCUBE	Free Compulsory Basic Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GES	Ghana Education Service
GNAT	Ghanaian National Association of Teacher
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JSS	Junior Secondary School
MOE	Ministry of Education
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
SMC	School Management Committee
SPAM	School Performance Appraisal Meeting
WSD	Whole School Development

ABSTRACT

This paper is based on research done in the Central Region of Ghana and addresses some of the issues surrounding the posting of newly trained teachers. The research draws upon documents; interviews with members of the education bureaucracy; and interviews with 23 newly trained teachers posted largely to basic schools in rural areas. The paper illuminates the problems in posting newly trained teachers to rural schools. Furthermore it suggests that the education system is, in some ways, exacerbating these problems and that the education bureaucracy has a major influence on newly trained teachers' perspectives on the profession. This paper also includes an exploration of some positive aspects of the issue, such as some of the reasons why teachers accept difficult postings, and ways in which some parts of the education system are responding to the crisis.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

This paper draws on research done as part of an ongoing study of the induction and socialisation of 23 newly trained teachers in Central Region, Ghana (see figure 1).

Figure 1: a regional map of Ghana
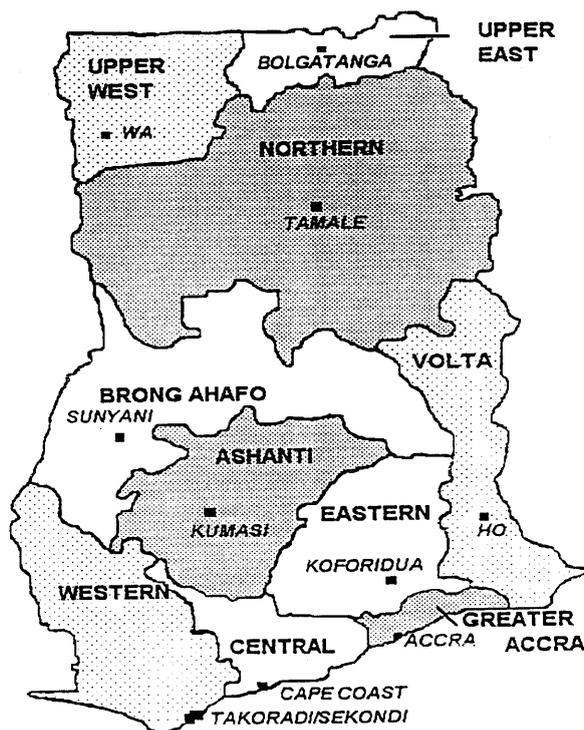
The experiences of these teachers offer a rich insight into some of the processes taking place as newly trained teachers move from training to their initial teaching posts. By considering their perspectives within the broader context of the Ghanaian education system, it becomes possible to see the specific experiences cited here as illustrative examples of a more general picture. Thus, the paper is a response to the call for more qualitative research in the area of teacher development in Ghana (see, for example, Harber and Dadey, 1993; and Akyeampong, 1998) to inform policy-making and education reform. It also complements the monograph on this subject by Daniel Konadu, a consultant at the Ghana Ministry of Education, published by the Institute for International Educational Planning in 1994.

Becoming a teacher in Ghana involves socialisation at the classroom, school and community levels. It emerged very strongly from the research, that the posting process and teachers' interaction with the bureaucracy had a powerful formative role in teacher socialisation. Literature in this area has noted the negative impact of inefficient deployment procedures in developing countries (Rust and Dalin, 1990; Konadu, 1994) in a general way, but this study attempts to outline in detail its impact on teachers' perceptions. Harber and Dadey (1993, p.149) noted the consequences of

widespread "systematic decay" and mismanagement in education in sub-Saharan Africa in the working lives of head teachers. And, more recently, Coombe vividly summarised how teachers' lives might be affected by this problem:

> …they [teachers] are at the mercy of bureaucracies which they perceive to be irrational, unpredictable and unresponsive. Teachers feel themselves disempowered by the system and often by their own principals […] This lack of clarity in management structures is evident to teachers who are subject to inordinate delays in matters of appraisal, promotion, confirmation, deployment, payment, pensions and discipline… (Coombe, 1997:113-114)

Yet, in spite of the weight of evidence supporting this view, a recent review of issues in education and development in *The New Internationalist*, a journal dedicated to popularising these issues, laid most of the blame for sub-Saharan Africa's education problems at the door of the IMF and the World Bank; there was only the briefest of acknowledgements of the role played by over-centralised and often failing bureaucratic systems.[1].

The 1970s and 1980s witnessed a long period of economic decline and mismanagement in Ghana, during which spending on education fell from 6.4% of GDP to 1.4% (World Bank, 1996). Since the government instituted structural adjustment and basic education reforms in the late 1980s, there has been a significant increase in expenditure on education, rising to 5.1% of GDP in 1997 (Akyeampong and Furlong, 2000: 8). Education now accounts for 37% of the total recurrent government budget and this increase in funds has been directed primarily at basic education in line with government targets for universal primary education, rising recently from 41% to about 65% of the budget for education (World Bank 1996:4-5; Ministry of Education 1994:3). However, in international comparisons, based on UNESCO data, Ghana's spending on education is said to be relatively low in comparison to other sub Saharan African countries in terms of GNP[2] (Colclough, 1999) and it has still not returned to its level before the economic crisis.

Several commentators have suggested that lack of funds is the major problem and more could be spent, particularly on teachers' pay, which has declined in relative terms and is often cited as a major cause of low morale (See for example Pryor, 1998). There is no doubt that teachers' pay and status has declined in Ghanaian society and there have been attempts to alleviate this through incentive and housing programmes for teachers as part of the Free Compulsory Basic Education Programme (FCUBE) (Konadu, 1994). However, with significant increases in spending on education and 46.7% of all costs of FCUBE between 1996 and 2000 being met by donors (World Bank, 1996), it could be argued that lack of funds is not the major problem, but rather how that money is spent. In recent internal and external reports on education in Ghana (see for example, Ghana MOE 1995; James Nti, 1996; World Bank, 1996) it is argued that the problems in Ghanaian education are caused by a number of factors including inadequate funding for non-salary items and poor

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[1] The *New Internationalist*, August 1999
[2] Colclough bases his comparisons on GNP (1% of GNP) while the World Bank report on education reform in Ghana uses GDP (1.6% of GDP). Interestingly, there is a discrepancy of 0.6 between the World Bank (1996) and UNESCO (1995) figures, while the increase in education spending as a percentage of GNP needed for Ghana to achieve gross enrolment of 100 would be 0.3

administration; low pay for teachers is only part of the picture. Furthermore, a study of the experience of becoming a teacher in Ghana brings to the surface some of the problems faced by any rapidly developing country with a growing population of school age; large differences between urban and rural areas; an education bureaucracy that does not function effectively; and a decline in the status of teachers within society.

The problems associated with posting newly trained teachers also need to be understood with reference to two interconnected problems within the education system. Firstly, the education system is failing in its main aim: to deliver the curriculum. The criterion-referenced tests, which were administered in 1996, revealed that only 5.5% of pupils at the end of the basic education cycle in state schools were achieving a mastery level in English (60%) in the test and only 1.8% were achieving mastery level in maths (55%) (Akyeampong, 1998: 9). Secondly, there is a severe shortage of trained teachers in the rural areas.

In 1994, Konadu asserted optimistically that:

> One may conclude that Ghana has made a tremendous effort – especially since the reform of 1987 [the introduction of FCUBE] – to adopt rules, procedures and administrative structures aimed at rationalising and optimising the provision, deployment and utilisation of teachers. (Konadu, 1994: 25)

However, he also noted that there were many problems to be faced, including the uneven distribution between rural and urban districts and regions, which left many rural schools with one or no staff while urban schools were often overstaffed; he also noted the increasing reliance on untrained national service staff to fill the gaps. He concluded his study with the following more sanguine statement:

> …the objective of optimal teacher deployment and utilisation is still far from being accomplished in Ghana. (Konadu, 1994: 50)

Despite having a teacher education system that saw 5695 newly trained teachers graduating from the 38 national training colleges in 1996/97 (GES, 1997), the problem of understaffing in the rural schools remains. The following, taken from an article in a national newspaper in 1999 illustrates the problem:

> A survey conducted in four districts in the Upper West Region has identified the lack of teachers as the major contributory factor for the fallen standards in education in the region. It also revealed that out of a total of 262 newly trained teachers posted to the region this academic year, 115 refused to turn up [...] It was discovered during the investigations that 28 out of a total of 314 primary schools in the four districts have only one teacher each since the beginning of the current academic year. (The Daily Graphic 4/5/99: 13)

As these reports suggest, the problem is not one of a lack of teachers (the national pupil teacher ratio is 30 at the basic level), so much as a problem of deployment, with a significant proportion of trained teachers each year not taking up their postings to the rural areas where they are needed (see also Akyeampong, 1998: 15). The Minister of Finance in Ghana acknowledged the problem when he wrote of the need to improve "ineffective staff posting procedures" (World Bank, 1996, Annex 4: 3). To

add to the problem, the huge growth in private education at the primary level offers alternative employment opportunities to untrained and trained teachers in schools situated largely in urban areas (Akyeampong, 1998: 16).

The link between these two facts: understaffed rural schools and poor results seems irrefutable and is widely acknowledged throughout the education system. There is therefore a need to understand how and why the system of posting teachers in Ghana is not working as effectively as it should, particularly from the perspective of newly trained teachers. This is of interest to all those considering alternative approaches to administering the education system in Ghana or embarking on reform in that area.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH METHODS

This research was carried out as part of the MUSTER (multi-site teacher education research) project[3]. At all points in the research process (planning, piloting, analysis and reporting), this research was done in close collaboration with the team of researchers at The Institute of Education at Cape Coast University in Cape Coast, Ghana and is part of a wider ongoing study of teacher training in Ghana. Three aspects of the research method need further explanation: the choice of region, the choice of the sample and the structure of the research.

Central Region was chosen for two main reasons. Firstly, it is the region that is most accessible from Cape Coast, but secondly, because it is a typical region in a number of important ways. Its balance between rural and urban areas, approximately 60/40, makes it a predominantly rural area and broadly similar to the national ratio of 70/30. As it is in the coastal area of Ghana and contains some of the best schools in the country, it is perceived, by some, to be relatively privileged. However, when newly trained teachers choose the region they would prefer to be posted to, it is only the fifth most popular region, highlighting the deprivation and remoteness of some of its rural areas. Like all regions with large rural areas, it has problems filling the vacancies in its basic (primary and junior secondary) schools, and rural district directors have an average of three vacancies for every teacher posted. It also faces the problem of a significant number of newly posted teachers not accepting their posting. Accurate figures can be difficult to come by, but I was given estimates by District Directors in rural districts throughout the region ranging from 10% – 40% of teachers not accepting their posting in 1998 for one reason or another. One reason for this is that Central Region contains some of the most economically deprived districts in the country, such as Ajumako, Assin Foso and Twifu Praso and the following statistics (table 1) give some insight into the situation regarding staffing in these districts. The figures for the urban area of Cape Coast and national figures are given for comparative purposes.

Table 1: GES Manpower Survey 1996/97

District	Primary teachers "at post"	Vacancies	Percentage of vacancies for teachers
Ajumako	386	99	26%
Assin Foso	631	216	34%
Twifu Praso	572	232	41%
Cape Coast	372	0	0%
National figure	60564	10881	18%

In choosing the teachers to be involved in the study, I wanted a sample that was balanced in relation to the general picture of newly trained teachers in Central Region in terms of gender and urban/rural postings, and with roughly equal numbers from each of the two colleges (one in Central region, one in a neighbouring region). Some of the teachers initially chosen for the sample (approximately 20%) had not reported to their post and, in effect, my sample became skewed to those who did report. Therefore, although I was unable to trace teachers who had not reported in the time available, I have included a discussion of the perceived reasons for these teachers not reporting in the context of reasons teachers give for reporting, as they do in the majority of cases. Furthermore, three teachers, who had graduated in 1997 and transferred from rural to urban schools after only one year, were included in order to gain insights into the issue of early transfers from initial postings, which should in most cases be after three years. Newly trained teachers may be posted to either primary or junior secondary schools (JSS), which are also considered to be basic schools, even though they have subject specialist teaching rather than the integrated teaching of primary schools. This is a significant issue in relation to the training they receive and their satisfaction with the posting so it was essential to include teachers in both types of basic school.

Table 2: Characteristics of the sample of twenty-three newly trained teachers

	College A	College B
Number of participants	11 teachers	12 teachers
Gender	9 male, 2 female	6 male, 6 female
School level	7 primary, 4 JSS	8 primary, 4 JSS
Social context	9 rural, 2 urban	7 urban, 5 rural
1997 graduates /transfers	1 1997 graduate who had transferred from a rural to an urban school	2 1997 graduates who had transferred from a rural to an urban school

Although my research was focused on newly trained teachers in school, I also interviewed: head teachers in each of the schools, circuit supervisors, GES (Ghana Education Service) district directors and other district officers, GES regional officers and GES/MOE national officers. I interviewed the principals at both the colleges whose graduates I had chosen for the study. The first interviews were conducted with

each of the teachers and their heads in separate interviews in their schools during the second term of the academic year. Follow up interviews and lesson observations were arranged with some of the teachers and all were then invited to Cape Coast University for a day of discussion and workshops. The interview data contained in this paper is primarily from the first phase of interviews.

CHAPTER 3

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: BUREAUCRATIC INITIATION, PROFESSIONAL SOCIALISATION AND TEACHER THINKING

Studies of newly trained teachers in Western literature have traditionally focused on one of three things. Firstly, there is the interest in functional aspects of becoming a teacher as they are inducted or initiated into the professional working culture of their school (TTA, 1998; Buchner and Hay, 1999). Secondly, there are the longitudinal studies, often conducted by teacher educators, who trace teachers' thinking through training and into the "practice shock" of the school (Bennett et al, 1993; Lacey, 1977; Zeichner et al, 1988). The frame of reference for these studies is often how the knowledge acquired in training is adapted or negotiated through interaction with the school context, often discovering that the progressive agenda of teacher educators is undermined by a conservative school environment. A third tradition, related to the second, has followed Ball's recommendation to study the "micro politics" of the school (1986) and Goodson and Hargreaves' emphasis on teachers' lives (1996), and focused on becoming a teacher in the context of existing professional and classroom cultures within the school (See, for example, Nias, 1989). These approaches have informed the wider study of which this was part, but they have tended to underplay the importance of the process of being posted (or in the UK choosing a post), what one might call "posting shock", by focusing on the school or classroom as the key site of socialisation. The school and the classroom are both important in the Ghanaian context, but the significant role of the education bureaucracy suggests a need to reconceptualise the debate around an adapted framework.

One example of an alternative approach can be found in Michael Samuel's study of becoming a teacher in South Africa. He developed what he called the "force-field model of teacher identity" to try and bring together the contradictory frameworks of idealism, pragmatism, different cultural conceptions of education, and the reality of an education system in transition (1998). This envisages a complex interaction between "inertial forces" (pre-training "identity"), "programmatic forces" (teacher training) and "contextual forces" (community/school/system). This model draws on the literature noted above, but also attempts to reflect the dysfunctional aspects of an education system in transition to show the importance of the interaction between the identities of individual teachers and the complex contextual forces they come into contact with. As is the case in South Africa, this can often prove to be the most significant process in determining newly trained teachers' perspectives on teaching in Ghana.

In Ghana, it can be argued that the primary interaction in terms of teacher socialisation is between the three overlapping spheres of experience: *organisational culture*, particularly the education bureaucracy; *professional culture* and *teacher thinking*. Socialisation, as Etzioni (1969), Lacey (1977), and Zeichner et al (1988) and Samuel (1999) have noted, needs to be considered not only in terms of the

individual being moulded by "the culture and aspirations of the organisation", but also in terms of their interaction with and resistance to it. When teachers qualify in Ghana, they become part of the national professional association GNAT (Ghana National Association of Teachers), but they also become part of the Ghana Education Service (GES). Its position in Ghana's education system is explained in the following quotation:

> MOE is supported operationally by the Ghana Education Service (GES), which was established in 1974, largely as a result of pressure from the Ghanaian National Association of Teachers (GNAT), to promote a sense of collegiality, accountability and peer discipline among teachers. (World Bank, 1996: 4)

Unfortunately, the GES has not been successful in achieving the primary aim behind its foundation and has become an unwieldy bureaucracy according to the Ghanaian consultant James Nti:

> The GES is top heavy, especially at HQ with its 10 Directors, 10 Deputy Directors, 20 Assistant Directors and several Principal Superintendants. The Regional level has the same characteristics. This characteristic gives the wrong impression that the GES is putting on the garb of an employment agency. It is too centralised and rule/procedure oriented rather than outcome oriented… [There is also] mistrust between MOE and GES and between Regional and District Directors […] At present, GES is a monolithic organisation, setting its own standards, delivering teaching etc. and monitoring and appraising itself. MOE is left in the dark as to what is happening until some shocking public examinations results are published or an act of some gross indiscipline surfaces. GES […] has no effective mechanism to encourage or prompt it to do better. (Nti, 1996: 30-32)

There is a common perception in Ghana that teaching is "government work"[4], with the implication that it is not to be taken too seriously; this seems to be partly a consequence of the bureaucratic culture of GES. Interestingly, all members of GES are former teachers and remain members of GNAT, so one finds that the rhetoric of professional solidarity in the union, as articulated, for example, in the journal *The Teacher* often masks deep conflicts between the teaching profession and those ex-teachers who administer them. This is epitomised by two bureaucratic rituals that are central to becoming a teacher in Ghana and will be discussed in more detail later: the late payment of new teachers' salaries, and the bureaucratisation of the supervision of new teachers.

The over-bureaucratisation and inefficiency of education administration is not a problem unique to Ghana. Harber and Dadey (1994) note Murphy and Hallinger's delineation of common problems, such as poor communication, bribery, exploiting the system and favouritism, and also cite Rideout's three types of public sector mismanagement in sub Saharan Africa: "unintentional", "malicious" and "incompetent over-centralisation". These distinctions are useful in analysing new teachers' experiences of GES, which largely seem to be of the third type, leading to

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[4] Quotation from an interview with Kwame Akyeampong, June 21st 1999, Cape Coast, Ghana

intentional manipulation of the system in some cases. Another useful concept is Davies's notion of *teacher deviance*, particularly in the context of inappropriate or unenforced rules and a weak code of professional ethics (1994). Clearly, in a context where the main professional association for teachers is bound up with the education bureaucracy, the notion of a professional culture as distinct from an organisational culture is problematic. On this point, Davies makes a useful distinction between the actual existing *occupational culture* of teaching, epitomised by the idea of "government work", and *the professional culture* that may represent an aspiration in codes, individual ideals and so forth (1994). This approach allows an analysis to engage with discourses about teaching at the rhetorical and the actual level which often coexist simultaneously as will be seen with reference to newly trained teachers' perspectives in Ghana.

Teacher professionalism is a highly contested concept in the developed and developing world (see, for example, Goodson and Hargreaves (1996); Sykes (1999); and Hedges (1999)). Etzioni categorised primary teaching as a "semi profession" (1969) and despite the unattractiveness of the term, it does capture the conflict between the relative professional autonomy experienced by most teachers in the classroom and the location of effective administrative control outside the domain of the school. This external control is often justified by the central authority in terms of achieving some minimum standards and preventing potentially high levels of various forms of *teacher deviance*, particularly in relation to abuse of power (Davies, 1994) though some argue that increased autonomy can lead to greater responsibility. In Ghana, stories of misdemeanours and crimes committed by teachers coexist with a strongly articulated professional discourse in the colleges, the GES professional code, and the schools, which goes beyond the rhetorical. In many communities, teachers are still highly respected and it is interesting to note that many of the members of district assemblies in rural areas are teachers. However, what seems beyond doubt is the general decline in status of teachers in Ghana, which is paralleled in other developing countries (Lockheed and Verspoor, 1991). Teaching, which was traditionally a profession that inspired pride and symbolised progress has become, for many, a second choice career, often, as Cummings notes, in competition with an expanding and rewarding private sector (in Rust and Dalin, 1990). Lockheed and Verspoor argue that people often become teachers for reasons of personal advancement rather than a commitment to the public good, leading them to conclude:

> …teaching in primary schools neither attracts nor retains the best-qualified and most-motivated individuals. (1991: 92)

Therefore, to understand this decline in the status of teachers in Ghana, it seems essential to talk to people who are becoming teachers about their motivation in the context of a culture that brands them as "ne'er do wells"[5]; hence, the focus of this paper.

Motivation is a complex thing and many writers have written powerfully of the different kind of person-centred motivation expected of teachers, even by teachers themselves, and this is often a key point of defence in the context of hostile public

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[5] This was said to me by someone at GES headquarters. The full quotation was: "Primary teaching is seen as a place for ne'er do wells"

discourses about teachers. When considering the problems and constraints that frame so much of education in developing countries, there can be a danger of missing the point that there are a lot of good teachers quietly and professionally going about their job. Many teachers find themselves trying to reconcile higher motivations for teaching with lack of fulfilment of their basic needs. Maslow developed his hierarchy of needs (physiological, security, social, esteem, and self-actualisation) in relation to other professions, but they have relevance when considering teachers' perceptions. A recent, largely questionnaire-based, study in Ghana of newly trained teachers (Apt and Grieco, 1994) highlighted that poor pay and working conditions leave many teachers apparently stuck on the first rung of Maslow's "ladder"; and in another study Pryor noted that this situation:

> …can lead to a vicious circle of deprofessionalisation and diminished self-esteem as teachers face the shame of being ineffective in providing for themselves and their families… (Pryor, 1998: 222)

However, this sense of inadequacy and lack of basic needs does not prevent many teachers from continuing to have a stake in teaching in terms of higher "rungs" on Maslow's ladder, particularly given the respect many teachers are afforded in society as individuals even when the profession as a whole is regarded as having low status and low pay. In the 1995 Study of teacher motivation in Ghana, conducted by UNICEF and the GES, the following four reasons were given for being a teacher:

> a love for children and desire to be around them or a positive role model who was a teacher
> because of a lack of other employment or educational opportunities
> because of characteristics of the profession
> as a result of having been forced into the profession by circumstances or because of parental pressure including a family tradition. (GES/UNICEF, 1995: 14)

They also discovered, perhaps unsurprisingly, that those who became teachers because of a lack of other opportunities or due to family pressure were likely to have a much lower level of commitment to teaching than those who gave the other reasons. Significantly, this data was uncovered in the qualitative part of the study, directly contradicting assertions made in the quantitative part, paralleling the experience of other researchers in Ghana (see for example, Akyeampong, 1997) and these experiences were an important reason for choosing a qualitative approach for this study.

In another part of the research project (MUSTER) of which this is part, Akyeampong and Stephens examined the reasons trainees beginning at the colleges gave for becoming teachers and their conclusions are revealing. 80% of trainees had entered teaching because it was their parents "wish" (2000: 11), many had tried alternative forms of employment or further education, particularly retaking exams for university and most tended to be from poor socio-economic backgrounds (2000: 12). From this evidence they conclude that applying for teacher training in Ghana, for many, is based on the opportunity for subsidised further education it offers and is at best a second choice career. The research findings among newly trained teachers in this study echo

that view and reveal an interesting rhetorical tension between altruistic discourses about teaching and individualistic desires for status and self-advancement.

Hofstede (1971), in an argument of great relevance to Ghana, has warned against the dangers of universalising theories of motivation based on a highly individualistic American model of behaviour. His research offers four alternative dimensions to consider motivation in different cultures: power/distance (egalitarian/hierarchical); uncertainty avoidance (risk taking/risk averse); individualism/collectivism; and masculine/feminine. The picture that emerges in the research below reveals a culture in transition where collective ideas of teaching still have influence (the constructions of teachers as "community developers", for example), but individualistic perceptions and motivations are increasingly emphasised by the teachers themselves. In Ghana, the conflict is also acute when one considers the widespread respect for hierarchy, alongside the cynicism with which many approach what they regard as compromised forms of authority like the GES.

Motivation and perception of roles can be considered as aspects of teacher thinking, which, despite being central to many current debates about education, is often regarded as the most elusive area to research. Palme (1999) notes the paradox of teaching in developing countries by drawing attention to its apparent simplicity (pupils copying from the board) alongside its complexity (mediation between tradition and modernity and different linguistic versions of reality). Jessop and Penny (1998), in their studies of teachers in The Gambia and South Africa, outlined three frames of teacher thinking, which emerged from their qualitative research. They saw a pattern in the way teachers talked in both countries whereby teachers would willingly talk about instrumental issues, such as salary, or relational issues, such as their feelings towards the children or the community. However, they noted a "missing" frame, that of making meaning from the curriculum and reflecting on practice. In Ghana something similar took place in the interviews, particularly in the early stages, and the emphasis of this article reflects teachers' emphasis on the posting process, perceived by them to be a key formative experience, although not originally considered as a central focus of this research. Much teacher thinking research emphasises *key* formative experiences, as perceived by the teacher (see, for example, Akyeampong and Stephens, 2000), and in Ghana the impact of the bureaucracy through the process of being posted is, arguably, the key formative experience in becoming a teacher in Ghana, particularly in the context of relatively low levels of commitment among new recruits to teaching.
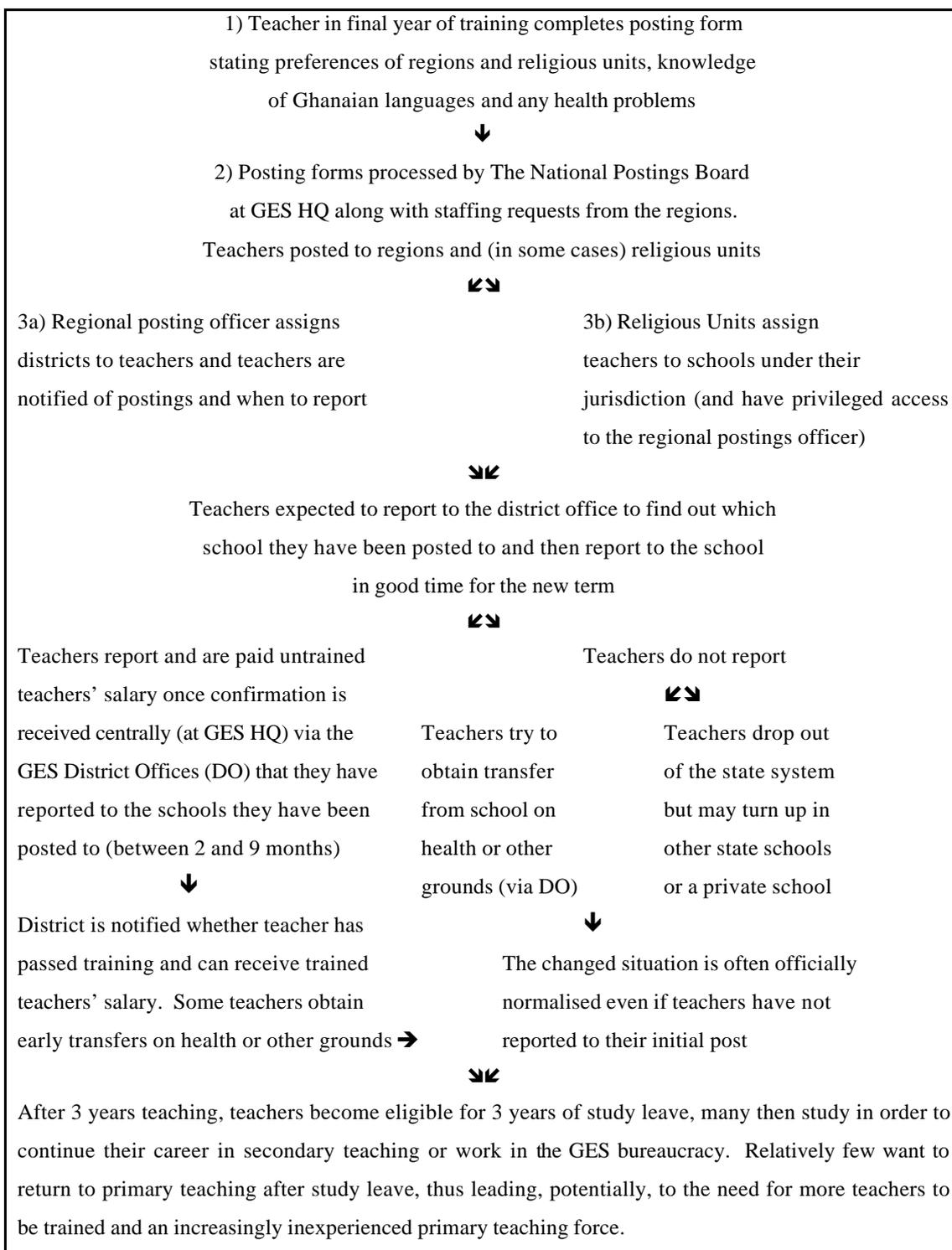
CHAPTER 4

THE POSTING SYSTEM: RATIONAL SYSTEM OR "UNSAVOURY RITUAL"[6]?

In Ghana, the posting system can be represented along rational Weberian lines (see, for example, Konadu (1994)). However, this is undermined in a number of important ways that profoundly affect the perceptions of newly trained teachers as to how it, and GES in general, operates in practice. The diagram overleaf (figure 2) shows the main stages of what is a highly complicated procedure. (See Konadu, 1994, for a more detailed description of this process)

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[6] "The Unsavoury Ritual" was the title of an editorial in the Daily Graphic (22/4/99), looking at the delays in paying new teachers' salaries

Figure 2: System of posting newly trained teachers in Ghana 1998 – 1999

1) Teacher in final year of training completes posting form stating preferences of regions and religious units, knowledge of Ghanaian languages and any health problems

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2) Posting forms processed by The National Postings Board at GES HQ along with staffing requests from the regions. Teachers posted to regions and (in some cases) religious units

↙↘

3a) Regional posting officer assigns districts to teachers and teachers are notified of postings and when to report

3b) Religious Units assign teachers to schools under their jurisdiction (and have privileged access to the regional postings officer)

↘↙

Teachers expected to report to the district office to find out which school they have been posted to and then report to the school in good time for the new term

↙↘

Teachers report and are paid untrained teachers' salary once confirmation is received centrally (at GES HQ) via the GES District Offices (DO) that they have reported to the schools they have been posted to (between 2 and 9 months)

Teachers do not report

↙↘

↓

District is notified whether teacher has passed training and can receive trained teachers' salary. Some teachers obtain early transfers on health or other grounds ➔

Teachers try to obtain transfer from school on health or other grounds (via DO)

Teachers drop out of the state system but may turn up in other state schools or a private school

↓

The changed situation is often officially normalised even if teachers have not reported to their initial post

↘↙

After 3 years teaching, teachers become eligible for 3 years of study leave, many then study in order to continue their career in secondary teaching or work in the GES bureaucracy. Relatively few want to return to primary teaching after study leave, thus leading, potentially, to the need for more teachers to be trained and an increasingly inexperienced primary teaching force.

4.1   The posting form

When trainee teachers finish their 3-year training course, they are asked to select the 3 regions, in order of preference, where they would like to be posted. As has already been noted, there is a strong bias in trainees' choices to the more urban southern

regions and only a few of my participants had chosen Central Region as a first choice. When trainee teachers make their selections, the most common order of preference is as follows: Greater Accra, Eastern Region and Ashante Region. These choices reflect a strong preference among trainees throughout the country for the Regions nearest the most developed cities in Ghana: Accra, Kumasi and Tema. The following quotation from a newly trained teacher is an example of one kind of behaviour that might be termed "teacher deviance". Along with newly trained teachers seeking urban posts in government schools, despite being given a rural posting, and the widely acknowledged problems in record-keeping within GES, this seems to have become increasingly common in recent years:

> *I had a friend who was posted to Brong Ahafo [to] a village you had to walk to the school so he said he wouldn't go so he found a private school in Tema.* [Female teacher in an urban primary school]

Central Region would generally be the fifth most popular choice of region (behind Brong Ahafo, which is considered to have the best opportunities for setting up a farm). Its disadvantage is its high proportion of rural schools, but its main attraction is its southern location and relative nearness to the major cities and the two main higher education institutions for teachers: Cape Coast and Winneba universities. In fact, among all the newly qualified teachers I interviewed, further education was very high on their list of priorities, reflecting a universal desire to get qualified in order to move into higher status sectors of teaching or out of the profession altogether. The following quotation typifies this desire and, since he is nearer the universities having been transferred the previous year, he is in a position to further his studies and prepare for the university entrance exam in a way that teachers in the more isolated rural schools cannot:

> *When you go to school and others who were with you get a better job...so most teachers want to leave. Personally, I enjoy teaching but if I get a better job I will go. Now I am doing Art Education at Winneba to teach in Senior Secondary School [...] At school I wanted to be an artist. I had a skill and wanted to develop it. But it was unfortunate I didn't get the grades for Tech [Tertiary education]. At training college I did art and vocational skills, but I don't get a chance to do the art here so [at a JSS school] I have to force myself to teach catering. [Would you like to be a head?] Nobody likes to be that...*[teacher in an urban JSS having been transferred from a rural school after one year]

On the posting form teachers can also state a preference for a certain kind of religious unit (Presbyterian, Catholic, Muslim etc.), which each run a relatively small number of state schools in each region. These units have a limited amount of autonomy and tend to be relatively overstaffed and poor communications with district offices can offer a loophole in the system, leading teachers to get early transfers from their initial posting, as the following example reveals:

> *[Were you happy with your posting?] Not really, you know when you go to the new station there are always problems. Initially I was sent to E. (a rural school). I didn't report because I wanted to upgrade myself. When I was released and came to this place, I thank my stars, though the transport is a*

problem. [How did you get a transfer?] I got a release. I decided to change from the Catholic to the AME Zion educational unit. [Was it easy or difficult?] Initially, before I came out I was looking for a good posting as I was a sportsman, I needed to be in certain areas to train pupils and officiate sports events. [I've heard people often pay bribes for early releases...] It would depend on the link...everybody would prefer the town for extra classes to upgrade yourself. A village that only gets a car once a week is very difficult. [Male teacher who didn't report and got reposted to an urban JSS]

One district director in this study noted that a Unit with two schools had allowed ten teachers to transfer in one year, without consulting or considering the likely cost and impact.

Trainees are also asked to state any health problems that might prevent them from working in a rural area, backed up by a health certificate, and many teachers see emphasising health problems as a way of transferring from difficult postings:

In fact, at first, I was posted to a village (S.) and because of my health things were not going well with me so I went to the District Office and was posted here. The village is far and vehicles are not patronising that place and I always had to walk so I was finding it very difficult. The doctor recommended I should be transferred. [Bribes?] No, I just confronted the circuit supervisor and he asked me to present medical forms and an application to the district office and she gave [the director] gave me an immediate transfer. [Female teacher transferred from a rural to an urban primary school]

4.2 The posting system

Once the form has been filled out, this information is then processed centrally and teachers are posted to regions; the regional postings officer then has the responsibility to assign them to specific schools. The following are taken from the 1997 guidelines for posting newly trained teachers:

60% of trained teachers should be posted to primary schools and 40% should fill vacancies in JSS. There would be no replacement of pupil teachers [underlined] […] Regional Directors are advised to take special note of Districts within their regions where there are acute shortage of teachers when doing the District allocation […] Due to complaints from teachers, Regional Directors are advised to impress upon their District Directors the need to assist the newly-trained teachers to find accommodation in their new communities […] Due consideration should be given to teachers with health problems […] These teachers should be posted nearer to places where there are hospitals or clinics […] Female teachers should be sent to urban areas and male teachers who did not choose the region should be posted to towns as incentives to let them stay and work. [National Postings guidelines 1998, Manpower, GES]

Implied in these guidelines are a number of problems faced by newly trained teachers when they are posted that will be discussed shortly, but it is worth noting that the rational operation of the system is seriously undermined by a number of key factors.

Firstly, due to poor record keeping and internal communication within GES, some teachers attempt to change the region they have been posted to by underhand means:

> *This year we had a little problem. Some of the cards for posting went missing and people exploited the gap. People take advantage and do other things. Some teachers claimed that they hadn't had a posting (even though they had) because they didn't like where they had been sent. Over the years it's a few, but this year it's been very bad. Some went to Accra and brought photocopied cards, I intercepted some of them and forced them to return to their former districts.* [Regional Postings Officer]

Similarly, when teachers are posted to schools and they discover they are in rural areas, a significant minority try to get an immediate transfer. The following quotations illustrate the breakdown in organisational culture from a number of perspectives and they are instructive when considered side by side. The first is a view from the head of Manpower in GES, and while acknowledging the problem, it suggests it is open to a rational solution:

> *Avoid allocating teachers to districts, which clearly do not require any more* especially when nationally we have a shortfall in our trained teacher requirement. *Let us try to be very fair and firm. We know it is not going to be easy since people are going to kick against posting to the very places where their services are needed.* The past year was terrible especially for Western Region and the regions in the northern sector of the country and to some extent Central region. [Presentation given by Louisa Owusu to GES Postings Officers at GESDI, Ajumako, 11/4/99; my italics]

In this quotation there is the rhetoric of enforcement alongside an implicit acknowledgement of organisational breakdown in the phrases I have put in italics. In the second quotation, the Ghanaian consultant, James Nti, who was cited earlier, notes that the system is widely perceived to be open to abuse:

> [The problems in GES are] borne out by the imbalance in the distribution of trained teachers. A case in point is the superfluity of trained teachers in urban areas in contrast to inadequacy in rural schools. This situation is created and encouraged by the fact that teachers posted to deprived areas use their godfathers and godmothers to have reposting or leave unceremoniously to take up appointments with private schools…Steps being taken to rationalise the distribution of teachers need to be encouraged. (Nti, 1996, p. 18)

This view finds an echo among many head teachers:

> *Those who stay for longer periods in the rural areas are the older teachers. The new teachers are sent to an area for one year. They will say because of the village environment their health is suffering so they will go to the hospital and get a medical form to be transferred to the urban centres. I remember about four years ago, they did the postings in Accra. Somebody was sent from Accra to A. [a rural village]. They say the father was a big name in Accra so they packed all the belongings, they come down and when they saw the place, they didn't even step down from the car…they said "Is there light?" "No" "Is*

there piped water?" "No", and then they drove away. It's a true story. The head of that school told me. [Head teacher in an urban primary school]

The next two quotations from teachers who worked at the same remote school for one year reveal the depth of the problems caused by bureaucracies perceived to be open to influence and not to act in a fair way. The first quotation is from a teacher who managed to arrange a transfer after one year even though the minimum time that teachers are supposed to stay in post is three years:

> *I also got a transfer [after one year from a remote school] because I wanted further education and being there I was cut off from this so I wanted to be by the roadside and have access. I was sick as well, I was seriously sick. There were problems with the water supply and I had to make appeals to my landlord. We were taking drinking water from the rocks as the bore-hole was spoiled. [Were bribes involved?] I wrote a letter that was forwarded to the office and I told my uncle and he went to the office and the transactions that went on I cannot tell.* [Male teacher who transferred from a rural primary to an urban JSS after one year]

In contrast, one of his fellow teachers is left at the school and his perception of unfair treatment at the hands of the education systems seems to have caused great resentment and undermined his commitment to the job:

> *I wanted to transfer because of problems of being sick, having to walk, but they refused to give it to me because there aren't many teachers here, but others have pushed through by giving them money and other things and they just allow them to leave.* [Assistant Head teacher at a rural primary school]

GES says women teachers are not to be posted to rural areas. In practice some are, leading those who are to see themselves as having been treated unfairly and seek early transfers. Yet, women make up a significant percentage of the graduates from training. This highlights a conflict between an emphasis on the education of girls in rural areas in education policy, very real problems facing women posted to rural areas, and what rural schools need and what training colleges produce. Many in the education system perceive a need for more female role models in rural areas, and many male teachers in this study said they resented the practice of posting women to urban or semi urban areas. Women teachers who accept postings to rural schools rarely seem to stay long and, according to district officers, often refuse the posting in the first place. Thus, the practice recognises a Ghanaian reality (fears of parents that their daughters may lose their marriage market or be put in vulnerable positions) which is apparently not acknowledged in recruitment for training colleges.

The picture that emerges from the perceptions of teachers interviewed for this study is of a bureaucratic system that does not operate fairly, benefiting some who have influence (and some facing genuine hardship) while creating resentment among those who actually accept their posting and stay at it. Thus, a culture of manipulation exists alongside a culture of resentment and it is hardly surprising that there is ambivalence towards GES among teachers and heads despite the fact that it is staffed by ex-teachers. In fact, it would not be overstating the case to say that among some teachers it faces a serious crisis of legitimacy, epitomised by the strike over delayed

allowances and salaries, which took place in 2000. This becomes even clearer if one considers two other aspects of bureaucratic socialisation, which have a huge impact on newly trained teachers' lives and their attitudes to teaching as a career. The first is the lack of enforcement of the bond (hinted at already), which is supposed to ensure teachers, who have received three years bed and board during training, spend three years service in the school they are posted to. The second is the late payment of salaries.

4.3   The bond

Theoretically, if a newly trained teacher does not accept a posting, an embargo should be put on their salary and they should not be re-employed by the state system, but in practice the system has not been enforced for several years. This leads to widespread cynicism and a sense of powerlessness about the system at all levels as is reflected in the following comment from a District Director:

> *According to the regulations we are working on now, when the new teacher has been posted to a district, he is bound to be there for 4 years. Sometimes he does not report at all. But he goes to another district and he gets away with it. A teacher posted to my district is now teaching at W. [an urban district] and for the time being he is working there and I'm sure he will get everything normalised.* [Interview with a District Director in Central Region]

Traditionally in Ghana, to ensure that teachers who had been trained served for a minimum period of years wherever they were posted, they were given a bond to sign. That bond, when it was first introduced, was a significant amount of money and therefore carried a considerable sanction, but over time, particularly due to inflation, the amount became negligible:

> *…a few years ago it was as low as 24000 Cedis[7], which was less than two months of a teacher's salary at the time and teachers weren't afraid to sign a bond*. [Interview with a District Director in Central Region]

Then, four years ago, due to the under-supply of teachers, a decision was taken to abolish the bonds that in hindsight seems deeply problematic, given the mixed messages it sends; you must obey the rule, but it will not be enforced:

> *For the past 4 years, bonds have not been in the system, but colleges were duplicating old ones and giving them to trainees even though they know it isn't real. Enforcement is the problem. If the district doesn't report, you wouldn't know so it's up to the district directors to report to Manpower.* [Interview with a National Officer of Teacher Education Division, GES]

The perception from the central administration of GES, as is revealed in the quotation above, seems to be that the problem lies with the districts; this is a raw nerve given that Ghana is currently, theoretically at least, working towards the process of

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[7] £1 = 4000 cedis at that date.

decentralising education administration. As one would expect, the perception at the district level is quite different:

> *We send the report about them breaking the bond and nothing is done. Maybe he's a son or relative of government officials and the government is not even-handed.* [Interview with a Circuit Supervisor in Central Region]

Mankoe and Maynes (1994) studied the potential for the policy of decentralisation in Ghana to be successful and in their survey results, they highlighted the low "actual" control that schools, communities and districts have over posting, with the high "preferred" control. This would seem to offer a way forward given the apparent failure of the centralised system to develop an effective and fair system. Recently, there have been discussions and projected policy changes, envisaging a system of sponsorship whereby individuals considering training would have to seek "sponsorship" from the district assembly where they would later teach. However, this policy, due to be implemented in 1999 has been shelved until 2000 or later.

4.4   Late payment of salaries

Alongside the lack of enforcement of the bond, another feature of the GES is undermining the stated policy aim of filling vacancies in rural schools with newly trained teachers: the late payment of salaries to new teachers. This is something that had affected all my participants, with delays ranging from 2 to 9 months and it is a practice, which seems to hit teachers in the rural areas hardest, as they are often furthest from their families who might be able to help them financially. The following extract is taken from an editorial in the *Daily Graphic*:

> Some reports from the Eastern Region suggest that some newly trained teachers posted to the region since September last year have not received any salary so far. What is more disturbing is the fact that whilst the regional directorate of GES appears not to be aware of the problem, that fact of the non payment of salaries to newly trained teachers posted to some parts of the region is a common knowledge at some of the educational units. The GES has to put its house in order. The human factor is essential in the provision of quality education, which is the focus of the education reforms. But at the time the GES is making appeals to teachers to accept postings to rural areas, because of large scale refusal by some to take up appointment in certain areas, those who have taken up the challenge are subject to frustration… [Editorial in The Daily Graphic, 22/4/99, p.7]

This issue remains one of the chief complaints of NQTs against GES and was one of the factors leading to a national strike in 2000. It has received a lot of attention in recent years in the national press, with the Daily Graphic, a government paper, calling it 'the unsavoury ritual', and much discussion within GES about how to improve the situation.

4.5 The supervision system

A final example of socialisation by the bureaucracy is the supervision system. Circuit Supervisors are the main point of communication between the school and the District Office and one of their responsibilities is to support and guide newly trained teachers by a process of regular supervision. Some Circuit Supervisors are praised for the support they give, but many are not and this quotation gives an insight into the way that an emphasis on bureaucratic procedure (the checking of lesson notes, rather than observing teachers) can undermine good teaching and professional attitudes:

> *…it is somehow due to how the Circuit Supervisors have been supervising the system, in that sometimes we, in the rural areas, we have problems with the lights […] so in this case, me for example, if I know that I'm not able to prepare my lesson notes, I'd rather read whatever I'm going to teach to get it started so I may be late in preparing my lesson notes, but when they come they collar you that you have to do your lesson notes whether you would have taught that or not. So sometimes some will take advantage of that, they will prepare lesson notes, but they will not intend to teach, prepare maybe in advance. Someone is in our staff, he will prepare sometimes […] and he has a big bundle of notes and he just transfers the notes. So in this case this person always has the access to [old] lesson notes and he just transfers, but being a new teacher where am I going to get it? […] So in this way the supervisors are stressing on the lesson notes, the teachers will take advantage, prepare lesson notes and not teach, and go away.* [Male teacher in a rural primary school]

4.6 Orientation in the districts

These quotations reveal a bureaucracy perceived to be in crisis, open to influence, unwilling to discipline, unable to pay on time, and carrying out practices that undermine professionalism; an open door waiting to be pushed by teachers driven to "deviance". The picture, however, is not entirely bleak and there are a number of positive signs of change. Perhaps the most interesting example of this is Ajumako district in Central Region. It is the 24th most deprived district in the country and for a long time has had a problem attracting and keeping teachers as most of its schools would be classified as rural and many are remote. Yet, Ajumako gives the strong impression of district-inspired progress and shows how the context can be changed without increased resources, but with a more proactive management culture.

Firstly, it provides a popular orientation programme for all newly posted and newly transferred teachers in the first term, which, among other things, introduces key District Officers and explains their roles to new teachers. Some other districts provide orientation, though in 1998 this provision was patchy in Central Region, and two other rural districts with problems in the retention of new staff, claimed financial restrictions had prevented them from doing so. Ajumako has also developed an "adopt a school" programme, which gives all members of the district office three schools that they should be in regular contact with to try and ensure that the district

office is more responsive to school-level needs and problems. On entering the Director's office, one is immediately confronted by a detailed chart on the wall with pins for each vacancy in each school, giving a very clear public profile to the problems faced in the district, but also showing the up-to-date quality of information available in the office. The acting director is also very aware of what a strong disincentive the lack of further education opportunities in the rural areas is for newly posted teachers and he is in discussions with the Dean of the Faculty of Education at Cape Coast University in order to develop an outreach programme.

One of the strengths of the Ajumako approach is that it builds on the positive potential in the system and shows the potential for organisational renewal. It is worth restating that within the Ghana education system, with its negative socialisation process, the majority of teachers do still report to what are often very difficult postings, something that is discussed in greater detail in the next section. Similarly, the lack of support from and poor communication with some GES District and Regional Offices and National HQ, often put down to resource constraints, can be seen in a new light next to the example of Ajumako.

CHAPTER 5

WHY DO TEACHERS REPORT?

It is very difficult to attribute any one factor to explain why some teachers report and some do not, but it is interesting and revealing to examine how newly trained teachers explain why they accepted their posting. Almost all the teachers, who had been posted to rural areas, spoke of their disappointment at first; most had chosen the more popular regions and had hoped for a more urban setting to teach in. The following is fairly typical:

> *Initially I was very very annoyed [at being posted to a rural area]. I didn't like it at all. People were giving me comfort saying I should come friends, pastor, relatives etc...my uncle is a teacher, he encouraged me.* [Male teacher in a rural primary school]

This teacher acknowledges that the influence of having family members who are teachers was a factor in encouraging him to accept a difficult posting and he seems to have felt social pressure to behave responsibly, but bearing in mind the findings of the UNICEF/GES study on motivation cited earlier, this may not be the strongest influence on teachers who are genuinely reluctant to be teachers. However, the social pressure, and the moral ethic of teaching it emphasises, offers a framework for more committed teachers to consider their own work and judge other colleagues whose standards fall short through: not reporting, drunkenness and other misdemeanours. The following quotations represent views expressed to me by about half of my sample and, it should be noted, might well be expressed alongside more pragmatic views of the profession and their careers within it, an example of what Jessop and Penny called "differing professional outlooks" (1998) that teachers might use to make sense of their work and their roles:

> *My father is a teacher [...] the way my father brought us up I actually admired him so when I was young I dreamed of being a teacher to bring up children and train them [...] Teaching is the best. Even Jesus was a great teacher. It is the greatest thing to be a teacher and train children to be responsible in the community. Give your best, even if the government isn't rewarding them, God will reward them.* [Female teacher in a rural primary school]

> *[...] this is the first time coming here. I've always been in the city so it's a change of environment. It's my first time to be in village. I like it, I want to experience life well and help the children too. [...] I wanted to know other areas so that when you are at the top you know how the downtrodden are living, you don't see these things in the city.* [Male teacher in a rural primary school]

The job is seen, either in religious terms, almost a vocation, or in developmental terms as a contribution to society, or more commonly, as a mixture of both, with some spirit of adventure thrown in. Once the job had been framed in that way, it allowed some of them to speak forcefully about punishing teachers who had not reported to their post,

or had transferred from rural areas without completing the bond period, though the latter tended to be viewed more sympathetically. Teachers seemed to be trying to negotiate the contradictions of traditional high status notions of being community-oriented teachers, and modern individualistic conceptions of self-advancement and self-reliance. There was considerable resentment among the majority of rural teachers towards their less responsible colleagues, but also a keen awareness of the failures of the system that might lead to certain kinds of behaviour. There was also fairly strong support for the reintroduction of the bond and its enforcement; some took a hard line view, given that they themselves had accepted difficult postings, while others were more equivocal, noting the poor conditions and continued lack of incentives in many areas.

Almost all the teachers expressed some understanding for the reasons that teachers did not accept difficult postings. It was also noted that the district offices sometimes didn't help teachers in getting to the more remote schools and seemed to know very little about them, sometimes actively discouraging teachers from going:

> *[If someone doesn't report] …you need to know about the situation. Maybe they have nowhere to stay, no money, the reason they are moving must be established.* [Male teacher in a rural JSS]

> *[Do you have problems of teachers not reporting here?] Especially lady teachers. One was posted here as one of four, but at the district office they laughed at her for thinking of going to the remote area so she transferred.* [Head teacher of a rural primary school]

There was general support among the teachers I interviewed for the development of stronger ties between schools and communities; in the past many schools had been seen by isolated rural communities as "alien"[8] institutions, as one district director put it. Although it is too early to fully evaluate its impact, the recently introduced policy of School Performance Appraisal Meetings (SPAMs) seems to have rebuilt a sense of collective responsibility among teachers and communities and may well be the start of a culture of co-operation and accountability that should benefit teachers and pupils. All the teachers interviewed who had experienced SPAMs recognised their value and some had seen positive outcomes in terms of provision of food and subsidised housing as a direct consequence.

Alongside the moral/ethical pressure that teachers may be under to accept a posting and behave responsibly when they take it up, there may be more pragmatic reasons for accepting a posting. One of the most important is the opportunity for study leave, which was available until recently after two years of teaching. This is a defining aspect of the professional culture of teaching currently existing in Ghana and is considered in the section below. Another pragmatic way of dealing with a difficult posting was to see it as a challenge and an opportunity for personal independence, highlighting the increasing prevalence of modern individualistic motivations among newly trained teachers. This view was shared by male and female teachers and was quite common:

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[8] This point was put to me by one of the District Directors in Central Region

> *Central Region was my first choice…to be on my own away from my parents and see whether I can.* [Female teacher in a rural primary school]

> *I just liked it [Central Region] and wanted a change of environment and wanted to be on my own and away from the family (my Dad and Step Mum are in Accra and Mum and Step Dad are in Kumasi).* [Male teacher in an urban JSS school]

Another pragmatic way that newly posted teachers come to terms with their posting in rural areas is by farming, in contradiction of the GES professional code; a fact also noted by Pryor in his 1998 study. The majority of the teachers in rural areas had begun to farm and the following is typical of this perspective:

> *[Is farming an incentive to stay in the village?] Yes and it can also help you, providing food etc. I spend free time on the farm, yes. When I go away, I have somebody to look after the farm…during vacation.* [Male teacher in a rural primary school]

Another source of encouragement for teachers to accept difficult postings is the GES policy, whenever possible, to post two or more teachers, often from the same college, to the more remote schools and it seems to be an important way of encouraging teachers to accept their posting. All teachers who had been posted to rural areas with other teachers recognised the value of it, as the two examples below demonstrate:

> *A. is a mate even from school. I was happy to be posted here with her. I was relieved. [How would you have coped on your own?] I would have tried…with the help of the head it was OK […] There is one other newly trained teacher from O. training college. I'm glad to have started with other women.* [Female teacher in a rural primary school]

> *I was happy to be posted with a friend to J. He was re-posted, but he's still nearby […] Being posted together made it easier…knowing you were being posted with a colleague motivated you to come.* [Male teacher in a rural JSS school]

It seems that it is much easier to come to terms with a situation if you know you are not alone in facing it. However, in general there is widespread disillusion at promised, but limited and thinly spread nature of incentives for rural teachers (such as bicycles) and many seek early transfers as a consequence.

As was noted at the start of this section, having family members in teaching may well encourage pragmatism about the job and a clearer view of its attractions, particularly for people from poorer backgrounds:

> *I originally wanted to be a journalist but when I finished secondary school in form three, my father died so there were no available funds so my mother advised me to take up teaching…she teaches primary.* [Male teacher in a rural primary school]

For this teacher, and many others I interviewed, it emerged that teaching, with the allowance, food and lodging during training and opportunities for paid study leave at university after two years of teaching offered an alternative route into higher education and a limited degree of financial independence. This was attractive to people from all social backgrounds; perhaps teaching was not particularly attractive as a career, but there were many incentives in the first years of training and teaching. The high priority given to study leave in newly trained teachers' views of their motivation to stay in the profession was universal among the teachers I interviewed and this provides an illuminating example of a system not employing its incentives in an efficient or long term way. In general study leave is not seen as an opportunity to develop one's skills as a primary teacher, but a way to leave the sector altogether.

5.1   Self-advancement and study leave: teaching as a "stepping stone".

[Why do teachers get such a bad press in Ghana?] One of the reasons is that certain people using it as a stepping stone [...] they do anything they like and spoil the name of teaching, but those who like to be teachers are proud [...] you are a role model. [Male teacher in a rural JSS]

[Do you have doubts about being a teacher?] Yes. I thought it's just a stepping stone so I'm not having the joy that needs to be gotten from a real career. [Female teacher in a rural JSS]

Time and again during this research, I heard the phrase "stepping stone" used to describe teachers' motivation by people inside and outside the system and by teachers themselves. During a workshop that I arranged at the Institute of Education at Cape Coast University, to which all the newly trained teachers I had interviewed were invited, it became clear that study leave was very important to all of them. Study leave is the system by which teachers, after two years of teaching (recently increased to three years) are able to attend university on full pay to do courses in education if they pass the university entrance exams. Many said it was the main reason for becoming a teacher and accepting difficult postings, suggesting that it should perhaps be linked to appraisal or given, in the first instance, to teachers who have worked in remote areas. Most expected to get it and district officers confirmed that most who wanted it got it by their fourth year of teaching.

Study leave provides people with a second chance to go to university, albeit it to study within the education field and each year there are approximately 4000^9 teachers on study leave. This figure can be put in perspective by comparing it to the approximately 6000 graduating from the training colleges each year. Teachers I interviewed saw it in terms of personal advancement as much as professional development. Although there has been little research done in this area, it seems that most teachers who complete study leave, if they stay in the profession, will become secondary school teachers, work in other parts of the education sector or take up bureaucratic positions within GES. Most of the teachers I interviewed for this study

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[9] These estimates were given to me by people within GES and confirmed by individuals working for NGOs involved in education in Ghana

saw their career moving in that direction and none were interested in becoming heads of primary schools. The following is typical:

> *[Do you see teaching as a "stepping stone"?] Some think that way, but once you are starting teaching, you must be prepared well so you teach well and don't mislead them. [Would you like to be a head?] Not in primary. I would like to teach in secondary, but my ultimate aim is to be a lecturer.* [Male teacher in a rural primary school]

Many of the teachers I interviewed were already engaged in self-study, or other self-improvement activities, to increase their opportunities both within the profession and possibly outside of it by taking the university entrance exam or until recently improving their school leaving exam results. The first quotation is fairly typical of those who see a career in teaching and the second, though not typical, gives an insight into the perspectives of those who plan to leave:

> *I'm having studies with a new teacher in the JSS. I'm studying to rewrite secondary school exams. We plan to teach at a higher level, maybe secondary level or training college.* [Male teacher in a rural primary school]
>
> *Some of my friends can't believe I'm a teacher because of the way I can drive and work in my brother's store and the way I behave. I like working hard […] I know other things – driving, electronics, selling 2nd hand goods so they will see me moving with such groups. Even right now, I've tried to build a store – I have a cassette store of my own. I go to C. [a nearby town] every day to monitor and employ somebody. The headmistress knows, but doesn't mind because it doesn't affect classes. GES should be more flexible about these things. Since I have started, I have not been absent for a day. I always try to come […] I will further my education and change it. I will do a business course. [But you won't be able to get study leave…] I know I have to serve 3 years when the time is approaching I will decide whether to have study leave or not. I will come back if I get study leave, but only for some time. I don't want to be a teacher.* [Male teacher in an urban primary school]

When the second teacher says, "my friends can't believe I'm a teacher because…of the way I behave", he reveals a perception among some people in Ghana that teachers' work is less demanding than other work. Given the culture of GES it is an attitude that is hardly surprising though it is less than true if on considers the hard work and commitment of many teachers. When this is considered alongside the widespread evidence of a lack of enthusiasm for primary teaching as a long-term career, there is perhaps a need for a fundamental rethink of the structure of education management, training and the professional culture of teaching in Ghana, including the provision of study leave. For instance, recent changes to the three year fully funded pre-service teacher training programme have sought to emphasise primary methodology, but if careers in primary schools are likely to be much shorter than might be assumed after three years of training, one has to ask whether this is the best way of preparing committed teachers for primary schools.

The recent drive for greater accountability and interaction with the community, embodied by the establishment of SMCs (School Management Committees) and

SPAMs, seems to have introduced a new dynamic into school/community relations and many people feel that sponsorship by districts will encourage greater responsibility, motivation and commitment among newly trained teachers, though questions remain about how it will be administered. Also, donor-supported programmes like Whole School Development seem to be re-emphasising training in the school context in a way that is having an impact on induction and teacher deployment and retention. For instance in this study there was evidence of newly trained teachers in WSD schools giving peer support and advice to colleagues and friends in non WSD schools.

Many people, including the head of Teacher Education Division in GES recognise the need for primary teaching to become something more than a transitory career that you pass through on the way to other things, but given the low status of primary education in Ghana (and the hard work it involves), and the difficulties posting women to rural areas, this is easier said than done.

CHAPTER 6

POSTING: A YEAR ON

In February and March 2000 I returned to Central Region in order to trace the teachers involved in the study and, where possible, to re-interview and observe them. I also interviewed respondents in GES, or in a number of cases their replacements, and discussed drafts of this article with key Ghanaian informants and colleagues. A number of things emerged to clarify the picture of posting.

There were 23 newly trained teachers at the core of the study: 8 women and 15 men. Selection was based on which college they had studied at and was aimed at achieving a balanced sample between men and women, rural and urban teachers, but was otherwise random. 5 of the teachers had graduated in 1997 and of those 3 had transferred from remote to semi-urban schools after the first year. Out of 8 women, 3 had had babies within the first two years of teaching and one of them had obtained a transfer to a district office desk job nearer her husband's place of work. 8/17 (almost 50% of teachers posted to rural and remote schools) were transferred or released during or at the end of their first year in post. Also, of the 8 women, 4 were posted to rural schools and only one stayed longer than one year. One of the 1997 teachers transferred from a remote to a semi urban school at the end of his first year, and, after one more year, has been given study leave and is in Winneba furthering his studies. All the teachers posted initially to urban or semi urban schools are still in post.

This sample cannot be considered representative of the bigger picture, but when their experiences are considered alongside the information obtained from district officers a number of issues arise and there are clear areas for further research.

The initial career paths of newly trained teachers do not, in the majority of cases here, conform to the pattern of taking up a post for three years after pre-service. This is particularly true in rural areas and severely undermines continuity of staffing in many of those schools. In the face of a staffing and deployment crisis, district offices with high numbers of rural schools have introduced a number of pragmatic policies to prevent high levels of non-reporting. One district director noted that pupil teachers are "holding the fort" in many schools and admitted that they had almost given up trying to post newly trained teachers to the more remote schools because of high levels of non-reporting the previous year:

> *This year was a bit different. Instead of posting them to the hinterland, we posted them to schools on the main road. The schools in the interior still suffer. We made a special application for 70+ pupil teachers this year.* [District director]

Another district director admitted that the common practice of transferring teachers after one year from "hardship" postings had become a de facto promise to give newly posted teachers an incentive to stay for at least one year. All saw the problem of getting newly trained women teachers, and rich male teachers[10], to accept difficult postings and saw sponsorship as offering a possible solution, particularly if based on a form of circuit sponsorship.

The problem of delayed payments of salaries had been one of the causes of the strike and many in the district offices had sympathy with the teachers, although they had not joined them in the strike. Allowances had been provided by GES to ameliorate the delays, an improvement on the situation last year, but at district level many saw inefficiencies in the centralised nature of the system, particularly with the perceived bottleneck at the Accountant General's office (through which all posting information must pass before salaries can be released), as the main problem, along with late reporting of teachers and the problem of dealing with high levels of non reporting and early transfers.

In almost all of the districts visited I was confronted by new district directors and, in line with the importance placed on districts by current reforms such as decentralisation and Whole School Development, there were signs of increased interaction and sharing of best practice across the region as a whole. For example, all districts had offered orientation programmes for newly trained teachers in 1999 where several had not the previous year.

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[10] The following are typical perceptions of many district officers: "Some people are hardy and some are reared on plates. Even P. here, some object. Those from rich backgrounds have problems…cooking on firewood..."; "Human nature being what it is. If you have a father in GES HQ and you are posted to F. district, you should be given a pleasant posting, if you are not used to rural life.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: A REVIEW OF THE PROBLEMS AND SOME POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The paper began by noting the major problem in Ghanaian education: the concern about the quality of primary education and level of staffing in the rural areas. It also outlined the role of the education bureaucracy, GES, in exacerbating the problem through an ineffective postings procedure. For many newly trained teachers their experience of GES as they move from the colleges to the schools leaves them with a permanent image of a system that is neither fair or rational, rewarding deviance or manipulation and undermining professionalism. Thus, the occupational culture apparently undermines the development of a professional culture, which is then expressed in either rhetorical or individualised terms. The professional association, GNAT, representing bureaucrats and teachers is arguably compromised in its defence of teachers' interests when they conflict with the operations of the bureaucracy, as they often do. Furthermore, the contextual factor of the declining status of teachers within society may also undermine professional aspirations articulated in training and by the teachers themselves. This arguably encourages teachers to see their career in more individualistic terms, while many of the discourses surrounding teachers in Ghana speak to an older high status community-oriented conception of teaching.

On the other hand there are many positive signs that need to be noted: there are many teachers who accept difficult postings and show an individual commitment to the job that rises above poor pay and conditions. Despite some conflicts over expectations and tradition, there is still considerable goodwill towards teachers and the aims of education in many communities in Ghana, and there are signs that the SPAM project is encouraging dialogue between teachers, schools, and the community, with positive outcomes for all; in the process, it seems, teachers' roles may be reconstructed as servants of the community rather than leaders, but newly posted teachers may accept this if the community shows that it values them, through provision of foodstuffs for example. Although when I returned in 2000 the SPAM programme seemed to have stalled and was being given new impetus by a team being sent round the districts by GES HQ. Study leave is a key motivator for newly posted teachers and perhaps should be linked more closely to appraisal and the acceptance of difficult postings to create a professional culture that rewards good behaviour as it is often viewed in terms of personal rather than professional development. The recent increased emphasis on primary methodology in 3 years pre-service training is also questionable given the apparent career aspirations and trajectories of teachers involved in this study. In fact, this study highlights a need for longitudinal studies of teachers careers in Ghana, which may aid in planning future educational reforms.

There is a profound fear among newly trained teachers, with a modern individualistic outlook, that if you spend too much time in an isolated village without access to further education, you become "a village man", a term which strongly conveys the perceived ignorance of rural dwellers in the eyes of some urban educated Ghanaians. A solution needs to be sought that either builds on already-established links between would-be teachers and communities, such as the proposed district sponsorship

scheme, which could be used to encourage young women to go to rural communities where they would perhaps feel safer, where they have relatives, for example. There are signs that small improvements in teachers' working and living conditions in rural areas, might encourage more enthusiasm for postings; and the policy of posting two or more teachers together to rural schools seems to be fairly effective, particularly in the case of women.

The bond, tying teachers to their first posting for a specified number of years, is being reintroduced this year and carries a considerable sanction (five times the amount spent on their training); whether it will be enforced within the current organisational framework is debatable. With GES receiving technical and financial support from a number of donor agencies, and the commonly expressed desire for changed expressed by individuals within the bureaucracy, there is some hope that a more rational bureaucratic culture will develop. It is much too early to say whether this is what will happen, but there was an interesting straw in the wind towards the end of the 1998 – 1999 academic year. The national headquarters of GES was full of recently put up posters informing all visitors that if they were dissatisfied with the service they received from the people they had come to see, they should make a complaint. It may seem like a small thing, but it highlights a growing awareness that GES exists to serve the education system and the public rather than itself. Whether GES at the national level will be willing to decentralise power to the districts, in line with publicly stated policy, remains to be seen. Also, it needs to be noted that there remain doubts about the capacity of districts to cope with deployment and salary payments in the short term.

In the 1999 Strategic Plan for Education, there is the following concrete promise in relation to incentives for rural teachers; perhaps revealing long awaited movement on the issue:

> 1200 units of teachers' accommodation will be constructed especially in remote areas as an incentive to attract trained and qualified teachers.

There are also the widely supported moves to increase school/community partnerships, which place the onus on communities to make posting to their school attractive to the new teacher. And, based on the evidence of my interviews, there are quite a few communities showing a willingness to provide free or subsidised accommodation and food in order to encourage teachers to stay. That leaves the difficult issue of what should be done in the case of communities that cannot or will not do the same, but it is certainly an improvement. The concept of district sponsorship for trainee teachers, as has already been mentioned, offers the hope of solving one of the major problems of posting, that newly posted teachers do not feel any agency in choosing their posting, often finding themselves posted to a district, even a region, that they would not have chosen. It has been suggested that a system of sponsorship, linked to the increased powers of district assemblies under the decentralisation programme, would achieve a number of desirable outcomes. It would encourage people planning to go to teacher training to find districts that needed teachers and then get sponsored by them on the condition that they would return to teach in that district and teach for the period of the bond. Thus the sense of lack of agency, disappointment and injustice that many feel as part of the postings process as it is now would be replaced by a more professional commitment to teaching in their

chosen district. Ultimately, the holy grail of education in Ghana - posting trained motivated teachers to schools where they are needed and where they are willing to stay for enough time to make a difference - can only be achieved by acknowledging the links between organisational culture, professional culture, teacher thinking and willingness to commit oneself to teaching as a lifelong career. In the process a balance between the individual aspirations of teachers and the needs of the communities they serve in a rapidly modernising society needs to be found; a balance that transforms a culture of manipulation and resentment into one of professionalism and commitment, building on foundations that are already there.

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