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Education in Ghana: Influences of the Outsiders

Brian Johnstone

With an extensive history of influences by international organizations, including financial lending packages, technical advice and services, and policy recommendations and obligations, Ghana's education system should be excelling. However, in its most recent evaluation, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) rates Ghana's Education for All Development Index (EDI) a low 113th out of 129 (UNESCO, 2007). This paper will consider influences on Ghana's education system by international organizations, focusing primarily on the World Bank's use of human capital theory, USAID's use of appreciative inquiry methodology, and my personal observations and experiences as a volunteer math and science teacher, to understand how influences of the outsiders are impacting education in Ghana.

Introduction

The initial structure of Ghana's post-colonial education system was defined by the Education Act of 1961 and was based on the British system. While significant international education borrowing and reproduction were reflected in Ghana's initial system, direct outsider interventions and influences began markedly in 1983 when the nation's entire economy was in a state of financial crisis. In response to the crisis, the government began a series of structural adjustment programs sponsored by the International Monetary Fund with substantial participation from the World Bank. Since that time, outsider entities have been funding and significantly influencing various aspects of Ghana's education system. The World Bank continues to be the dominant external influence in Ghana's education (Ministry of Education, 2003) and is substantially guided by human capital theory (Samoff, 1999). Alternative outsider agencies and approaches, such as appreciative inquiry methodology (O'Grady, 2000) and volunteer service organizations (e.g. United States Peace Corps), also provide funding and influence. With such an extensive history of influences by international organizations, including financial lending packages, technical advice and services, and policy recommendations and obligations, Ghana's education system should be excelling. However, in its most recent evaluation, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) rates Ghana's Education for All Development Index (EDI) a low 113th out of 129 (UNESCO, 2007).¹ Through the lens and timeframe of my own experiences as a white Peace Corps volunteer in Ghana, and to identify a possible explanation for why Ghana's education system continues to be of a comparatively lower standard, this

paper will examine three specific outsider influences to Ghana's educational system: the World Bank's use of human capital theory, USAID's use of appreciative inquiry methodology and my personal observations and experiences as a volunteer math and science teacher in a small rural secondary school.

There has been an ongoing debate about the role of outsiders in research and development programs since the 1960s. Merton (1972) provides a foundational critique of the insider doctrine, which argues that the outsider cannot adequately represent a group to which he or she does not belong for two reasons: (1) the outsider does not have the capacity to empathetically understand the group; and (2) the inquiry of the outsider may not be relevant to the needs of the group, since the outsider is unable to sufficiently understand the group. Criticism from some feminist communities suggests that "speaking for others is arrogant, vain, unethical, and politically illegitimate" (Alcoff 1991, 6). However, the notion of insider or outsider is simplistic, and the categories themselves can be limiting and polarizing. Banks (1998) builds upon these two categories by introducing a "typology of crosscultural researchers," which expands the number of categories to four: the indigenous-insider, the indigenous-outsider, the external-insider, and the external-outsider.² Though still limiting by the nature of classification itself, these categories are helpful guides in understanding the positionality of researchers and development programs and will be useful in considering the three specified outsider influences.

History of Ghana's Education System³

The roots of contemporary outsider influences in Ghana can be found from an initial examination of

the historical development of the post-colonial education system. Under the first Ghanaian president, Kwame Nkrumah, the Education Act of 1961 was established. Fashioned from the British system, Ghana's education system was organized into a two-tier system of basic and secondary education. Basic education consisted of primary and middle education. The Education Act established local control over education, which included the responsibility of establishing public basic schools, and it required that basic education be compulsory and free.

In 1966, in response to concerns about the relevance of the colonial-based system established by the Education Act of 1961 (Martin, 1976), an Education Review Committee was formed to evaluate Ghana's education system. Through their investigation, the committee proposed considerable restructuring of the system. The most significant aspects of their proposal were to specify age six years as the entry point for education and to make pre-university education a seventeen-year system—ten years of basic education, five years of secondary education, and two years of "sixth form" education. Also included in their recommendations was an alternative path of pre-vocational continuation classes after eight years of basic education.

For the next several years, there were numerous variations and experiments proposed to the system. Finally, in 1974, two significant events occurred. The first was an educational reform entitled the "New Structure and Content of Education." The second was the formation of the Ghana Education Service to ensure that the reforms were effectively implemented. The educational reforms of 1974 introduced the Junior Secondary School to the system and emphasized the education of occupational skills, including technical drawing, metalwork, wood-

work, masonry, catering, and dressmaking.

By 1983, the education system and the entire economy of Ghana were in a financial crisis. The government, consequently, began a series of structural adjustment programs sponsored by the International Monetary Fund. One aspect of the structural adjustments was the creation of the Education Sector Adjustment Credit (EdSAC), which provided a forum for international institutions to participate in the restructuring of the Ghanaian education system. Some of the participants included the World Bank and the U.K.'s Department for International Development. In 1986, the Evans Anfrom Committee was established, which resulted in the implementation in 1987 of several changes to the system that define the current education system of Ghana.

Under the present system, primary education and junior secondary education comprise basic education and are six years and three years in duration, respectively. Senior secondary education is three years in duration. Basic education is for children aged six through twelve years and is considered free and compulsory. The academic year for both basic and senior secondary schools is 40 weeks. Primary education consists of six subjects: English language, regional indigenous language and culture, mathematics, environmental studies, integrated science, and religious and moral education. The ten subjects of junior secondary education include English language, regional indigenous language and culture, mathematics, social studies, general science, agricultural science, pre-vocational skills, pre-technical skills, religious and moral education, and French as an option. The senior secondary school curriculum is comprised of four core subjects and a minimum of three elective subjects. The core subjects are English language, mathematics, integrated science (which includes general,

agricultural, and environmental sciences), and social studies. The three required elective subjects focus on one of five programs: agricultural, general (arts or science), business, vocational, and technical.

Upon completion of senior secondary school, students take the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination, administered by the West African Examination Council (WAEC). WAEC is a nonprofit organization, which was established in 1952, during British colonial rule, to develop and institute standardized testing services in Anglophone West Africa.⁴ Overall student assessment is comprised of thirty percent from continual internal assessment and seventy percent from the final score of the WAEC exam. Admission to a university or other tertiary institution is based entirely on the results of the exam. Consequently, curriculum content, particularly in senior secondary schools, is structured to support the WAEC exam, which was originally established entirely by outsiders, ensuring "a British-style, examination-driven system which reinforce[s] widespread reliance on rote learning" (Woolman, 2001, p. 36).

Overview of Outsider Influences and Funding

According to the Ministry of Education (2003), the most significant issue with the Ghanaian education system is funding. In 2000, the government spent approximately one-third of its national discretionary recurrent budget on education and received considerable funding from international donor and lending agencies. In general, each of these international institutions was providing funding based on specific objectives of that institution. The World Bank, for example, had three funding programs for Ghana's education sector. The largest, with \$50 million, was allocated for

seven basic education initiatives over a five-year period. These included decentralized classroom construction projects, syllabus revision programs, promotion of girls' education, developing a computerized education information system, designing an education information campaign, creating a pilot schooling improvement fund, and training educational program management. The second program, which was not directly related to the pre-university education system, consisted of \$32 million, over a five-year period, for the purpose of increasing literacy for adults. Lastly, the third program was sponsored jointly with the government of Japan and supported analyses and policy development for senior secondary schools (Ministry of Education, 2003).

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) provided direct educational funding in the amount of \$35 million between 1996 and 2002 for the project QUIPS (Quality Improvements in the Primary Schools). The objectives of the project were to improve teacher and education management training, curriculum development, monitoring and evaluation techniques, and to promote decentralization. The project was being implemented in collaboration with several technical assistance teams, including Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Community School Alliances (CSA), Improving Learning through Partnerships (ILP), International Foundation for Education and Self-Help (IFESH), and Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (PME). A review and evaluation of the ILP component of this project, as an example of appreciative inquiry methodology, is provided later in this paper. In addition, \$18 million of non-education sector, non-project assistance funding was provided to the government based upon meeting specified education policy requirements. The Department for International

Development (DFID) provided funding over a five-year period for the promotion of decentralization. Funding from UNICEF was in support of human resource development programs. And the European Union provided \$10 million to Ghana in non-project related funds for education. At least fourteen other organizations were also providing financial support, technical assistance, advice, and/or human resource services to Ghana's education sector in 2000 (Ministry of Education, 2003).⁵ While overseeing the complex web of outsider influences must surely be an overwhelming task for the Ministry of Education, it is unclear the degree to which such influences contribute to educating Ghana's population, as the following inquiries highlight.

The World Bank and Human Capital Theory

Human capital theory has come to dominate education policies throughout the world (Spring, 2001; Samoff, 1999). The purpose and use of such policies are to measure the economic returns associated with educational investments and determine funding allocations and levels based on the expected economic returns. To examine how human capital theory is utilized in the evaluation of Ghana's education system, two analyses are considered: "Returns to Education and Experience in Ghana, 1987-1999: Evidence from four rounds of the Ghana Living Standards Survey" by Appiah-Kubi, Nsowah-Nuamah and van den Boom (2001) and *The Economics of School Quality Investments in Developing Countries: An Empirical Study of Ghana* by Paul Glewwe (1999).

Based on similar yet somewhat differing interpretations presented by Appiah-Kubi et al (2001) and Glewwe (1999), the mathematical representation of the

human capital regression model can be expressed as,

$$\log(w_i) = \alpha_0 + \alpha_p S_{pi} + \alpha_s S_{si} + \alpha_t S_{ti} + \alpha_2 E_i + \frac{1}{2} \alpha_3 E_i^2 + \log(w_{00}),$$

where w_i is the wages received by the individual, i ; α is the rates of return to schooling for primary (p), secondary (s), and tertiary (t) education; S is the number of years in each of the schooling levels; E is the number of years of work experience; and w_{00} is the expected income without education or experience.⁶

By using statistical methods, Appiah-Kubi et al (2001) determined that the public rate of return to schooling in Ghana is 3.2% for basic education, 16% for secondary school, and 3.2% for tertiary school. From these analyses, policy recommendations were provided which suggested a higher investment in basic education in order to equalize the rates of return. Specifically, "the results suggest that educational sector reform in Ghana be highly concerned with improvements in basic education, with the upholding of the quality of secondary schooling, and with opportunities to increase the share of private expenses in secondary and tertiary education" (p. 15). Not included as variables in the extensive analysis were influences from region, culture, religion, gender, class, family economics and structure, teaching styles, individual learning styles, or community values. By focusing only on rates of return, the analysis and recommendations offered by Appiah-Kubi et al result in "significantly decreased attention to learning as a process and to other social and political goals generally expected of education systems (equality, equity, national unity, citizenship)" (Samoff, 1999: 68).

In *The Economics of School Quality Investments in Developing Countries: An Empirical Study of Ghana*, Paul

Glewwe (1999), a senior economist at the World Bank at the time, expanded the scope of the human capital model to include additional variables in the statistical approach to determine the economic benefits of government investments in education. The extensive analysis presented in Glewwe's 373-page book utilized quantitative methods to determine how improvements in school quality affect the cognitive skills of students, how cognitive skills are related to income, and how investments in education impact child nutrition and fertility.

The results of this exhaustive analysis were quite surprising, not because they provided remarkable new insights, but because they generally did not provide any new insights. Glewwe's research findings are highlighted below:

Very simply, [the Ministry of Education] should first invest in blackboards for all middle school classrooms that do not have them now. Once every middle school classroom in Ghana has a blackboard, then leaking roofs should be repaired, if there is any money remaining in the Ministry's limited budget. Once all leaking roofs have been repaired, any remaining funds could be spent on purchases of new textbooks, assuming that there are some benefits to workers outside the wage sector (p. 197).

[There is] sporadic evidence of positive links between elements of human capital (schooling or skills) and enterprise income (p. 241).

Increasing schooling attainment does increase farm income (p. 283).

[A] mother's mathematics skills have positive impact on child weight-for-height [a measure of child health] (p. 318).

There is a strong negative relationship between fertility and schooling (p. 340).

All of Glewwe's findings seem to be fairly commonsense: blackboards are good, as are leak-free roofs and new textbooks; schooling is beneficial to income, farming and health. However, his final finding and corresponding recommendation are surprisingly disturbing:

If blackboards are installed, the actual cost of reducing the number of children ever born to a given woman by 0.5 is well under one US dollar... these results suggest that any family planning programme that costs more than one US dollar per birth avoided may not be cost-effective (p. 341).

Making an association between "one US dollar" and each "birth avoided" as a suggestion for funding family planning programs in Ghana dangerously disregards the overall role and impact of family planning organizations. Glewwe's conclusions, in general, and his dramatic and very specific final recommendation, in particular, highlight how human capital theory, particularly when applied to developing countries by the powerful core capitalist nations and subservient international lending agencies, focusing on capital over humanity, ultimately results in the further

dehumanization of already oppressed people. To worsen matters, the last words from this esteemed and influential senior economist from the World Bank suggest the continuation of such analyses and recommendations:

The ultimate hope of the main author of this book is that the application of this methodology to other countries will eventually lead to schools becoming more effective and, consequently, to better educated children and adults in developing countries. Only then will the efforts made to produce this book have been truly worthwhile (p. 353).

When such statistical methodologies are applied to social sciences, it is not at all clear that appropriate variables can be defined or sufficiently understood. Appiah-Kubi et al (2001) clearly demonstrated this fault in their analysis by excluding significant variables, as previously mentioned. However, Glewwe's (1999) analysis appears to be quite extensive and thorough, including, for example, the use of twenty variables for his weight-height regression. However, the central theme was consistently capital—income, cost, investment. Though it is not surprising that capital is central to research sponsored by the World Bank, it is, nevertheless, highly disconcerting that references to personal happiness, educational fulfillment, or community knowledge and values are nonexistent in education agendas that are based on human capital theory and that dominate the education discourse of international lending institutions. Such research clearly reflects an outsider (indigenous-outside or external-outside) positionality,

having "little appreciation for the values, perspectives, and knowledge of the community" (Banks, 1998: 8).

Appreciative Inquiry Methodology

In contrast to the analytical approaches of Glewwe (1999) and Appiah-Kubi et al (2001), Improving Learning through Partnerships (ILP), funded by USAID, another highly influential outsider agency, provides a community-based approach to improving the Ghanaian education system. This section outlines the methods by which ILP aspired "to narrow the gap between central-level policy makers and those close to the classroom, where the real process of education occurs" (O'Grady, 2000: 10).

There are three components to ILP—master teachers, community empowerment, and appreciative inquiry. These three components are intended to work towards a unified goal of improving education within the communities. Master teachers are highly trained educators with additional knowledge of primary school teaching methodologies. Their primary role is to facilitate school-based teacher education, emphasizing practice-oriented learning and necessary theory to support the practices. There is also a strong focus on self-study, experiential learning, the use of low-cost teaching and learning materials, and optimized classroom seating arrangements. By bringing the master teachers to the schools, teachers become active learners within their own environment. This is also intended to promote a team approach to education, in which teachers, the headmaster and the circuit supervisor take joint responsibility for planning, teaching, creating instructional materials, and reviewing lesson plans.

The second component of ILP is to provide empowerment to the community, particularly in terms of

project funding decisions. In addition, strategies for improving communication between the schools and the community are provided. A two-way accountability system is established and is structured around community meetings, which provide a forum for the community to report status on infrastructure projects and for the schools to report on school academic progress. The third component of ILP is the implementation of an appreciative inquiry teaching methodology. In this approach, participants—students, teachers, community members, and headmasters—are encouraged and acknowledged for their contributions. As O'Grady (2000) describes,

The assets, or appreciative inquiry, approach does not ignore problems. It helps people deal with them more positively, actively, and creatively by seeking the root cause of success, not the root cause of failure. Damaging preconceptions of people tend to promote low expectations, even paralysis. Creating the expectation of excellence, on the other hand, often begets excellence (p. 18).

In 2000, there were over 330 partnership schools throughout Ghana. Criterion-referenced tests indicated that the ILP program was having a positive effect on student performance in English and mathematics. Within one year, ILP students were performing approximately 8% higher than non-ILP students. "In addition to rising test scores, teachers report lively student-teacher interaction" (O'Grady, 2000, p.13). While program evaluations included attention to student performance, the emphasis consistently returned to the promotion of and correlation

to a positive learning environment. O'Grady (2000) summarizes the impact of appreciative inquiry methodology in Ghana as follows:

In this instance, the combination of master teachers who train classroom teachers in basic skills instruction with school-community partnerships, both in the framework of appreciative inquiry—a methodology that encourages a positive and visionary approach—are contributing to successful educational change in Ghana (p. 7).

Additional research, including anonymous feedback from the participants, would be beneficial to help further understand the program's impact on the students, the partnership schools, and the communities. At a cursory level, this program certainly seems to have some promise as an alternative approach to education within the current financial constraints of Ghana's education system. For example, instead of the priority being to ensure blackboards are provided throughout Ghana, as Glewwe (1999) concludes, ILP proposes that communities determine how funds be allocated, respecting the knowledge and values of the teachers and community members—the indigenous-insiders.

Personal Reflections

For two years I lived in school housing in the town of Goka, near the border with Cote d'Ivoire. I taught math and science at Goka Secondary Technical School, which had a student population of 40-45. The community was more than twenty miles from paved roads, the

state electricity grid, telephone communications, or running water. Severe poverty was present in the community, but, without a direct basis of comparison, there was not the daily awareness of inequality that is found in urban settings.

The school had been built in the early 1990s as part of the structural adjustment program and was to be one of the few district schools to offer the technical elective program. In support of this plan, thousands of dollars in vocational equipment for courses in woodworking, metalwork, and masonry were supplied to the school. However, all of the equipment required electricity and, consequently, just occupied precious classroom space, the headmaster not wanting to relinquish the equipment to another school in hopes that it would later be useful as a bargaining tool or that the community would eventually get electricity.

Although English is the official language of Ghana, it is typically a second or third language for those who actually learn it. In rural communities, in particular, only a small fraction of the population is able to speak the language. Many of my senior secondary students would not even be considered at basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) proficiency in English.⁷ Within the school, English skills and finding relevancy to the subject matter were some of the most difficult challenges to teaching.

During 1998, the year I first arrived in Ghana, Canagarajah (2001) conducted a survey of 708 Ghanaian children between the ages of six and sixteen who had dropped out of school. When asked why they had left school, half of the students indicated that "schools were useless and uninteresting" (p. 8). Teaching math and science to students who got up at five in the morning to complete family chores, who were often unable to eat breakfast before school, and who were not fluent in

English, the mandated language of instruction, was an undesirable situation, for the students and the teachers. Ultimately, my job became something other than solely being a math and science teacher within the confines of the Ghanaian education system. Through alternative activities, including in-class student-centered dialogue outside WAEC-impelled curriculum and after-class community projects, in shared and mutually respectful learning environments, most of the students came to truly appreciate the learning experience.

In retrospect, I cannot say whether or not chalkboards in the classrooms made the difference, for we were definitely short on textbooks and most of the classrooms had leaky roofs. But I do know from my personal experience teaching in Ghana and more recently in south Los Angeles that valuing students as human beings, finding self-respect as a teacher and expressing respect to other teachers, and recognizing the contributions of community members can have a direct positive impact on the attitudes of students, teachers, school staff, parents and the community. The educational activities in which the students and I engaged in Ghana helped me, as a clear outsider when I initially joined the community, to be adopted by the school and community as an external-insider. Through our dialogue and shared experiences, I came to question and ultimately reject many of my former beliefs and values, which were based on my experiences and privileges as a white man from a core capitalist nation, and welcome and embrace the values and beliefs shared with me by the students and community. While the students assisted me with my own personal transformation, leading me to pursue further education and labor opportunities in areas of social justice, I assisted them in negotiating between their local knowledge and values and those imposed on

them by the outsider-influenced education system. Quite a few of the students also pursued higher education, including the first student from the school to obtain a bachelor's degree, and several have become teachers themselves.

Conclusion

Ghana's education policies, influenced significantly by outsider agencies and a history of colonialism, continue to be measured and guided based on statistical analyses of census results, living standards surveys, test performance data and the corresponding economic rates of return. The notion that "the educational process has no end beyond itself; it is its own end" (Dewey 1916, p. 50) has been eclipsed by human capital theory and a business model of education. Consistent with this continued embrace of human capital theory by international financial institutions, ILP was discontinued in 2003, and Paul Glewwe was promoted to professor at the University of Minnesota, where he continues to be a prolific analyst and author on such topics as living standards in Vietnam, human capital in China, flip-charts in Kenya, educational outcomes in the Philippines, and the impact of conditional cash transfers on education in Honduras. Through the ongoing influence of international financial institutions, outsider statistical analysts will continue to speak for marginalized communities about their educational needs.

[T]he practice of speaking for others is often born of a desire for mastery, to privilege oneself as the one who more correctly understands the truth about another's situation or as one who can champion a just cause and thus achieve glory and praise.

And the effect of the practice of speaking for others is often, though not always, erasure and a reinscription of sexual, national, and other kinds of hierarchies (Alcoff, 1991: 29).

As a white-American, I am in no position to suggest how education in Ghana should be constructed. However, in comparing the examples of human capital theory with that of appreciative inquiry methodology, it seems the latter promotes greater community empowerment and more socially beneficial objectives, including mutual respect between students and teachers, a philosophy of experiential learning, education decision-making conducted at the community level, and a greater influence by community insiders. As Owuor (2007) advocates, "The process of decolonization of school knowledge requires that the African peoples confront the claim that outsiders have the knowledge and abilities to better understand their needs and shape the direction of their own development process" (p. 34). Unfortunately, by persistently privileging the voices of outsiders, particularly when guided by human capital theory, highly influential international organizations continue to promote programs and policies that are disconnected from and unable to address the needs of the communities they allege to be assisting.

Endnotes

¹ The EDI provides insight into national education development and is formulated by combining four supporting indices for primary school enrolment, adult literacy, gender equality, and primary school survival.

² Banks (1998) defines these four categories as follows: "(1)

The indigenous-insider: This individual endorses the unique values, perspectives, behaviors, beliefs, and knowledge of his or her indigenous community and culture and is perceived by people within the community as a legitimate community member who can speak with authority about it. (2) The indigenous-outsider: This individual was socialized within his or her indigenous community but has experienced high levels of cultural assimilation into an outsider or oppositional culture. The values, beliefs, perspectives, and knowledge of this individual are identical to those of the outside community. The indigenous-outsider is perceived by indigenous people in the community as an outsider. (3) The external-insider: This individual was socialized within another culture and acquires its beliefs, values, behaviors, attitudes, and knowledge. However, because of his or her unique experiences, the individual rejects many of the values, beliefs, and knowledge claims within his or her indigenous community and endorses those of the studied community. The external-insider is viewed by the new community as an 'adopted' insider. (4) The external-outsider: The external-outsider is socialized within a community different from the one in which he or she is doing research. The external-outsider has a partial understanding of and little appreciation for the values, perspectives, and knowledge of the community he or she is studying and consequently often misunderstands and misinterprets the behaviors within the studied community" (p. 8).

³ Providing extensive details of the history of Ghana's education system, the primary source for this section is the website for Ghana's Ministry of Education (2003).

⁴ WEAC currently serves the Anglophone West African countries of Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, The Gambia and Liberia.

⁵ Some of the international organizations involved in Ghana's education system in 2000 were: The World Bank, United States Agency for International Development, Department for International Development, UNICEF, German Government, United States Peace Corps, Japan Overseas Co-operation Volunteers,

The European Union, The African Development Bank, Action Aid, Catholic Relief Services, World Vision International, Literacy and Bible Translation, Plan International, Forum for African Women Educationalists, Volunteer Service Overseas, School for Life, World University Service of Canada, CARE International, Partners for Internet in Education, and the West African Examination Council.

⁶ Though using the same concept and citing the same sources, there were some basic differences in the equations presented by Glewwe (1999) and Appiah-Kubi et al (2001). For example, Glewwe used natural logarithms (ln) and Appiah-Kubi et al used base-10 logarithms (log). Also, there were some differences in how work experience and income without education were represented.

⁷ According to Cummins (2002), basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) represent the ability of individuals to communicate at a basic, non-academic, interpersonal level. Studies have suggested that approximately two years of study are required to achieve BICS level of conversational proficiency.

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