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Deep Understanding Defined Within the Primary School Class One Curriculum

Kim Mendell

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Deep Understanding
Defined Within the Primary School Class One Curriculum

Kim Mendell

School For International Training
Independent Study Project

December 7, 1998
Acknowledgements

I didn’t know how I would be received in Ghana before my arrival. My experience during the “urban drop-off” in the initial stage of our program proved to be an accurate indication of Ghanaian hospitality. I mentioned the word “cassava” and people took my hand, weaving me throughout Kotokuraba and the surrounding area to not only locate cassava, but to inquire of its origin, its uses, and its history. I needed only to mention my name and my purpose and I had a friend.

I have a number of people to thank for contributing to my independent study project. Most of my encounters were brief, but their effects are still reverberating. I thank the lady who walked with me down the road in Asiakwa when I was lonely. She told me her name before we parted. Ironically, it was “Comfort.” I thank Gladys, who worked at the front desk of a hotel in Kumasi, for walking me straight to the door of a Tro Tro bound for Techiman. To Mr. Osei-Manu, the headmaster at the Owen International School, I thank you for leaving your class to take me on a walking tour of local primary schools, and even to the district office. I thank Ayi Owen for allowing me to live in her home and bake cookies. I thank the bus driver of the Kumasi-bound STC bus for letting me sit on the stairs.

Much thanks to my host family for allowing me full access to their computer, and to Naana and Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang for not withholding my mail because I hadn’t finished my research papers. Finally I thank my advisor, Dr. Beatrice Okyere, for her time and energy towards my project and for inviting me to her home for paper revisions.
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Abstract

This research paper is an examination of deep understanding; its definition, its sources, and its translation within the primary one class curriculum. Six major sources are targeted: class size, teacher training, availability of supplies, teaching methods, enrichment, and communication with focus on enrichment. Deep understanding is translated through active participation and production. The methodology used includes 13 interviews conducted with teachers, headmasters education officers, parents and students. Observation took place in 10 primary schools in 3 regions. Enrichment is present within the curriculum on a small scale, and deep understanding is not always achieved in the classroom.
Introduction

The importance of obtaining a “deep understanding” of material is often easy to understand, but more difficult to achieve. “Deep understanding” is defined in this paper as that which is accomplished and influenced by a variety of sources which converge in the classroom. The primary sources being enrichment. This type of understanding is conveyed through individual expression by vehicles of active participation and production. Active participation measured by degree of questioning by students and teachers, encouragement of independent thought, and teamwork. Production achieved through enrichment such as art, music, dance and drama.

Ghana is divided into 10 administrative regions that are further separated into 110 districts. According to the 1994/95 statistics there are 12,134 schools in Ghana, 92% of which are public. The 1987 major education reforms proclaimed a 6-3-3-4 system of basic education. The 6 year public primary school curriculum should include math, science, social studies, Ghanaian language, English, agriculture, life studies and physical education. Art, music and dance are not required subjects, although they are supposed to be integrated within the other subjects.

According to a study conducted by the Center for Research on Improving Quality of Primary Education in Ghana (CRIQPEG) in 1993, students weren’t learning to read or write in English or in the local language, science, physical education, agriculture and life skills were the most frequently neglected subjects. The average student to textbooks ratio was 2:1.

I’ve identified 6 major contributors to the achievement of a deep understanding among pupils in the public and private primary one classes examined. They are as follows: class size, teacher training, availability of teaching supplies, teaching methods, enrichment, and communication and support among policy makers, district education officers, teachers, students, and parents. Sources of deep understanding outside the classroom were not explored although they are also influential.
Methodology

In order to achieve a comprehensive view of the teaching methods employed by teachers of Ghanaian primary one classes, I used four primary research methods. They were as follows: interviews, observations, participant observation and literature review. I chose primary one of the purpose of limiting my sample, and because I wanted to focus on lower primary.

Interviews and Observations

I conducted a total of 13 interviews with teachers, headmasters, students, parents, professors at the University of Cape Coast, and members of the Techiman district office of education (see appendices A-E). I spent a total of 40 hours interviewing teachers and headmasters and observing primary one classes. It was fairly simple to enter a classroom, with the headmaster’s permission, and observe for an average of 4 hours and interview the teacher during breaks in the curriculum. Most of my observations and interviews were conducted in the morning before lunch break. I visited 10 different primary schools, 6 public and 5 private, in three different regions.

My research began in Komenda village (Central Region) at Ghasel Primary School, where I interviewed and observed the class of Rose Obeng Quayson. I also interviewed Mr. Ebu Sam about building playground equipment for the schools of Komenda. I then traveled to the neighbouring village of Bronyibima where I interviewed and observed Theresa Abigail Otto.

In Takofiano, Techiman (Brong Ahafo Region) I interviewed Ayi Owen, founder of the Owen International Primary School, Mr. Oheneba Osei-Manu headmaster and primary one teacher, two parents of students, and Mr. Peter Adams teaching assistant of the primary one class. I observed the primary one class at the Owen school across an extended period of 7 days. I interviewed the primary one teacher, Mr. Dandeebo Luke, at the Godbless International School (Kenten), and also headmaster, Mr. Ibrahim Tawiah. En route to the Godbless school, I briefly visited the Good Samaritan International School and the also the New kenton Primary school. At New Kenten I spoke with the principal superintendent, George S. Kuliere. I later visited the SDA Basic primary school (Takofiano) where I interviewed the headmaster Mr. Assuamah O. Y. and the primary one teacher Mr. Yaw Gyamfi.

At the Techiman district office of education I interviewed Mr. M. K. Boakye Jr., a district training officer, and Mr. Kwaku Donyina, the deputy director general. Next I visited the Hermann Gmeiner primary school in the SOS children’s village in Asiakwa (Eastern region). Here, I interviewed the primary one teacher, Ms. Cecilia Teye and spoke with the headmistress, Ms. Juliet Kono.
I spoke with Dr. Beatrice Okyere, Head of the Department of Education at Foundations at the University of Cape Coast. I concluded my research at the University Primary School where I interviewed the primary one teacher, Ms. Constance Dickson.

I also engaged in much formal discussion with Ayi and Bill Owen about their primary school.

**Participant Observation**

I was granted the opportunity to teach a math lesson to the primary one class at Ghasel Primary school for about an hour. I also taught the nursery and JSS one class at a primary school in Beseasi. In Techiman, I was asked to teach the primary one class a couple of group games during P.E. class, and I also taught these games to the primary one class at the University Primary school. I also engaged in some informal discussion and play with the children of the Owen International School in Techiman.

**Literature Review**

The literature examined included presentations and papers given to me by Dr. Okyere at the University of Cape Coast.

**Data Analysis**

The majority of data was obtained from interviews and observations. I collected some statistics and made a few simple calculations for the purpose of comparing data.

**Limitations**

Difficult to communicate subtleties in an objective manner. There was also a discrepancy, at times, between what I was told and what I saw. It was difficult to communicate with small children just learning English, especially when I was trying to discover their interest, understanding of class material and storytelling abilities. I also found it difficult to remain objective in my questioning and data analysis. I made a concerted effort, but at times I felt as though my questions might have been too pointed, and my interpretation of answers at times biased.
Education was introduced as a missionary venture. The entire educational system is derived from a colonial past. The pre-university system included a total of 17 years schooling before the implementation of educational reforms. It was also declared that the headmaster of a school should be a member of the church.

In 1951 the government launched the accelerated development plan for education. This plan laid the foundation for a universal primary education system. It was followed by the 1961 education act which declared basic education as “free and compulsory.” It led to increased enrollment and improved teaching and learning methods. In 1965 Ghana’s educational system was considered one of the most advanced in Africa.

The mid 1960’s brought political instability to Ghanaian government. Nkrumah was overthrown in 1966. The strains placed on the country’s economy persisted into the early eighties. The education system collapsed before the Rawlings administration took control in 1981.

Political turmoil and economic decline of the 1970s and 1980s caused a drop in government expenditures on education form 6.4% to 1.4% of the GDP. Schools experienced a severe shortage of textbooks. School structures were left to deteriorate. Enrollment decreased while the drop-out rate increased, and there was an exodus of trained and experienced teachers.

The 1986-87 economic recovery program called for a major overhaul of the education system. The government was in need of donor assistance to restructure the entire system. This program established a number of learning objectives for all primary school pupils. They included: requiring children to develop the abilities to count, read, write and generally communicate, to develop sound morals and cultural awareness, to be able to adapt to a changing environment, to lay the foundations for the development of life skills, and the development of the foundations for inquiry and creativity. The 6-3-3-4 system was established, reducing pre-university education from 17 to 12 years. The primary school curriculum was expanded to include 9 subjects: math, science, social studies, cultural studies, Ghanaian language, English, agriculture, life skills and physical education.

After the reforms, enrollment increased. The 1987-89 growth rate was between 8.3% and 11.8%. There was an increase in government financial assistance, and in available school supplies distributed to the district offices. Teachers were sent to in-service training courses. The government was still not able, however, to focus attention at the primary level which had the greatest percentage of untrained teachers and where the pupils were low achievers.

The primary education program (PREP) was introduced in 1991. It was financed with money from USAID as a five year program intended to continue the efforts begun by the 1987 reforms. It is expected that by the year 2000 PREP would have achieved a number of goals.
including getting 80% of school-age children to attend school, establishing a 40:1 ratio of students to teacher, and assuring that 80% of the students completing P6 will have acquired basic reading, writing, and manipulative skills.

The free compulsory universal basic education (FCUBE) was established in 1995 to strengthen the PREP reforms. It also served to improve management at the district level, further involve the community, and increase access to basic education.vii

**CROQPEG**

The center for research on improving the quality of primary education in Ghana (CRIQPEG) was established on the University of Cape Coast campus to support the efforts of PREP.viii This includes researching primary school education to gain a more comprehensive and realistic understanding of the primary school environment focusing on the availability and use of instructional materials in the classroom. After discussion with educational leaders and policy makers, CRIQPEG determined that learning of language was vital to the improvement of education quality. The study launched by CRIQPEG begun in 1993 to measure pupil skills in oral language, reading, and writing. Over 1000 students in 14 primary schools from 2 regions in Ghana were tested. The study lasted until 1996.

The study found that school supplies, namely textbooks, were inadequate. The majority of children had to share textbooks. Even when textbooks were available, they were not being distributed. Students used mainly exercise books, pencils/pens as learning materials. In most classes, teachers copied material from textbooks to the board, so the majority of the class was taught on the board. Teachers taught 2-3 lessons per day instead of 8-9. science was the least taught subject, and other neglected subjects included agriculture, physical education, and life skills. Children weren’t learning to read or write in local language or in English.ix

The Ghana Education Service

The Ghana education service (GES) was established to carry out the policies formed by the Ministry of Education located in Accra. The GES is divided into eight divisions: Man Power and Training, Administration of Finance, Inspectorate, Teacher Education, Basic Education, Secondary Education, Logistics and Supply, Special Education, Curriculum Research and Development, and Technical Education.x Policies are formed by the ministry of education where they are filtered from regional offices, to district offices, to circuits and finally to teachers.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Rank of Ghana Education Service</th>
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<td>Director General</td>
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Table 1
Deputy Director General
Director
Directors (districts)
Assistant Director
Principal Superintendent
Senior Superintendent (after 11 years)
Superintendent (after 8 years)
Assistant Superintendent (after 5 years)
Cert ‘A’ Teacher (after training college)
Pupil Teacher (after SSS)
Analysis of the Major Sources of Deep Understanding

Class Size

The majority of teachers I spoke with agreed that their class size was too large. The average class size for public schools visited was 52 pupils, while the average of private schools was 31 pupils. The largest class I encountered was 92 pupils at the SDA Basic public school in Techiman. It was a combined class of two sections of primary two. The smallest class I encountered (17 primary one pupils) was also in Techiman, but at the Ayi Owen International private school.

Out of 10 schools visited, 8 had pupils’ desks arranged in rows. In 3 of the 8 schools, the desks were too close together for the teacher to move freely up and down each row. At Ghasel (Komenda), the students were sharing desks. The other two classes had desks arranged in groups. At the Ayi Owen school, children sat 3-4 to a round table. The desks in the P1 class at the University school were arranged in a horseshoe formation. Two groups of students sat two by two around the circumference of the room, while two groups sat at tables in the center of the room, 10 students per table. Teachers often find it difficult to engage their students in group work due to the small size of the classroom, and the large number of students.

Classrooms often overcrowded due to the fact that they must accommodate a growing population. The 1987 education reforms established a teacher pupil ratio of 1 to 40, but the CRIQPEG study found that classrooms were frequently overcrowded. This is more of an issue in urban schools than in rural schools. Often, enrollment increases exponentially in the lower primary classes, and then levels off in the upper primary and JSS (junior secondary) classes due to an increased drop-out rate. New schools are being built, but mainly in the rural areas where there are few schools initially.

Various techniques are employed to combat large classes. I observed teachers move frequently around the classroom, calling on children and checking independent work. All of the teachers agreed that grouping the children was a good teaching technique, but I only observed its implementation in two schools. I observed the majority of teachers move frequently around the classroom, calling on children and checking independent work. All of the teachers agreed that grouping the children was a good teaching technique, but I only observed its implementation in two schools. I observed the majority of teachers using rhymes, memorized and repeated by the class, to capture their attention. In the SOS children’s village school, I observed the teacher call children to the front of the class row by row during a lesson.

Primary schools often have several different streams of students, each steam consisting of P1 to P6. Some schools choose the shift system where one stream attends class in the morning
while the second stream arrives for an afternoon session of class. This can be problematic for children in the afternoon session with increased mid-day temperatures making concentration more difficult.

Access to all of the children by the teacher during a lesson was an issue. The teacher is often forced to spend a good deal of time teaching a single point in order to reach all of the children in the classroom. If the teacher cannot or does not move around the classroom, the children in the back of the room are often neglected. Or, if the teacher doesn’t call on enough children, or spend enough time on a lesson, he or she won’t be aware of this unless an assignment is given.
Teacher Training

All public school teachers are required to attend a 4-year teacher training college following senior secondary school. Private school teachers, however, do not have the same requirement. Eight out of the nine private school teachers I encountered had not attended teacher training college. The public school teachers I spoke with had an average of 13 years experience, while the private school teachers I spoke with had an average of 6 years experience.

One private school teacher told me that he attended teacher in-service training courses in town. Each course lasted a duration of two weeks, and he had attended five. These such courses are headed by the Ministry of Education.

I was told by several primary one teachers that they were not instructed how to teach all the subjects required to be taught at the primary level. Although, this was refuted by an administrator with whom I spoke. I received the impression that math and English were relatively straightforward subjects to reach, and were taught daily, however, life skills, agriculture, music and dance were move vague subjects in terms of the teaching methodology required, and were not taught on an every-day basis. In all of the primary schools I visited, except the SOS school, the teachers were required to teach all subjects. At the SOS school, a separate teacher was appointed to teach each of art and physical education.

The Owen school in Techiman was the only school that appointed a teaching assistant in the primary one classroom. I was told by most of the headmasters that teaching assistants were only employed to assist in kindergarten classes.

The 1987 education reforms called for a reduction in untrained teachers. 60,000 “trained and qualified” teachers were supposed to have received in-service training. The CRIQPEG 1993 study found that classes were still overstaffed and understaffed, and teachers were still using ineffective methods of teaching like rote memorization and copying from the blackboard.\textsuperscript{xiv}

Regular in-service training sessions are supposed to be held by the district training officer and also by the headmaster. It is the duty of the district office to keep teachers updated on new policies, reforms, teaching strategies etc. The district officer should go over broad observations and make suggestions to teachers and faculty. I was told by an ex-training officer that these suggestions on teaching style and methodology were often not heeded by the teachers.\textsuperscript{xv} The training officer is required to make follow-up visits after the in-service training to monitor progress. Every headmaster I spoke with told me that they held in-service meetings “when necessary.” No one could give me an exact figure.

The district officers aren’t required to supervise private schools. The most extreme school situation I entered was at a private primary school in Techiman. The headmaster had left for town,
while two untrained teachers were left to teach the entire primary school. The school was not registered with the Ghana Education Service.
School Supplies

Every teacher, headmaster and district officer I spoke with agreed that there is a general lack of school supplies available. School supplies include textbooks, exercise books, pencils/pens, and crayons. The district office is responsible for textbook distribution and sometimes exercise books. Parents are responsible for providing pens/pencils, crayons and exercise books. District offices don’t supply art materials, aside from “gray buft” (like a foam) which can be used for projects.

Textbooks are distributed every three years from the curriculum research and development division of the ministry of education in Accra to each of the 110 districts.\textsuperscript{xvi} The headmaster of each school is required to travel to the district office to retrieve supplies. Distribution is done according to total school enrollment.

The 1993 CRIQPEG study discovered that textbooks are generally available, but not used. Examiners found that 55\% of the classrooms visited had a book to pupils ratio of 1:2. The textbook quality if often poor. Books that are supposed to last three years only last one. Since they are provided free by the government, materials are often not properly cared for by students or teachers. Textbooks are often kept in storage because teachers were being charged for books damaged by the students.\textsuperscript{xvii} This policy, however, was recently abolished.

Textbooks are often distributed unfairly to schools within the district. Headmasters often don’t have transportation to travel to the district office to pick up supplies especially in the rural areas. District officers were supplying favoured school with more supplies. Supply of books is often inconsistent because publishers are frequently changed.\textsuperscript{xviii} Parents often don’t provide children with book bags so they have no where to store supplies and frequently lose them. I found pupils with book bags in 1 out of 10 schools visited.

The CRIOPEG study reported that children didn’t have supplemental readers. Only 4\% of students had exercise books, and 10\% of teachers had teacher’s handbooks. Not all parents provide their children with adequate pens/pencils and exercise books, so children are required to share or not complete the lesson assigned. This is a problem especially in overcrowded classrooms where the teacher doesn’t have time to wait for children waiting to share writing utensils, and often isn’t even aware that all the children haven’t completed the assignment.

The 1961 education act declared basic education free and compulsory, although every school I entered charged fees. The school often doesn’t provide supplies other than textbooks. The public schools charged an average of 1000-2000 cedis/term for sports or general school development. The private schools charged anywhere from 30000 to 110000 cedis/term.
The majority of schools I entered had little to no teaching aids in the form of manipulatives, instructional charts or posters. In the classrooms that did have teaching aids, they were usually provided by the teacher out of his or her own salary, or merely collected by the teacher. In some classrooms, teachers used pebbles, bottle caps, and/or empty food and beverage containers as teaching aids. Most teachers and headmasters named inadequate funds as the reason for the lack of teaching materials.

Some of the school structures I visited were unsafe, incomplete and/or generally inadequate. Schools with multiple streams often required “temporary” structures until more permanent facilities were built. I visited one school which sheltered classes beneath a thatch canopy with visible holes large enough to make teaching impossible during bad weather. I read the headline of an article in the Tribune, a local paper sold in Kumasi, which announced that a school structure had recently collapsed killing one student and injuring 14 others.
Teaching Methods

Every classroom I visited was dominated by the teacher except for one. Student desks were usually arranged in rows eliminating the possibility of group work without rearranging the entire room. Repetition and copying were techniques used by every teacher to varying degrees. Few questions were asked, either by the teachers or students, and students rarely left the classroom setting for educational purposes.

The 1993 CRIQPEG study reported the use of ineffective teaching methods like rote memorization and copying from the blackboard. Children weren’t learning to read or write. They study did not address the teaching of any type of enrichment activities like art, music, dance or drama.

In every classroom I entered except one, the teacher spent the majority of his or her time in the front of the classroom, teaching lessons from the board. Due to a lack of textbooks, the teacher is inclined to copy information onto the board, and teach the lesson with the students’ attention focused towards the front of the room. All the teachers I spoke with, except one, agreed that grouping children, allowing them to work together was important. But, I rarely witnessed this technique. When feasible, the teacher would also walk up and down the rows of students to check individual work. Three of the classrooms I entered were too crowded for the teacher to pass freely about the room.

The students also recited memorized rhymes frequently. I only observed one teacher actually discuss the meaning of a rhyme with his class. xi This same teacher also discussed the meaning of the words used in the Ghanaian national anthem. Evidence of children learning by rote memorization:

Example 1:
Mr. Osei-Manu the headmaster and P1 teacher of the Techiman school, and also former district training officer gave me one such example of rote memorization.

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*****  *
*   *
*  *
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He found that students were able to recognize the first pattern as the number 5, but were unable to identify the second pattern as an illustration of 5. In essence, the students were learning by memorization, and were not grasping the concept of counting.
Example 2:
I asked a child to explain heat energy to me. He was only able to recite a memorized definition and was unable to generalize the concept to a concrete example.\textsuperscript{xx}

Example 3:
A boy was reading a passage about a boy shooting a bird with a gun. I asked him if the boy could shoot something other than a bird. I asked him what shooting meant, how it would effect the bird. He was unable to generalize beyond what he had just read.\textsuperscript{xxi}

I also observed teachers use some creative techniques, in and outside of the classroom, to allow children to conceptualise what they were teaching. (see examples 1-5 under enrichment). Although they weren’t as common as repetition and copying, these techniques used are proof that enrichment activities can be incorporated into the curriculum through innovative teaching techniques. I observed these techniques in overcrowded classrooms as well as those without adequate teaching aids.

I only observed I teacher out of 10 who taught an English lesson emphasizing phonetics. For the most part, teachers were writing words on the board and asking the children to simply repeat them without breaking down the words into individual sounds. Again, this is an instance of rote memorization overshadowing the understanding of a concept.
**Enrichment**

I asked every teacher I interviewed to define art as it is integrated into the curriculum. The majority of those asked defined it as the drawing or copying of pictures by children. I observed an overall emphasis on repetition and copying and a lack of teaching concepts.

As it stands, the public primary school curriculum does not include art as a separate subject. Some P1 classes have a short period of music and dance taught either once or twice a week. Most teachers described this period as a time for children to sing songs. In response to my inquiries as to why this is the case, the training officer at the Techiman district office of education responded that art is integrated into the curriculum. “Environmental studies includes life skills which includes art.” The training officer also defined art as drawing pictures. Dr. Okyere spoke of the ‘fine arts’ as a part of vocational skills. Dr. Okyere described the fine arts as a “time for children to be creative.” Also, that the fine arts are now being “de-emphasized” within the primary school curriculum because policy makers are focusing more on subjects like Math and English. In fact, there is presently no art department at the University of Cape Coast.

The 1993 CRIQPEG study found that life skills, which is supposed to include art, was among the neglected subjects taught by primary school teachers. The same study reported that teachers were unable to teach all of the subjects outlined in the curriculum. They were focusing on 2-3 subjects per day. The district offices aren’t required to distribute art supplies, although the Techiman office told me of “gray buf” which they occasionally distributed to teachers for art projects.

All of the classrooms I entered, except one, did not display anything produced by the students ie: art projects. I saw one art project displayed in the P1 classroom at the SOS school. While visiting the Owen International school, I witnessed a short play enacted by the children of both kindergarten and the P1 classes. It was the second play they had produced since the start of school in classes. It was the second play they had produced since the start of school in September. The children seemed to enjoy acting, reciting lines, dressing in costumes, and generally taking part in something of their making.

When pressed about this issue most teachers mentioned a lack of art supplies as the biggest problem. One teacher told me that she wasn’t taught how to teach art, music or dance in the training college. Another teacher included that she didn’t really know how to teach music or dance, and that it wasn’t defined anywhere by the policy makers. The issue was confronted during an in-service meeting, and the headmaster responded by bringing in someone from the nearby University of Cape Coast to demonstrate how it should be taught. The teacher felt that the issue had not been resolved.
I witnessed several innovative methods of teaching by a few teachers used to illustrate concepts through active participation.

Example 1:
One teacher described an assignment that she gave to her P1 class. She asked them to design a toy from any available materials they found at home. When the children brought the toys to class, she asked them how they would then improve upon their design.xxvi

Example 2:
I witnessed another teacher who, while teaching his students the Ghanaian national anthem, attempted to explain the meaning behind the words. ie: asking the children to point to their heart.xxvii

Example 3:
I witnessed two teachers take their kindergarten classes outside to fly a kite that they had designed.xxviii

Example 4:
I witness three teachers take their classes outside to orient them to the environment.

Example 5:
The teachers at the Ayi Owen school invited children to dance and sing during a music and dance lesson.
These examples are few, nonetheless, they are proof that enriching activities can be incorporated within the curriculum by teachers regardless of experience or availability of art supplies.

The SOS school was the only school I visited that had in after-school program. This program, available to students in P4 to JSS, included such things as French, drama, batik dyeing, kente weaving, drum and dance clubs, various indoor games, along with outdoor organized games such as volleyball, football, and table tennis. These activities were organized and led by the teachers after classes.

There seems to be a lack of such organized extra-curriculum activities for children. I interviewed Ebo Sam of Komenda about his plans to build playground equipment for the school children.xxix When asked where he obtained this idea he replied that children need a time and a place to interact in a setting outside the classroom. It’s important for their development.
It is true that the schools which have the most enrichment programs incorporated in the curriculum, and supplementary to the curriculum, are those which have the greatest funding. It is, however, possible to include enrichment activities in the daily lesson plan. It requires teachers to be both innovative and eager to encourage their students to engage in activities in such a manner that behooves them to question, to come up with new ideas and different ways of doing things, to work together and share ideas. I witnessed this type of teaching methodology on a small scale in classrooms that were both overcrowded and lacking in sufficient supplies.
Communication and Support

The teaching profession isn’t necessarily a respected occupation. The 1993-94 head of state insulted all teachers by declaring that he could bring in the militia to teach in the schools.xxx A person could be hired to teach in a private school after only having completed senior secondary school (SSS), and without any prior teaching experience. The Ministry of Education is not responsible for monitoring private institutions. This lack of support at the government level filters down through the policy makers in Accra, to the GES officers, to the teachers and finally to the students and parents.

I spoke with the deputy district officer in Techiman about the lack of communication between policy makers in Accra and the teachers and district officers at the grass roots level.xxxi Often, the policies are developed by the Ministry of Education that are not applicable or beneficial at the grass roots level. He gave me a specific example; the time spent in SSS was reduced from 5 years to 3 years with the 1987 reforms. After this reform, it was discovered that students were experiencing more difficulty on the examination following the completion of SSS. Instead of increasing the time spent in SSS, policy makers recently decided that time should be reduced to 2.5 years. He suggested one reason; perhaps policy makers fear that the district officers will revolt against policies.

Dr. Okyere spoke of a forum, sponsored by CRIQPEG, which brought together policy makers with district officers, teachers and parents. The forum was successful because the policy makers were introduced to a number of problems at the grass roots, level, and some policies were adjusted. CRIQPEG, however, no longer sponsors, such programs. The reason being because the CRIQPEG project ended in 1996.

The frustration experienced by the district officers is then transferred to the teachers. The 1993 CRIQPEG study reported frequent teacher absenteeism. They also reported low levels of teacher and instructional supervision. I witnessed this after visiting schools to find up to 3 teachers absent, and their classes left unattended. Teachers also left large classes unattended for periods of 15-20 minutes throughout the day. In some cases, not even informing the class of their leaving. Teachers are also frustrated about having to teach so many subjects within a day, about the lack of school supplies, and the large class sizes. Teachers are often paid very little. I spoke with 2 untrained private school teachers who were only being paid 25,000 cedis per month to teach multiple classes.xxxii

Lack of concern among the teachers is then absorbed by the students. This is evident in frequent absenteeism, increased drop-out rate, and lack of parental support. If a student is having a problem in class, that teacher needs to communicate that problem to the parents.
Several teachers mentioned lack of parental support as a major issue facing Ghanaian primary schools. Some parents don’t provide their child with adequate school attire ie: torn and/or unwashed uniforms, and they don’t provide the child with the necessary supplies ie: pencils/pens and exercise books, or money for lunch.

Communication and support among policy makers, GES officers, teachers, students and parents is the key to the success of Ghanaian primary school education. The school system could be endowed with money, school supplier, and trained teachers, but if the teachers don’t receive support from the government or the parents, the same problems will remain.
Discussion

Public vs. Private Schools

There were some interesting contrasts and similarities between public and private primary schools. The public schools were overall more uniform in terms of curriculum, funds obtained, materials available, and teacher training. The private schools are not under the supervision of the GES, so their conditions are more varied.

Public schools are supposed to obtain materials from the district education office based on their total enrollment, and this distribution is monitored by the district officers. Private schools often obtain materials from independent resources. I observed private schools which had an abundance of school supplies: pens/pencils, textbooks, teaching aids, games, and educational posters. I also entered private schools that had even less available supplies than most public schools.

Private schools are not required to follow the public school curriculum. They generally follow the public school curriculum anyway, however, they may not teach as many subjects.

Public schools often had larger class sizes, but the teachers were more experienced since they are required to attend a training college. In most of the private schools I entered, many of the teachers had not been to a training college. Private school teachers are often paid less than public school teachers, but are generally more activated to teach. The private school teachers I spoke with cared more about the overall cause of the school and the goals it aimed to accomplish.

Rural vs. Urban Schools

The overall structures of rural and urban schools were very similar. Their differences are associated with the surrounding population, and the availability of resources.

Enrollment in urban schools is generally greater than in rural schools due to increased population in urban areas, so class size is greater. It is more difficult for children to attend school in rural areas due to the nature of the lifestyle. Children are often forced to grow up quickly. Mothers need them to assist with the housework, taking care of younger siblings, and spelling in the market. Also, children may live far from the closest school, and don’t have a means of transportation aside from walking.

Urban schools have greater access to supplies. It is easier for headmasters to travel to the district office of education regularly so pick up supplies. This is often a hardship for rural teachers due to a lack of transportation.
Enrichment and Deep Understanding

The incorporation of enrichment within the primary school curriculum is important because it encourages the use of teaching techniques other than rote memorization and copying. Enrichment activities such as art, music, dance and drama encourage both participation and production on the part of the students, and participation and production are indicators that a student has achieved a deep understanding of material. Creative teaching methods also foster a deep understanding; encouraging students to think independently, and to attack problems from different angles.

In a culture so rich with the fine arts, it’s important to teach children appreciation. They may be surrounded with art, dance, and music outside of the classroom, but if children aren’t encouraged to explore these avenues, they may never develop a proper understanding or appreciation of their surroundings.

Primary school is a time for exploration. Young minds are in the process of development; absorbing the environment and already forming opinions and interests. Since schools are considered institutions of learning which all children are required to attend, it is the responsibility of policy makers, educators and parents to join forces and insure that these institutions are accurately representing and presenting a variety of ideas, subject and views. It is the student’s responsibility to decide which avenues will require further exploration.
Conclusion

Enrichment activities do exist within the primary one school curriculum, but on a small scale. Thus, students are not always obtaining a deep understanding of material. They are not always actively involved in the learning process, either through class participation, (answering and asking questions, working together with fellow students) or production of art work, plays or music.

A more comprehensive study should be conducted with a representative sample of Ghanaian primary schools in order to explore this issue further. If a lack of deep understanding is found to be an issue, another study or a follow-up study should be conducted on adults to determine whether this lack of deep understanding is maintained later in life, and what effects it has on individuals. Policy makers, GES officers, teachers, parents and students need to converge more often to discuss the problems and issues facing schools. The primary school curriculum should be re-examined, and teachers instructed to incorporate enrichment activities into lessons.

A primary school isn’t just a place for students and teachers. It requires the cooperation and involvement of people at all levels: community, region, country, and even national. A school is a forum, or a converging point for various philosophies, perspectives and subjects. It holds our future.
Appendix A

Interview Questions for Teachers

*Not every teacher was asked every question

- How do you like teaching here?
- Where were you educated?
- Where have you taught and for how long?
- Why do you choose to teach in a private school? (when applicable)
- How do you feel about the size of your class?
- How do you work around a large class size?
- Are there enough supplies, textbooks for each student?
- How is individual expression incorporated into the curriculum?
- Do you attend in-service training?
- Do the children have a recess period?
- Do they play organized group games during recess? PE?
- Do you teach phonics?
- How is art incorporated into the curriculum?
- What is your definition of art?
- Do the children have access to art supplies? Supplied by whom?
- Do the children produce anything?
- How do you teach music and dance?
- Do you find it hard to teach so many subjects?
- Do you keep in contact with parents?
- Do you have time for children outside of class?
- Do you know what I mean by “deep learning?”
- What is the most pressing problem facing Ghanaian primary schools today?
Appendix B

Interview Questions for Headmasters

*Not every headmaster was asked every question*

- How long have you been a headmaster here?
- How many years have you taught before becoming headmaster?
- How many of your teachers have attended training college?
- What is the average teacher salary?
- How much tuition do you charge each student?
- Do you hold regular in-service training sessions?
- Do you feel that they are successful?
- How often do you see the circuit supervisor?
- Is he/she helpful?
- Do you receive art materials from the district office?
- Do you receive an adequate number of textbooks?
- What is the biggest issue facing Ghanaian primary schools?
Appendix C

Questions for Advisor

*Asked of Dr. Beatrice Okyere

- GHANA presentation of 1987 reforms when and when presented?
- Do you see a communication gap between policy makers and the grass roots level?
- Is there room for individual expression within the curriculum?
- Are teachers encouraged to group children?
- Do teachers teach phonetics during reading?
- What were the results of the CRIQPEG study of 1991?
- What is the role of FCUBE?
- Have the 1987 reforms and policies been implemented?
- Why is there no art in the curriculum?
- How is art defined?
- Are teachers taught how to teach art, dance, and music in the training college?
- Are they taught how to teach all subjects?
- Are they able to teach all subjects included in the curriculum?
- Are any efforts being made to reduce class size?
Appendix D

*Interview Questions for District Officers*

*Asked of the district officers in Techiman office.*

- What is your role in this office?
- How many schools are in Techiman?
- How many schools are in a circuit?
- Does the training officer visit schools unannounced?
- What is the role of the circuit supervisor?
- How often does he/she visit each school in the circuit?
- Do teachers follow suggestions made?
- What are some of the issues currently facing Ghanaian primary schools?
- How are supplies distributed?
- Who prepares the curriculum?
- Is there room for individual expression within the curriculum?
- Where is art in the curriculum?
- Do you distribute any art materials?
- Where do the policies come from?
Appendix E

*Interview Questions for Ebo Sam*

- When did you first get the idea to build a playground?
- Why?
- Where would it be built?
- Is there a lack of organized community activities for children?
- Who would build it?

*Interview Questions for Parents*

- How do you feel about your child attending school here?
- Is your child learning?
- Why did you choose to send your child to this school?
- How is this school different from other schools?

*Questions asked of Children*

- What is your favorite part of school?
- What types of games do you play?
- Do you like school?
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Endnotes

i Rise Hunter ISP on English literacy at the primary school level in Ghana.

ii S. K. Adjepong lecture on education at the University of Cape Coast, 11/6/98

iii Paper presented on CRIQPEG 1991 baseline study. Presented in the United States by the University of Cape Coast. 1996

iv Paper presented on the contribution of the primary education programme to the education reform programme delivered at the one-day workshop on improving the quality of primary education at UCC. 10/6/1992.

v See endnote iii


vii Dr. Beatrice Okyere interview.

viii Abi Harris. IEQ in Ghana Assessment in Ghana. The Quality Link newsletter. Spring 1996.

ix See endnote ii

x Rise Hunter ISP on English literacy at the primary school level in Ghana.

xi Oheneba Osei-Manu interview

xii Paper presented on CRIQPEG 1991 baseline study. Presented in the United States by the University of Cape Coast. 1996.

xiii See endnote vii

xiv See endnote ii

xv Oheneba Osei-Manu interview

xvi See endnote viii

xvii Dr. Beatrice Okyere interview.

xviii Interview with Techiman district officers.

xix Oheneba Osei-Manu observations

xx Observation in Komenda.

xxi Observation at Owen International school.

xxii M.K. Boakye Jr. interview.

xxiii See endnote xii

xxiv See endnote ix

xxv Constance Dickson interview

xxvi Theresa Abigail Otto interview

xxvii Oheneba Osei-Manu observation

xxviii Observation at the Owen International school.

xxix Ebo Sam interview

xxx Oheneba Osei-Many interview

xxxii Kwaku Donyina interview

xxxii Visit to Good Samaritan School.