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The importance of posting and interaction with the education bureaucracy in becoming a teacher in Ghana

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Abstract

This paper addresses some of the issues surrounding the posting of newly trained teachers in Ghana. It specifically investigates the assertion that the posting system is 'ineffective' from the perspective of newly trained teachers who have been through the process. It emerged from analysis of the qualitative data that newly trained teachers' experiences and perceptions of the posting process had a significant impact on their occupational culture. The research draws upon documents, interviews with members of the education bureaucracy, and interviews with 23 newly trained teachers posted to basic schools in rural areas in Central Region. The paper illuminates some of the problems involved in posting newly trained teachers to rural schools and looks for explanations as to why some teachers take up their postings and others do not. © 2002 Published by Elsevier Science Ltd.

Keywords: Basic education; Teacher education; NQTs; Deployment; Ghana; Induction

1. Introduction and context

This paper draws on research done as part of the author's forthcoming doctoral study¹ of the induction and professional socialisation of 23 newly trained teachers in Central Region, Ghana (see Fig. 1). It is primarily intended to give insight into newly trained teachers' perceptions of the postings

system and their interaction with the education bureaucracy. It also seeks to contextualise those perceptions by considering the ways in which these experiences influence aspects of newly trained Ghanaian teachers' occupational culture, a term used by Davies (1993), and here understood as an identifiable set of routines, understandings, and practices shared by a professional group as part of a broader professional body. In fact, in this research it emerged that the posting process had a significant formative role in newly trained teachers' socialisation. This should be seen in the context of a public education system that is widely perceived to be failing in terms of stagnant enrolments, difficulties in staffing basic schools in rural areas, and evidence of a failure in imparting basic skills (Akyeampong and Furlong, 2000). The paper can also be seen, partly, as a response to the call for more qualitative research in the area of teacher

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¹ This is part of the MUSTER (Multi-Site Teacher Education Research) Project, which is a research project funded by DFID. It is based on collaboration between educational research institutes in Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago and the University of Sussex Institute of Education. There were four main strands to the research: the costs of teacher education, the college context, curriculum issues, and the process of becoming a teacher.

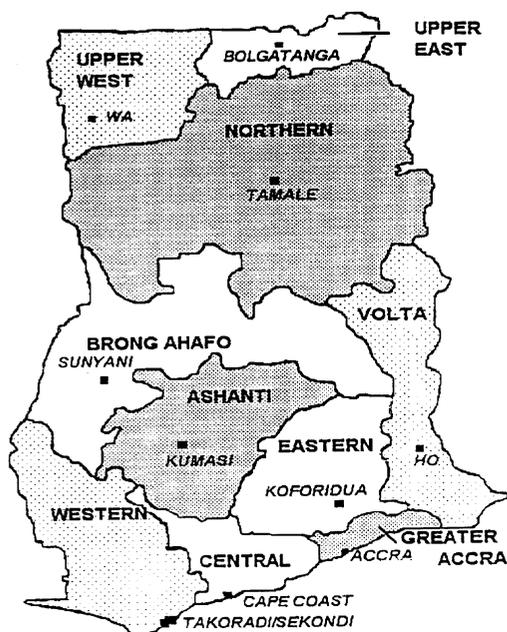


Fig. 1. A regional map of Ghana.

development in Ghana to inform policy-making and education reform (Harber and Dadey, 1993; Akyeampong, 1997).

The research was undertaken in Central Region in two phases of fieldwork carried out between January 1999 and April 2000, while the author was based at the Institute of Education, Cape Coast University, Cape Coast.

2. Becoming a teacher in Ghana

In this study, the primary concern was to elicit teachers' perceptions of their experiences of their first posting. Induction by the head and reflections on training are dealt with elsewhere, in my doctoral thesis, but during the research the posting process itself emerged as a key rite of passage in becoming a teacher in Ghana. The data was analysed using qualitative methods, but was oriented by Davies' work on the 'occupational culture' of teachers in developing countries, which noted that in 'contexts of stringency' teachers may deviate from the professional standards expected of them (1993:168).

She outlined some of the 'cultural typescripts' that make up teachers' occupational cultures in Africa, noting that they tended to be contradictory as they contained modern and traditional aspects, and would often represent attempts to reconcile teachers' notional position in the community with their poverty; they may also incorporate practices such as caning which may be frowned on in official documents (1993:167).

The literature on becoming a teacher in Ghana after training is limited to a study of newly trained teachers' reflections by Apt and Grieco (1994:iv). This largely quantitative study drew mainly positive conclusions about the impact of training, though with reservations about its appropriacy, but also noted that, "Many new teachers face major problems of accommodation, transportation and salary payment." This paper includes a qualitative investigation of some of these instrumental aspects of becoming a teacher.

Debates about becoming a teacher often centre on key formative experiences. Lortie (1975) has suggested that 'the apprenticeship of observation' is crucial in determining perceptions of teaching. On the other hand, the rationale of teacher education suggests that training is the key factor. However, it is possible to put a case that socialisation, or 'social learning' (Harber, 1989:1), in one's first teaching post is the key formative process in becoming a teacher. There are several things impacting on a newly trained teacher's experience in their first post, such as the community and the head, but this paper focuses particularly on the interaction of the teacher as an agent operating (or learning) within, from, and sometimes in conflict with, the bureaucracy and particular agents within it.

Studies of becoming a teacher in developed countries (Lacey, 1977; Zeichner et al., 1988) focus on the school or classroom as the key sites of socialisation, and have tended to underplay the importance of the process of being posted (or choosing a post) and the role of the bureaucracy; this is perhaps a reflection of the relatively unproblematic aspect of the deployment process in developed countries. One of the few examples of research in this area in the developing world was done in South Africa by Samuel (1998). He argued

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