LOST IN TRANSLATION:
Why the Structures of Formal Schooling are not Translating in Rural Ghana

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

BECE – Basic Education Certificate Examination
CRT – Criterion Reference Test
EFA – Education For All
GES – Ghana Education Service
GNAT – Ghana National Association of Teachers
GNECC – Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition
GOG – Government of Ghana
HIPC – Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
IMF – International Monetary Fund
JSS – Junior Secondary School
MDGS – Millennium Development Goals
MOESS – Ministry of Education, Science and Sports
NGO – Non-governmental organization
PRSP – Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SAPS – Structural Adjustment Programs
UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
PART 1: Introduction and Background

Introduction

Many scholars have declared that the education system in Africa is now in a crisis, and has been in decline over the last few decades (Dei 2004, 7, 35). Research across Africa has highlighted the fact that in rural areas, the formalised school system based on fixed timetables, a loaded curriculum, and trained teachers is not able to provide literacy, numeracy and other basic skills (CARE 2003). In rural Ghana, the vast majority of children who pass through the basic education system (KG to Grade 9) are unable to read and write (in English or in a local language), or do basic math after completing grade 9 (Kraft 41, USAID “A Look at Learning” 2005). Criterion Reference Tests (CRTs) conducted in the 1990’s and early 2000’s in Ghana indicated an extremely low level of achievement in English and Math (GOG MOESS “Reforms” 2007). In 1994, for instance, only 3% of Grade 6 students scored satisfactory marks in English, and only 1.5% in math (USAID “A Look at Learning” 2005). Although the language of schooling is English, many students in rural areas are not accustomed to using English outside of school, and their low levels of understanding in English, as indexed in test results, makes the other subjects all the more difficult to learn.

Overall, from the CRT results spanning one decade, it seems that at least 95% of the P6 (Grade 6) students are not achieving minimum competency in the basic skills of mathematics and English (Kraft 1995, 64).

Since 2002, the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) has been the only indicator of achievement. The BECE marks the end of basic school (Grade 9) and tests students on all the core subjects – English, math, social studies, science and other courses. A passing grade is required to enter secondary school. In 2005/2006, in Ghana as a whole, 62% of students passed. In the poorer districts as an aggregate, the percentage was around 40% (GOG “ESPR” 2006, 69). These marks show a decrease in achievement in relation to the previous years.

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These scores vary radically between not only regions, and between districts, but between rural and urban areas. In one school I conducted research in Yilo Krobo District, Eastern Region, only 2 of the 28 students in Grade 9 passed the BECE (Conversation with teacher, Krobo School, March 22, 2007). Some schools in the Eastern Region have not had one student pass in years (Personal communication, World Vision Staff). What this suggests is that the majority of students in the rural areas are not able to achieve basic literacy and numeracy after completing 9 years of schooling.

But schools function to do more than just teach literacy and numeracy. Schools meet other social, political and cultural needs (Haddad “Meeting Basic Needs” 1990, 55). Putting aside the curriculum for now, the institution of school is set up to teach certain values, attitudes and dispositions such as individualism, competitiveness, and efficiency through the structures of schooling, including - teaching methods, testing structures, and time structures.

It is essential that they learn, that they acquire the basic tools of literacy and numeracy as well as skills in problem solving, critical thinking, and the work habits of diligence, creativity, and personal responsibility (USAID “A Look at Learning” 2005, 3, emphasis added)

School is supposed to teach children to develop creatively and emotionally and to acquire “values, and attitudes” necessary for responsible, active, and productive citizenship” (USAID “A Look at Learning” 44, emphasis added). The Government of Ghana concurs: education “instill[s] attitudes that will help [children] both to cope creatively with their own environment and to be assets to their country” (GOG MOESS “About” 2007, emphasis added). In Ghana, most children are not learning the basics of reading, writing and math, but what else are they learning in school? This study focuses on these attitudes that schools confer through the structures and interactions of the school, instead of in the coursework. Because these lessons are usually left unstated, they have been termed the hidden, or implicit curriculum.

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2 Enrollment Rates: The Grade 6 completion rate in 04/05 was 75.6%, and percentage enrolled in Junior Secondary School (JSS) was 74.7% (GOG “ESPR” 2006, 47). Enrollment for Senior Secondary was 18% (GOG “ESP” 2005, 16), with female enrolment rate (as percentage of number of enrolled) at 84.4% for primary school, 68.7% at JSS, and 43.5% at Senior Secondary School (GOG “ESPR” 2006, 49).
In schools based on the western model, the role of the implicit curriculum is central to schooling and even holds a privileged position in relation to the overt curriculum. The student who doesn’t comply with the rules, who comes late, or cheats in a Canadian school, for example, will be eliminated as quickly, or more quickly, than one who fails on the coursework (LeCompte 1978, 34). On the other hand, you can comply with the rules and procedures without being a good student (Jackson 34). There is therefore, a “privileging of form over content, ritual over substance... . ‘The hidden curriculum becomes the overt curriculum’ (McNeil 1998 in Luykx 1999, 191).

Outline of the Paper

The structures of schooling as political and historical constructions, are supposed to convey certain meanings in order to lead a nation towards progress and development. Some of these basic structures are child-centred teaching methods, individualised testing methods and fixed time structures which embody and imbue certain values of creative thinking, individualism /competitiveness and efficiency.

We will look at the ways in which these structures, or rules of schooling, (namely, testing, teaching methods, time structures) are not translating in rural Ghana. What is “produced” in the classroom “is far from what was intended” (Coe 2005, 6) by the donors and government. They are failing to follow this curriculum, and they are employing **rote teaching methods, collective work methods, and flexible schedules**. We will examine the contextual factors that make the official structures of this implicit curriculum unrealistic, and the way that these acts of non-compliance read as a critique of the official values of schooling, although they do not ‘argue on the same terms’.

After decades of the development response failing to address this disjuncture, this paper asks, why is this failure of the education system reproduced? I will argue that donors approach this disjuncture as a managerial problem when in reality it is a structural problem; the structures of the formal schooling system do not fit into the contextual reality of rural life in Ghana.
Significance

We are looking at the failure of the implicit curriculum, and this is significant not only because the lessons the donors and national government aim to teach are not being translated, but also because a failure to meet these rules of formalised schooling also results in the lack of ability of the school to meet its overt objectives of teaching literacy and numeracy. Because it is supposed to be hard to learn through rote methods, because it is difficult to follow the curriculum if one does not show up everyday, and because one will not learn the material if one copies off one’s friends, a failure to comply with the structures of formal schooling in this system is more than a failure to learn efficiency, individualism and creative thinking, it results in a failure to learn the overt curriculum- reading, writing and arithmetic.

It is important to make explicit the values behind the structures of schooling and the historical and political impetuses behind these structures being implemented in Ghana. It then becomes necessary to understand how these structures are negotiated on the ground and the ways in which they are not compatible with local contexts. This is essential in order to uncover and challenge the meanings imbued through the structures, and open up more of a debate on whose interests they are in. Furthermore, it is important for the donors to understand that this is a contextual and structural problem and not a managerial problem with technocratic fixes. Making explicit the ways in which non-compliance happens in the schools also opens up the possibility for this space to be used as a starting point for political action and alternative ways of teaching and learning.

I contend that the way the structures have been negotiated and the actual lessons learnt, are more in line with what is relevant in the real world in rural Ghana. Knowing English and solving for “x” are skills that have no real life applications in rural life in Ghana. In this way, teachers and students are already in a way challenging the implicit and explicit values of a Western-capitalist based schooling system.
The Origin of the Values of Schooling

It is important to understand the origins of the structures and accompanying values of the western-based school system in order to understand what is really being negotiated.

The History of School

School is a set of “historical constructions related to economic, social, and political events in a particular space and time” (Giroux in Luykx 1999, xii). Let’s go back to the historical position of the institution of the school itself, before moving on to look at what values the structures of the school are set up to teach.

Many people see the Western system of schooling as a universal, almost, natural institution. When North Americans think of school we think of a certain system which seems self-evident - that universal system of desks, rows, textbooks, notebooks, chalkboards, bells, roll call, lectures, seatwork, tests, detention and so on. Donors (like most North Americans, I’m sure), carry the assumption that this is what we mean when we imagine School in Ghana. This is the kind of system of school that everyone, everywhere ‘has a right to’.

But this system came out of specific place and history, for a particular purpose, and in fact it is relatively new. At the time of colonising Ghana (1874), Britain was establishing compulsory state schooling – the type of desks, rows, chalk etc, that we know now (Carlen 1992). Before this, school was not universally attended and it was private or church based. A shift toward state controlled universal schooling reflects a change in control over schools “in favor of the dominant classes whose interests are articulated in the apparatuses of the state and in their functioning” (Sharp 1980, 118). Schools became one of the “most sustained zones of contact most people [had] with the state” (Coe 2005, 4), and therefore with the dominant ideology.

At the time of the industrial revolution, English society was changing radically. By 1870, when mass schooling was made compulsory (in Britain), capitalism and manufacturing were established in England, but this transition to industrial society entailed a “severe restructuring of working habits” and new disciplines (Thompson 1967, 57). This structuring of a new labour force involved “setting new rules on time,
pay, movement, [and] continuity of the work process”, as well as structuring new ideas, beliefs and values (Thompson 1967, 94). It included “a changing division of labour, the introduction of fines, bells, clocks, money incentives, preaching and schooling, [and] the suppression of fairs, sports and holidays” (Thompson in Carlen 1992, 18). There was before this, an irregular working day, week and year and lack of separation between work and home (Thompson 1967). A key aspect of a compulsory system of schooling established in Britain was the separation of children from home and school from work (Carlen 1992, 21; Coe 2005, 4). It was as much about stopping one kind of education as it was a new kind of education (Sharp 1980).

Training the citizenry in new “habit[s] of industry” (Thompson 1967, 84) and the transformation of the working-class’ beliefs, attitudes and behaviors, facilitated the “organisation, division of labour and discipline of a new workforce” (Carlen 1992, 20). The main aim of the birth of mass schooling in Britain “was unequivocally social control” (Sharp 1980, 121).

What needs to be said is that ...this is a place of the most far-reaching conflict; that the historical record is not a simple one of neutral and inevitable technological change; ... values stand to be lost as well as gained (Thompson 1967, 94).

**History of Hidden Curriculum**

The structures of schooling in the field sites in rural Ghana look a lot like the structures of school in Britain and North America. There are separate rooms for each class, rows of desks, notes, textbooks, bells, timetables, competitive tests and grades, roll-call, rules of interaction for asking and answering, and so on. The argument is that the now internationalised school organisation and structure, based on the British school model, “gives rise to certain patterns of interaction” that seem natural but are culturally determined by a specific type of school system that embodies certain values and objectives (Masemann 1974, 4; and Luykx 1999) like the ones we saw in the early British schools.

The structures, rituals, and patterns of interaction teach values relevant to the dominant society and values related to the work world. There is a similarity between traits suited to the workforce and those which are rewarded in the classroom. These include “punctuality, obedience to authority, perseverance, dependability, deferring
gratification, tact, and predictability” (Bowles and Gintis 1976, 37, in LeCompte 1978, 23). LeCompte adds to the list: conforming to a schedule, avoiding wasting time, keeping busy, maintaining order and equating achievement with personal worth (1978, 25). Jackson says, “from kindergarten onward, the student begins to learn what life is really like in The Company” (1990, 37). But what if the context the school is in has no factories and no “Companies”?

“Space, time and social processes” in the school have a political meaning (Althusser and Bowles and Gintis, in Giroux 1983, 264) and the state acts as an intermediary that “limits and channels the responses that schools can make to the ideology, culture, and practices that characterise the dominant society” (Giroux 1983, 278). However, he warns us against viewing schools in an overly instrumental deterministic light; when we are on the ground, it will seem more accurate that the state, and society in general, have a more “complex and contradictory” relationship to the schools (Giroux 1983).

In this paper I focus on three main areas of socialisation, namely: valuing individualistic work (through testing and forms of individual school work), ways of viewing achievement and status (through competition, rewards and punishments), and students’ relation to time (through schedules, rules of punctuality, and time limits). These events become more significant when we keep in mind the context of a standardised, stylised repetitive environment, the predictability and frequency of the classroom processes, and the fact that attendance in this environment is compulsory (Jackson 1990, 5).

The Origin of Schooling in Ghana

Colonial, and later donor influences, set boundaries on what the school system will be in Ghana; they laid the foundation of the structures (and values) of the school that we will examine in the classroom. Here we are interested in how the hidden curriculum carries certain values associated with industrial capitalism and “modernisation” when it is realised through colonial and neocolonial institutions in Ghana. And, how power is embodied in the structures, forms, process and procedures that are supposed to imbue certain lessons.
School is an institution of the colonising project that was brought to Ghana through European imperial powers. Colonial practices were embedded within patterns of relations and institutions, including the school (Vavrus 2000, 223). School in Ghana was first established in the 1500’s by European colonizers and missionaries for a small minority of Ghanaians, to train administrators and to evangelise (Eshun 1998; Graham 1971; Weis 1976). When Britain officially colonised Ghana (then the Gold Coast) in 1874 they used school to educate intermediaries for colonisation, essential to their policy of indirect rule (Gocking 2005). This was a way to impose superiority of knowledge, language and culture. They cut off pupils from their families in order to “create new breeds of indigenous elites who aligned themselves with the culture, values and world view of the coloniser” (Smith 1999 in Adjei 2005, 4). The major ethnic group in the south of Ghana (the Ashantis) were generally not interested in education, they thought their children “had better work to do” (Eshun 1998, 102).

The process of imposing Western-based content, structures, goals, and values through schools into the Third World is a key tactic of colonisation (Philips, 1999; Smith, 2001 in Huckaby 2004). School in Ghana today is based on the Western (international) structure, goals and values of education, and is associated largely with the creation of a Western, urban, white collar elite, whose values and world view is similar to those educated in the West (Coe 2005).

Up through the 1920’s and 30’s, the (colonial) Government was not interested in mass education (Coe 2005, 58). It was not necessary to their project of indirect rule, and, what they did not want was educated unemployed masses (Battle 1970). By 1950, seven years before Ghana gained independence, only 6.6% of the population was in school (GOG MOESS “Colonial” 2007). The Nkrumah Government, which brought about independence in 1957, then took up the project of formal mass education as “a major instrument of national development” (GOG MOESS “Colonial” 2007), and in 1961, education became “compulsory” (GOG MOESS “Post-Independence” 2007). Mass schooling in Ghana was not a “colonial project” in the literal sense, it was a project of the first government of Ghana. Schools were expected to “socialise individuals into the attitudes and values presumed necessary for the successful maintenance and growth of industrial structures;...schools ‘make men modern’ and “modern persons were expected to build modern societies” (Weis 1976, 1). The goal here was social change for (national) Development. “In this context development is
seen as a transformation of society and not just an increase in physical and human capital” (Dei 2004, 26). Modernity necessitating a rejection of “traditional culture” and values, and instilling ones associated with industrialisation and modernisation (Coe 2005, 110).

But the practices of colonialism did not end with political independence. The processes and ideologies of colonization are still manifest within institutions and relations, especially through the systems of knowledge production and the structures of colonial schooling (Dei 2004, 2) which provided the “foundation” for the education system in Ghana today (GOG MOESS “Colonial” 2007). Furthermore, the transition from colonial economy to a post-independence economy “became closely tied to external market forces dominated by powerful economies of the North” (Dei 2004, 28). The World Bank, an institution of Western capital and control, has been involved in structuring Ghanaian society from the very onset of independence.

By the 1980’s debt was ballooning (Gocking 2005) and so an economic recovery program was instituted by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). A series of structural adjustment programs (SAPS) launched reforms in all social sectors (Dei 2004). “SAPS emphasised retrenchment in the public sector, social services, privatisation and fiscal discipline” (Dei 2004, 28).

Educational SAPS: privatised many educational services and implemented “cost recovery” (meaning shifting costs onto community, parents, and business); introduced school fees in primary schools (KG-9) (which were recently removed); decentralised management to districts and regions; changed the overall structure of school- reducing the number of years of school (which are currently about to be extended again); extended the length of the school year; changed the textbooks and developed new curriculum; cut expenditures on staff, staff training, and textbooks; froze salaries; and recruited unemployed highschool graduates to teaching (Dei 2004, 34-40). When we come to look at how the structures are negotiated in the schools, it will become important to understand not only that these reforms have largely come about through the ‘encouragement’ of the donor agencies, but that teachers and administrators have been contending with ever changing (and not always smoothly) policies and rules.
In the ‘post’-colonial era, The World Bank, among other donors, helps form the schooling system in Ghana. The World Bank has influence over everything from the structure of years of schooling, to curriculum, teaching methodologies, management and testing criteria. They do more than provide “benchmarks” (World Bank “EFA” 2008). I will also argue that the top-down approach to changing structures and curriculum, and the increase in demands of teachers (along with a salary freeze), also leads to a decrease in effort by teachers (Dei 2004; Coe 2005).

By the mid 90’s Ghana was heavily indebted, and by the late 90’s there was major inflation and economic trouble (Gocking 2005). In 2000 Ghana joined HIPC (Highly Indebted Poor Countries) to receive debt relief. Receiving HIPC debt relief involves signing onto more conditionalities by The World Bank and The IMF (Gocking 2005)- one mandate was that the MDGs (including a requirement to implement compulsory (Western) schooling become a mandatory framework for development in Ghana (GOG “GPRS II” 2005, 5). EFA (Education for all), another international commitment Ghana has joined, defines education as a “human right” (UNESCO 2007).

Today, outside aid funds education to the amount of 45 million. The Government of Ghana, in comparison, provides 2.5 million (GOG MOESS “Fpmu” 2007). Large amounts of funding allow foreign aid agencies, especially USAID, DIFD, JICA and The World Bank, to leverage major conditionalities in the education sector. This kind of power “undermine[s] the leadership role of the government” (GOG “ESP” 2005, 36).

In these ways colonial powers and donors have set up structures of schooling that carry political meaning and values, and they continue to limit and create possibilities of what School is in Ghana.

3 See Appendix A for a list of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
4 It goes on to set up standards in Ghana as detailed as the number of hours kids should be in school (Abadzi 2007, 18)
5 United States Agency for International Development, UK Department for International Development, Japan International Cooperation Agency, respectively
Discourse

Not all the structures of education are imposed on Ghanaians by colonial and neo-colonial powers (such as donors). The discourses on education are often taken up by Ghanaians as much as they are by foreign institutions. These discourses surround ideas of education in connection to economic growth, modernisation, development and progress, and these ways of discussing education and schooling create boundaries, ways of thinking, problems and solutions. Power is embodied in these discourses as well as in the structures we looked at above (Foucault, 1980). Dei considers that the greatest influence of The World Bank for example, in Africa, is not the policies they impose, but the “domination of the development discourse” (2004, 23). We have to examine how discourses on education and economic progress are taken up by Ghanaians and help create what the structures and values of school will be.

Discourses on Education

The Government of Ghana, in the Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper\(^6\) writes that they aim to achieve economic “emancipation” from their “meandering in the economic wilderness” so that “Ghana can achieve middle-income status” (GOG “GPRS II” 2005, 4, 5, 2). How does Ghana free herself from these aimless wanderings in the jungle and get on the road that leads to middle-income status? The “road” to modernisation involves an economy based on industrialisation, technology and high productivity, according to the official discourse (GOG “GPRS II” 2005, 4), and the “crucial key” to economic success is the education of the work force (GOG “GPRS II” 2005, 7). The “logic and evidence” of pursuing ambitious education development is “totally irresistible” according to the Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy II (GOG 2005, 8). This formula for modernisation has been exemplified by the industrial countries that have achieved high-income status.

Comparing briefly to Britain, it wasn’t that the British Government planned the structures of school to teach lessons that would facilitate a transition to capitalism – it was after capitalism had been established, that the state began to take control of

\(^6\) All country’s GPRSPs are written as a framework for development in concert with The World Bank, and are a requirement for loans
the schools and the schools then began to reflect the values of the dominant society and dominant economy. In Ghana, the state (and donors) attempt to instill values that will facilitate and spark modernisation. (Evidently, it is not working).

In this theory, education is linked directly to the creation of modern economies (and consequently to the creation of modern societies) (World Bank “Strategic Choices” 2008). The Government says that it would help the work force become “much more open to the absorption of modern high-productivity, high income technology” (GOG “GPRS II” 2005, 8). In a Poverty Reduction Strategy “the work force” will propel the forces of technological and economic progress if only they are invested with the conducive attitudes and skills.

What attitudes and skills should the school then teach? Quality education “should be defined in terms of creativity and innovation” says the Government of Ghana (GOG “ESPR” 2006, 107). These views echo the view of the donors whom, we have seen, have a massive influence on discourses and policies. The United Nation’s Education For All (EFA) movement (to which the Government of Ghana has signed onto), declares that primary education improves productivity, helps develop entrepreneurial skills, and other “appropriate values, attitudes, and behaviours” (Haddad et al 1990, 55, emphasis added). We will explore what some of these values are that are usually left unstated by the donors.

These discourses are not produced “locally”, but rather, in the ‘the world of global contacts“ (Behdad 1992, 41 in Vavrus 2000, 228). You can’t distinguish between local ideas and foreign/ global ideas here, or donor’s from Ghanaian’s (Vavrus 2000).

Discourse becomes Hegemonic

These ideas of education in relation to progress, modernization and human rights, have become so powerful that one can generally only debate under the ideas and not about them. Ways of seeing the issues become ‘obvious’, and the solution cannot be outside the discourses; we can argue within this development framework and not the ideas themselves (Ferguson 1994). To illustrate, we can debate on what the content of standardised tests should be, but not on whether they should implement standardised individualised testing. Although signing on to agreements and conditionalities with donors does not necessarily signal ideological agreement: Ghana
has signed onto EFA, but compulsory attendance is not actually enforced, and is only the law in so much as it says it is the law. Still, there is the inability to argue outside the framework, and say “we don’t think education is a human right”, and this means real alternatives get marginalised.

There is always, as well, a gap in official discourse. The failure of discourses on education and development to live up to their promises provides basis for its own critique (Scott 1985). There is an “inevitable gap between the promises that any hegemony necessarily makes and the equally inevitable failure of the social order to fulfill some or all of these promises” (Scott 1985, 336). Discourses on education spell out huge promises about economic development which they have failed to deliver in Ghana. Schooling touted as so necessary, has proved to be so irrelevant in everyday life in rural Ghana. However, “the promise of schooling has not proved completely illusionary” as students still hope to gain some chance to gain state or company jobs in the future (Coe 2005, 161). “Properly understood, any hegemonic ideology provides, within itself, the raw material for contradictions and conflict” (Scott 1985, 336).

Contradictions created between discourses and practical reality abound in the schools in rural Ghana and will be the main area of focus in the field.

Summary of Background

The school as a historical institution was meant to imbue certain values consistent with an industrial capitalist economy and it was brought to Ghana with the aim to align certain elites to the mind of the colonizers. Subsequently, it was employed by the state on a universal scale to modernise the nation. The establishment of discourses and policies, help pose definitions of what is realistic, what is possible and what is practical (Scott 1985) in the world of schooling in Ghana. The Ghanaian Government in many ways has taken on the project of schooling to instill values that will propel the workforce towards ‘modernising’ the economy with as much enthusiasm as the colonial powers and donors. But the gap between the discourse and its promises provides a disjuncture in which rural people in Ghana create new meanings in the spaces and places the state has set up. Before examining how the structures of schooling are accommodated ‘on the ground’ we will take a look at the field site and methods of this study.
Research Area and Methods

My research site is the rural classroom in Ghana in which the implicit curriculum is manifested, accommodated, negotiated and contested. This research was undertaken as part of my honours thesis at the University of Toronto and was conducted during a 10 month internship with an Educational NGO in the Eastern Region of Ghana.

Of my ten months in Ghana, four months were spent living with a family in a large village in Akuapem North District, which I will call Jaso. The remaining six months were divided between living with a family in the capital of the Eastern Region (Koforidua), and the family in the village.

This paper rests on ten months of daily-living fieldnotes, and the in-class portion of this paper is based on two weeks of in-class observational fieldwork in primary schools. I spent one week in one of the public Junior Secondary Schools (JSS) (Grades 7-9) schools in Jaso, and one week in a public school in a nearby district, Yilo Krobo. A further few days were spent in the primary private school in Jaso with the grade 4 class. In-class data are supplemented by two other studies using in-class observation: Cati Coe’s Dilemmas of Culture in African Schools: Youth, Nationalism, and the Transformation of Knowledge (2005); USAID’s A Tale of Two Ghanas: The View from the Classroom.

Much time was spent talking with teachers, headteachers, and to a lesser degree students. At times I was also asked to teach a class or two in the schools, which I did. Working with the NGO also allowed me insight into the education system from the government and administration perspective, and from the NGO perspective. I often met with various government officials in the Ghana Education Service (GES), with regional and district Government officials, Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT) members, and other NGOs working in the education sector. My project also involved visiting various rural schools and interviewing students, parents, school management committees, and headteachers about government policies. Some of these schools were hours away from a main road, electricity, and hospitals, down dirt paths that could only be covered by SUVs.
**Figure 1: Maps**

Ghana, West Africa


Regions of Ghana

Districts in the Eastern Region, Ghana


*The Field Site*

The Eastern Region lies mainly within the rainforest zone of Ghana, most of which has been cleared for farming. The area has a long tradition with missionaries and other Western institutions, especially Akuapem North, which is where the first churches (Basel Missionaries) in Ghana were established. In this way, Akuapem North, and much of the surrounding districts in the Eastern Region are not typical, having a longer history with missionaries and schools than other parts of Ghana (Coe 2005).

Jaso is a large village, or rural town (depending on whom you ask) in Akuapem North District. There are about 150 households according to my informal count from the top of the hill, but it is not at all clear where the boundaries of Jaso lie.
The area is ethnically diverse. I met people from Akuapem, Asante, Krobo, Ewe, and Guam groups. The main language in Jaso and the Region is Twi; the Yilo Krobo district in which I also conducted observation work is Krobo speaking; and English, the official language of Government and schooling, is fairly widely spoken.

Centred around the junction of a paved road, and non-paved roads, and being a market centre gives Jaso more of a ‘town status’, with electricity for some households near the road, cell phone reception, a small clinic, two public primary/JSS schools and one private primary school. The water supply comes from boreholes, wells, and a stream. There are a number of small congregations as well as at least two mosques that I know of. Many people believe in the traditional spirits and practice traditional rites. But the majority of people subscribe to Christianity.

In Jaso and the rural areas in which I spent any significant amount of time, the main professions were farming, work in the trades, and small business, such as a small store or trading - there were small stores for basic goods, a pharmacy, and a tailor, for example, and in the market people would trade agricultural goods, cloth, household items, and other things. This type of self-employment is the dominant form of work, though salary jobs in the area include teaching, working at the small clinic, or policing, and hired labour jobs include- tending someone else’s shop, being a driver, and masonry.

Life in the area is relatively independent from the government by North American standards. Jaso was the only rural area I did research in that had electricity, and even there, when the power went out, as it regularly did, (sometimes for days), daily life continued as usual. The ways in which the state’s presence would be felt is -the nurse at the clinic, health inspectors that come from the regional level to check for still water and other malaria risks, electricity meter inspectors, through development projects such as immunisations, police officers who had a small office in the town and police from the region who would patrol the market periodically; and of course, the most sustained arena of interaction with the state remains the school.

The further one gets from the main roads, the less interaction there is with the state. Villages in the area would have little contact with police, electricity inspectors (there is no electricity in most rural areas), and would be hours away from a clinic or hospital. The second school I attended was in an adjoining district - Yilo Krobo, it
was similar to Jaso but more rural, without electricity, although still along the main road.

**PART 2: The Field - Values and the Classroom**

The classrooms in which I observed, worked, and taught, are the spaces in which the state interacts with the populace, they are the sites where meaning is created, and where students and teachers negotiate the structures and policies of schooling of the state and the donors.

We have looked at the meanings that the structures of schooling are supposed to convey in order to lead a nation towards progress and development. A few of these basic structures are the teaching methods, testing methods and time methods\(^7\). The structures of schooling are not neutral, they carry values, which are supposed to embody and imbue certain lessons on creative thinking, individualism /competitiveness and efficiency\(^8\).

But Ferguson reminds us that “intentional plans are always important, but never in quite the way the planners imagined” (1994, 20). We will see that what is “produced” in the classroom “is far from what was intended” (Coe 2005, 6). Teachers are using *rote methods* of teaching, students are ‘cheating’ and *working together*, and teachers and students are running schools on *flexible schedules*. By renegotiating the structures they renegotiate the values, creating new meanings in the spaces the state generates (Coe 2005).

People are not passive recipients of the state’s or donor’s plans, but neither can we conflate non-compliance with ideological opposition. For each of these three areas of non-compliance we will examine the contextual factors that make certain choices more realistic.

\(^7\) We are focusing on three main structures, restricted to the ones that are *not* followed in rural Ghana

\(^8\) And they can be related to the schools reproductive and other functions
Creative Thinking / Critical Thinking

An assumption held by many in the West about education is that one of education’s main aims is to “empower all learners to think and act critically” (Dei 2). Our own education in Canada reflects the idea that school is not simply about memorising words, equation and facts, but about understanding, creating and thinking (in theory). The Government of Ghana echoes these views: “quality education should be defined in terms of creativity and innovation” (“ESP” 2006, 107). Western institutions have seen a shift in teaching methods to more active methods over time to reflect this thinking. A USAID report, examining the quality of education, wants to know whether in Ghana, they “teach the students ‘how’ to think, rather than what to think”? (Kraft 1995, 52). The assumption is that the methods should be active, child-centred, promote creativity, questioning, and discovery. Indeed, teacher-training workshops that I encountered in Ghana were to train teachers in more child-centred methods.

The USAID study by Kraft (and others) concludes that the methods used are not teaching creative problem solving (1995, 49), despite the occasional appearance of using these types of methods. Education NGO workers and NGO reports lament that instead, rote methods are used in 100% of rural schools in Ghana (Conversations with colleagues; Kraft 1995, 41). Like Kraft’s and Coe’s findings in in-class observation in rural Ghana, I also noted that the predominant methods of teaching were rote methods: copy, memorise words and patterns, repeat and reproduce.

This goes against the very essence of what we think education is, and these methods are not seen as “developmentally” appropriate (USAID “A Look at Learning” 2005, 36). “Developmentally” seems to convey both development of the child, and Development of the nation. They are “colonial teaching methods” that today, impede “progress” (USAID “Overview” 2001; Kraft 1995, 41).

Let’s look at a case of memorising but not understanding:

Fieldnotes: March 22, 2007
Krobo Junior Secondary School (JSS), Form 2 (Grade 8)
At 10:30 the bell went off to signal break. Math had gone overtime so we skipped the next scheduled class and started Science at 11:15.

A young male teacher begins the lesson.

He writes on the board:

*Chemical Elements*  
*a) Atom*

“In Form 1 [last year] what did we say an atom is?”, he asks.

There is a long pause.

A girl starts “a small unit of....” but doesn’t finish.

A boy tries, “smallest basic unit of a substance”

“It’s the smallest unit of every substance”, clarifies the teacher.

“We have some central parts”, he explains, “We have the nucleus...” He draws a circle on the blackboard. “In the nucleus we have two things.... Protons, neutrons....” He draws them in the circle.

“The smallest particle, okay?”

A boy responds, “Yes, sir”

The teacher continues, pointing to the drawing, “protons, neutrons ... Okay?”

“Yes”, the class says in unison.

“Do you get it?” he asks.

“Yes”, says the class.

“...electrons...”. He then draws the electrons around the atom. “So you understand?”

Class: “Yes”

Teacher: “Any question?”

“No”, says the class.

He explains the structure of an atom using a metaphor, he then gives a definition of an element and a list of 20 elements, including their symbols and their states. They read them out in unison and the students copy them off the board into their exercise books. He says he will bring in examples of elements that he can find, another time.

In this scenario, an abstract idea, the concept of an atom, is learnt through definition, diagram and metaphor. Talking to a small group of the best students at
the end of class, it became clear that they could repeat the definition, but were not sure what a *substance* was [the definition of atom being: “the smallest unit of every substance”]. Meaning, they could not translate the definition of the atom into something in real life. We talked about the basic unit of the substances of the objects around us, and they were not able to relate the lesson to the objects, although they understood the question (Discussion with students, Krobo JSS, March 22, 2007). Elements, further, are understood to be a list of names (English terms), symbols and states, but no concrete examples are shown.

The result of simplifying and memorising unexplained knowledge is that “substance” is lost. Knowledge becomes a commodity important mainly for its exchange value and symbolic value (Luykx 1999; McNeil 1988). The “best” students will be able to memorise the definition of an atom and produce it on an exam in order to achieve high grades and entrance to higher education, and for the select few, one day, government or other wage jobs. They will not be able to explain how the things around us are made of very small particles that in combination form elements, such as the aluminum on the roof.

Even more “practical” or concrete knowledge, such as farming, can be made confusing when lists and definitions from the textbook are memorised and copied into exercise books (Kraft 1995; Coe 2005):


Krobo JSS 1 (Grade 7).

25 students are present: 9 girls, and 16 boys.

We took a long break around midday so we missed a class. At 12:15 we started for the last period of the day with “Agriculture”, taught by an older male teacher.

Sometime into the lesson they go on to the topic of “land rotation”.

The teacher writes and says: “Land rotation”

The class repeats it 2 x

Teacher: “Who can give a definition of land rotation?”

A boy answers.

The teacher writes from the textbook:

*Land Rotation*
Land rotation is the system of farming in which the farmer cultivates a piece of land for a period of time and then leaves this land to another piece of land when the land loses its fertility. This time the farmer does not move with his family and settlement.

...Then:

Advantages of land rotation

The teacher comes to check how far they have come with writing the definition.

Teacher: “What are some of the advantages?”

A boy walks out of the room without saying anything.

The teacher writes, referring to the textbook, *The land regains lost nutrients*. He then asks: “How?”

A boy answers: “Fallow period”

Teacher: “What is fallow period?”

Boy: “It is the period where the land rests to regain its fertility”

The teacher then explains and asks them to “Say fallow period”

The class says: “Fallow period”

“Again”

“Fallow period”

...*this is because the land has been able to rest.*

The class writes it down.

The teacher continues writing... and they continue on with the disadvantages from yesterday.

The teacher takes a call on his mobile phone, and then asks, “Any question?”

There is silence.

He writes from the book the differences between shifting cultivation which they previously covered, and land rotation.

The teacher calls on someone to see if he can remember what they just learnt: “You! What is fallow period?”

The boy stands up but doesn’t speak.

“You were writing too much” the teacher says to him.

Another girl tries but gets it wrong.
The teacher says: “Someone say it better”

A Boy gives another definition but gets it wrong.

The teacher scolds them, “When you go home look at the book”

“In the exam they say give definitions of land rotation and two advantages. These are the questions they will ask”

“Any question?”

“Any question?”

Class: “No”

The teacher then gave the students an exercise:

*Exercise*
1. *What is land rotation?*
2. *State two advantages of land rotation*
3. *State two disadvantages of land rotation*

He ends by warning them: “These will come on your exam. If you’re not able to answer them you’ll be in trouble. Clap for yourself.”

Teachers give terms, definitions and lists without much explanation, they are facts to be copied; there is no discussion of meaning or process or the logic of categories (Coe 2005). The emphasis is on memorising definitions in English, word for word, and most students find it difficult to rephrase what they learnt (remember English is not used in everyday life). Processes of farming are turned into lists, unfamiliar terms, and definitions. These students, all of whom live amongst farms and most of whom probably farm themselves, could not define fallow period⁹ (even after just hearing and writing it).

Homework or classwork is usually copying notes from the board, for example, the definition of land rotation, and then answering questions in an exercise book that the notes answer directly. The exercise here asked: “What is land rotation?”. No thinking has to be done, one simply takes the lesson notes copied from the board and writes them again to ‘answer the question’. These same questions will then be asked of them on the exam.

⁹ Though I didn’t ask them, I am confident they would be able to explain the practice of fallow period in Krobo or Twi, their native languages, since the practice is common in Ghana, and they live amongst farms
Very few questions are asked by the children, despite the somewhat rhetorical, “Any question?” and “Do you get it?” from the teacher, and despite the fact that many did not understand the lesson. This classroom method is one that reinforces a clientelist model. If methods either set up a student as one who can “learn, ask questions, contribute new answers, or who must be dependent on others to tell them what they need to know” then we can assume that this system creates students who are dependent on others to tell them what they need to know (McNeil 1986, 207, in Luykx 1999, 173).

At the same school a young male teacher currently undergoing in-service training tries to incorporate child-centred methods into his teaching. With increased participation we can see how the students are attempting to memorise patterns, and repeat words, instead of understanding meaning:


Krobo School JSS 3 (Grade 9)

We started the class at 8:30 am. 12 students were present. 4 girls, 8 boys. 8 students were absent.

The topic of the day was managing risks in a beadmaking enterprise. This is a review of a previous lesson.

He wrote some headings on the board and asked: “What are some of the risks?”

A boy stands up to answer: “Indirect risks”

Another boy adds: “Direct risks”

These categories are clearly memorised as they are totally non-intuitive answers to that question.

“What are these?”, the teacher asks.

“Risks”, says the class.

The teacher: “Let’s look at examples. Examples?”

A boys responds: “Theft”

The teacher writes it on the board and asks, “Which means?”

The class says, “Thief”
He corrects them: “Stealing”

He writes on the board a list of a few direct and indirect risks from the textbook. He then asks some yes-or-no questions and some finish-the-sentence questions.

“We’ve seen people stealing?” he asks.

They respond in unison: “Yes”

Like Brock-Utne’s studies in other parts of Africa, it was also my impression that answers were memorised, and for yes-or-no questions students can usually guess the correct answer by the intonation of the question (Brock-Utne 2000). Some students might not understand the meaning of: “We’ve seen people stealing?”, but from the intonation of the question they know the answer is yes. An example of a negative-answer question is: “Can you cut yam and eat it [raw]?”; the intonation of the question shows the class that the answer is “no” (from catering class in Jaso: JSS 2, May 10, 2007). In these instances we hear almost the whole class answer in unison, calling out: “yes”, or “no”. It gives the appearance that they are all understanding the lesson. But when you ask them individually, for example, to define fallow period, the student will stand up, the class silent, no one saying anything, not even “I don’t know”.

Back to the lesson on beadmaking enterprises:

Teacher: “What can we do to stop stealing?”

Boy: “By taking note of the items and putting them at the right place”

Teacher: “Any other one?”

Boy: “Regular checking of the items”

Teacher: “Regular checking of the what?”

“Items” says the class.

Teacher: “How can you explain this?”

Boy: “You take the accounting of the items, know the number of them”

This boy is able to reword the answer.

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10 No student would dare to answer a question with “I don’t know”.
Teacher: “If I’m producing beads I take note. I have 20 types of what?”
Class: “Beads”

These kinds of sentence completion questions use a more interactive mode of teaching but usually they are based on memorised wording. Sentences are repeated, but, commonly, the last word is replaced by “what?”. It’s another way of repeating what was just said, but in this way by filling in for the “what”. Students also might be asked straightforward questions on general knowledge that will generate lists, and then they repeat them and read them out loud (Kraft 1995; Coe 2005). Meaning, it seems, is less important than memorising and repeating. Those who can reproduce the same wording on an exam will excel (Coe 2005).

Continuing now with the same lesson:
Teacher: “Check number of beads produced and sold, also check the amount. 20,000 [Cedis] times 10 is what?

A girl whispers something, and then says the answer louder, but she is wrong.
Teacher: “No. It’s 200,000 [Cedis]. Is that clear?”
Class: “Yes”

[Obviously it wasn’t]
Teacher: “Next one- fire. What can we do to control risk of fire?”
Boy: “Regular checking of the fire”
Teacher: “How can you check fire? How can we prevent it? We want to prevent it.”
They go on to come up with other responses to preventing fire. Then to other risks. He continues to ask them questions that they learnt previously.

The students demonstrate that they are not all understanding the questions but that they are looking for patterns to the answers. Many students do not speak English fluently but are very bright and can ‘read’ (sound out words), ‘write’ (copy), and memorise sentences and patterns. In this case the boy is a good example of a student, who like the majority, has a tenuous grasp on English, but is able to discern patterns. The boy tried to find a pattern between - How do we prevent stealing? Checking of the items, to - How do we prevent fire? Checking of the fire. He

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11 Ghanaian currency
evidently does not understand the meaning of either “prevent” and “check” or perhaps “fire”.

**Contextual factors**

The USAID research team writes that this colonial method was an adaptation to an era of no books (Kraft 1995). In the two schools I conducted observational work in, the classes were equipped with blackboards, chalk, notebooks, pencils, a few protractors and rulers, and textbooks\textsuperscript{12}. So why have they not stopped using the “highly counterproductive” method (Kraft 1995, 41) despite teaching colleges, in-service training and workshops promoting more active child-centred learning? Even when we have seen in the first and third scenario that the young teachers try using methods that elicit more responses from the students, they remain using a rote method of asking questions. Why have these training programs failed to modify behavior? (Abadzi 2007, 53).

Child-centred methods conflict with the structure of authority in rural Ghana. Coe, who has done fieldwork in Akuapem North (the same district as Jaso), also argues along the same line (2005). They do not necessarily hold the belief that children have the knowledge needed for the (child-centred) approach to work. Knowledge is held by those in authority, not by everyone, and not equally. Children should listen, be respectful, and not question adults inside and outside the classroom. In this way, child-centred approaches contradict lines of authority— they are not appropriate (Coe 2005; Fieldnotes, various dates). In the West, rote teaching is associated with teacher control and powerlessness for the students, in Ghana “it is seen as good teaching” (Coe 2005, 141).

More active learning might also go against the idea of what school knowledge is. School knowledge is by definition “facts” to be memorised, “regardless of their relation to students’ own knowledge” say Luykx about the meaning of school in Bolivia (1999, 178). It is terms and definitions to be memorised. Indeed in Ghana as well, school knowledge is defined in contrast to practical knowledge. Its value is more symbolic. They are not learning how to farm, they are learning to reproduce the

\textsuperscript{12} Schools that are more remote than Jaso and Krobo often do not have sufficient notebooks and pencils
definitions of farming on an exam in order to obtain certificates. All attempts to use more practical learning methods or to teach practical subjects have failed because of “the social meaning that attaches to education”, Coe argues (2005, 141). And this is related to this pedagogical strategy which “arises from the historical and social context of schooling in Ghana, in which education has always been associated with the creation of a relatively small urban and white collar elite whose distinction arose in part because of the disdain for practical subjects” (Coe 2005, 142).

This is also why Basketry and other practical tutorials were not actually taking place in the schools. They were teaching only, the “theory of basketry” (Conversation with teacher, November 1, 2006). The beadmaking teacher explained, after making a mistake on the beadmaking fieldtrip (conducted for my benefit) that: “I’m not a beadmaker. I teach beadmaking” (Krobo JSS fieldtrip to beadmaking workshop, March 20, 2007). When they do conduct practical lessons, such as workshops, fieldtrips or cooking practicals, the participation is radically different, this being understood as distinct from lessons on school knowledge that they will be tested on.

Another reason this rote method might be used is that it reduces the effort for teachers and students. Teachers can give terms and definitions, and students can memorise them, without either going through a difficult process of explanation and learning. Instead, it is the “ritual of seeming to deal with the topic” where “you don’t have to confront the fact that they have learnt very little” (Luykx 1999, 175, 190). We will come back to look at why they might want to reduce their efforts and avoid dealing with the topic.

Another explanation for the continuation of the use of rote methods is that the teacher is doing what he or she learnt in school. It is difficult to teach a method one did not experience oneself. Many teachers seemed genuinely frustrated that the kids were not learning the material. They would get annoyed and say- we teach and we teach, but they do not get it (paraphrased from conversation with teacher, Krobo School, March 20, 2007), blaming the students for their frustrations. As an illustration:

A young male teacher at Jaso, after probing for answers to different questions on the geography of Ghana and Africa, which the students did not have answers to, chides them for their “ignorance”: 
“This is why I’m saying some of you will not go to Form 3 [the next grade up]. And you’re laughing. You’re not ashamed”, says the teacher.

He continues to explain why he uses this method of asking the children for the answers:

“Right now we have a method called child-centred. It is the child who will feed the teacher and not the teacher who will feed the child” (Fieldnotes Jaso JSS, May 10, 2007).

Outcomes

This method of teaching is identified by donors as one of the main causes of the failure to teach the curriculum, as donor reports assume it is difficult to learn or to achieve good grades when taught with rote methods (USAID “A Look at Learning” 2005, and notes from NGO Stakeholder Meetings). Because of this pedagogical approach, Kraft says “children are thus completing primary and JSS predominantly illiterate and unskilled” (1995, 41).

Competitiveness / Individualism

Course work and testing structures carry certain values of individual work and competitive work. It seems obvious to most North Americans, why students should work individually and be tested individually and competitively, instead of collectively. Individual class work, assignments and tests, teach students how to work alone amongst others, but they also say a lot about being accountable to a set standard, about measuring individual worth, and about competitiveness between individuals for material rewards (Jackson 1990, 16; Masemann 1974, 14; Dei, 8). Adjei, himself schooled in Ghana, identified the historical trend in Ghana as one where educators have been “pushed or persuaded” to become individualistic (Adjei 2005, 14).

However, what Coe found, during her fieldwork in Akuapem North, was that students in rural schools “created a model of participation based on solidarity”, teaching each other, sharing notes, and working together (2005, 161). And that the more rural the school, and the less likely the students were to continue on with education, the more they were likely to share a climate of solidarity and mutual support (Coe 2005). One example is that while teachers were on strike for months, a
classroom of students came to school at Jaso JSS everyday to study and learn together.

As far as I observed, students did class work or homework and class tests with other students. Even during the Basic Education Certificate Exam (BECE), the nationwide test to enter Senior Secondary School, students whispered answers to each other. I was there during the BECE exam in Jaso, and while there were teachers whose role was clearly to supervise the students, the teachers paced around outside the classroom and did not watch the students as they whispered answers to multiple-choice questions. Nor did my surveillance of the ‘cheaters’ deter them. My gut response was to tell the teacher about which students were ‘cheating’, until I realised the teacher’s purposeful non-gaze (Fieldnotes, Jaso JSS, April 13, 2007).

Now, there is still the semblance of competitive schooling, with tests, supervising teachers, individual exercises, and students that, as far as I saw, always whispered when working together, despite the fact that they would not be punished for it. But there was a lack of surveillance that we in the West expect when we talk about “School”. During class tests, for example, teachers would leave the room, urging me to follow them (Fieldnotes Krobo JSS, March 23, 2007). The whispers and the supervising teachers, acknowledged the structure they were accommodating- the actual practice went against it. The students took actions that contradict the basic tenants, the teachers took a non-action that allowed them to do that.

**Contextual factors**

This is not necessarily a conscious objection to the values of competitiveness and individualism that the structures of classwork and testing are supposed to convey. Teachers may feel, in the rural areas, that it is futile to enforce such rules when very few of the students will be continuing on (to secondary school), or be ‘using’ the information learnt. In Krobo JSS, for the BECE of 2006, 2 of the 28 students passed, and one of those two continued to secondary school (Conversation with teacher, Krobo School, March 22, 2007). So on one hand, it is irrelevant whether they cheat or not because they won’t be continuing on, and on the other hand, like what we saw when analysing rote methods, it also does not matter because the ‘knowledge’ itself is either not relevant or not important (GNECC 2007). School knowledge is by
definition, knowledge for children, meaning it is not important knowledge like that which is held by elders (Coe 2005). Why should it matter if they share it?

Students themselves may not see an inherent problem in working together. Not to say that Ghanaians work collectively and not competitively, but the norm is to rely on one’s networks and not learn by oneself. In our own society as well, Jackson writes of the contrived nature of competitive structures in schools- there are very few instances in life, even at work, where one cannot draw upon other resources and networks (Jackson 1990).

Allowing students to work together may also be a function of the teachers wanting students to pass, as it makes their school look better and satisfies donor (international) testing requirements\(^\text{13}\). On the other side of it, students, are trying to get symbolic grades. Teachers have to mediate between fulfilling requirements that they conduct tests and achieve a certain kind of success along the lines of international standards, and the fact the students cannot pass the exams. Allowing students to pass (by cheating) means teachers can appear to have taught the subject and students can appear to have learnt it. The exam is again, the “ritual of seeming to deal with the topic” (Luykx 1999, 182)\(^\text{14}\).

Outcomes:

A similar outcome as with rote teaching, knowledge becomes stripped of its relevance; it is a “ritual rather than an education” (McNeil 1988, 215). ‘Cheating’ is a withdrawal from the official rules and goals of the structure (Luykx 1999). Like rote teaching, it renders the event hollow, serving only the interests of institutional functioning and symbolic value. It comes to represent a critique of the goals of the exam and of schooling, but it is also a passive acceptance of the goals (Luykx 1999). We will return to look at ways these, as well as other acts of non-compliance, act as critiques of the system of schooling.

\(^{13}\) The CRT for example, was implemented by USAID

\(^{14}\) This also says a lot about what formal, Westernised testing structures (don’t) test for
**Time-sense/Time Discipline**

Time structures such as bells, schedules and deadlines, are an integral part of what makes a school a school. Laws of “punctuality and regularity are written into the rules of all the early schools” as we saw with the beginning of mass schooling in Britain (Thompson 1967, 84). People should be at a certain place at a certain time, things happen on time, regardless of when interest is aroused or disappears, and school work or tests must be completed within a fixed amount of time (Jackson 1990, 16). If we remember from our own schooling in the West, these, along with rules regarding cheating, were the strictest of guidelines, infused with the greatest amount of seriousness.

School can restructure ways of thinking about and experiencing time. This new temporal discipline can shape ‘Time’ as fixed into discrete segments for which there are appropriate activities, and as a thing that is scarce - a resource to be used efficiently, that can be wasted, saved, spent or turned into money (LeCompte 1978; Smith 1982). It also sets standards for punctuality, regularity and synchronisation of events (Thompson 1967).

This temporal discipline is related to capitalist forms of production and the intensification of production, which create a need for synchronisation, and “uniformity of scheduling and patterning” (Smith 1982). If there is a shift toward hired labour, time becomes money - “the employer’s money” (Thompson 1967, 61). A new time-sense to better manage the labour force is also a new imposition of authority. A more restrictive framework is produced by, and produces the need for, greater management of daily life: the problem becomes “too little time”, the solution is better management (Smith 1982). And on the grand scale, time as abstract and quantitatively precise supports a philosophy of ‘progress’.

In Ghana, schools (in theory), follow the same, or very similar rules regarding time. They start at a particular time, each class spans 35 minutes, with 2 breaks in the day; they end at a fixed time; bells sound the beginning and end of lesson; class is in session Monday to Friday; and in-class tests should be completed within fixed time limits.
One of the things that struck me immediately was the flexibility of schedules and deadlines at the schools. Many, if not all, teachers and students do not come on time, and many schools do not carry out classes everyday, they might not come on market days for example, or they do not stay in school for the whole day, closing early. The schools I visited had bells but they were not heeded, the schedule of the classes for the day was not followed, students might be given time limits for in-class work, but they were rarely adhered to.

*Overall time in class.*

What the USAID team found in rural Ghana was in line with what I saw in the schools. For reasons of coming late, leaving early, taking long breaks, and doing sports and other activities, the actual learning time was 2-3 hours a day maximum (Kraft 1995, 59).

At Jaso and Krobo schools there was an emphasis on starting punctually, at 8 the kids would be lined up in their classes singing patriotic songs. In another Akuapem school when I arrived at 8am, sitting in an almost empty classroom, I was told class regularly starts at 9 or 10am. Kraft (1995) found similar findings. When I visited more rural schools around Jaso on market days for a library book project I initiated, no matter what the time, I did not find them in session at all. It seems that many schools are not in session on market days\(^{15}\), but each school negotiates its own norms.

Many other scheduled in-class observation fieldwork days, I showed up to find the schools had not reopened after holidays, or they were out of the classroom doing sports, dancing and drumming, or marching practice (USAID “A Look at Learning” 2005, 50; Fieldnotes, various dates).

Another way of measuring time in class - The World Bank report estimated that students were engaged in learning for 39% of the time they were expected to be (Abadzi 2007, 2), teachers were present an average of 4 days a week, and 1/3 of teachers were late on any given day (Abadzi 2007, 26). They concluded that student

\(^{15}\) Which was the only day of the week I could get a car to take me to these rural schools
absences follow teacher absences. But if you ask teachers in Ghana, they will tell you that it is the students who do not show up on time, or that all teachers are not required to be there on time or all the time (since there are more teachers than classes / they rotate) (Conversations with teachers, various dates). Neither students nor teachers are disciplined for coming late.

Schedules

Donor reports say that it appears to be at the “whim” of the teacher as to whether the timetable is followed or not, and classes might go on for hours while other classes will be cut out. The USAID research team and a World Bank report found the same scenario I found in the Eastern Region, that in almost every school, the “posted written timetable had little, if any, connection to what actually was offered in the schools” (Kraft 1995, 60) (Abadzi 2007).

We saw some examples already of classes going over time and others being skipped. Another example happened at Krobo school. On break, in the staff room one day, I stated that I wanted to sit in on Religious and Moral Education (RME) class that afternoon. The teacher replied, “No, no RME today” then he looked up at the schedule and said “uhhhh, Form 3. I wanted to leave early today... . Okay, he says to me, you can teach RME if you want.” Not realising that that would defeat the purpose of observation. I did in fact take up his offer to teach RME. During this class I don't think the other classes were in session. When we finished, the teachers and headteacher had a staff meeting which ended at 1:30, at which time it was too late to hold the final class of the day, so we closed half an hour early (Fieldnotes, March 22, 2007).

This was not an unusual day. Everyday that I attended a school their schedule varied. I always made a note of which classes were on which days so that I could vary the courses I attended and attend certain ones that might be of interest. I quickly learned that the schedule did not work that way.
Bells and being late

In Jaso we see an interesting example of classes that ignore bells, and a teacher takes on the issue of whose fault it is that they are late:

Jaso JSS, May 10th, 2007

At Jaso school I show up late\(^{16}\) at 8:30, and the class is already in session. It’s social studies for JSS 2. A large class with 40 students.

A young male teacher is talking about the functions of institutions when I arrive.

A few minutes after I settle in he asks the class: “Are all institutions good? All institutions are supposed to help in the development of the country. Because we are still, what? Developing!”\(^7\)

“Give an example of one who is not performing up to satisfaction”

A girl says: “ECG” [Electrical Company of Ghana]

The bell goes off.

The teacher continues: “We can say they are not among the very good institutions in the country. He goes on to talk about water shortages and GWSC [Ghana Water and Sanitation Company?]. “GWSC...because of their poor services we don't get what? Water.”

A girl calls out: “Hey, your time is up!”

The teacher replies: “I know, I know.” And continues, “Chieftaincy is another institution which is not performing. This town, there is no chief, they are fighting. How can this town progress?”

“What do you think we should do to institutions that are not performing up to expectations?...”

He addresses the institution of the school.

“If your teacher comes late and you don't want that...?”

A girl calls out rebelliously, directing the answer at him and not teachers in general: “I'll cane you!”

The classroom fills with shouting, they continue:

Another girl gives her reply: “I'll report you to the headmaster!”.

\(^{16}\) At this time I was mostly staying in Koforidua and the irregular transportation meant that like many teachers and students I was often late getting to Jaso or Krobo schools

\(^{17}\) Development talk is the not just the discourses of NGOs and government!
And another girl: “I’ll advise you”.

The teacher brings things back to reality “Good. If you report me to headmaster I’ll fight you”.

“So you do what? Advise the.... do in-service training... give motivation [which means money, or equivalent] like bags of rice...”

This may have been added in for my benefit, since I work for an Education NGO, or to highlight to the students that it is lack of ‘motivation’ that makes the teachers late.

“The schools are the most basic institution...what would you suggest [to improve them]?”

The students now shift to the usual lines and away from the teachers and that moment of outlet.

A boy says: “I’ll tell students to study hard.”

A girl adds: “I’ll advise the government to provide the needed logistics.”

The teacher continues that thought with his grievances: “The environment in our schools must be good, the structure, TLMs [teaching and learning materials]...”

We are back to the regular lines: teachers frequently blame students for their poor marks, or government for not providing material supplies and enough pay.

He then continues with reporting on corruption and how to address the problems of the ECG.

Then he notes: “Since my time is up we will look at the geography of Ghana”.

A girl tells him: “We haven’t finished culture...”

He replies, “You put that aside”.

During the geography lesson, the bell goes off, it’s 9:20. He continues the lesson.

When he finishes, he yells at a girl and raises his hand in threat, she quickly puts up her arms in defense and crouches back in fear of being hit.
By the time they finish that class there is a short period of Math in which they learn pie charts. The little boy who rings the bell comes in at 9:50 and yells “Change class please.”

The teacher leaves them with an exercise.

At 10:25 Another young male teacher comes in to teach Religious and Moral Studies on the topic of chastity and immorality.

The Bell goes off at 10:50, he continues.

11:25 the bell goes off. He continues with ways of controlling sexual desire.

The bell then goes off at 12 noon. They stop the lecture on the evils of masturbation to say Holy Mary. He then continues to explain the evils of lesbianism, more examples of chastity and immorality and then closes the lesson.

All these bells were sounded by a small little boy with a hand bell, and each time he would call out “Change class please”. Why did they continue this practice when it never signaled the changing of class? And why were the students the ones to tell the teachers your time is up, something I observed on many occasions? We will return to these issues.

Let’s compare that day with the official schedule:

8am       Social Studies
8:40      Bell goes off, the lesson continues. In the middle of the period the teacher moves on to Geography
9:20      Bell (bell is 5 minutes late) Geography continues for another 10 minutes
          Math then starts 10 minutes late and they spend 20 minutes on pie charts.
9:50      Bell to signal break. The students are given a math exercise instead.
10:25     The next lesson begins, it is 10 minutes late. The course is RME
10:50     The bell goes off, the lesson continues
12:00     The bell goes off, although this should be in the middle of their second break. The lesson continues. They go on for about another 10 minutes. This lesson running about 2 hours. The prevocational teacher then enters and she begins the lesson on Catering
1:30      Bell goes off. Catering continues until it is almost 2. Then they close.
In-class Tests

For in-class assignments and tests there was usually a timeline in which to complete them, but this too, was flexible. Only one of the three classrooms (in a Junior Secondary School) might have a clock in the room, and the students do not have watches, so the exercise is more one in instilling the idea that time is important. A favourite saying of teachers, that I noticed, when trying to get students to do something faster, is “We are working with time here!” Time can be used by the teachers as a point of authority but not as an exact measurement of the time the students have to do the assignment.

Here is an example of the flexibility of class-test time limits:

March 23, 2007 in Krobo JSS 3, the teacher gives a class “test”:

The young male beadmaking teacher writes on the chalkboard:

Class test. 1. State...

“Keep quiet and start work”, he says.

... step by step how glass beads are made.

“Start from tools, materials... It’s now 11:22 exactly. 11:50 I’m collecting them. Don’t look in any book. That is all for today.”

We then leave the kids to work on it without supervision and we do not return. We go to JSS 2 which was not in session while we were in JSS 3.

In JSS 2, he gives an exercise:

“Whatever you saw [on the field trip], you write. Ready to give a presentation on what you saw. Do it quickly. You're working within 10 minutes.”

15 minutes later he says “Get ready to stop work. It’s left with 5 minutes.”

5 minutes later he says: “Get ready to stop.”

2 minutes later: “Stop stop. You- stop! Hey stop! Pass them forward.”

For a few hours I hadn’t seen another class in session. Class breaks and start times were irregular that day.
Students are not learning to use time precisely (when someone says do it in ten minutes it could mean 22) and anyway, they don’t have a clock to refer to here (except in JSS 3), but they are learning about authority. Those in authority will try and get you do things quickly when they order you to do something for them. It is also an order that usually follows a child’s look of resentment when directed to do something. Children learn the lesson: appear to hurry to appear dutiful (at least until out of sight).

**Contextual Factors**

Donors explain the flexible schedules as a ‘cultural problem’. Donors write: “good time use... is not a priority, and this concept may be novel” (Abadzi 2007, 53), but “training teachers to use time better is particularly challenging in low-income countries, given low levels of education and a long tradition of time wastage at all education levels” (Abadzi 2007, 53). They also blame low-income parents for not knowing how to “recognise the features of effective schools” (Abadzi 2007, 51).

This assumes traditions and ignorance are the source of using time differently and of not following the rules of the time structures in schools. What other explanations can we look to explain a different way of constructing time?

Outside of school, time is not divided into discrete segments for which there are appropriate tasks and activities. “Task orientation” as it is called in the literature (Smith 507), may simply be a more respectful way of saying what the donors are saying, but it might also be useful to see it as a different way of working with time - that time is not a fixed entity in which certain activities must conform to in daily life. Everyday activities do not abide by the clock, if there even is one available. But this is not necessarily “bad time use”. I would say that they are not boxed in by the constraints of doing things only at particular times, and within time limits – we saw previously, in the Agriculture lesson that students can leave the classroom when they need to leave, and not at a particular time. If a student needs to go to the washroom he will go (and there is no need to make an announcement about it or ask someone’s permission). The teacher also can take a call on his mobile phone if it

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18 The World Bank concludes: “...outside expertise is needed” (Abadzi 2007, 53).
19 Though this rarely happened
rings during class, following the rule that people don’t conform to arbitrary schedules.

There are also concrete reasons why teachers and students are late. There is work to be done at home by the children in the mornings, students may also have to walk far to get to school, transportation is irregular (as I found out!), and not everyone in more rural areas has a clock, watch, cell phone or radio to tell the time. These are practical contextual constraints that make being at school at a certain time unrealistic. One teacher, who was also a friend, explained that they couldn’t punish the kids who are late because they have to walk far to get to school or they have work to do in the mornings (Conversation with teacher, November 1, 2006). The school that teacher taught in compensated by having the entire school start at 9 or 10 everyday. Children have to move between the demands of their family (to help in the morning with carrying water, cooking, and other work) and the demands of the school that they be there at 7:45. Children’s help is especially needed on market days. And the market in Jaso is certainly the reason rural schools in the Jaso area are not in session at all on market days (one out of the five school days), and why attendance is lower on that day in schools where they are in session. Teachers, because of this reality, cannot possibly punish kids who miss days of school, though they may later insult them for not learning the material that they missed. Teachers have to navigate between what is realistic to demand of the students and what the official rules demand of them. Inevitably, they get frustrated.

On the level of both the theoretical and practical, parents may not see the sacrifice of sending their children to school everyday as worthwhile. They may consider other work to be more practical (GNECC 2006). On the issue of getting to school at a certain time\textsuperscript{20}, the lesson in that, may not be necessary to learn. What is the use of that in the rural areas? Students might also not see the use of that ‘lesson’.

Teachers may follow students’ behaviour, or may not come because they will not be punished for it. Headteachers do not find it necessary to force teachers to be there on time. In the public schools there exist measures and procedures for sanctioning and disciplining (such as those in the private schools), including salary deductions for absences, monitoring by headteachers and circuit supervisors and district disciplinary

\textsuperscript{20} In some cases they do not have clocks in the house
committees, but they are not usually exercised (Abadzi 2007, 39; GOG “ESPR” 2006, 94). CARE found that the district education officials in one district in Northern Ghana felt that there was “collusion” between the circuit supervisors and headteacher and teachers, despite the free fuel that NGOs were providing for the supervision (2003, 33). The ESP (Education Sector Review) concludes that the supervision system is “in need of review” (GOG 2005, 17).

Part of the context is also the beliefs of higher level government officials. Because of the different contradictions, donors might question strict adherence to a schedule (Kraft 1995, 58), but the government does not want to institute flexible-schedule schools (Hartwell 2006) (even when they have shown to teach reading and writing more effectively- see Hartwell 2006). They do not want to say - scrap these time constraints even though we don’t follow them. The national Government wants “Western schooling” that will lead their nation toward modernisation and development, and so their recommendation is often that controls are tightened (GOG “ESPR” 2006). The schools are caught between the discourse and the reality.

Outcomes

The children are not learning the same lessons of punctuality that the Western school system is set up to teach, and further, the act of not following the time structures of the school also questions the legitimacy of the state over the management of people’s time and lives (Carlen 1992, 81). It resists the demands of external institutions and people in authority to institute temporal discipline (Smith 1982). But is not aimed at “large historical abstractions”; they are doing something different because it is in conflict with prudent and realistic activities of everyday life (Scott 1985, 348). In this way, it argues on different terms. They are fighting it rather than fighting about it. EP Thompson explains the distinction with an example: it is the difference between arguing over whether to work in a factory and arguing over the length of the working day (1967). In rural schools in Ghana they are not arguing with the government over how many classes they should offer in one day and how long each one should be, they are simply not following the schedule (in the prescribed way). We don’t always see the argument of doing something different because they are not arguing on the same terms.
However, the symbolic use of time might be a way to use it strategically. Smith found in PNG that people in rural areas, where schools and wage labour had been introduced, were “impelled toward appropriation of the new order’s dominant temporal orientations by the desire that they and their community might compete successfully in that new order on its own terms, as they see them” (Smith 1982, 513). People retain the structures of the schedule, the bells for example- they work with time, exploiting its symbolic and political value. Those in authority can use it over other people in the village, saying “we are working with time”, which means you are working with my time, and my demands. This also situates the person in authority as more Westernised (one who works with time). One can also strategically use Western notions of time by referencing to “Obruni time” (white people’s time), while showing up punctually to an event, versus “GMT” (Ghana man time), a derogatory way to talk about someone who follows local views of time, and would not show up ‘on time’ (Fieldnotes, June 5 2007). This constructs someone as either more traditional /ignorant or more developed/international, depending on how they use time, or appear to use time. For an example of the latter, wearing a watch depicts higher status, but it doesn’t have to be a functioning watch (Fieldnotes May 27, 2007).

Lessons on time, as inscribed in the daily structures of a school, are supposed to provide lessons on ways of viewing time, efficiency, and authority- but they are also directly related to the curriculum - if you don’t show up regularly it becomes difficult to learn the material in this type of schooling system. These practices undermine the overt goals of the school - learning to read and write; they are only there 39% of the time (Abadzi 2007,2), and they are only learning 40% of the curriculum (BECE Results in GOG “ESPR” 2006, 69).

Summary of Values in the Field

We have examined the disjunctures between how three main structures of schooling, based on colonial and British systems, are intended to be followed as proposed by the donors and government, and how they play out in the classroom.

These structures are reinterpreted, and the kids are generally not learning the related values of active learning- creativity, questioning and innovation; the lessons behind
competitive testing - individualism and competitiveness; and they are not learning the values of conducting activities at fixed times and within fixed time periods - efficiency and punctuality. The main lessons donors and national government might be attempting to instill through promoting these formal rules of schooling, are surely being lost in the translation of policy to practice.

These teaching structures, testing structures and time structures do not always fit with the contextual reality of rural Ghana; everyday practices and everyday values do not make the proposed system realistic. School knowledge becomes mainly symbolic capital - even when the main lessons have not been learnt. Its value has become separate from the intended lessons.

In the next section we exemplify the ways in which donors attempt to address this contextual problem as if it were a managerial problem, which only leads to a further reduction in effort. Then we will examine something we have already touched on - in what sense we might call these acts of non-compliance a critique of the schooling system.

**PART 3 - Further Discussions and Conclusions**

**Lack of Political “Will”, Management and Discipline**

The ways in which the donors attempt to address these ‘problems’ in the schools are misguided, as they approach the problem as a managerial problem, instead of as a contextual problem. And this only has further negative repercussions (from the standpoint of the donors) since further discipline often leads to deskilling.

In the two schools I was in physical problems had generally been solved, there were books, notebooks, pencils, chalk, decent or good infrastructure and other basics. Donor reports, identifying underlying problems, from their standpoint, identify the problem as one of lack of discipline, management and “political will”. Most NGO workers too, will ask - why doesn’t the government simply implement stricter discipline on teachers who are late or who don’t supervise students, or why don’t they simply train them with the new and improved methods? Headteachers don’t seem to be disciplining teachers, circuit supervisors do not seem to be supervising
headteachers, and so on up the chain of authority. The donors seek to ID the areas that are weak on management and fix them by instilling more controls.

We can compare the situation with the private primary school in Jaso. They follow the rules of time closely (but still use rote teaching). So, it is not necessarily a matter of a context that doesn’t ‘allow’ people to follow the rules. The private school used sanctions and disciplined teachers, who were late, absent, not teaching during class time, or didn’t prepare lesson plans, despite paying them less. Students perform better on exams, despite private school teachers being less qualified. But the parents of these children are from a class that can afford to pay small school fees and are more interested in the performance of their children. Also those who can afford to pay for school might also be the families less in critical need of the labour of the children in the morning. It works here, not because the teachers will be fired for not showing up (increased controls), but because the parents (and/or students) are more interested in the lessons of school including the lesson of starting punctually. I would suggest that in Jaso, the main difference for slightly higher exam scores in the private school is the increased amount of time spent in class, on task, and the increased interest of the parents of the students, who encourage their wards to do their homework and in some households, speak English to them at home.

It does at first glance appear that the private schools are functioning better because of the increased discipline. And that in part leads donors to maintain that in public schools the government is “not convinced” to instill discipline and follow rules more closely (Abadzi 2007, 51). That there is a “lack of interest in enforcing sanctions” (Abadzi 2007, 24). They say that the officials may “implicitly accept the gap” (Abadzi 2007, 120), the government is not “accountable” nor “under pressure to change the equilibrium” and is “unwilling or unable to control teachers and unions” (Abadzi 2007, 50). This is assuming the government should be under pressure, but not from those who use the services of the school (!). We will look at some possible explanations for why they are “not convinced” or not interested in instilling greater discipline.

An increase in control does not always lead to better practices, and can often backfire. According to McNeil’s well known theory - an increase in control leads to deskilling in schools in the US (1988). Meanwhile, decentralisation of control does not equal local ownership of the project.
McNeil saw that when contention between controls and educational purposes was resolved in favour of controls, teachers felt undermined, and began to reduce their effort and make things easier for both themselves and the students (1988). Examples of controls are an increase in testing, paperwork, standardisation of curriculum - things that take power away from the teacher. And when the events in the school were not taken seriously, students found ways of gaining rewards with minimum effort instead of becoming more engaged in learning; it led students and teachers to meet in the “path of least resistance” (McNeil 1988, 176). And this may be what we are seeing when we look at the rituals of memorisation and testing in Ghana.

Teachers in Ghana have been facing an increased workload and continuous changes to the structure, curriculum and testing systems (Dei 2004), they also find themselves in a profession that is losing respect, and their morale has been going down (Dei 64, Coe 2005). This is a situation wherein teachers will, we can assume, want to reduce their effort. Luykx calls it a “complicity of understanding”; a USAID report calls it an “accommodation to failure” (Luykx 1999, 186; Kraft 1995, 92). These reasons can explain why an increase in discipline would not produce better teaching and how the controls that are in place now, might be leading to this reduction of effort by teachers.

But students in rural Ghana, do not necessarily follow the lead of the teachers as they do in the US. We have seen that it is the students who tell the teachers when their time is up, and they could be found, while teachers were on strike, in the classroom working and learning together for months. Teachers reducing effort does not necessarily lead to students reducing effort, as it does in McNeil’s study in America (1988).

Perhaps in response to this situation where an increase in controls is leading to a reduction in effort, the reported trend in education and development in Ghana has been toward decentralisation of control and community ownership of schools (Dei 2004; GOG “ESP” 2005). The Government acknowledges that there needs to be a shift from “command and control to service and support” (GOG “ESP” 2005, 17).

The question is, why would the community take ownership of a project that is not theirs and doesn’t address their needs? “The assumption that community participation enhances the effectiveness of education provision should be examined” (USAID “Transnational” 2002, 139).
The failure to institute controls, the acceptance of the gap by government, may be due to the fact that stricter controls would not improve the situation. When the donors fail to approach the issues as contextual disjunctures and approach them as managerial problems, the development response will fail to change the problems they are trying to address.

The Government’s failure to institute stricter controls in the schools might also be a response to a situation in which - if everyone did complete school there would not be jobs for them to go to. Even now, with a relatively low percentage of students completing Basic or Secondary school, there are many unemployed disenfranchised graduates. Locally, the project of school in Ghana is not associated with the mass “education project of citizenship, but with the creation of a Westernised and wealthy urban elite who can serve as brokers between the state or international resources and local areas” (Coe 2005, 145).

Non-compliance as a Critique

A casual reading of the literature on rural ‘development’ yields a rich harvest of unpopular government schemes and programs nibbled to extinction by the passive resistance of the peasantry. (Scott 1985, 31)

We are now coming back to look at how the actions taken in the school, that fly in the face of the prescribed structures of the official system, substantiate a critique of the values of schooling. Ghanaians in rural schools do not necessarily see value in the structures of the Western school’s child-centred teaching methods, strict rules of time, and competitive testing. They see the symbolic and exchange value of education, but not the values in the everyday structures- these two things do not translate as the same thing. For example, people might somehow believe in the efficacy of Western time-sense and ‘efficiency’, but on a daily basis, why is it important that their child gets to school on time? Their labour is much needed in the morning, and in what situation is it necessary for my child to learn that she has to be somewhere at 7:45? This is not a useful lesson in the context, there are no office jobs in her future. Why is it necessary that bells must be followed even if they are in the middle of a discussion? The specific values, related to the lesson behind stopping for a bell, are not necessarily subscribed to, nor do they seem practical to follow in
everyday rural life. There is a difference between discourse (and belief in how it should be) and what is practical.

For further example, why should children lead the class-work? How can students be as disrespectful as to question teachers and their knowledge? Why should students not work and learn together on class assignments when that is what people do outside of the classroom? In these ways, through their everyday actions, people in rural schools in Ghana might be questioning the very essential values that these structures are attempting to instill. Teachers, headteachers, and students do not necessarily disagree with the structure, they may well believe in the same discourse, that Western schooling will lead to modernisation; they might believe in one thing, but that might not possible, not realistic within the context. It doesn't seem realistic to make them do tests individually, or make them come at a certain time. The belief systems have to be “reinterpreted in line with the material and symbolic interest of the class receiving them” (Scott 1985, 320).

Non-compliance is structured by what might be practical. Donors make assumptions as if the parents do not know what is in their best interest, but we can't assume people do not know what is in their best interest. Still, context does not necessitate a certain outcome. For example, the kids in the private school, many of them also have parents that need their help in the morning, but they make sure to get their wards to school punctually because they believe there is a value in this lesson. Choice is always made, but within context. Choice and contextual factors cannot be separated.

There is something that looks like “defiance in a language elites cannot understand or in locations not monitored by those in power” (Bjork 2002, 466). And that is part of ‘arguing on different terms’. Donors don’t see it, they might just consider them ignorant. **But in the end, these millions of acts of non-compliance have destroyed the state’s and donor’s grandest plans (Scott 1985) including the schooling system in rural Ghana.** We have seen that defiance does not need to be directed at the ‘system’, the government, or the donors, for it to be a legitimate critique. These defiances were not directed at the system, but as a response to impositions that go against people’s ability to meet financial and other daily demands (Scott 1985).
This kind of critique may hold open a space in which people could do something different. Luykx writes: “a symbolic space for alternative or oppositional meanings is essential in order for direct action to take root and develop” (1999, 282), but it does not necessarily lead to the formation of a different kind of education system. Not complying and creating “symbolic space” is not the same thing as conscious reflective thought that challenges one system and brings about an alternative.

Final Comments

We started by looking at ways in which colonial powers, donors, and discourses create boundaries, rules, and definitions for the structures and values of schooling in Ghana. What is happening in the classroom is very different from what the official blueprints for education outline. Students and teachers are not following structures of teaching methods, time rules, and testing rules because these structures and the values they represent do not fit in with everyday context in rural Ghana.

On the ground, schools feign compliance with schedules, testing and teaching methods. For example, methods seem to be adhered to, they appear to be using child-centred methods by asking students questions, but questions are simply fill-in-the-blank questions. Students still take tests but are allowed to cheat. Teachers keep the schedule of classes on the wall but do not use it. Bells are sounded but ignored. There is the appearance of compliance.

The appearance of conformity also creates opportunities for local schools to promote different values. They create something different in the spaces of the state-“a social space in which the definitions and performances imposed by domination do not prevail” (Scott 1985, 328). They appear to follow the script of the donors but are doing something different (Bjork 2002). In fact, the more marginal the position from the state the more autonomy (Bjork 2002). While the failure to follow these rules of the hidden curriculum also results in the failure of the education system in the rural areas (by the standards of testing), it also acts as a critique of the structures and values of schooling, and may hold open ideological space.

Notwithstanding any international agreements that one ‘has to’ sign on to, donors are aware that the schools aren’t following the rules. But donors, as we know, want to
avoid painting the picture that the millions of dollars they have spent on education have failed in making any significant impact. And they continue to respond with techo-fixes to what they see as a managerial problem when it is in fact a structural one, and they therefore fail to ‘fix’ the problems.

Schools and teachers are mediating in between meeting the demands of the donors and the demands of the real situation. The students seem to be the ones most confused by the contradictions. Calling to the teacher “Madame, the time is up”. The teacher responding: “And so what?” (Jaso, Catering Class, May 10 2007). The students seem to be asking: so then why are the bells going off?

Openly confronting the system is not likely because it would mean lack of donor support; moreover, those who are “successful” became so by going through a foreign system of schooling. Even more importantly, the unlikelihood of systemic change is probably due to a lack of alternative ideological frameworks. The belief that this system will lead to economic growth and progress is strong (Dei 2004, 2). An alternative system becomes stigmatic, if not unimaginable.
Appendix A

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – which range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015 – form a blueprint agreed to by all the world’s countries and all the world’s leading development institutions. They have galvanized unprecedented efforts to meet the needs of the world’s poorest.

The UN Millennium Development Goals:

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
• Reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day
• Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education
• Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women
• Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015

Goal 4: Reduce Child mortality
• Reduce by two thirds the mortality rate among children under five

Goal 5: Improve maternal health
• Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio

Goal 6: combat HIV/Aids, malaria and other diseases
• Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS
• Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability
• Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes; reverse loss of environmental resources
• Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water
• Achieve significant improvement in lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers, by 2020

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development
• Develop further an open trading and financial system that is rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory, includes a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction—nationally and internationally
• Address the least developed countries’ special needs. This includes tariff- and quota-free access for their exports; enhanced debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries; cancellation of official bilateral debt; and more generous official development assistance for countries committed to poverty reduction
• Address the special needs of landlocked and small island developing States
• Deal comprehensively with developing countries’ debt problems through national and international measures to make debt sustainable in the long term
• In cooperation with the developing countries, develop decent and productive work for youth
• In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries
• In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies—especially information and communications technologies

Source: http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/goals.html
UN Web Services Section, Department of Public Information, United Nations © 2005
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