Understandings of Education in an African Village:

the Impact of Information and Communication Technologies

Report on DFID Research Project Ed2000-88

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Abbreviations

BECE	*Basic Education Certificate of Education*
CEDEP	*Centre for the Development of the People*
CLC	*Community Learning centre*
DA	*Development Awareness*
DFID	*Department for International Development*
EFA	*Education For All*
GES	*Ghana Education Service*
(G)PSDP	*(Ghana) Primary School Development Project*
INSET	*In-service Education of Teachers*
JSS	*Junior Secondary School*
QUIPS	*Quality Improvements in the Primary Schools*
SD	*School Development*
SDA	*Seventh Day Adventist*
SMC	*School Management Committee*
SPAM	*School Performance Appraisal Meeting*
SSS	*Senior Secondary School*
USAID	*United States Agency for International Development*
VOLU	*Voluntary Workcamps Association of Ghana*
WSD	*Whole School Development*
PTA	*Parent Teacher Association*

Executive Summary

Introduction

This the final report of the educational research Project *Understandings of Education in an African Village: the Impact of Information and Communication Technologies* funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). The project was a case study centred on one village and involving collaboration between researchers from Africa and Europe using participatory and ethnographic methods. It investigated students', teachers', parents' and other community members' understandings of schooling in a rural village in Ghana ('Akurase'). It was also concerned with the impact of technological change on these understandings and the implications that this might have for development initiatives.

The project was made possible by the existence of a sister project, funded by DFID's Development Awareness (DA) section, involving workers from a UK-based NGO using a range of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to link schools, teachers and communities in the UK with a village in Ghana. It worked with people in both settings to produce accounts of their lives using digital media. These were turned into a website and film, as a medium for cultural exchange and a resource for development education.

The DA Project gave people in a rural village the chance to reflect on their lives, and facilitated their authoring of accounts of these lives. It enabled the *Understandings* research project therefore not only to study rural people's attitudes to education, but also their early experiences of ICTs through the way that digital images were first collected in the village and then shown back to the people there.

The research sought to add to the small amount of good qualitative work at local level based on empirical data; and to represent the perspective of rural teachers, learners and community members. The aims of the research were to:

1. investigate young people's and teachers' understandings of and attitudes to schooling in a rural Ghanaian village;
2. explore the possibilities and problems afforded by ICTs as educational tools in a rural African setting;
3. generate knowledge about the appropriate development of information literacy in developing countries.
4. increase institutional research capacity at a Ghanaian university particularly with respect to qualitative research and the use of new media.

These aims generated the following research questions:

1. How do children, young people and educators in a Ghanaian rural community choose to represent their lives and educational opportunities?
2. What is the impact of their access to ICTs?
3. What role do they see for ICTs in the development of education and employment in their village?
4. What are potential problems and benefits of ICTs on rural education in developing countries?

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The project succeeded in its aims. The research did not always take the expected course, in particular the digital media accounts of people's lives were less useful as primary data than anticipated. However this enabled the research to evolve its ethnographic approach and to gather some rich data.

Methodology

The research drew on data collected by members of the Development Awareness project; however, most of the operative data set was collected by the *Understandings* team. Central to our approach was the notion of 'data chains' a device used to make more explicit the way that we moved from our field experience to the textual outcomes of the research. Visual material was used not just in its own right as the first link in the data chain, but also to prompt reflection on the issues that concerned us and the people we were working with. The visual material acted as stimulus for dialogue, in the shape of informal interviews, which then generated another link in the chain. The chain was continued by discussions of the previous links between insider and outsider researchers. Through this, not only were we able to interpret existing data, but also to generate more in the form of narratives derived from wide experience and understandings of the context. This linked with other data already collected and guided further lines of inquiry.

The data set consisted of the following:

- Uncut digital video footage created by young people and teachers and other community members in the village.
- Informal interviews and discussions collected alongside the video sequences.
- Informal interviews centered on the reactions to media produced from villagers' work.
- Fieldnotes and reflections of the *Understandings* project researchers.
- *Understandings* project team discussions in the field.
- Notes taken during participant and non-participant observation of activities such as lessons and PTA meetings, some videotaped and sessions where villagers used the internet.
- Group interviews and discussions.
- Informal unstructured and semi-structured interviews.
- Letters and emails from village school teachers.

Findings

The research yielded findings both about ICTs and about more general understandings of education, especially with respect to the interaction of the community with schooling. Findings on ICTs are presented here first, whereas in the main report the order is reversed since the more general situation within the village helps to establish the context.

Executive Summary

Information and Communication Technologies

Initial Attitudes to ICTs

These findings relate to attitudes demonstrated before any intervention and during the early stages of the filming in the village:

- Villagers' experience of ICTs was limited, but it was having a profound effect.
- Virtually all the people listened to the radio and watched television, though infrequently.
- The relatively small amount of hardware and the lack of understanding of English constrained the amount of choice that people were able to exercise over listening and viewing.
- Changes in cultural attitudes and practices were ascribed to television and radio.
- ICTs were thought of as forms of entertainment rather than as tools for learning.
- Villagers had a deficit view of their own society, reinforced by the opinions of others such as urban Ghanaians. The penetration of outside culture via ICTs had been such as to reinforce this view.
- Villagers viewed cultural exchange via the DA Project either as benign but linked to philanthropic development efforts, or malign and seeking to use ICTs to exploit or mock them.
- Because people had not been able to see the way that the images would be used, they were still powerless and fell back on understandings of media derived from their passive consumption of ICTs.

Issues arising following some experience of ICTs

- When participants encountered the internet, an important consideration was that it was mediated through the DA Project and contained text that was familiar to them and that they had produced themselves. Their sense of recognition had an effect in counteracting feelings of inadequacy both at personal and collective level.
- Because using ICTs is attractive, the prospect can act as an incentive to continue schooling. This is not only because formal education is seen as a means of access, but also because literate people are better able to engage with the text on the internet.
- Digital media offer powerful ways of creating images that emphasise common features between people in different settings. However, this is only likely to occur as part of a deliberate editorial policy.
- People are particularly enthusiastic about the internet. Teachers who had been unenthusiastic about the educational possibilities of other ICTs were able to see the possibilities of the internet.
- Experience of the way that text produced by local people was being used on the internet, appeared to act as catalyst for community action in the village. Factors which may have been influential in this are:
  - People's experience of the ICTs was active rather than passive.
  - 'Recognition' via the internet called the community into being, shaping the way that people thought about themselves in relation to the outside world.
  - Connection with the outside world seemed to offer possibilities for external assistance.

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- Even limited access to ICTs might be used as a lever to more interactive yet culturally appropriate pedagogy, particular through 'low tech' approaches such as storyboarding.
- Greater access to ICTs will potentially enable schools to tackle parts of the curriculum that are difficult (e.g. health education around HIV/AIDS).
- Access to ICTs might act as an incentive to retain teachers as well as a means of continuing their education.
- In many places a sense of community needs to be generated before effective collective action will take place. Centres providing public access to ICTs might, in suitable circumstances, act as a catalyst for this process.

General Understandings of Education

Pupils

- Most children are unable to follow the main 'text' of school lessons, which is constructed by the teacher assisted by one or two higher achieving pupils and by ritual responses from the rest of the class.
- Understanding is especially bad when English is used, as most children cannot speak more than a few basic phrases.
- Most children do not follow schoolwork because they do not possess the understanding from previous work that is a prerequisite for the syllabus of the higher grades of primary school and junior secondary school.
- Corporal punishment is frequent, routine and not administered according to official guidelines. Though accepted as normal, it is very unpopular with children.
- Some children's schooling is interrupted by migration and lack of clarity over whose responsibility their schooling is.
- Payment of school fees acts as a symbol for children that their parents value their education.
- Remaining in school is especially difficult for girls as they often receive less support from parents.
- Poverty is a strong constraint on children's success in basic education, though still most of those who are relatively well off in the village fail to achieve good results.
- Facilities (especially light) and support for home study are a crucial factor in the success of the small number of children who are able to benefit from village schooling.
- Even where children perform relatively well, lack of facilities and opportunities in rural schools prevent children from gaining both vocational skills and academic advancement.
- Children see the amount of household chores as a constraint on school learning.
- Work on farms is used to supplement children's income. For some this provides extra cash, for others it supports their basic needs and enables them to continue in schooling.
- Children are expected to provide payment in kind in the form of farm labour and firewood for the teachers. This is also unpopular but accepted by most children.
- Children in Akurase choose to drop out or attend infrequently, because they can see few real returns to basic schooling.
- Teenagers find little social or cultural stimulation in Akurase and are keen to leave the village.

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Teachers

- The issues and conditions for teachers posted to rural areas have remained relatively stable throughout the last thirty years.
- Teachers find the material conditions, as well as the attitudes and expectations of pupils and parents demotivating and blame these for the lack of success of their work.
- Some of the teachers in Akurase are young men from an urban background who intend to leave at the earliest possibility in order to move to a town. These teachers express disdain for the rural situation and are at pains to differentiate themselves from village people.
- Older men who have settled in the village tend to pursue work as farmers alongside, and sometimes in competition with, their school work.
- The two male teachers who no longer had hope of an urban future nor were the assimilated into farming were consistently drunk.
- It is difficult to attract and retain women teachers in the village; the only established one has moved there with her husband and regrets it.
- There is a great deal of absenteeism amongst teachers, which is seen as normal and justified as a necessary corollary to the problems of living in a rural village.
- It is difficult for heads to supervise teachers because of:
  - the social costs to themselves of strict enforcement of the rules;
  - fear of losing staff;
  - fear of compromising their own position with the authorities.
- Lack of effective supervision means that teachers do not work to their potential. Thus, for example, they see lesson notes as a bureaucratic obligation rather than as a teaching aid.
- Teachers in Akurase do not rate the schools highly and educate their children privately when they can.
- Teachers consider the main advantage of private schools to be that they insist on English as the medium of instruction and of informal communication from the beginning. This enables children to understand the curriculum better.
- Teachers welcome opportunities for in-service education, especially where it encourages them to reflect on their practice and analyse actual classroom events. This kind of activity enables teachers to learn from each other.
- Understandings of professional practice articulated in workshop settings are not put into practice. Teacher centred pedagogy is seen as a coping strategy with pupils who do not understand the content of the lesson or the interaction which is supposed to carry it.
- More structured and planned peer interaction would give pupils a chance to practise the interaction of adults in a democratic society, rather than learning to be obedient children. It would be a helpful way of making lessons more accessible for the majority.

Community

- Education is not an aspect of village life that is seen to be particularly important by the majority of the adult population.
- There is a general perception that village schooling is failing and that standards are declining.

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- Teachers' lack of regard for the villagers is mirrored by the villagers' low opinion of the teachers.
- Many villagers consider that education in Akurase is not worthwhile because:
  - It is not relevant to the children's future prospects as farmers.
  - The schooling in the village is not of sufficiently good quality to warrant investment of time, energy and economic resources.
  - People are too poor to afford the relative luxury of schooling.
  - Some are indifferent to the progress of the children in their care.
- Migration and the policy of successive governments have eroded traditional matrilineal family structures, so that the responsibility for children's care and education is blurred.
- Poor families often rely on child labour to survive, and even when they do not, expect a strong contribution from children who are often only loosely connected to their guardians.
- Many people question whether there are any returns to education for children who do not leave the village and gain post-basic education. Many are also contemptuous of those who 'waste' education by returning to engage in farming.
- Successful education is seen purely in terms of examination passes and migration out of the rural context.
- The failure of the system to address problems raised by parents is seen as a disincentive to parental participation. For example, the fact that two habitually drunk teachers have remained in post despite long-standing and numerous complaints, is especially resented by parents.
- Parents therefore feel that schools and teachers are responsible to the state, not to them.
- Many parents do not pay school fees and PTA dues, whereas a minority is keen for contribution levels to be increased.
- Wider community involvement in schooling is not working because the notion of community on which it is based does not conform to experience. Many people in Akurase are settlers and owe allegiance to other places. They are therefore not keen to invest in the school or any other village structures.
- People's lack of identification with the place where they stay and educate their children appears to be more common in Ghana than is generally recognised and militates against community participation.

Conclusions

Within the constraints that it was under, the *Understandings* project has met its goals. It has investigated young people's, teachers' and other community members' understandings of and attitudes to schooling in Akurase and to present them in a critical way, which respects the problems they face as human beings. The findings of this part of the research are not discordant with what is already in the literature about village schooling in sub-Saharan Africa and Ghana in particular. However, we have managed to provide a rich picture, which is grounded in a great deal of collaboration between insiders, outsiders and those who occupy a middle position. Our confidence in the quality and usefulness of this picture has been reinforced by the responses of those with whom we have already shared our findings and analysis.

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We also set out to explore the possibilities and problems afforded by ICTs as educational tools in a rural African setting. This we have been able to do, particularly with respect to finding themes that might be pursued in further development work. This might form the basis for a larger scale piece of work that would explore specific issues more thoroughly. Our aim of generating knowledge about the appropriate development of information literacy in developing countries was also met, largely through the positive experiences that the DA project was able to generate. Again, this was really only a start and our conclusions indicate directions for further research and development.

Finally, we have succeeded in increasing institutional research capacity at a Ghanaian university, by giving members of the team active and purposeful experience of qualitative research and by raising the profile of this work with other academics and students. The response to the research suggests that work in training Ghanaians in qualitative research could be pursued further.

In summary our conclusions are as follows:

- The impact of limited, passive and unmediated access to ICTs is that rural people are sufficiently involved to be drawn into the periphery of the global media world, but both the means of access and the nature of the texts only emphasise their sense of inferiority and exclusion.
- By contrast, the way that Akurase people were exposed to ICTs through the DA project, although still limited, was active/interactive and mediated.
- Three factors contributing to people's enthusiasm for ICTs were:
  - Recognition - people were able to see themselves and their way of life reflected.
  - Association – they were able to communicate and associate as part of a prestigious global community.
  - Appropriation – active creation of media enables the appropriation of skills allowing people to develop information and media literacy.
- These three concepts might form the basis for a conceptual framework for further research in ICTs and media. It would be particularly useful in appraising and analysing developments with people in low income countries and other marginalised groups.
- It is likely that the effort to bridge the global digital divide will create a wider gulf within low-income countries, though impossible to be sure of this at this stage.
- Continued unmediated, passive consumption of ICTs is very likely to lead to wider in-country inequities.
- Overall, people in Akurase see themselves as being at the bottom of a very large and weighty heap.
- Migration and the gradual erosion of traditional family structures have weakened the ties that bind people together.
- Successful family relatives are those who have moved to the towns and cities and thus the feelings of isolation and stagnation of those left behind are amplified. Only a very few see school as path to a 'better life'.

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- It is not the lack of schools and classrooms that is adversely affecting enrolment and retention, so much as the rational decision of families not to invest in 'worthless' goods. UBE in Ghana will only be achieved when people are convinced that what is being offered by the schools is of sufficient quality to make attendance worthwhile, since in places such as Akurase the quality of the schooling does not merit the continuing effort and commitment by many parents and children.
- Improving the quality of education in rural Ghana such that it delivers basic literacy and is relevant to the concerns, needs and future lives of those it serves is a complex issue and will require simultaneous change on several fronts.
- The central plank of current decentralisation policy, community involvement, is not in place, because of a misplaced, over-romanticised view of community. If one wants to stimulate community involvement in a school, one has to encourage at the same time school involvement in community.
- Because the education system is not responsive to their complaints, people soon lose interest. Policies such as School Performance Appraisal Meetings will only work when they are seen to be effective and not just signals of some distant aspiration.
- Teachers welcome opportunities for the kind of in-service education that encourages them to reflect on their practice and analyse actual classroom events. Activities of this kind, which are followed up rather than being single events, enable teachers to learn from each other and are likely to be more effective in motivating improvement. Support of this nature might persuade teachers that their needs were being recognised and addressed.
- Better supervision is needed at all levels, especially to ensure teachers' attend and make productive use of time when in school. Current patterns of classroom interaction form one of the barriers to better learning. However this will not be changed without better motivation on the part of teachers. This would need to be linked to improvements in the conditions of service of rural teachers.
- At the moment, placement in a rural school is seen as detrimental to one's career and chances of further education despite the promise by the GES of quicker access to study leave with pay. If government policy could reverse this situation, possibly through a system of bonding and qualification explicitly linked to rural service and to study combining reflection on practice and active school improvement, then much might be achieved. This might then engage teachers emotionally and intellectually in the task of ameliorating conditions in villages, since it would bind their own self-actualisation to that of the village.

Recommendations

- Experimental and pilot work in using ICTs in schooling should pay great attention to teacher training. This would provide opportunities to develop suitable pedagogic practices both to counter unproductive pedagogies currently in use and to tackle parts of the curriculum that are difficult to deal with.
- Telecentres or community learning centres provide one means through which

communities and education can be brought together. Whilst it may not be possible or desirable to institute large-scale implementation of these, pilot projects are needed to experiment with methods of financing, managing, skills development and evolving suitable day-to day practices. They should be carefully monitored financially, and evaluated summatively so that actual costs and benefits may be appraised. However, formative evaluation should be the priority so that they take shape in ways that are most sensitive to local needs. Within these evaluations, it would be important to include a consideration of the way that the public and private sector might interact and also of the role of regional, continental and international donor co-operation.

- The mission of these centres should be media literacy of a kind that emphasises people's active role in creating and not just consuming media products. Equipment available at these centres should reflect an active approach, including a digital camera and a scanner along with training in how to use them. To facilitate this the construction of a virtual learning environment or at least a locally produced portal with links to appropriate sites, might be a priority.
- Some of these centres should be run on the basis of photovoltaic and satellite communication technology since these may be cheaper and certainly more practical options for rural areas in the near future.
- Pilot centres should aim to construct knowledge about developing:
  - active skills of authoring and uploading for presenting and reflecting on peoples' lives through ICTs
  - virtual learning environments (VLEs), which emphasise student participation and peer interaction
  - communication between villages and with the wider world
  - staffing, management and governance structures that facilitate the relationship between school and community.
  - ways of linking with people's core social interests such as funerals, and keeping in touch with widely dispersed family, and professional concerns such as sharing ideas about farming and the state of prices for crops in different market centres.
- The Ministry of Education and Universities should give serious consideration to the development of a degree in education through village-based distance education. This should include practical activities grounded in classroom practice and in facilitating community involvement. Campus-based courses could also be held in the holidays. Support by ICTs could be built into the pilot for some or all students and might provide important lessons for future developments. These activities would have to be backed by a system of bonding that was enforced.
- Current efforts at educational decentralisation should be encouraged. However they are only liable to improve the running of schools when power is actually moved downwards to district and circuit levels. This will involve local officers being empowered to act and being responsive to parental and community representation.

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- Macro and micro level change need to go hand in hand. National reforms, which remove impediments to local initiative and enable holistic change, will work only if there is close communication between the various levels of the system. The kind of reform exemplified by (Whole) School Development should continue to be developed.
- School development activities should also include continuing school based in-service training, based on reflection on practice and analysis of actual classroom events. Workshops would need to be followed up by headteachers and circuit supervisors giving support on pedagogical and curricular matters.
- The education authorities should encourage a view of the school as a place where children can model desired adult behaviour, rather than accept a similar role to the one they play in the home. This might result in more effective pedagogical practices.
- School Performance Appraisal Meetings are a good idea, but structures need to be implemented to ensure that they are followed up.
- Structures should also be put in place to ensure that School Management Committees are more representative. They should include those in leadership positions in the community, but also other people who might develop leadership skills. In particular there should be minimum requirements for female representation on SMCs, so that approximately half the members are women. Similarly, parents and other community members should be in the majority rather than teachers.
- There is a need for more training of SMCs and PTAs, so that they have higher expectations about standards of behaviour and attendance of staff and knowledge of procedures to ensure these are conformed to.
- SMCs should also be involved in schemes to provide lanterns for children in non-electrified villages and in urging parents to structure chores around school work rather than vice versa.
- In promoting community involvement in schooling, more thought should be given to the activation of community. Developments that make the school a centre for community resources and action should be considered.
- The new policy of allowing English medium from the start of schooling should be encouraged, though possibly with extra time devoted to learning a Ghanaian language as a school subject.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 The Understandings Project

The aim of this chapter is to provide a short introduction to this report on the educational research Project *Understandings of Education in an African Village: the Impact of* ICT funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). It gives a brief rationale for the project and places it in the context of Ghanaian education. It then goes on to describe the village in which the research took place. The methodological approach and methods of the research are described in more detail in Chapter 2.

The project is a case study centered on one village and involving collaboration between researchers from Africa and Europe using participatory and ethnographic methods. It has investigated students', teachers', parents'[1] and other community members' understandings of schooling in a rural village in Ghana. It is also concerned with the impact of technological change on these understandings and the implications that this might have for development initiatives.

The project was made possible by the existence of a sister project, funded by DFID's Development Awareness section. This involved workers from a UK-based NGO using a range of ICTs to link schools, teachers and communities in the UK with a village in Ghana. The idea of this was to get people in both settings to produce accounts of their lives using digital media. This would then be turned into a website and film as a medium for cultural exchange and resource for development education. We (the authors of this report) were already collaborating on education in Ghana and were asked to contribute to the development (DA) project. John Pryor had a background in educational ethnography and we had both been investigating ways of developing qualitative research in the field of basic education in Ghana. The DA project promised to provide a unique opportunity. Not only was it going to give people in a truly rural village the chance to reflect on their lives, but it was also intending to facilitate their authoring of accounts of these lives. Moreover, it also represented an opportunity to study rural people's early experiences of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) through the way that digital images were first collected in the village and then shown back to the people there. Thus, the *Understandings* research project was piggy backing on the DA project. Though linked, they had separate and, to a certain extent, divergent aims.

The research has been based on two premises. The first is that although a great deal has been written about the problems and shortcomings of Ghanaian education, there is a shortage of good qualitative work at local level based on empirical data; moreover virtually none of this represents the perspective of rural teachers and learners. Our research has enabled us to gain a good in depth view of these perspectives and therefore to add to knowledge about why and how rural Ghanaian education is in the situation it finds itself. The second premise is that

[1] The term parent is misleading within a Ghanaian context. Many children do not live with their biological parents and the different forms of matrilineal and patrilineal families further complicate the matter – this is discussed in more detail below. Within this report we use the term parent unqualified to denote generically those relations by blood or marriage who consider themselves or are considered to have guardianship over children.

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many of the barriers to the use of ICTs in developing countries are rapidly being circumvented and we are on the threshold of a major penetration of digital technologies even to remote areas. Though nobody can know exactly what direction technological development will take, insight into the way that rural people engage with ICTs when they are first confronted may be very useful to policy makers.

Formally then the *Understandings* project has aimed to:

1. investigate young people's and teachers' understandings of and attitudes to schooling in a rural Ghanaian village;
2. explore the possibilities and problems afforded by ICTs as educational tools in a rural African setting;
3. generate knowledge about the appropriate development of information literacy in developing countries.
4. increase institutional research capacity at a Ghanaian university particularly with respect to qualitative research and the use of new media.

We would claim that the project has succeeded in these aims though the research has not always taken the course we would expect. In particular we have found the digital media accounts of people's lives less useful as primary data than we anticipated. Nevertheless, they have been useful in shaping our research and this problem has enabled us better to frame our methodology.

1.2 Anonymity

In this report we are not making use of the full name of the DA Project (it includes the name of the village) for reasons of preserving anonymity. However, in whatever context research is conducted, determined detective work will enable a curious individual to find out about the actual setting and who were the actual people involved in the activities reported. The context of this research, where *Obruni* (foreigners) were staying within the village for extended periods makes this task even easier. Once the village was identified, although individual pupils and parents might be able to retain their anonymity, it would be a very easy step to discover who were the teachers and the community leaders mentioned in the research report. There is a further irony here that those who are able to remain anonymous are also those who have least to lose, whereas those whom it is more difficult to hide behind the screen of research conventions are those who have most to lose.

Added to this the development awareness project was specifically concerned with making connections with real people whose faces and names appear on a website. Because of this, we were never in a position to promise the sort of anonymity that one would normally expect in ethnographic research and we made it clear to people that we were associated with the DA project. It is also impossible to shape the nature of the research such that individuals' reputations are not affected. Educational research like other social research is necessarily analytic. Therefore, even when it tries to avoid being judgmental, it presents data, which can

feed the judgements of its readers.

However, despite anything we might have said about publicity, the context of the research makes it difficult for collaborators to understand the implications of their involvement. This is an issue that is impossible to resolve fully. Thus in public documents so far we have chosen to anonymise both the village and the individuals. Alternative Ghanaian names have been chosen for individuals. Place names have been reduced to generic Twi words.

Thus Akurase = 'village', Kuro = 'town', Ahenkuro = 'capital town'; Kurokese = 'big town'.

1.3 Education in Ghana

The context for this chapter is educational research in Ghana, and the context for educational research is an education system that is apparently universally found wanting. Its decline, from being considered one of the best in Africa at the start of the seventies, to partial collapse by the mid eighties, has been well documented and analysed (UNESCO, 1997; World Bank 1993, Yeboah 1990). Since then, increased political stability has brought concerted attempts at improvement including restructuring of basic education and teacher recruitment and initiatives on textbooks and school buildings. The context for current initiatives is that the main players in development aid have all accepted Ghana as a good example. In the 1990s she successfully accepted multi-party democracy and has since accomplished a smooth changeover in governing party. Economically too, structural adjustment was accepted. In 1987 a policy of Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) by the year 2005 (originally 2000) was adopted and aligned well with the world-wide agenda of Education For All, which followed the Jomtien Declaration (Lockheed and Verspoor 1991). All of this has led to a willingness by outside donors to contribute to education in Ghana. Nevertheless, the performance of schools remains very modest (USAID 1996; ODA/MOE 1995; Quansah 1997).

A recurrent analysis identifies as a problem the widespread demotivation of pupils and teachers, due at least in part to a lack of community involvement. This has led to the adoption of a policy of educational decentralization, which at the moment is mostly an aspiration rather than something that is being fully implemented, and to educational development programme, which emphasise community participation. An example of this was the World Bank financed Primary School Development Project (PSDP). Despite considerable effort, the mid term review of this project noted that "there has been no apparent improvement in the performance of teachers in the project schools...very little teaching is going on in many classrooms, and instructional time is not used effectively" (Korboe & Boakye 1995:4). This situation was still found prevalent in the final report, especially in rural areas (Fobih et al. 1999) and as Condy said (1998: section 5) "if we look for examples of how community participation… has helped to increase access to education in Ghana, the evidence is weak." Criterion referenced testing, conducted in the mid to late 90s and supported by USAID found that only a very small percentage of students finishing primary school had any functional literacy. In this there were strong regional differences, with Greater Accra showing by far the highest achievement. However, more significant was the

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fact that rural pupils were considerably weaker than those in the towns. The group that was performing best consisted of those pupils attending private schools, an area of considerable growth in recent years. A report on these tests suggested that this was due to:

- Greater control and supervision of teachers
- Effective School Management Board
- Interest of parents in what their children learn
- Open days which bring teachers, parents and children together
- Availability of proportionately more instructional materials
  (Quansah, 1997:28)

Again the idea of community involvement is to the fore though there should be little surprise about this. By choosing to send their children to private schools and by making a much greater financial investment some parents are de-facto part of a school community, but it is a community from which many are excluded, particularly the rural poor who function largely outside the cash economy.

The two large schemes currently running which are sponsoring community involvement - Quality Improvements in the Primary Schools (QUIPS) funded by USAID and Whole School Development (WSD – now also known more simply as School Development) funded by DFID - were both designed before that report on PSDP was published. Inevitably given the focus of this project on one village, the theme of community is recurrent in our analysis and indeed, through an unexpected turn in the project, is an idea, which brings the two sides of the research, understandings of education and ICTs together.

1.4 ICTs in Ghana and other Developing Countries[2]

The accelerating pace of technological change is a world-wide phenomenon. In the consideration of Education for All (EFA) around the Jomtien Conference Lockheed and Verspoor (1991:56) could dismiss the role of computers in primary schools in developing countries as a 'blind alley'. Ten years later, whilst many of their arguments remain valid, the landscape has changed considerably and the Dakar Framework for Action pledges to 'harness new information and communication technologies to help achieve EFA goals' (World Education Forum 2000:8:x). The penetration of ICTs into people's lives is far-reaching, and, despite the 'digital divide' between rich and poor, their impact on less developed countries, not least on education, is inevitable. "Technological changes … are becoming more rather than less important in defining the circumstances under which development will take place." Lewin (1993:61).

Until now the two main barriers to the spread of ICTs in less developed countries have been cost and the lack of infrastructure. Recently however the position has begun to change.

[2] Some of the text for this section has been provided by Martha Burkle and Sandra Meredith who worked on a literature review of ICTs in developing countries for the project. Their contribution is warmly acknowledged.

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Successive generations of hardware are produced in ever greater numbers and at lower relative prices so cheaper apparatus is increasingly serviceable. Thus within sectors where it is seen as a priority (e.g. some Government departments, Higher Education and export oriented business), sophisticated technology has become quite common. Even more striking is the growth of communications centres, now increasingly common in regional towns, where ordinary people can use international telephones and faxes and access the internet[3]. Recent developments in photo-voltaic technology and wireless telephony promise to accelerate this growth, removing infrastructural constraints on the use of networked ICTs and thus making this research even more timely (Vanbuel 2001).

It is not surprising therefore that the possibilities of rural connectivity and its implications for developing countries are the subject of considerable speculation and development. There is a large number of initiatives, many of them in the distance education sub-sector, that use tools such as broadcasting to communities, classrooms and learners, electronic networking between instructors and learners and among different learners and schools, and computer-based instruction. It is difficult to evaluate the success and effectiveness of these initiatives without extensive fieldwork. While the reach of educational programmes is clearly extended with the use of new technologies, their impact on and value to the long-term development of learners is much less clear. This is the case not only because of the absence of detailed empirical studies but also because one needs to define what constitutes success by using educational rather than technological or organisational criteria.

In most countries success is measured by easily quantifiable data: how many teachers and classrooms have been added, what proportion of the population is in formal and non-formal schooling, how high is the matric pass rate, which lab and computer equipment is used, what additional sources of information are available, etc. Performance in the school and the classroom in terms of *what* is being taught and (more importantly) learned - in other words, what is the nature and quality of the educational product - does not obviously lend itself to such measurement and consequently is frequently neglected. When new technologies are incorporated into this state of affairs the temptation is to see in them an important step forward regardless of the actual value they add to the educational process. They are no doubt important when they serve to overcome material and technical obstacles to teaching and learning, but in themselves are insufficient as tools aimed at improving the quality of education and its output (Lewin 2000).

Another point that should be raised here is that in a context of large disparities of wealth and access to services, the introduction of new technologies is likely to benefit those who are already privileged, and thus deepen the digital divide within countries. Access to electricity,

[3] Perhaps the most impressive index of development in Africa over the last 20 years, a period when such statistics are hard to find, is accelerating growth in main telephone lines. From approximately 150 per 1000 in 1980 to 450 per 1000 in 1995 (African Development Bank, 1999).

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phone lines, money and security play a major role in determining who can enjoy the advantages of the new opportunities opened by technology. In a continent with a high proportion of the population residing in the countryside this is particularly relevant. Although a host of new technologies seek to overcome this lack of infrastructure, this will remain a problem in the short and medium term. One has to evaluate carefully whether goals could be achieved more cheaply and easily with more conventional means than by introducing expensive ICT tools. This may often hinge though on the extent to which ICTs add new, specifically educational, value.

As Leonard and Dorsey (1996) recognise, beyond issues of access there is a second level of barriers to successful use of ICTs, concerned with attitudes and understandings rather than hardware and infrastructure. The existence of an environment conducive to new teaching methods and new relations between instructors and learners is a factor that must be taken into consideration. To take a few examples, if a wealth of new information reaches learners through the Internet, but then is processed through the traditional rote learning method and is taken as a body of facts that need to be memorised and recited on demand - not much has been gained. If art education resources in the form of Web sites of international galleries and museums are made available to teachers and used in the classroom, the notion that some forms of art (to be found in certain physical and virtual sites) are superior to those forms which are not so available will be codified and reinforced. If the Encyclopaedia Britannica can be accessed through the Internet or CD-ROM, but such other sources of information as oral history or folktales cannot, the status of the former as a foundation for learning will be enhanced. Again this is particularly important in the context of Africa in which the status and value of different bodies of knowledge are subject to serious political and cultural contestation.

The crucial point is to look at ICT as a set of tools that ideally could and should be used to further *educational* goals rather than as a solution to *technical* issues of access. While finding a solution to the latter issues is important, in a state of limited resources the focus should be on educational benefit. Determination of policy in this regard should systematically seek to examine the implications of projects to processes of teaching and learning, and to the development of new educational methods.

According to Greenstein (1998), the following general problems can be identified in the use of ICT in the education sector in Africa.

- There is little co-ordination between projects within the same country, let alone on a regional and continental scale.
- There are few links between education at the different levels: primary, secondary and tertiary. Especially in areas where universities are functioning, it is important to develop links across levels to enable a much larger number of people to take advantage of the relatively well-resourced academic institutions.

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- There are few links between formal and non-formal learning. Schools and adult education centres are frequently seen as completely different types of institutions, managed by different state departments, catered for by different NGOs, and aided by different donor agencies.
- There do not seem to be comprehensive programmes on offer. Computer training courses are frequently de-linked from practical training such that the skills acquired cannot be integrated easily into work situations, adult education is de-linked from current or potential searches for jobs, radio instruction is not clearly integrated with any other educational or developmental programmes. Rather a series of isolated initiatives coexist without being integrated into a holistic framework of the "whole school development" or "whole community development" type.

All this is not to say that many of the projects do not offer useful courses, innovative learning methods, and development programmes despite operating in difficult circumstances. Within Ghana the GhaCLAD initiative has been a major source of movement in ICT development. It grew out of a conference where the notion of rural telecenters based in village schools was mooted (Arthur 1998). Impressive plans for the development of ICT usage are being operationalised, though still at an early stage (Darkwa 2000).

Somewhat larger and better funded is the USAID supported Leland Initiative, which is also concerned with projects to increase access. This has been establishing Community Learning Centers (CLCs) in Ghana, which are now operating in Kumasi, Cape Coast, and Accra (Fontaine and Foote 1999). The Ghanaian community learning centres operate on a cost-recovery basis and employ local staff and volunteers. The centres are aiming to help strengthen basic education, train teachers, provide health care information, strengthen municipal administration, and encourage business development. One of the partners in this initiative, the Centre for the Development of People was associated with the *Understandings* project (see http://ict.aed.org)

Another North American backed initiative is the *Classroom without walls* project, which works in Ghana as a non-profit endeavour under the aegis of an NGO, the Voluntary Workcamps Association of Ghana (VOLU) (Greenstein 1998). Volunteers, mostly from the USA, work with their Ghanaian counterparts in launching a Computer Literacy and Distant Learning Project.

At the level of secondary education, the Ghanaian government is promoting the Ghana SchoolNET, which is a network that will allow all students and teachers to exchange information electronically. SchoolNET is aiming at building a support system for schools, enabling them to explore the various possibilities the internet offers for improving the processes of learning and teaching. The SchoolNET plan calls for: creating and extending E-mail capabilities to all schools; linking schools in the rural areas by packet radio to GhanaNet; establishing a direct link into the internet.

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However all of these initiatives are still at an early stage and are thinly scattered. Just what the impact of ICTs will be, and how people might choose to utilise the technology, is unpredictable. Whilst there is a lot of material available, especially on the internet, which describes this kind of project, there is remarkably little in-depth research, which evaluates the effects they are having either at the macro or the micro level. As Lewin (2000:230) points out:

> Advocacy precedes the demonstration of benefits to learners under realistically available conditions.

Whilst the Understandings project did not entirely work 'under realistically available conditions' it does provide a more critical appraisal both of the positive and negative elements of the rural people's interaction with ICTs and in the final chapters suggests how these might be of use to planners and policy makers.

1.5 The Village

Akurase is a typical African village situated in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The district is noted for its low standards of educational achievement and Akurase is no exception. The size of the village is less than one-half square kilometre. An untarred road from Kuro passes through the village. There is no electricity and water comes from two boreholes in the village. Akurase is a relatively quiet community with no festivals of its own. Social events are mainly funerals and outdooring of newborn babes and their mothers. Most of the inhabitants are subsistence farmers growing foodstuffs. A few farmers grow some cash crops such as citrus and cocoa but usually not on a very large scale. Virtually all the farmers use hoes and cutlasses for farming. Most of the inhabitants have migrated from their villages and Kurokese to Akurase because there is land available for farming. Most people at Akurase therefore consider themselves citizens of other towns and villages.

Few Akurase community members are functionally literate. An enumerator at Akurase during the 2000 census told us that most of villagers in Akurase informed him that they had dropped out of school in either grades 3 or 4. In his estimation about 10% of the people who fall in the age bracket of 30-40 years have completed middle form four (the first ten years of schooling). For those within the age bracket of 40 to 50, the number is very insignificant. Some people at Akurase have their wards attending primary and JSS at Kuro instead of the local school in Akurase. A few individuals have radio sets but ownership of television (mostly black and white) is the privilege of the very few with no more than 13 television sets (most of them not functional) in the whole of Akurase.

1.6 The Schools

Akurase has three schools (two primary and one JSS). According to an elder of the village, the JSS (which used to be the middle school) was established in 1965 by the community members, through contributions. Before that time there was no middle school in the area so the children had to walk long distances after completing primary school to attend a middle

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school in the surrounding towns like Kuro and Kurokese. After building the school, the elders consulted with the local authority, which provided roofing sheets and took over the construction.

On the establishment of the Roman Catholic (RC) primary school, which was the first school to be established in the community, the elder of the village said, "the RC primary school was established in the 1940's through the efforts of some community elders". He said the community moulded blocks through contributions and legacies from community members. At that time children were going to school at Kuro. Being quite far this prevented most children from attending school so the establishment of the school helped children to attend school in the community. The establishment of the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) primary school by that church however, is a recent development. It was constructed under the World Bank sponsored Ghana Primary School Development Project (PSDP) scheme whereby the shell of the school ('the Pavilion') was provided centrally by the project and the walls were constructed by the community, in this case the SDA church. This school has a headteacher's bungalow, also provided by the World Bank loan.

All the schools have a classroom for each class. The RC School also has some storage areas and the JSS a larger room that can accommodate more children and is also used for meetings. Larger assemblies at the two primary schools are held in their respective churches. At the time of the research the Catholic Church was roofed but not yet completed. The schools have pit latrines.

The catholic school was one of the pilot schools for Whole School Development (in this District and as a result has a full set of desks and seats. In the other schools the situation varies with some furniture available but in the JSS until now children have had to provide their own chairs.

The notion of community is important to this report, since issues about perceptions of schooling are separate from those about ICTs: community is the concept that joins the two strands of this project.

Chapter 2 Methods and methodology

2.1 The Approach of the Project

We believe that the approach of the project to the research has been distinctive and innovative. It is reported on in more detail in our chapter (Pryor and Ampiah 2003) appearing in Swadener and Mutua's (2003) forthcoming book on Decolonizing Educational Research. In this chapter we explain how we have worked more concisely as an introduction to the research.

At this stage we should like also to draw attention to the fact that although this report was written primarily by John Pryor with substantial contributions and editing from Joseph Ghartey Ampiah, lecturers at a UK and Ghanaian University respectively, it is the fruit of much collaboration from the large team of people who are mentioned in the acknowledgements. This consisted of three associate researchers two of whom were postgraduate students of education with a background in rural education, having taught in situations similar to those researched. They had also had some research experience, but only as data collectors, given a specific and tightly framed task and not expected to engage with the material they obtained. The third was a rural development worker who had been working in the NGO sector using participatory methods. In addition to this, we were helped by the DA project workers, who made their fieldnotes available to us and were available to join in discussion with us. During the main part of the project their team consisted of two community video practitioners, who were living in the village and of two different interpreters. One of the workers also returned to the village the following year, this time accompanied by two trustees from the NGO both with a University background. The way that this collaboration has occurred is in essence the story of this chapter.

Although the problems and shortcomings of Ghanaian education, particularly in the rural areas, have generated much comment, the most prevalent form of published analysis consists of evaluation studies associated with development projects, or quantitative work for post-graduate accreditation by local universities. These usually depend on surveys, observation studies and scrutiny of documents, where the perspective of the professional evaluator is to the fore. Our work moves into the largely unfilled gap for qualitative work at the local level seeking to provide an account that represents the perspective of village communities, of teachers and of learners[4]. Our aim is that this might provide a vital input into policy making, since educational reform in Ghana has been frustrated not so much by conceptual shortcomings at policy level, as by the way policy interacts with local understandings (Pryor & Akwesi 1998)

We would claim that in the most common approaches to educational research in Ghana, based on surveys and one-shot interviews in contexts where there is a great power differential and/or a cultural distance between researcher and researched, the voice of the villager is at

[4] Peil's (1995) article is an example where more ethnographic work has been attempted in an urban setting

best very weakly heard. We have used more participatory research methods, where people are more active in generating data (Chambers 1997; UNDP 1998). The work is located within a tradition of qualitative educational research, drawing on a number of ethnographic models (Atkinson and Hammersley 1998). It also accesses the more general ethnography of Ghana (e.g. Ansu-Kyeremeh 1997). Its use of video generated by participants and other participatory approaches aligns it with Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) (Chambers 1997; Gaventa and Lewis 1991). Analytical frameworks are derived from the literature on international education.

2.2 Data chains

The original impulse for the project came, as mentioned in the previous chapter, from the Development Awareness Project that was working in Akurase. Its aims were to promote cultural exchange and international understanding amongst children in the UK and Ghana by facilitating accounts of their lives using digital media. These accounts seemed to offer a particularly rich source of data for representing rural people's views of education. As it turned out, the video data did not prove as useful as anticipated. Even after three months, the camera was still such a novelty in the village that it attracted too much attention. The priority of the filming schedule was to get footage that would be useful for the development education project, so there was a need for 'staged' filming. However, in the event, this was not such a problem, since it acted as an impulse towards the theorisation of the methods of the research, which were designed to make the most of the skills and experience of the different members of the research team.

Central to our approach was the notion of 'data chains' a device used to make more explicit the way that we moved from our field experience to the textual outcomes of the research. The visual material was used not just in its own right as the first link in the data chain, but also to prompt reflection on the issues that concerned us and the people we were working with. This involves *Stimulated Video Recall* (Cowan 1994), a less specific form of the *Interpersonal Process Recall* developed by Kagan (1976). Similar techniques are described by Collier (2001) as 'Indirect Analysis' in visual anthropology, though in contrast to us he does not see the researched as the authors of the images. The visual material acts as a stimulus for dialogue, in the shape of informal interviews, which then generate another link in the chain. Alongside Ghartey, the researchers conducting these informal interviews were mature postgraduate students in a Ghanaian faculty of education and a rural development worker for a Ghanaian NGO. However, they were chosen because they had also spent much of their lives living and working in similar villages. The chain is therefore continued by their discussions of the previous links with the lead researchers. These aimed not only to interpret what had been gathered already, but also to generate further data in the form of narratives derived from the wide experience and understandings of the associate researchers. This then, in turn, was used to link with, make sense of, and extend other data already collected and guide further lines of inquiry.

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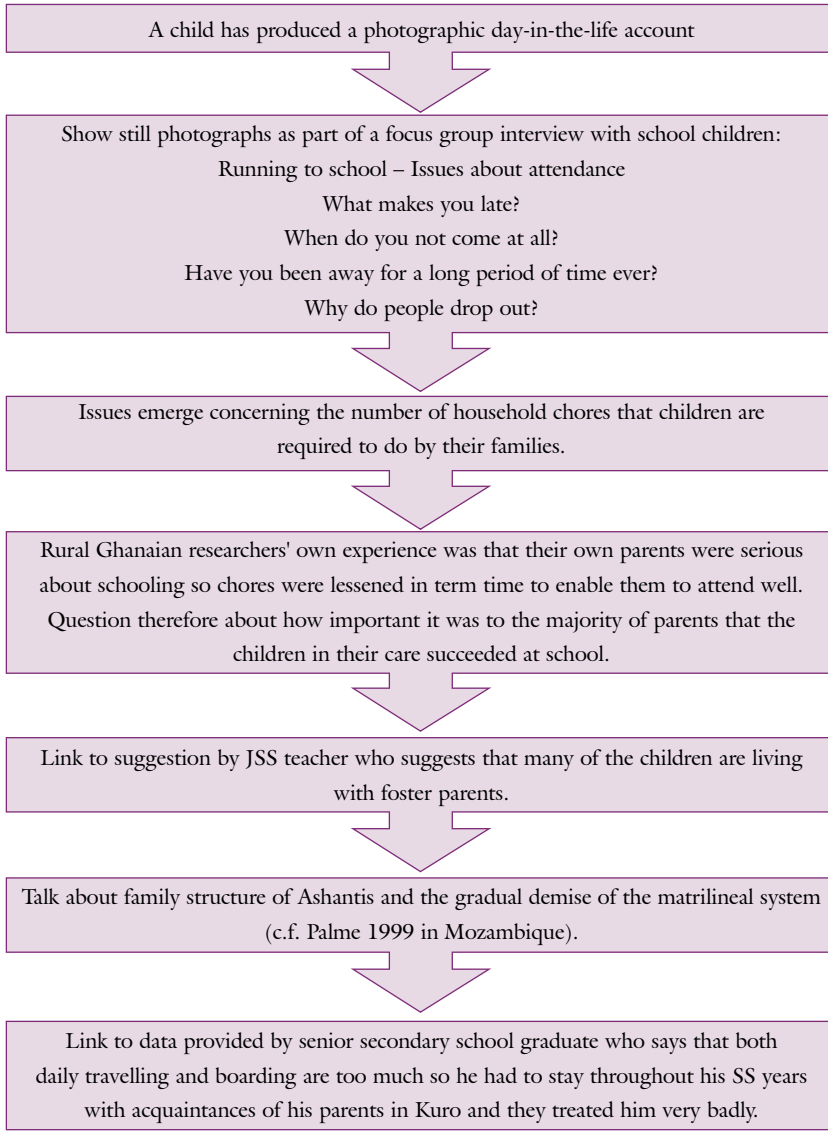
Figure 1

Example of a data chain



We were therefore using the data in a similar way to narrative researchers' use of stories, by seeking resonances with the personal experience of the researchers, though not so much to generate data about other places as to guide reflection on what was happening within the context discussed (c.f. Lenzo 1995).

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The data chain therefore links those who are completely within the cultural setting with those who are outside it. It generates further data from the dialogues in which these two sets of people engage. This idea builds on a long tradition of exploring insider and outsider roles in anthropology and more recently within other traditions of cross-cultural educational research. The associate researchers occupy a position, whereby their identity and the understandings that spring from it are shaped both by their position as postgraduate students and by their experiences and affiliations as members of the culture under study. The collaboration within the data chain seeks to address the central paradox of ethnographic work, that, whilst seeking to present events and practices from the point of view of participants for whom they are familiar, normal and taken-for-granted, we are also wishing to make them sufficiently strange to make them stand out and be perceived.

In practice, this is what research teams in this kind of research have always done. However, by using the device of the data chain we are seeking to make more apparent the blurred boundaries between data and interpretation and to problematise our collective practice. We are also acknowledging and making explicit through this what Brown and Dowling (1998) call the 'epistemological paradox' namely that the process of recontextualisation, - selection, re-presentation, even before subjecting data to analysis - necessarily entails its transformation. Our approach is in no way discordant with ideas that have emerged in ethnography since Geertz's (1973; 1988) books and Marcus and Clifford's (1986) edited collection. However, these ideas have remained outside the educational mainstream and have certainly had no impact within Ghanaian education faculties.

The data chains approach makes concrete the processes that one might go through methodologically: it has an influence on the practicalities of data collection and analysis, and has profound effect on the epistemological stance. It leads on the one hand to what Measor (1985) describes as a feeling of knowing that what is emerging from your data is justified, having gone through a dialogic process of sceptical analysis, whilst on the other hand having to agree with Geertz's (1988) assertion that cultural analysis is always incomplete and that the further you get with the issues you are studying the more the suspicion grows on you that there is yet another side to the story and somehow you are not getting it quite right. The chain is never complete and a link is always left hanging in mid air. Nevertheless we are more confident in our findings as a result of what Stake (1995:85) calls naturalistic generalisations, that is "conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life's affairs or by vicarious experience so well constructed that the person feels as if it happened to themselves." Yet, throughout the process these conclusions have been challenged in our discussions.

2.3 Following the chain – community and education

The data chain that we have summarized in Figure 2.1 was in fact very central to the way that we as a group of researchers developed a part of the text that follows. It drew upon the perspectives of children, teachers and adult members of the village and gave us access to

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important ideas about 'community' within the village.

The chain started with a photograph taken by a school child where they had chosen to show a group of classmates running to school. The next link came from the children discussing the photo and confirming that lateness was an issue for them:

> All of us often come to school late. …

They went on to explain why they were late:

> In the morning I prepare a fire, sweep the house, cook food and dispose of the refuse at a faraway place and this makes me come to school late.
>
> I am the only child in the house and I do all the chores in the morning, fetching water, sweeping, washing the dishes before I realise I am late for school. I walk along the track to school about four kilometres, I set off around 6.30a.m.

They continued by suggesting that for many of the parents their labour was more important than their success at school:

> During the cocoa season some of us are asked by our parents to go for the cocoa grains from the farm before coming to school. This makes us come late.

This led to the reflection of the Ghanaian researchers on their own circumstances. Here, their parents moderated the chores, and put schooling as a high priority, since education was seen as an investment. When considering the data that we had collected around the village, we followed this idea in several directions. However, the next link in this particular chain came from what teachers said about children's home circumstances:

> Most JSS pupils live with foster parents and therefore do a lot of house chores so that they don't have much time for school work.

This was confirmed by what others said. Many of the pupils in the school live with either single parents (mostly mothers alone), and others, especially those in the junior secondary school, do not live with their parents at all, but instead stay with relatives. Some have also moved from the settlements around Akurase to stay with foster parents in order to attend the JSS there. Others have come from much farther afield. This is by no means unusual in Ghana, and is indeed the experience of our research team; it is especially the case with ethnic groups (like the Ashanti) that follow a matrilineal system of inheritance. Under this system children belong to their mothers' family and therefore look for support from a maternal grandfather or uncle. These relationships are often obscured by the use of terms such as brother or sister, mother or father, son or daughter to denote any family member in the same, previous or next generation respectively. With stable populations, this system can work well in that it extends the responsibility and sense of belonging beyond the immediate relations. Despite this, matrilineal practices began to break down under the colonial regime and

managing a nation that incorporates both patrilineal and matrilineal systems has always added complications to making state policy. However, government policy has always been that it is the responsibility of the biological father to provide for a child's education. This has all served to blur the position and, whilst conscientious adults take responsibility for a wide range of children, others are able to shrug off their obligations. In traditional society relations lived close by and children were liable to be visible to both sides of the family. However, with the move toward cash crops, the development of settler communities for agricultural purposes like Akurase, along with the effects of urban migration, families are widely dispersed. Palme (1999) has noted similar problems in Mozambique when a matrilineal culture begins to break down. For poor rural people having children staying with them, especially when they have not bonded emotionally with them feels like quite a burden. Educating them is an expensive business and one that may not provide any return for the investment. Children are expected to work to contribute towards the household to an extent that in some cases they consider to be exploitation.

The data chain has connected up different parts of an ethnographic data set, the reflections of researchers on their own insider knowledge but from outside the specific context, and outsider knowledge derived from the literature. It could be seen that this chain stops at this point. However, our interpretation in this particular instance, that people's orientation to schooling in Akurase is affected by their being caught between traditional social structures which are being gradually eroded and the more universal globalised expectations of a modern state. This has resonances with other aspects of our analysis and so links up with other chains of data. The data chain produced here is an illustration. The issues are picked up in much more detail later on.

2.4 Research questions, data collection and data set

The research questions we were addressing proceeded from the aims of the research as stated in the last chapter. They were as follows:

1. How do children, young people and educators in a Ghanaian rural community choose to represent their lives and educational opportunities?
2. What is the impact of their access to ICTs?
3. What role do they see for ICTs in the development of education and employment in their village?
4. What are potential problems and benefits of ICTs on rural education in developing countries?

As the research took shape we added other community members to our focus in question one.

The data set was collected over the period January 2001 to March 2002, however there are four identifiable phases. A fifth phase is added, as this proved important to the analysis, though the data is rather thin as it was after the project was due to end. The table below shows the periods and the main focus of each phase.

The data set itself consisted of the following:

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Table 1: **Data collection in Akurase**

Phase	Dates	Description	Focus
One:	Jan - March 01	DA project working in Akurase of people's lives	Filming, gaining account
Two:	March - April 01	Intensive data collection period by the *Understandings* team	Participatory research aimed at understandings of schooling
Three:	July- August 01	Second intensive data collection the *Understandings* team	Follow up on phase two data and focus on ICTs. Internet session
Four:	Feb – March 02	Return of DA project workers to Akurase	Completing cultural exchange. Screening material from UK and Ghana, two more internet sessions
Five:	March – July 02	Community activity in Akurase	Emails and letters from teachers

- Uncut digital video footage created by young people and teachers and other community members in the village.
- Informal interviews and discussions collected alongside the video sequences.
- Informal interviews centered on the reactions to media produced from villagers' work.
- Fieldnotes and reflections of the *Understandings* project researchers.
- *Understandings* project team discussions in the field.
- Notes taken during participant and non-participant observation of activities such as lessons and PTA meetings, some videotaped and sessions where villagers used the internet.
- Group interviews and discussions.
- Informal unstructured and semi-structured interviews.
- Letters and emails from village school teachers.

Hand written fieldnotes were probably the largest part of our data set although transcriptions of interviews were also important. Sometimes it was appropriate to used a tape recorder and sometimes not. The Ghanaian researchers had in any case to translate the texts. We used a system whereby what was said by the people in the village was tabulated and reported either as an answer to a direct question (coded DQ), a response to a more indirect probing (IQ) or supplementary information volunteered (SI). Where the researcher had a good enough record of the actual words these were translated as near as possible and placed in inverted commas. An example of an account of a short interaction is in the Appendix 2.

2.5 Problems of data collection

This was essentially quite a small-scale piece of research. In order to fit in with the parameters laid down in the bidding process, both the time scale and the amount of fieldwork were limited.

We had expected the video footage to be a much richer source of data. The main reason why it was not was as already discussed, because the camera never became naturalised in the environment. However, on top of this the main purpose of the people doing the filming was not the collection of ethnographic data. Instead as it was financed under DFID's

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Development Awareness programme, their chief concern was the creation of good quality images for use in the UK and on the internet, so this point could not be pushed. Thus, although the research project was always given good access to the film, the nature of this work was divergent and its priorities were different. Nevertheless, without the help and co-operation of the DA project, very little would have been achieved.

Partly because of these difficulties it would have been better to have allowed longer for the intensive data collection and especially for processing and discussing the data set afterwards with the associate researchers. It would have been better if we had allowed a much longer time scale before returning to the village to collect data on the impact of the ICTs and especially to have built in a phase where we accompanied the DA personnel on phase four. The composition of the *Understandings* research team and the techniques we used did manage to procure rich data when we were in the village. The observations of the DA team were also rich but they found it harder to obtain informal interview data. One of them remarked:

> It has to be said that, even though the villagers have known her (the project co-ordinator) for some time now – she spent three months living in Akurase last year working with them – there is a culture of politeness in Ghana that means no one is going to be rude. It is hard even to get a descriptive comment; there is no tradition of encouraging free thought in pupils.

Finally, we also suffered from a shortage of data in phase five and beyond – hardly surprising since that was not originally planned to be part of the project. It would be worthwhile to return to the village and evaluate the whole experience, as we believe that people's retrospective views would be informative.

Chapter 3 Pupils' perspectives

3.1 Introduction

It is important to realise that there were considerable differences between what different children said and thought about school, some of which could be ascribed to sociological factors such as gender and family background, whilst some were more a question of individual differences. Our data are rather biased towards the older children as, although we talked to children of all ages, conversations in depth tended to be with those attending the JSS.

3.2 Understanding lessons at school

The most obvious thing to say about schooling for a majority of the children is that it is deeply mystifying. A fundamental reason for this is the language policy. At the time of the research this stated that instruction should be in a local language (mother tongue) during the first three years of primary school and then in English, the national language. (This is also discussed under Teachers' Perspectives below). Textbooks, except for those pertaining to Ghanaian language teaching as a subject, are all in English and written work for assessment is also in English. Observation of lessons can suggest initially that there is some degree of understanding as children respond to teachers' questioning with choral responses of "yessir" and some answer individually with single words or short phrases. However, it soon becomes apparent that for most children these are just ritual, cued responses. Any question that invites more than this kind of response is either unanswered or is dealt with by one of a very small group of children. This means that when it is necessary for children to understand (i.e. it is an important procedural matter rather than a curricular one) then business is transacted in Twi. During the time that we were in the village, no conversation that moved beyond ritual greetings was ever conducted in English between any of the research team members and children who had not advanced further than Akurase JSS. A typical response to schooling from one of the girls who had completed JSS over a year ago was to say that when the teachers asked questions in English she could neither understand nor speak English. Even the boy who was said to be the most successful of the current JSS graduates and who said that English was a favourite subject of his, was only able to make sense of television programmes if they were in Twi.

However, observation of lessons where substantial amounts of Twi were used did not suggest much greater comprehension, as the starting point of the lesson was often beyond the majority of the children's understanding. Somewhere along the line, most had got lost, and teaching geared to the curriculum guidelines for that grade did not allow them the opportunity to catch up. Teachers' ideas of whether children have understood a lesson are complicated by the fact that written work and assessment of material even when addressed originally in the local language is in English. We scrutinised a number of exercise books where almost every piece of work was given a zero grade; one indeed showed no understanding of any of the exercises. Much work has shown that teachers' informal assessment of what children have understood in lesson is problematic, even under ideal circumstances (see for example Pryor and Torrance 1999). The idea of using the local

language for greater comprehension but assessing this comprehension using English adds yet another complication.

Given that for almost all the pupils most of the lessons remained meaningless, the key to success appeared to be having notes, which were copied from the chalkboard or a textbook, and which could be learned by 'heart' at home and reproduced in the examination. Thus, it was not just effort at school that counted but extra work and support at home. Alice, another child from JSS3, said:

> I didn't understand English only Twi so I didn't understand most of the subjects that I was doing in school, although I was able to get 28 at the BECE examination. In the evenings I was studying at home with my sister, who also had taken the BECE examination. (Interview)

One of the few English speakers in the village was Albert who was one of the success stories, having just finished senior secondary school in Kuro. He said that when he first started SSS his classmates laughed at him because he couldn't speak English at all, having come from Akurase JSS. In the secondary school they were in principle forbidden to speak Twi on the campus and although this was not rigidly adhered to, there was sufficient English speaking to enable him eventually to catch up. Albert would therefore be in favour of changing the language policy to follow that of private schools where English is the medium of instruction and other communication right from the beginning. This was also endorsed by several of the other older children, for example, Alice who said that although it was better in the long run to use English, in the short term children preferred teachers to use Twi. What emerges very strongly from the children's perspective is that lessons consist mostly of sitting passively doing very little that related to the lesson, especially if they are conducted in English.

3.3 Conflict in school and its causes

When children were asked to say what they did not like about school and to compile a film record of this the most important thing for many of them, especially the girls, was corporal punishment (see appendix 3). It is widely understood that this is now completely illegal though in fact it should be just much more closely regulated than before[5]. Whatever the case, the practice was frequent throughout the schools and children, parents and teachers accepted use of a cane as normal. One mother said, "One of the teachers caned my child who sustained injuries," (Interview). She was angry about the injuries but accepted the beating. Practices observed included teachers caning children when they failed to answer questions as well as being used as a punishment for lateness and unruly behaviour. One aspect that was found especially disturbing by the British members of the team was the fact that young male

[5] 'It is allowed for certain offences and must be administered by the head of the institution or his delegated representative' (C. Ameyaw–Akumfi at that time DG of GES, now Minister of Education) There should be no more than six strokes and details need to be recorded in a book." (Alhassan et al. 2000:1). In their survey of 200 teachers, 75% were in favour of corporal punishment with 30.7% agreeing that 'children change their bad behaviour'; 13.7% that 'this is the only language they understand'; 34.1% that parents flog their children constantly at home; and 18.5% parents demanded that I punish them'.

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teachers were beating girls not many years younger than them. One of these girls (see box 2 below) claimed this as a major reason why she had dropped out.

A frequent cause of conflict with teachers was lateness for school. The main reasons for this was the number of chores that children had to do, especially the fact that collecting water from the bore hole is a standard job and since there are only two in the village, children often have to queue for a long time. Some pupils have to walk a distance of up to four or five kilometres to school daily (Interview). One boy said that many of his fellow students did not wake up early enough to prepare for school. "Some of the pupils stay out late in the night, playing on the street." (Interview) This was a cause of frequent complaints from adults.

Apart from absence, there is a lot of truancy especially at the JSS. Some of this is condoned by parents who require children to work on the farms. But also many of the children are expected to support themselves and most of them do this through farm work for cash in order to provide for their basic needs and school materials. Some boys in the JSS even own farms. However, pupils are also expected to work for the teachers. Every fortnight they are expected to bring firewood to school for the teachers and on Friday afternoons those in the JSS work on the school farm, whose produce is used by the teachers. The children said that some of the teachers select some of the pupils to work on their farms. Work for the teachers was also unpopular with the pupils.

3.4 Girls' Education

Apart from corporal punishment there were other reasons why it appeared harder to complete school as a girl than a boy. To begin with there were very few role models of women teachers – only one teacher in the RC Primary, a kindergarten teaching filling in for a vacancy in the SDA school and no women at all at the JSS. Only two female teachers have been posted to that school in six years and only one of them lasted a whole year. This is a fairly typical situation for rural schools in Ghana (Hedges 2000; see section on posting of teachers below). Although the girls that we spoke to were generally more enthusiastic about school than the boys, they also found it harder to persuade their parents to continue their education. One parent reported that people think it is a waste of time educating females. They say, "The best place for the female is the kitchen." (Interview) (See also box 1).

Things could become especially difficult for girls when they reached adolescence. A few girls had had to leave school because they became pregnant, though according to all the school children we spoke to, young men from the towns who came for funerals, or those who had left school and who lived on their compound were responsible (Group interview). Once girls became pregnant, they did not return to school to complete their education. However, in contrast to the situation reported elsewhere (see especially Leach et al. 2002) no girls complained of molestation by teachers or students.

Pupils' perspectives

Box 1: Case Study of Drop Out

Felicia dropped out of school when she was in JSS1, about 2 years ago. There were several reasons why she left. One of the teachers was always beating her. Her father was not ready to pay for her school materials such as notebooks. Also she was hungry at school because little was provided before going to school and her father only gave her ¢300 (=US$0.04) which was too little for her. She is better fed now that she farms and sometimes makes kenkey (fermented maize) to sell. Felicia would like to go back to school like most of her friends as this might give her a better chance of becoming a seamstress and of 'getting a proper marriage'. However her father is illiterate and her mother dropped out of school in grade 2 and they do not see the point of schooling for girls, so finding the money for materials like textbooks and exercise books would not be possible.

However when asked Felicia's father, Kwame, was at a loss to know why she dropped out of school. He says that 'nobody forced her to stop' and he has no plans of letting her go back again, although she does not help him in farming activities. Felicia is his oldest daughter and is one of two out of seven who are not in school. Three of those who are, live elsewhere. He says that teaching at Akurase is not effective, particularly at the Roman Catholic primary school.

3.5 Non academic opportunities

Despite the fact that the rationale behind the JSS is that it offers vocational education, apart from agriculture the only other subject offered is basketry. The finished work is offered for sale and the profit becomes part of school funds. The one recent female teacher taught needlework, which was very popular especially with the girls, and some time ago, there was also a carpentry teacher. Lack of money for facilities as well as lack of staff is also responsible for the dearth of vocational opportunities.

Teenagers felt there was little social or cultural stimulation in Akurase. There are no festivals in the village partly because it is a settler community rather than a traditional village (see below under community). There is little to do after 6 o'clock, especially if children do not have access to lanterns. Leisure or cultural activity is grouped around funerals, which last for a long time in Ghana, especially amongst the Ashantis. Some children also get involved in church activities. HIV/AIDS has just made an entrance in the village and two deaths have been confirmed. Children at the JSS have knowledge of the disease, how it is spread and how it is prevented, but for those we spoke to, the disease seemed very remote.

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3.6 School fees and poverty

The school fees for basic education are ¢3000 per year ($0.43)[6]. However, there are other fees to pay and exercise books to buy. Repeatedly we heard teachers complaining about parents who did not pay fees and parents complaining that they were too poor to pay them. However, others said that no matter how poor you were, it was always possible to raise the amount of money needed to pay the school fees. It was mentioned at a PTA meeting that a child had been seen to pay the equivalent of a whole year's school fees to request a certain record at a funeral. The important thing to note was that for the children that we spoke to their parents' prompt payment of school fees seemed to have a symbolic value: if the parents cannot pay then that was taken as an indication to all concerned, including the child, that education is not valued (contrast the cases in boxes 2 and 3). Although the school put pressure on children to pay, (the headteacher is personally billed for all the children on the roll if they do not pay) there seemed to be little evidence of children being excluded for non-payment. Instead what happened was a gradual apathy and the child would begin to attend less regularly, as it became obvious that their chances of progressing to a stage where their education might alter their life chances were minimal. They would then drop out and in Akurase JSS the drop out rates are high.

Box 2: Case Study of a Well-Motivated Student

Juliet is 16 and lives with her grandmother in Akurase while the father lives in the Western Region. She is the fourth born of seven children by the same parents. She started schooling in another village in the Ashanti region then moved to her father's home to complete the third grade and has continued school in Akurase ever since. "I hope that at least I can read and write after JSS as I wish to continue schooling and become a teacher." Every morning before she comes to school Juliet has to do the usual house chores for girls of her age such as sweeping and cooking. However she gets up early and her family understands how important it is for her to be on time to school. She is determined to do well at school and is always punctual. She says, "No house chore interrupts my schooling." She is the school's girls' prefect. Unlike many of her friends her fees payment is always very prompt and it is her father who pays. Juliet thinks that teaching and learning go on well in the school and that the teachers teach well. Her favourite subjects are General Science and Religious and Moral Education.

However, it is poverty that makes the crucial difference. The difference between success and failure at BECE can often be a question of being able to work at home. After school children have chores to do and in Ghana it is always dark by 6.30 p.m. Poor families do not have enough money to run more than one lantern and in the absence of electricity this means that children are not able to do homework. Given the fact that pupils do not generally understand the curriculum, teacher absences and the general lack of comprehension of what is going on

[6] There is a range of other fees imposed on children by PTAs, District Assemblies and the school, which might amount to another ¢12000 ($1.71).

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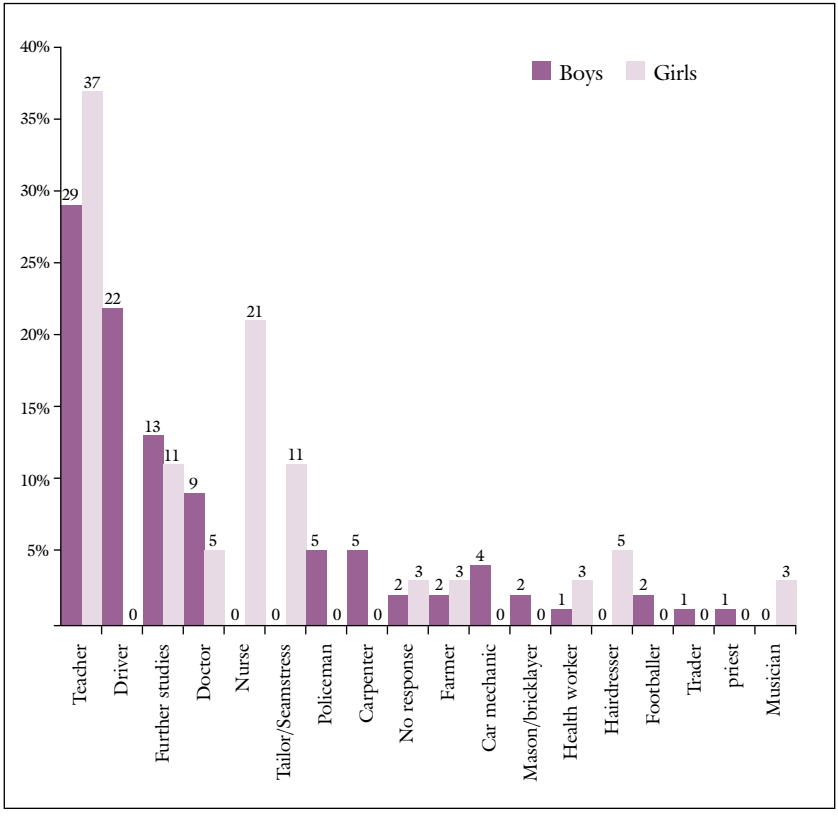
in lessons, the only possibility is for children either to learn by rote or to try and integrate what they have done that day into a wider concept by home study. David, the star student of the current JSS3 attributed his success to home study: "There are three lanterns in the house and my father always provided two of them for the children, so I had one to myself for the evening." Albert explained the fact that he worked so much better in Kuro was not only because of better teaching but also due to availability of electric light, which enabled him always to find some place where he could see.

Moreover the poverty and unattractiveness of rural areas, even of small towns like Kuro, mean that the few who reach senior secondary school are still handicapped by a catch-22 situation that makes it difficult for them to go to university. If they achieved really good marks they might have some chance of attracting a sponsor, but even the most successful like Albert have to consider C and D grades good, rather than the As and Bs that are achieved in more well endowed schools in Kurokese.

3.7 Job Aspiration

Figure 2: **Percentage of children in Akruase JSS aspiring to different jobs**



Pupils' perspectives

We asked all the children in the first two years of the JSS (82 boys and 38 girls = 120 in total) what they wanted to do when they left school. This was a very informal survey done partly to generate some independent evidence about how well they could write very simple English. The recent article by King and Martin (2002) dealing with a similar subject and replicating classic work from the 1960s by Foster (1965) provides an interesting contrast and had it appeared before we undertook our survey we would have gone into a little more detail, especially since our sample was very different from their group of elite Ghanaian senior secondary students. In particular it would have been interesting to know not only what the students would like to do but also what they expected to do. However, in contrast to King and Martin (2002), the children in Akurase were given a completely open choice. The results are shown on *figure 2*. The majority of professions chosen might represent realistic aspirations for those children who manage to finish JSS. However some of the more popular choices - teacher, doctor and nurse - might only be available to at most two or three children, especially since only a very few students (so far a maximum of five per year) actually go from the Akurase JSS to senior secondary school in Kuro or elsewhere.

3.8 Secondary schooling

In order to look at this in more detail the case of Albert is instructive. His parents are subsistence farmers though his father has also worked as a trader. Albert had been able to go through the Catholic Primary School, the Akurase JSS and after a very low pass in his BECE (Basic Education Certificate of Education) had become one of three Akurase children in the SSS at Kuro in his year group, the others being girls. "When we were in JSS2, we were asked to write about our future careers and I stated that I would be a medical doctor. I felt I had interest in General Science, but the results in BECE did not qualify me to take the General Science programme so I had to study Agricultural Science." The journey to Kuro costs ¢1000 (=$0.14) each way and the boarding costs are high so in order to attend the school Albert stayed throughout the three years with different friends of his parents in Kuro. He paid for his boarding and lodging by doing various work and domestic chores for them. He said that they often mistreated him and life was not easy but it was worthwhile to complete his schooling.

At first it was hard for the rural children to compete with the children from Kuro but eventually Albert was recognised as one of the best and was expected to do relatively well in his final examination. Albert would like to read Agricultural Science at the University; however, his choice of subjects at SSS might not qualify him for this, partly because the relevant teachers were unavailable at the school in Kuro. He would therefore like to train for 3 years, teach for two or three years and then he might have to change some of his subjects, pass examinations in them and be able to go to University. However, he needs to raise a considerable sum to be able to register for classes and he is not sure how he will be able to raise the money. His parents have supported him very well so far but they do not have that kind of money. His only hope is a relative working as an electrician in London, but he is already paying for his cousin to go through University. Albert can be seen both as a success

and a failure. He is successful in that he has managed to achieve a great deal more educationally than his peers from Akurase do, but in terms of realising his potential he falls well short. As can be seen it has not been easy for him, but the fact that his parents have given him as much support as he can legitimately expect is important.

3.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, children from a village like Akurase, who do succeed academically, apart from intelligence, show a combination of great persistence and single-mindedness. They also need a good deal of support from family members. For the others, their time in school is spent waiting for something to happen – a sports day or a cultural activity always brings much higher attendance. At the end few are literate in English, the only language that they are liable see in print and even fewer can converse in that language orally. Neither the interactions nor the outcomes do anything to encourage the sense of agency that would help them to be the active citizens that the country claims to be wanting, instead it is continuing the education for underdevelopment that the colonial administration introduced (Rodney 1971; Pryor 1998). This is an issue that is picked up below.

Concern at high dropout rates must be tempered by looking at the situation from the child's perspective. Real returns to education only seem to accrue if one is able to progress to something beyond Akurase. Why bother to continue for nine years or more when one could cut one's losses by dropping out early? The majority of the children could hardly learn less outside than in school. In fact through informal apprenticeship the majority would learn a great deal more and through their farming activities they have no doubt gained much useful knowledge, which because of the strong classification dividing school from outside knowledge is not considered legitimate in school (Bernstein 1996). Even with the knowledge that is claimed to be the province of the school the situation is problematic, since completing nine years of English instruction does not guarantee the ability to converse in that language.

3.10 Summary

- Most children are unable to follow the main 'text' of school lessons, which is constructed by the teacher assisted by one or two higher achieving pupils and by ritual responses from the rest of the class.
- Understanding is especially bad when English is used, as most children cannot speak more than a few basic phrases.
- Most children do not follow schoolwork because they do not possess the understanding from previous work that is a prerequisite for the syllabus of the higher grades of primary school and junior secondary school.
- Corporal punishment is frequent, routine and not administered according to official guidelines. Though accepted as normal, it is very unpopular with children.
- Some children's schooling is interrupted by migration and lack of clarity over whose responsibility their schooling is.

Pupils' perspectives

- Payment of school fees acts as a symbol for children that their parents value their education.
- Remaining in school is especially difficult for girls as they often receive less support from parents.
- Poverty is a strong constraint on children's success in basic education, though still most of those who are relatively well off in the village fail to achieve good results.
- Facilities (especially light) and support for home study are a crucial factor in the success of the small number of children who are able to benefit from village schooling.
- Even where children perform relatively well, lack of facilities and opportunities in rural schools prevent children from gaining both vocational skills and academic advancement.
- Children see the amount of household chores as a constraint on school learning.
- Work on farms is used to supplement children's income. For some this provides extra cash, for others it supports their basic needs and enables them to continue in schooling.
- Children are expected to provide payment in kind in the form of farm labour and firewood for the teachers. This is also unpopular but accepted by most children.
- Children in Akurase choose to drop out or attend infrequently, because they can see few real returns to basic schooling.
- Teenagers find little social or cultural stimulation in Akurase and are keen to leave the village.

Chapter 4 Teachers' perspectives

4.1 Teachers' attitudes

Teaching in Akurase is not easy. Whatever their orientation to local life the poor results obtained by the schools make it very difficult for teachers to maintain any sense of professionalism and pride in their work. They adjust by having very low expectations of the children and practising a culture of blame. Teachers bemoaned children's lack of interest in schoolwork and their indiscipline and accused the parents of neglect. The JSS teachers excused their poor results by saying that the children when they arrived from the primary schools were unable to do the basic tasks that would enable them to access the JSS curriculum. Despite sometimes taking up the rhetorical position that literacy and numeracy led to a better life in any situation, when pushed, the general conclusion of most of them was that their efforts to provide a good education for children in Akurase were doomed to failure. Only for those who managed to get beyond the village, amongst whom they expected their own children to be placed, was it of any real use. The value of schooling is therefore much higher for those who will live their lives in cities and towns than for those children who will stay in Akurase and villages like it.

4.2 Teaching in the village

With the exception of one man in each of the primary schools and several in the JSS the teachers in Akurase are elderly by Ghanaian standards. Some are locally born, but mostly they come from more developed areas and have taken on the local lifestyle, usually by marrying locally and creating their own farm. Others have become embittered and apathetic and drown their sorrows in drink. This conforms to the wider national picture where the majority of teachers come from urban areas, whereas most of the population (some 70%) are rural Thus, given the great difference in levels of development between town and countryside most teachers posted to villages are entering an unfamiliar setting.

There is only one established female teacher in Akurase. She was originally posted to Kuro. Her husband, a struggling pharmacist in Accra, discovered that there was no pharmacy in Akurase and saw this as a business opportunity. He moved to the village to join his wife and encouraged her to request a transfer to the village school. She regrets moving, as the children in Kuro were much more receptive to teaching. According to her, parents of children in Kuro are much more interested in the schooling of their children than parents in Akurase. There was a female teacher some years ago posted to the JSS but she was unhappy in the village and managed to arrange to be posted elsewhere. It is unusual for female teachers to be posted to truly rural areas; indeed the national posting guidelines for 1997 stipulated that no woman was to be sent to a remote area. Akurase would probably be interpreted as such.

The three younger teachers at the JSS who were interviewed expressed indignation at their posting to Akurase. They were expecting to teach in urban towns or at least a village where the children performed better, but certainly not Akurase. They were surprised about the very poor academic performance of children at Akurase. These young teachers who had been at

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the village for barely two years did not intend staying for long. The gave the following as their main reasons:

(i) Lack of basic social amenities like pipe-borne water, electricity and the possibility of communication with the world beyond the village.
(ii) Community's poor attitude to schooling
(iii) Difficult economic and social conditions
(iv) Pupils' attitude to schooling and their poor performance of pupils.
(v) Pursuance of further education.

4.3 Absenteeism

The headteacher knew very well that some of his teachers were not happy about their posting to his school and that at the least opportunity they would leave the school but did not agree with them. Asked whether he liked Akurase, he said "Really I am happy here. What I know is life can't make it by itself but how you make it". He felt that planning one's life very well really matters whether one is in Akurase or Kurokese. According to him "when you don't plan well it (life) will be meaningless to you. The place will be nothing to you or if you are in Kurokese and you don't use your life profitably you will by all means be in difficulties" He agreed that "It is true that there are no economic opportunities here but what I know if you get to a place and study the environment, you have to adapt". The headteacher seems to have adapted first by having his family at Akurase and secondly having a farm, which provides enough food for him and his family. The young teachers are however not prepared to adapt. According to the headteacher the two youngest teachers "don't intend to marry and raise families here in Akurase." One is already married, the other engaged, with both women studying in colleges several hours travel away. Also those young teachers had told the headteacher that they could not involve themselves in farming, as they had no background in rural life. So they use some of the little money they receive as salaries to buy food as well as for travel away at weekends to see their families and relations.

The field notes of those who were based in the village for a long time reveal that these teachers at the JSS left the village most Fridays and when they did, were almost always absent on a Monday. Similarly, public holidays were also unofficially extended. However an interesting observation is that this had a less marked effect on actual attendance than it might have had, since within the JSS where there are specialist teachers and so the absence of one teacher does not necessarily mean that a whole day's tuition is lost. On one Monday during the period of intensive data collection occasion, the absence of a mathematics teacher was covered by the headteacher taking a social studies lesson instead. Nevertheless, teachers did not contradict the pupils' suggestion that putting on a substitute lesson was a very unusual eventuality and that this one was for our benefit, as we had asked to observe teaching and none was taking place.

When questioned about absenteeism, the teachers pointed to the fact that it was very difficult to maintain their relationships with wives and fiancées, if they did not take this extra time

away. The remoteness of the village meant that travel times were long and unless they took this extra day they were liable to spend most of the time travelling. Moreover, there were all sorts of other things to attend to in their lives, which could not be achieved at weekends and, because there were no communication facilities in the village, could therefore only be done when they were in the town. The attention of these teachers is therefore necessarily divided between their commitment to teaching at Akurase and maintaining the other aspects of their lives.

This practice of extended weekends is also noted by Hedges (2002:43), who states that amongst his sample of newly qualified teachers, it was considered almost a right. This is linked to what he notes as 'a sense of entitlement, common among urban Ghanaians, that they have a right to a certain lifestyle, which rural communities find difficult to accommodate.' The examples of these young men illustrate this well. They are in an alien environment and separated from their actual or potential spouses at a time when they are most likely to be distracted by alternative partners.

However, it would be wrong to ascribe all the teacher absenteeism to the younger urban teachers. All teachers would have things to do in the towns (such as collecting their salary). This was also true for the headteachers, though they were able to work the system by using opportunities when they were expected to report to the District Office to accomplish other business. The settled teachers had also taken to farming. This is one way of supporting themselves and their families. However, it also meant that sometimes they would go to farm early in the morning before attending classes. They would therefore go to school late and were already tired before the normal classroom work starts. On days when it rained particularly during the planting season they sometimes found it more profitable working on their farms throughout the whole day than teaching in the classroom.

The frequent absence of teachers has obvious implications for the performance of the school. Casely-Hayford (2000) noted even worse attendance by teachers in her case study in the Northern Region and indeed, she suggested that it was the main reason for the low quality of education provided by the schools. Fobih et al. (1999) found that absenteeism was a national phenomenon, though did not have the data to quantify it accurately or account for it.

4.4 Supervision

The task of supervision in Akurase as elsewhere fell very heavily on the headteachers, since circuit supervisors related mainly to heads. As Hedges (2002) notes, the idea of a probationary period for newly posted teachers as set out in GES (1998) regulations is in many cases a mere bureaucratic formality given the lack of supervision of Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) and the shortage of teachers. The District Director of Education did in fact visit the village while we were there, but this was the first time he had done so and it was generally acknowledged that it was our presence that was responsible.

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The poor attendance might therefore be laid at the door of the headteachers. Indeed poor supervision and support are reported a great deal in the literature (e.g. Asare-Bediako 1995; Quansah 1997; Agarwal and Hartwell 1998) Chapman et al. (2002:187) identify the crucial role of headmasters (sic) in school effectiveness but suggest that a main constraint was caused by their lack of training for a wider role and especially in the political aspects of working with communities:

> One of the current ironies of educational development is that the push toward decentralization…shifts more responsibilities to the group of educational administrators [i.e. headteachers] least ready to accept it (Chapman 2000:187).

In Akurase although the three heads seemed to cover a range of awareness, efficiency and grasp of the implications of their job, particularly in the case of the JSS headteacher who had to cope with the long week-enders, incompetence did not seem to be the main problem. Rather it was that the exigencies of the situation he was in that made the supervisory position so difficult. Similar problems would exist for other rural headteachers. Dealing with the issue of the absenteeism of teachers is a case in point. We identified three main difficulties:

- the social costs of strict enforcement of the rules;
- fear of losing staff; and
- fear of compromising one's own position.

Whilst their urban colleagues will have a reference group of family and friends from a similar economic and background readily on hand, headteachers in the village are likely to have to rely on the teachers who work under them for this kind of interaction. So, the headteacher of the JSS would often refer to younger members of staff as 'my friend Mr X'. Whilst he might also be annoyed about the fact that they made good use of their extra days and unofficial week end, the social costs to him of persistent reprimands and reporting to the district would have been very high.

Also, village schools in Ghana are not in a very strong position with respect to teacher recruitment. 18 percent of all primary school posts nationally are unfilled, and in some districts the figure rises to over 40 percent (Hedges 2002). In Akurase, there was a full complement of teachers, but amongst these were some untrained (pupil) teachers. For example, the wife of the headteacher, who would otherwise have been involved in the kindergarten, taught one of the primary school classes. The JSS, like many others in similar situations, had experienced teachers whose posting sometimes did not last the whole academic year and who were not quickly replaced. If the cost of actually having a teacher in post was the condoning of their unofficial absenteeism then this was a small price to pay.

The third point is that within bureaucratic systems, it is often not a good idea to attract attention to what is happening on one's own patch. This was one reason why the headteachers in Akurase were not keen to be complaining about their staff to the district office. The condoning of absenteeism is not confined to the school level and official

complaints would only involve more unpleasant work for the office. One of the headteachers also said that if he did so it was possible that the teacher would 'badmouth' him to the educational authorities. This suggests that he did not feel too confident about having his own management too closely scrutinised.

In this issue therefore the deficit is structural. It would take not just a competent headteacher but also an exceptionally determined one in a very strong social position to be able to attempt adequate supervision of teachers. Even if this attempt were made there is little guarantee that the teachers would not just leave their posts.

4.5 Posting - Teachers as rural or urban

In spite of the fact that the government of Ghana is committed to decentralization and community participation in education, none of the local stakeholders, children, parents, headteachers, teachers, SMCs, has any control over posting. The District Office of the GES in principle can decide which school to send a teacher to but in practice if they transfer someone away from a remote area they will have great difficulty filling the post. For a teacher who does not want to teach in this area, the notion that poor performance would be accorded the sanction of being moved might actually encourage them to absenteeism and poor practices. When this fails to take them out of the village it leads to frustration and some teachers take to alcohol, as was the case of the two teachers in Akurase.

Nevertheless, teachers had in the past managed to ensure that they moved away from uncongenial placements and this still seems to happen a great deal in many rural areas. The system of bonding which once held newly qualified teachers to four years in one posting was first eroded by inflation and then abolished, though the policy is to re-introduce it. Also, there are plans to connect this to a system whereby student teachers are sponsored by districts and are then expected to work in that district after they have finished their training. Hedges (2000), who studied the movements of 23 newly qualified teachers discovered that over half of the 17 who had been posted to rural schools had moved away by the end of the first year and only one woman remained longer than this. By contrast all those posted to non-rural schools were still in place in their third year. The means to do this variously ranged from using bribery and influence, to the purchase of illegally photocopied cards posting teachers to Accra. Hedges (2002:26) reports that teachers who break the posting rules usually get things normalised, a system, which he describes as "rewarding deviance or manipulation and undermining professionalism."

The young teachers at the JSS intended to find ways of getting a posting elsewhere at the earliest opportunity but were already in their second year in the school. There was a palpable difference between these teachers and those who had settled there in the way that they dressed. Whilst all of them were quite smartly dressed for lessons, they talked about the importance of 'setting an example' to the pupils, the settled teachers out of school were

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indistinguishable from other residents of the village at other times. The younger teachers however, never seemed to adopt country clothing and always dressed in a way more suitable for the city than the village. Through their dress and demeanour they seemed to be at pains to emphasise their distance from village life. Through their dress and their posture they were able to reconstruct their identities as educated urban outsiders and maintain the distinction between themselves and the rural world that they sought to hold at arm's length. This embodiment of social position and identity has many parallels in other cultures (Bourdieu 1984). This was also expressed directly through what they said about their dislike of conditions in the village and also indirectly by the fact that they were always at pains to describe everything in Akurase using a third rather than a first person possessive: 'their village', 'their farms' even 'their school'.

Again this is a phenomenon that has been recognised elsewhere. Hedges (2002) describes a similar disdain for everything rural in his study of newly qualified teachers and Roberts in the 1960s a noted the teachers' fear of becoming a 'village man' and all that that implied.

If urban teachers are so unenthusiastic about teaching in rural schools one might argue that it would be better to try to recruit rural people. The problem with this is that in fact relatively few of those coming forward for training live in rural areas. This is obviously partly a result of the poor results achieved in the villages, which mean that very few of the children from Akurase would ever progress far enough to apply for teacher training. Moreover, there seems to be some loss of face in returning to the village once one has succeeded educationally (see discussion under Community Perspectives). Therefore having made the hard transition through Senior Secondary School (SSS) to training college, coming back to the village as a teacher would be an uninviting prospect. The Teacher Education Division of the GES under the poverty alleviation programme is organising access courses specifically for female students who want to enter teacher training college. Districts that have vacancies for teachers have been asked to sponsor these female students. The teachers will be under bond for a minimum of three years to teach anywhere in the district after completion of their training. The policy of district sponsorship may ameliorate the situation and it may also widen the access of pupils who have sufficient attainment but not sufficient finances to train as teachers (c.f. the case of Albert under Pupils' Perspectives.). However, it remains to be seen whether the posting and the bond can actually be enforced.

A further way in which local people can enter teaching is as pupil teachers. Usually these people have been to SSS but have not entered teacher training college. This may not necessarily be because they did not achieve good enough results. The entry requirement for teacher training is quite low and a review of the applications of current applicants and their performance in the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations reveals that most of them obtained just the minimum passes. For some of those who passed to enter teacher training college, their financial status may be the limiting factor. There were some pupil

teachers in the Akurase schools but from the way that they talked and their engagement with workshop activities it was not easy to tell them apart from the trained teachers. Other researchers have also found this although Akyeampong (2001) found otherwise.

One way in which most of the older teachers appeared to differ from the other members of the village community was the fact that they did not send their children to the schools where they taught. Instead, the children of the teachers and those of the Chair of the SMC formed the largest part of the small group of children who went every day in a taxi to Kuro for private schooling. The headteacher of the JSS has one child that was too young for school but had lodged another with a relation so that she could attend a private kindergarten. His two nephews also attended a primary school in Akurase when he first came but he decided the sacrifice of sending them to Kurokese was worthwhile since they made so little progress in the village.

He ascribes the superiority of private schools to two things: first, the freedom from the language policy so that at all the private schools he knows there is an English only policy even for interaction in the compound between children. Thus they know how to understand and talk in English and are able to use the textbooks. This issue is taken up in the next section. The second reason given by this headteacher was the way the schools are run. Headteachers/proprietors employ almost exclusively untrained teachers but they are interviewed before being taken on so that their English is put to the test. Once in post, although they are paid less than the state schoolteachers, their performance is strictly monitored and if it is not satisfactory, they are dismissed.

This opinion accords well with research findings (e.g. Quansah 1997). Not surprisingly given the example set by those who might know most about education, a similar view of private schools was held by everyone who mentioned them in the village, a theme we take up in the community perspectives chapter.

4.6 Medium of Instruction

Government policy at the time of the data collection[7] supported by research is that the first three years of instruction in public primary schools must be by means of the local language. On the other hand, private schools in Ghana use English exclusively as the medium of instruction and this is popularly seen as one reason for the much greater success of pupils in these schools despite their lack of trained teachers. Hedges (2002) notes that the NQTs he interviewed in Central Region were all of the opinion that English as a medium of instruction from Primary 1 was the best idea and some were in schools where it was being put into practice. The language policy is unpopular with the villagers at Akurase. It came out clearly that many teachers and most parents in the village do not take kindly to the policy

[7] This policy was recently rescinded by the MOE. However, there is liable to be some time lag before practices on the ground change.

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that the local language (Twi) should be used in teaching at the lower primary. This is because they expect their children to "rattle" (speak fluently) English and not to speak the local language both in school and out of school. Speaking English, as much as reading and writing, is the sign of an educated person. At the PTA/SMC meeting a parent wondered, "Even untrained teachers who teach in the private schools are able to teach the pupils to understand and speak English." A kindergarten teacher in the village, whose children attend a private school at Kuro, observed that "before the children left the Akurase school, they felt shy to speak English but now they even don't want to speak Twi in the home. When they come on holidays, they prefer speaking English at home." Most parents see the language policy as not being helpful to their children. In Ghana, printed materials such as newspapers, official and legal documents, repair manuals, forms and even school textbooks are almost exclusively in English. As one parent said ruefully, "I kept my elder son on through JSS and he cannot speak any English. I sent his brother off to Ahenkuro to work as a shoe shiner and he is now learning to speak English well."

From the teachers' perspective the issue of medium of instruction is difficult. Ghanaian languages are seen as for oral communication only, as most of the teachers can neither read nor write the local languages. The situation is compounded by the fact that our interaction with some of the teachers showed that they were scarcely able to make themselves understood well enough orally in English to conduct a coherent lesson.

Where the language policy is adhered to what happens is that a lot of the local language is spoken in the class but the written exercises that form the backbone of the lesson are in English. Transition within the lesson is therefore poor and leaves most pupils in a confused state if they ever expected to understand the lesson anyway. In such a situation pupils who have most access to English – this includes those who go to private schools where the policy is only English right from kindergarten, stand a better chance of being able to read and understand exercises, which are given in English.

The advantages of mother tongue teaching have been well rehearsed in the literature and undoubtedly point in most countries to starting school with a mother tongue. Resistance to this policy is not only a Ghanaian feature (Diallo 2001). However, Ghana has peculiar circumstances, which make it different, the most important of which are that literacy in a local language has very little 'use value' and almost no 'exchange value' as access to printed materials in Ghana and the modern world involves literacy in English.

Suppression of local languages is historically linked with imperialism and the suppression of indigenous cultures. However, as Tikly (2001) points out, the situation in post-colonial countries generally with respect to language is not straightforward. He quotes Pennycook

(1995) who claims that although the status of English has acted hegemonically it can also work in the opposite direction as counter hegemonic discourses tend to be 'formed in English' (Pennycook 1995:72). The problem with understanding lessons taught in school may not necessarily be due to the medium of instruction but the manner in which the teacher delivers the lessons in class.

4.7 Views of educational processes and the capacity for improvement

As part of the data collection process and also as a payment to the development awareness project, the two lead researchers facilitated two workshops for teachers in Akurase and neighbouring schools, which also feed into the Akurase JSS. Appendix 1 shows a booklet that we produced from the first workshop and which was used to structure discussion in the second.

The structure of the workshops was based on work we have done with teachers in Cape Coast (see Akyeampong et al. 1999 for an account). We found the teachers in Akurase very much slower and more lacking in confidence. Language was a problem and, while it was possible to conduct all the work in the urban setting in English, here it was necessary to resort to Twi as well[8]. However, even when language was not a problem, teachers found it difficult to discuss. They were slow to engage with issues and when asked to discuss issues in small groups, they would copy down items from the programme or copy down the question. Despite the fact that all of their education has been in English and they were being required to report back in English, all their discussions were in Twi. Given that a recurrent theme of their discussion was about the importance and necessity of getting children to converse in English in lessons, there was a certain irony in this.

When we did get the teachers to talk about their ambitions and motivations for teaching we found that they were prone to talk within the two frames that Jessop and Penny (1998) identify from their work in South Africa and the Gambia. On the one hand they were very concerned with the instrumental issues (concern with salary, results, status, free time etc.)[9]. On the other, their discourse was situated in the relational frame where they talked of their mission in terms of devotion, caring, influence, and encouragement. However, it must be said that of these two frames by far the preponderant one was the instrumental. Indeed, almost all the conversation that took place with teachers outside the workshop and which was relevant to this research was about the problems of practising as a teacher in the difficult circumstances of Akurase. The most important of these – the indifference of the community, the low standards of the children and the lack of amenities in the village -we have discussed elsewhere. However, within the workshop we addressed the issue of what their ideas were about a good teacher and the second frame came into action. Examples of this were:

[8] An example of the level of English of some teachers might be seen from this evaluation comment written after a workshop "I have learnt are to teach well. To perform very well from now going."

[9] Interestingly Hedges (2002) also found that all his newly qualified teacher informants were concerned with instrumental issues to the exclusion of all others.

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> You must have good human relationship.
> You are a role model and the community is watching you.
> You must not insult the children.
> A good teacher should be punctual and regular at school.
> You should be sociable, cordial and tolerant … teacher should be sociable so that the children go to him and ask any question that he wants to ask.
> … be neat and active.

However mixed in with this we also found examples of talk about specific practices, for example:

> You can tell a good teacher by his preparation of lesson notes. Before a teacher can teach effectively, he must always have his lesson notes prepared. If your lessons are not prepared and you don't have teaching aids for the lesson you can't teach effectively.

> You need to give exercises and mark them accordingly. After teaching you have to give exercises and mark them whenever the children finish work so that you can know their understanding of the topic taught.

> You must have much time for the weaker pupils. In fact, some children are brighter than others and as such, you should have much time for the weaker ones so that they can also be brought up.

> Give homework to occupy them. Even yesterday when I was going to greet a certain man, there were many children on the street dancing to music. Even when the operator announced the presence of some teachers there the children refused to go home. If they were given homework, they may not be there. We should give them homework to occupy them.

> Visit pupils at home to know their problems. When pupils absent themselves and come to school the following day, we just beat them. We don't know why they didn't come to school. We must visit their homes to know their problems.

Jessop and Penny (1998:398-9) found the discourse of teachers problematic, suggesting "that teachers lacked a professional language for talking about pedagogy." However such a comment seems to be based on the assumption that there is a universally accepted language for talking about pedagogy and begs the question of whose professional language we are talking about. We would agree with Jessop and Penny that these positions may be more complex than appears. Their suggestion that potentially successful development work lies in a 'missing frame', which contains words such as action, meaning, ownership, understanding, curriculum, reflection, learning, dialogue is also helpful.

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However, the second set of examples above taken from the first workshop seem to illustrate the problematics of locating the third frame with respect to rural Ghanaian teachers. They are ostensibly a mixture of the instrumental and relational frames. Yet our data show that when the teachers talked about their experiences they were actually able to focus on very important professional issues relating to teaching and learning, but tend to do so in a way that did not use Jessop and Penny's suggested words.

In the second workshop we therefore asked the teachers to talk about the desiderata that had been identified in the first one four months previously. What was particularly difficult was to get the teachers to go beyond a recital of bland generalities about what was good or bad teaching. Moreover, as long as they persisted to do this the atmosphere of the workshop remained very low key and the discussion muted. It was only when, after we persistently asked them to be more specific, to give an example and to 'tell a story' that the discussion became more heated and the workshop appeared to benefit them. The response was mixed, as it was obvious that some teachers had not actually thought much about the issues and indeed some in the outlying village schools had not received the booklet, which had been intended to prompt them. However, others gave examples of having started new topics at a much more basic level as a result of assessing pupils' understanding before jumping into the lessons at the prescribed level and trying to teach what was in the text book[10]. The most striking and convincing stories that were told in the workshop were by the younger teachers in the JSS. The main intervention of all three was about attempting to create an atmosphere that was more conducive to pupil participation. They did this by refraining from 'insulting children when they do not get things right' and by punishing pupils who made fun of anybody who tried to contribute orally in class. One of them spoke also of getting the pupils to 'talk to their colleagues'.

There was a good deal of appreciation for the story telling aspect of the workshop contained in the evaluations made by the teachers. They talked of "enjoy[ing] the way the questions were being asked and the contributions made by the teachers", and "I have decided to use some methods given by individual teachers".

When they were given opportunities to explain themselves they were actually using words that had relevance and meaning to their experiences of the curriculum. This occurred when they were asked to relate their discussion explicitly to what happened in their classrooms, and yielded the most encouraging results. Important too was the fact that they were put into dialogue with each other. It was clear that they spent little time talking about teaching and learning in the normal occurrence of events and so needed structured activities to begin to develop a professional discourse. In doing this it is important to begin with both the understandings of professional practice and the vocabulary that are familiar to the teachers.

[10] Unfortunately the tape recording of this workshop was not sufficiently clear for transcription so we have relied on fieldnotes.

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There might be many possibilities for improvement if curriculum developers rather than attempting to subvert these, seek to extend them and enter into dialogue with them. Thus, by locating discussion of educational issues in teachers' lived experience, ideas from either the relational or the instrumental frame can be explored in terms of the practices that constitute and exemplify them. Teachers need more opportunities to learn from each other. This is not just a question of making them have workshops but the nature of the workshops needs to involve genuine sharing of and analysis of experiences.

It would be naïve to claim that these workshops had any long-term effect. However the enthusiasm of the participants, teachers from low attaining schools in a low attaining district, would suggest that it was important that greater recognition in the form of this kind of INSET might yield very positive results. It is difficult to make improvements when you feel that you are in a neglected backwater and that the little you do is of any import to those in authority.

4.8 Changes to the Village Teachers' Condition?

As a coda to this chapter on teachers' perspectives, it is worthwhile emphasising that many of the themes we have noted have echoes in the work of Roberts (1975). Hedges (2002) who alerted us to this paper, notes that there are three main areas of change since Roberts's day:

- The emergence of GES as the organising body for schooling
- Greater roles for parental feedback to schools through PTAs, SMCs and SPAMs
- Women being posted to rural areas.

Our data would suggest that as far as the people on the ground are concerned, the impact of all three is rather limited. Thus, we can see that the issues confronting rural teachers now are very similar to those faced by their predecessors some 30 – 40 years ago. An important methodological point is therefore why this important work is largely unknown and appears to have had little effect on policy. We can only surmise that it was largely ignored because it was micro-scale case study, and was not therefore in the views of mainstream development literature sufficiently reliable. Nevertheless, it made points that it took larger scale research decades to reproduce.

4.9 Pedagogy

As we have already indicated in the chapter on pupil perspectives the style of teaching observed in the schools in Akurase was very similar to what one might expect from acquaintance with the literature on teaching in sub-Saharan Africa. Lessons were highly teacher centred, ritualistic and when there was any interaction this was focused on a small group of more highly attaining pupils. The workshops suggested that participating teachers recognise the benefit of pedagogy which is not based on the 'banking' notion of education, whereby knowledge can be deposited with the children to be retrieved when needed (Freire 1970). However, none of our data pointed to teachers making frequent use of pedagogy that was not very teacher focused. Teacher centred learning seems to be the easy way out in

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teaching children, most of whom cannot be engaged in any meaningful verbal interactions in English or even in Twi on topics in the curriculum. Most teachers, particularly at the JSS, therefore dictate notes and explain them to the pupils despite the fact that this is not a practice that the teachers themselves consider to be ideal. The second reason that tends to perpetuate this practice is embedded in the way of life of African people. The fear of the teacher as an elder and the respect accorded him/her as one who is very knowledgeable in the subject(s) he/she teaches coupled with the fact that traditionally adults are always right in relation to children, makes the use of teacher centred methods of teaching look quite normal. The arrangement of tables and chairs or desks in the classrooms makes it very difficult for teachers to promote group activities. Thus most of the communication and other interactions occur between the teacher and the entire class of students. The view that knowledge is a social construction and that the learner plays an active role in the construction of such knowledge (Tabulawa 1997) is rarely recognised. Even where there are semblances of this practice, it occurs by accident rather than deliberately.

One of the most important preparations a teacher makes before delivering a lesson in class is the preparation of lesson notes, which are marked by the headteacher. Unfortunately, as in most schools, teachers in Akurase do not follow the lesson plans they have drawn up. Sometimes, the notes are completely ignored during lesson delivery. In none of the lessons observed did the teachers look through their lesson notes. Preparation of lesson notes is therefore a formality, which has to be followed. In an English class at the JSS, the teacher used the English textbook only. A look at his lesson plan shows that there were some important things he had written in his lesson plan, which he did not do with his pupils.

In addition, it was observed that the teachers do not follow the timetable for the school. Whereas there were 7 periods for the primary school each day of 30 minutes duration each, at best only two or three periods are fully utilised by the primary school teachers. The experience of the research team as well as the Ghanaian literature suggest that this is practice is widespread and not limited to the schools at Akurase (Quansah 1997; Fobih et al. 1999; Akyeampong et al. 1999). The weak supervision of teachers at Akurase does not help matters in this regard. Pupils therefore rarely complete the curriculum for any subject from primary one to six.

Student-centred education requires African children to act like African adults. In traditional society i.e. outside school, and especially in the rural areas, African children learn to be adults by observing adult cultural practice from the outside not through negotiation. Their actual relations with the adults are very hierarchical and non participatory, but they are aware that this is because they are children. They aspire to the more equal and collectivist relations that occur between adults and that are constantly modelled for them. To a certain extent outside lessons they are able to practice these with their own peers and are slowly inducted into the system. However, in school, especially in lessons, because they mostly only experience

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individual teachers interacting with students and not in discourse with each other, they have no model. They continue to reproduce the hierarchical relations and cannot aspire to anything else. If school is to include more active learning from students then it must involve children behaving like adults, and this is where the connection must be made between school and society[11] .

Unfortunately, everything to do with schooling (and the modernist state) seems to be couched in authoritarian terms. It therefore merely recalls and emphasises the tradition whereby adults know what is right and therefore their views are not challenged by children. If it is going to be difficult for cultural reasons to promote teacher-pupil interaction in which pupils and teachers sometimes express diverse and opposing views, then at least the use of group work, where pupils may disagree with each other instead of with the teacher, should be promoted. We advocate more pupil-pupil interaction in schools to promote divergent views and the freedom to express a variety of views oneself, as means to develop the central discourse of a democratic society.

4.10 Summary

- The issues and conditions for teachers posted to rural areas have remained relatively stable throughout the last thirty years.
- Teachers find the material conditions, as well as the attitudes and expectations of pupils and parents demotivating and blame these for the lack of success of their work.
- Some of the teachers in Akurase are young men from an urban background who intend to leave at the earliest possibility in order to move to a town. These teachers express disdain for the rural situation and are at pains to differentiate themselves from village people.
- Older men who have settled in the village tend to pursue work as farmers alongside, and sometimes in competition with, their school work.
- The two male teachers who no longer had hope of an urban future nor were assimilated into farming were consistently drunk.
- It is difficult to attract and retain women teachers in the village; the only established one has moved there with her husband and regrets it.
- There is a great deal of absenteeism amongst teachers, which is seen as normal and justified as a necessary corollary to the problems of living in a rural village.
- It is difficult for heads to supervise teachers because of:
  - the social costs to themselves of strict enforcement of the rules;
  - fear of losing staff;
  - fear of compromising their own position with the authorities.
- Lack of effective supervision means that teachers do not work to their potential. Thus, for example, they see lesson notes as a bureaucratic obligation rather than as a teaching aid.

[11] Croft (2002) has some very interesting insights into this issue in Malawi where the size of the classes in the early years, the practice of doubling up teachers to team teach and the actual pedagogic approach produce something which is neither student centred nor teacher centred and which appears to work relatively well in the difficult circumstances of these overcrowded and under-equipped schools.

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- Teachers in Akurase do not rate the schools highly and educate their children privately when they can.
- Teachers consider the main advantage of private schools to be that they insist on English as the medium of instruction and of informal communication from the beginning. This enables children to understand the curriculum better.
- Teachers welcome opportunities for in-service education, especially where it encourages them to reflect on their practice and analyse actual classroom events. This kind of activity enables teachers to learn from each other.
- Understandings of professional practice articulated in workshop settings are not put into practice. Teacher centred pedagogy is seen as a coping strategy for pupils who do not understand the content of the lesson or the interaction which is supposed to carry it.
- More structured and planned peer interaction would give pupils a chance to practise the interaction of adults in a democratic society, rather than learning to be obedient children. It would be a helpful way making lessons more accessible for the majority.

Chapter 5 Community perspectives

5.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the introduction one key element behind efforts to improve schooling in Ghana, as indeed elsewhere, is the involvement of the community. In this chapter we look at the attitudes of the adults in Akurase towards education and trace the ways in which these attitudes feed into prospects for school improvement through community involvement. In doing this Akurase is an interesting case since it occupies a mid position within the initiatives currently in place. The policy of community involvement is currently being enacted through policy changes that are systemic, policies that are progressive and smaller specific initiatives. The systemic changes, which involve the setting up of school management committees to govern the schools in a particular area, obviously affect everyone. However, one of the schools is also most directly involved in one of the progressive policy initiatives, Whole School Development. Funded by DFID, but locally managed, WSD initially provided enhanced resources and logistical support to specific District Education Offices and within those districts to groups of Pilot Schools. The idea was that to a certain extent the way that these resources were deployed should be decided through the new structures of the school management committee. Just after the end of data collection WSD, now to be known as School Development (SD) was to be extended to include all schools. The third level of smaller specific initiatives would include the SCORE project and QUIPS projects (Miller-Grandvaux and Yoder 2002; Odonokor 2000; Education Development Center 2001). Both of these initiatives included intensive involvement of NGOs in facilitating community participation. No such initiative was active in Akurase during the time of the project, though as we shall explain in a later chapter, the engagement of the Akurase Project did have a strong influence on community issues.

All of this means that Akurase is an example of a village where it is possible to observe the extent to which community involvement was happening and was working under conditions that better approximate to what might be sustainable than those involved in the projects such as SCORE and QUIPS.

5.2 Interest in education

As a group of researchers staying together in the village, we were focused on schooling, observing school, talking about it with the villagers and discussing it constantly with each other. It then came as quite an important moment, when one team member said that he had suddenly realized that actually the talk of education came almost entirely from us. As he walked about the village, he realized that listening to conversations, in the market, under the trees, at the boreholes, nobody, not even the children, was talking about school. It was an aspect of village life that was at most fairly peripheral. This was certainly the opinion of the teachers who constantly complained about lack of interest in general and poor attendance at PTA meetings in particular.

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Nevertheless, as we have seen from the section on the students, attitudes to schooling within the population are by no means uniform[12]. Some people, usually those who were slightly more educated themselves, had aspirations for their children to go on to secondary school and get jobs in the modern sector. However, even those who were positive about education conceded that everyone did not agree with them. This was a fairly typical comment: "Many people at Akurase condemn those who send their children to school. It is a waste of time." (Interview with parent).

5.3 Effect on retention

This apathy to schooling ought to be reflected in the drop out statistics of the village schools. Within a system where there is automatic promotion it should be relatively easy to track the extent to which drop out is currently taking place. We therefore examined the school registers and have used the data to compile Table 2. It is based on a comparison of the numbers of children on role in each of the classes during the school years 1999/2000 and 2000/1. Thus the first row relates to the cohort of children starting in P1 at the SDA school in September 1999 and compares the numbers with those in the same cohort the following year (now in P2). However, the position is much more complicated than it would seem to be. The names of the children are not consistent. This is caused partly by the mobility of the children who may move in and out of the village at times which do not necessarily fit in neatly with the academic calendar (see comments above under the pupils' perspectives). It is also due to the fact that the children within the village do not have straightforward patterns of attendance. This is shown in the case of James. He was currently in P4 at the age of 13. Although his mother was very keen on him completing basic schooling, he did not receive much support from elsewhere in the family. He had dropped out of school several times and then rejoined. However, as he becomes older within his class group, how long the motivation to persist will last is open to question (we will return to this case later). This points to the fact that to get a full picture of the way that retention worked or did not in the village we would have had to track individuals over several years. This would be a difficult undertaking as not all the registers for the previous years were available and over more years the gaps would be greater. Moreover, the schools did not necessarily know what had happened to children we asked about. The position is further compounded by the fact that at the time of collecting the data there had been a particularly high drop out during the course of the year in the JSS with as many as 12 children having left, mostly from JSS2.

What is perhaps most important in this respect is that whatever the figures indicated, the perceptions of both the teachers and other members of the village were that the drop out rate was high, that there were many children who were not in school who might have been, and that this was attributable to a widespread belief that schooling was not worthwhile.

[12] This was exemplified by discussion at the SMC/PTA meeting which was divided between talk of the problem of widespread non-payment of fees and dues by the parents in general, and even more protracted debate on a motion proposed by a parent and backed up by many others about raising the level of the PTA dues.

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Moreover the general impression is that although enrolment and retention improved when the JSS system was introduced and then again when the present headteacher was appointed, things are now getting worse. This conflicts with the reports in areas where there are projects with a higher level of intervention towards community involvement:

> The Community School Alliances project in Ghana has seen improving enrolment levels (Community School Alliances Project 2000). A Childscope report from Ghana said that virtually all children in each project community were enrolled in school by the end of the project, but enrolment data were not precise enough to measure what the project had done (Agarwal and Hartwell 1998).
> (Miller-Grandvaux, and Yoder 2002:13)

Table 2: **Pupil retention**

Drop out stage	School	Difference in number		Total Difference	Percentage of drop outs		Drop outs as % of children on previous roll
		Boys	Girls		Male	Female	
P1-2	SDA	10	15	25	53	60	57
P2-3	SDA	1	6	7	6	50	24
P3-4	SDA	4	1	5	31	8	20
P4-5	SDA	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
P5-6	SDA	2	1	3	17	9	13
P1-2	RC	-3	-4	-7	-19	-27	-23
P2-3	RC	0	3	3	0	16	9
P3-4	RC	-1	-3	-4	-11	-20	-17
P4-5	RC	-1	-5	-6	-9	-63	-32
P5-6	RC	2	0	2	14	0	7
JSS1-2	JSS	3	-1	2	11.5	-10	6
JSS2-3	JSS	-2	0	-2	-11	0	-6
Total	**-**	**15**	**13**	**28**	**-**	**-**	**-**

Some of the more recent literature would suggest that this belief is not confined to Akurase. For example Casely-Hayford (2000) notes that within the communities in Northern Ghana that she studied there was in some cases stagnation and in others growing resistance to the idea of formal schooling. This has profound implications for the possibilities of achieving universal basic schooling in Ghana by the target date of 2005 or even the international target, post Dakar, of universal primary education by 2015.

Our data would suggest that amongst the community of Akurase there are four main explanations. Education is not thought worthwhile because:

- Some adults in the village are indifferent to the progress of the children in their care
- People are too poor to afford the relative luxury of schooling.

- It is not relevant to the children's future prospects as farmers
- The schooling in the village is not of sufficiently good quality.

A further issue that brings all of these together is the question of where the power lies to do anything about these factors. Our conclusion is that none of the factors can be considered in isolation. Thus, in discussing each in turn below, elements from the others necessarily impinge on the argument.

5.4 Adults' commitment to children in their care

The particular data chain that we summarized in the methodology chapter was important in throwing light on this issue. The chain started with a photograph taken by a school child where they had chosen to show a group of classmates running to school. The children's discussion confirmed that lateness was an issue for them:
All of us often come to school late…

They went on to explain why they were late:

> In the morning I prepare a fire, sweep the house, cook food and dispose of the refuse at a faraway place and this makes me come to school late.
>
> I am the only child in the house and I do all the chores in the morning, fetching water, sweeping, washing the dishes before I realize I am late for school. I walk along the track to school about four kilometers; I set off around 6.30a.m. Most of us reach the school by about 8.35 a.m.

They continued by suggesting that for many of the parents their labour was more important than their success at school:

> During the cocoa season, some of us are asked by our parents to go for the cocoa grains from the farm before coming to school. This makes us come late[13].

Teachers confirmed that their impression was many children "do [such] a lot of house chores that they don't have much time for school work."

This led to reflection by the Ghanaian researchers on their own circumstances. Here, their parents moderated the chores, and put schooling as a high priority, since education was seen as an investment. This is corroborated by evidence from elsewhere. Miller-Grandvaux and Yoder (2002) report in their review of community school initiatives of the willingness to pay the opportunity costs of education as a potential benefit and cite work in Ghana by the Community School Alliances Project under QUIPS as supporting this.

Other data added to this analysis. A constant complaint from teachers, children and community members themselves was that many parents did not look after their children well.

[13] Members of the research team have translated much of the data presented here from Twi.

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As one of the JSS teachers claimed:

> Some parents do not even know where their wards sleep. There was an instance when a parent came to the school to ask whether her daughter had been attending school that week because she (the mother) had not set eyes on her for the past four days. (Teachers' Group Interview)

Many of the pupils in the school live with either single parents (mostly mothers alone), and others, especially those in the JSS do not live with their parents at all, but instead stay with relatives. Some have also moved from the settlements around Akurase to stay with foster parents in order to attend the JSS there. Others have come from much farther afield. This is by no means unusual in Ghana, and indeed is represented in the experience of our research team especially with ethnic groups like the Ashanti that follow a matrilineal system of inheritance, whereby children belong to their mothers' family headed by a maternal grandfather or uncle. The system has worked well for hundreds of generations and where patterns of settlement are stable the responsibility for childcare is shared between a wider group than just the biological parents. However, migration, which began to occur in the colonial era, started a process of erosion of this system. The incorporation into the nation of both patrilineal and matrilineal groups has added complications to making state policy. However, government policy has always been that it is the responsibility of the actual father to provide for a child's education. This has the effect of extending to boys as well to girls the situation, whereby they are less well supported, since they are likely to move out of the family of the supporting parent. The interaction of a variety of traditions with government policy has served to blur the position. Whilst conscientious adults take responsibility for a wide range of children, others are able to shrug off their obligations. In traditional society, relations lived close by and children were liable to be visible to both sides of the family. However, with the move towards cash crops, the development of settler communities for agricultural purposes like Akurase, along with the effects of urban migration, families are widely dispersed[14]. Palme (1999) has noted similar problems in Mozambique when a matrilineal culture begins to break down. Moreover, this can even lead to a much more individualistic approach to family membership. According to one of the teachers, many parents do not see that they are likely to benefit from children's educational success.

> It is not uncommon to hear a parent tell his child that "I don't care whether you go to school or not. After all it is your own future and not mine." Others will also say "If you won't go to school, then follow me to the farm. After all, I even need more hands on the farm." Some of the parents are often reluctant to provide for the needs of their wards. For example, they fail to pay the relatively meagre fee of ¢3000 per annum. [TI-JSS-40][15]

[14] Juliet (see box 2 above) is a typical case having lived in three different households and attended school in three different places Sometimes this can work to the benefit of children's education in that they might go and live with relations who are able to give them access to better schools, especially in the bigger towns and cities. However, children who have been sent to Akurase have almost certainly not come in order to benefit their education.
[15] There is some exaggeration of the meagreness here (see note 17).

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The issue of children's work is a very contentious one. While it is not impossible that it was taking place we did not discover any examples of practices that would fit the description of child slavery that has been widely documented and publicised within the cocoa industry in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire recently (Blewitt and Woods 2000; Robbins 2001). Investigative journalism as a genre tends to simplify situations and leads to over stated positions, which ultimately do not help those affected. In Akurase child labour whether within the home or on the farm is an issue and there are different positions taken by different individuals according to their perspective Our conclusion is that this is an area that needs further study but is not served by simple dichotomies between good caring parents that have children's interests at heart on the one hand and slave masters on the other. Like those who have researched the position elsewhere a more sensible situation is to recognize the spectrum of positions and to recognize that people in Akurase as elsewhere are caught up in economic globalisation, which has accelerated large-scale agriculture and made it increasingly difficult for poor farmers to compete. The extreme circumstances that allow people to accept extreme exploitation of children do not appear to exist in Akurase. However, they are nonetheless prone to the socio-economic influences that change the social rules that might once have protected the most vulnerable children (Bales, 1999).

5.5 Poverty

Obviously, the question of whose responsibility are the children and the extent to which they should contribute to the household does not impact equally on all people. When talking to richer members of the village we came across those who considered that their relative wealth extended the range of whom they consider their wards. Indeed, the richest man in the village was supporting children whose relation to him was merely that they went to the same church and showed promise. On the other hand, for poor rural people having children staying with them, especially when they have not bonded emotionally with them, feels like quite a burden. Educating them is also an expensive business and one that may not provide any return for the investment. The extent to which children are expected to work to contribute towards the household may be considered by the children themselves as exploitation, whereas to hard-pressed guardians, it is only a natural way of making the best use of resources for the collective good of those in the compound.

In a community such as Akurase, which, though poor, is by no means as economically stressed as other parts of Ghana, the idea that children are prevented from going to school by poverty is neither straightforwardly true nor false. Rather the economic position of the family is one of a number of factors. There was some evidence in Akurase of parents selecting which children to go to school and which not. However, as the discussion on enrolment rate in Akurase above has suggested, it was not so low that we were aware of very large numbers of children of school age around the village during school time[16]. Compared with more

[16] In fact, we would have been unlikely to see many since the farms where they might be working are at a distance from the village centre.

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economically stressed areas such as the rural part of Northern Ghana studied by Casely-Hayford (2000) most children did appear to be having schooling. So whereas she found no more than two boys from any family were sent to school and this only from large and prosperous families, in Akurase there might be one or two children who had not gone or, more often, had dropped out. Casely-Hayford placed poverty as a very important reason for non-enrolment alongside school based factors especially the non-attendance of teachers. This was also true for Akurase, but it was not always a case of parents forbidding attendance. The way that parental attitude, poverty, institutional practices and school attendance interact is not simple. As can be seen from the previous section on pupil perspectives, in particular the case study of Felicia. Here the lack of resources obviously played a part in her dropping out. However, it was not so much that her father forced her to stop going, but rather that he appeared indifferent. His role was passive rather than active; by failing to provide materials needed for school she was shamed into withdrawing. Although she wanted to continue it was more comfortable for her to go to farm and sell kenkey[17] than to be a schoolgirl without exercise books. Similarly, the extent to which children who had not paid their school fees were prevented from coming by the school headteachers was very variable. They talked of sending children back for fees on many occasions. However it seemed that if children persisted in returning even though empty handed they were not permanently excluded and the JSS headteacher spoke of contributing the fees himself when all else failed 'on humanitarian grounds'. Nevertheless, as with Felicia's lack of exercise books, the social position of the children concerned was inevitably compromised.

Our experience would support Condy's (1998:34) suggestion that 'localised action research might help to establish to what extent poverty as opposed to poor quality acts as the main barrier to schooling, and to assist communities to plan to address their real problems.'

A further poverty related issue is the question of private schools. Within the village there was small number of children whose parents could afford to send them to the 'international school' in the next town or else sent them away to the larger towns to board with relations so that they could receive what was perceived to be even better private schooling there. Amongst those who did this were the teachers in the Akurase state schools and also the chair of the SMC. This seems to be a case of what Hedges (2002:14) noted whereby

> the symbolic role of schools as vehicles for social change, democracy, and access to modernity and its trappings, is increasingly open to question, leading to widespread ambivalence and absenteeism. (Hedges 2002:14).

As has been noted above, the popular perception that private schools in Ghana, despite having many untrained teachers, have far better results, has been extensively supported by research (Quansah, 1997). Thus, in Akurase, as elsewhere, the presence of these private schools not only served to accentuate inequality of opportunity based on economic criteria, but also took away an important incentive for working towards improvement of the state sector from those who were in the best position to work for it.

[17] Maize cake

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5.6 Relevance of schooling

Despite the range of aspirations mentioned in the chapter on children's perspectives there was a general admission that those who did not become farmers were in a distinct minority. This made more important the whole question of whether educated people make better farmers, which was a very contentious one within the village. When this emerged with our data, we facilitated an informal discussion amongst a differentiated group of villagers on this issue, but little consensus was reached. On the one hand, a parent claimed that illiterate farmers perform better on the job than their literate counterparts since they have stayed on the job for relatively longer periods than their literate counterparts. "Even in the act of weeding, the literate farmer cannot match the illiterate." On the other hand, a woman told us that "the literate farmer knows more about farming because there is proper book-keeping and use of modern methods. "The literate farmer knows how to get more yield, he employs labourers who do most of the manual work for him". The debate was further joined by the example of two richer, educated men who had set up farms in Akurase. Some people found this to be a good example for children as they saw that education could lead to agricultural success. Indeed one of the more successful boys in the village (Albert, who had completed SSS) specifically mentioned one of these people as an inspiration to him, not just in the way that he had achieved a measure of wealth but that he was able, through employing people in Akurase, to help others. Interestingly this same man commented:

> My presence here as a farmer as well as that of a retired District Director of Education who has also acquired land for farming here is often questioned by members of the community. They do not seem to appreciate the benefit of schooling if at the end of the day, educated people like us would come and settle as farmers like themselves.

A father added in an interview:

> I would not encourage my literate child to come and farm after his education. People will make a mockery of him.

Although we do not have quantitative data to support this position it seemed marginally more prevalent. Indeed, when talking to people it seems that many could not really understand why anyone who had achieved economic prosperity through education which would inevitably fit them for the sort of opportunity that the village did not offer, would want to come back to the village. Education, was a means to leave, not to stay in the village.

However, these two rich educated farmers were like many in Akurase, outsiders who had taken the opportunity of the availability of land to come there. They were also seen as exceptional. Thus, Michael a boy from the JSS who had aspirations to educational progression could bewail that there were no role models in terms of academic achievement whose lives might challenge him. There are two implications of this. First, it means that the actual processes of progression are ill understood. There is nobody to go to for advice and it is difficult to make plans and strategies to cope with further study (for example Albert's subject choice as mentioned in the previous chapter). Second, it means that the benefits of

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education that are not specifically concerned with agriculture, such as increased health and skills which might enable people to take a leadership role and interact more effectively with outside agencies and the government, do not accrue. This is also a theme developed by Casely-Hayford (2000), who suggests that the development potential of education only begins to kick in when the number of formally educated children within a community grows.

5.7 Perceptions of quality

This point is obviously connected with the issue of the extent to which people understand what is going on within the education system and are able to appraise the extent to which it is working. One might add to the list of benefits of education the intrinsic joy of learning, which features so strongly in statements of intent at the highest level. However for this to have meaning, people have to see schooling as connected with learning rather than just about progression through a system: education must seem to be relevant. The example of better health cited above is instructive. Although literacy in itself can make a difference, if one is not convinced that health education at school involves learning how to live a healthier and safer life, rather than just being able to recite an acceptable exam answer, then one is unlikely to see good health as an outcome of schooling. What we found in Akurase was that at neither of these levels were children who will complete JSS likely to benefit. The curriculum did not seem relevant and most were not literate on completing school.

Interestingly at the time we were collecting our data, another piece of research on rural education was being written up. It is instructive to compare our results. Chapman et al. (2002) conducted an attitude survey to determine what constituted a good school in the minds of Ghanaian citizens and what they believed the community could do to support them. This adopted the premise of attitude theory, which states broadly that the degree of discrimination in people's responses is a function of their familiarity with the concept being addressed (Kerlinger 1973). Thus, if people had engaged strongly with school issues their responses would tend to demonstrate clarity of response. However, within their sample they found quite undifferentiated responses. For example if there were no obvious problems or complaints, then quality of schooling was assumed to be high, and they did not use traditional (i.e. input) measures of quality such as resourcing, access and enrolment. Moreover, there were no significant differences in attitude between the five different categories of respondent (guardians, community members, PTA executives, SMC executives and other local leaders). They therefore concluded that 'respondents are being questioned about issues to which they have not given much thought' (Chapman et al. 2002:186).

Regression analysis of both school practices and community support concluded that schools were rated most positively when:

- Children were learning practical skills
- The school was well managed by staff
- There was good discipline

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- The school-community relationship was good
- There were no obvious reasons for complaint.

According to Chapman et al. these then might be seen as the most important criteria for assessing a good school. Other findings were that Chapman et al's (2002) respondents did not feel schools were imposing unauthorized levies, they recognized a need for suitable teacher housing and the importance of girls' education.

Whilst their argument is persuasive, it would be a great deal more so if they had also conducted the research with the teachers in the communities. This might then have confirmed or disconfirmed in this setting their central methodological premise that greater dimensionality of response was achieved by this group, which presumably has given great thought to this matter[18]. We are suspicious about the conclusions drawn by that study. In the first place it is interesting to note that the criteria listed are all related to process, that is they are about what is actually going on in school. Work on educational quality would suggest that those at a distance would be more likely to choose input criteria such as the quality of resources, or attendance (see for example Watson et al. 1996). Thus, it seems that such a choice would suggest greater rather than less familiarity with school. However, our suspicion is that the problems lie in the inherent difficulties of questionnaire based survey methods. The tightness of the instrument means that respondents or the questionnaire administrators have to perform a 'best fit' with the categories presented. This is what might have happened here. Most surprising to us is that there is no mention of output measures of success except, possibly, for the one point about useful practical skills. Our data suggest overwhelmingly that output measures are most important to people in Akurase. They are concerned about being able to speak English, to read and write, and above all, to achieve the success in examinations. For it is this that will enable them to go and acquire sufficient education to put them in a well paid urban job or, even better, in the sort of overseas post that will enable them to support many of their family. This is supported also by our other experiences in Ghana and indeed in other parts of the world. This is also confirmed by evidence from elsewhere in the literature (see for example the various texts in Little and Wolf 1996 and Tabulawa 1997). As Serpell (1999: 119) succinctly states:

> Parents, teachers and students all regard admission to secondary school as the sole criterion of whether an individual's schooling was worthwhile.
> (Serpell 1999:119-120)

Indeed so strong is this evidence that we suspect that Chapman et al's respondents may perhaps have understood the ability to pass exams rather than vocational and life skills as 'useful practical skills'.

At an open meeting of the School Management Committee (SMC) and the PTA, the idea that standards were declining went completely unchallenged. Although this referred to a number of issues, the most important seemed to be that children from Akurase did not

[18] Indeed, even working with teachers in schools deemed to be very poor by their community users we have found that teachers have reflected on what makes a good school (see Akyeampong et al. 1999)

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perform well in the BECE (Basic Education Certificate of Education). Some debate took place as to whether this was only the fault of the JSS teachers or whether, as its headteacher contended, the difficulty was to do with the low level of children entering at JSS1. The issue of English language was also raised at this meeting and elsewhere and the position in the state schools compared unfavourably with that in the private sector ('international schools') where children are forced to speak English throughout. The remark quoted above of the father's unfavourable comparison between his younger son's mastery of English through work on the streets of the town with his older son's inability following schooling, is also indicative of wider opinion.

In terms of Chapman et al.'s (2002) findings as we have suggested above in the section on farming, basic education was seen to bring few intrinsic benefits, and useful skills were not seen as being acquired there. Instead, the rewards were mainly extrinsic and delayed until completion of the BECE or preferably following further progression through the system. Discipline in school was also a contentious matter. At the SMC/PTA meeting for example a man attributed the drop in standards at the JSS to a number of factors, one of which was disrespect on the part of the pupils towards their teachers. However, rather than just laying this at the door of the teachers, he went to blame the 'inability of some parents to restrain their wards from going out in the night'. As we have seen already this was a theme that was taken up by many. Our own observation was that if there was any insubordination it appeared to be mainly of a very passive variety and pupils' resistance to teachers' authority was mainly in the form of absenteeism.

With respect to Chapman et al's findings on the legitimacy or not of PTA dues, as we have noted above, feelings were mixed. Those who came to the SMC/PTA meeting were prepared to suggest raising the level of fees but a large part of the meeting was devoted to discussing the fact that most of those not attending did not pay the lower level of fees.

However, the *cause célèbre* as far as parents in the village were concerned was the drunkenness of two of the teachers in one of the primary schools. This had been a major criticism levelled at the school in the School Performance Appraisal Meeting (SPAM) one of the major new initiatives aimed at promoting community involvement. The headteacher of the school told us that 'the whole town came… parents said that some of my teachers are drunkards and they do not want their children to come here.' Although he assured us on this occasion that this was no longer the case, the evidence, observational as well as through what people said showed otherwise. In the SMC/PTA, meeting the complaint was once again made. The significant thing about this is that it was talked about by community leaders, parents, teachers and pupils themselves. Also following the SPAM, the district education office was aware of the situation. However, nothing seemed to have been done about it.

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Casely-Hayford's (2000) study in Northern Ghana found a close correlation between teacher behaviour and community reactions. This was most evident in the way that enrolment and teacher attendance were closely identified with each other. There, most of the teachers lived outside the community and commuted into the school. In some of the schools, the teachers were very rarely present. In Akurase, all the teachers were resident, since not being so was not an option. However, as already mentioned the younger male teachers at the JSS were frequently missing at the start of the week and following holidays. One school log book records that following Republic Day only the headteacher reported for duty on time and it was not until two days later that the school was fully operational. This was also a subject for comment by community members, but was generally accepted as being a normal state of affairs. However, it would be wrong to suggest that other teachers were always present. For example, one teacher who had settled in the village was to have been commended by the District authorities but on the day they came to see him he was found to be absent. Moreover, the absence had not been recorded in the logbook. Teacher absence is endemic in Ghana and Akurase appears to be no worse and indeed possibly better than other similar places. Fobih et al. (1999) by turning up unannounced at schools estimated that in rural areas pupils can expect their teacher to be present in school on an average of only three days each week.

However, to us as observers in the schools the most obvious shortcoming was the fact that in all them, but most notably in the primary schools and especially in one of them, it was often very difficult to tell whether lessons were in progress or it was break time. The same mixture of children and teachers sitting at desks and engaged in a variety of seemingly uncoordinated tasks seemed to occur. However, criticism of lessons was not a feature of adult community members. Criticisms and the low level of on-task behaviour seemed to be accepted as normal by teachers, pupils and parents, if indeed they were aware of it, since they appeared very rarely to visit the schools in session.

5.8 Responsibility, accountability and power

Much more important than blame is the issue of responsibility. Asare-Bediako et al. (1995) found that people within the community were apathetic and negative about their involvement in schools. Although children were now offered nine years of basic education, many did not see this as any more effective than the previous system and there were visible shortcomings in the professional standards of teachers. Moreover, they were angered by the fact that school was not free with fees being charged as well as supplementary amounts for activities such as sports and PTA dues seen as a compulsory top up. Unfavourable comparisons were made with private schools. All these are evident within our data. Indeed, it is apathy that seems to be most prevalent in what we experienced.

A village elder that had been involved in the building of the school contrasted current attitudes with the original interest in the old days. He said that "now parents don't attend meetings in numbers and consider school the sole responsibility of teachers."

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This is an important perception for it links the apathy to the question of accountability. People are prepared to accept new schemes for improvement but are wary of them. Thus, the SPAM had taken place in the village and was very well attended. However the complaints that were levelled at the schools, particularly the drunkenness of the two teachers, were noted but not acted on. Similarly, the SMC had been set up but people appeared unsure about what its function was. The merging with the PTA by holding joint meetings also further exacerbated this.

Another point, which was very significant at the meeting we observed, was the way that the SMC executive members were ranged at the front of the hall whilst the parents (the community) were at the back. Even more significant was the fact that the discourse of the meeting was that the executive members' discursive position was that of the school *as opposed* to the community. Thus they joined in the condemnation of parents who did not supervise their children sufficiently rather than seeking to comment on the drunken teachers. We were shown a list of members of the SMC by one of the headteachers. It consisted of:

1. Chair
2. Headteacher JSS
3. Headteacher RC P
4. Headteacher SDA P
5. Representative from outlying village school
6. Roman Catholic Unit representative
7. Student representative (i.e. an ex student of many years ago).
8. Secretary
9. JSS PTA
10. SDA PTA
11. Chief's representative.

The educated and richest member of the village was the chairperson, the assemblyman was the chief's representative and the secretary was a teacher from the JSS. There was no woman on the committee.

Thus, the makeup of the SMC also obscured the intention of community involvement. Rather than representing the grass roots, it was controlled by the powerful parts of the village and by the schools themselves. The SMC was therefore just another level in the system owing accountability, if at all, to the district authorities, the state. Given this position it is unsurprising that attendance at open meetings was low.

WSD was supposed to make the SMC central to the planning and running of the school. However, members of the committee seemed to be unsure about what exactly the pilot school status had brought to the RC school. The headteacher told us that the SMC was aware that there had been grants for extra equipment, but that they had not become involved in the bidding process or in deciding how the resources should be allocated. This would suggest that in this instance the WSD process was not being sufficiently closely supported at District level.

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As Suzuki (2002) claims in her study of community participation in Ugandan schools:

> Parents' perceptions of the accountability of the school affect the way they participate in education. Thus, accountability is one of the crucial factors for realising local democracy through decentralisation. (Suzuki 2002:243)

Our conclusion therefore was that parents did not participate partly because they felt that the structures through which they were supposed to assume some control did not really include them in any meaningful way. There were opportunities for them to give voice to their ideas, but nobody appeared to be listening. School therefore seemed still accountable only to the state, and not to the community. There is an issue of power here, but it is complex. Suzuki (2002) goes on to suggest that one negative factor in encouraging community participation in the schools she studied was the power imbalance between parents and teachers (including the headteacher). Although there were definite power imbalances in Akurase, the position was complicated and should not be portrayed merely as powerful, educated schoolteachers and powerless, ill-educated parents. Within the school, the teachers exercised power, but outside it, people were indifferent to what went on there. Thus, parents did not come to school except when asked and so the absenteeism and general lack of activity, which they did not approve of, went on unchallenged. However outside school the teachers had no special position and did not seem to be accorded any more deference.

> Attributes such as knowledge, power and prestige are attached differently to the concept of 'person'. In Africa the notion of personhood is predominantly tied to the idea of 'office'; i.e. people 'occupy' certain statuses, play certain roles, undergo rites of initiation and installation on assuming these, and are viewed as influencing others by virtue of their positional relationship to them. (Long and Long 1992:25-6).

So the degree of influence that a person has depends on the structures of the field in which they are operating. People can retain power by being indifferent to the school by non-participation. This is especially so in the case of the children. Teachers and parents talk of lack of respect for teachers on the part of the children. However, in the whole of the fieldwork there was no case of defiance ever witnessed. Therefore, resistance can only be by absenting oneself from the field, by finding a role outside school.

A school-related public meeting was thus neither home territory for the teachers nor for the parents. Thus at both PTA meetings observed the headteacher of the JSS could forcefully berate the parents for their shortcomings in providing for their children, but the response of the parents was neither cowed nor antagonistic, rather they seemed generally unmoved. Indeed what appeared to be the case was that both teachers and community recognised the shortcomings of the schools in Akurase but neither party felt they had any power to effect change.

In summary, then, people were distanced from schooling and at a personal level were apathetic. Many of them failed to see how schooling was relevant to their lives and concerns. The potential benefits of schooling for the majority of the village did not materialise,

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because the quality of schooling did not deliver the literacy, the ability to speak the language of power or the examination results that would have made the considerable investment over nine years worthwhile. Moreover, the structures that were supposed to enable them to secure an improvement in the quality of schooling were not working. Given this situation, an apathetic response is hardly surprising.

5.9 Community Involvement in Education

Chapman et al. (2002) advocate training programs for communities, but caution that these may be difficult due to the 'stickiness' of notions about good school practices in some people and the suggestibility of others whose opinions are less fixed. They say that decentralization programmes have run ahead of the public's capacity to participate in many cases. This is indeed the case in Akurase where the school was not seen as a matter of concern for the community as a whole. From what we have seen already this is obviously linked with a general apathy towards education. However, another issue that came to our notice, the refusal of many villagers to pay a levy of under ¢ 20 000 to a fund to bring electricity to Akurase, alerted us to a more general attitude that might be of great importance for the debate about community participation in education, and indeed other, development projects.

As noted earlier, Ghanaian education is at present beginning to implement a policy of decentralization, which is underpinned by the notion of community involvement. Solutions to educational problems including community involvement are very popular throughout the world for a number of reasons. The two real driving forces behind this are probably attractiveness to planners as an alternative source of funding (Bray 1999) and its alignment with global discourses about choice and consumerism whereby accountability to users is an important idea, at least on a rhetorical level (Ball, 2000). However, community involvement has also been argued for strongly in terms of its theoretical and educational merit. These convincing arguments appeal for example to the greater possibility of meaningful learning when community members, involved initially in logistical and practical support, are drawn into instructional roles, so that in Bernstein's (1996) terms the framing between the school and the outside world becomes weaker. This may then also lead to better-conceptualised study, and would be the basis for the kind of situated learning advocated by Lave and Wenger (1991). Their notion of learning as participation in community is echoed in other currently fashionable ideas such as that of education as a dialogic process:

> I am conscious of myself and become myself only when revealing myself to another, through another and with the help of another. The most important acts constituting self consciousness is determined by a relationship toward another consciousness (toward a thou)… the very being of man (both external and internal) is the deepest communion. To be means to communicate … to be means to be for another and through the other, for oneself. (Bakhtin 1984 in Danow 1991:59)

This quotation has particular resonance in an African context because the pluralisation of this idea - substitute 'others' for 'another' - yields something very close to 'Ubuntu' what Mbigi

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(1997) has termed "Africa's gift to the world" and which Desmond Tutu has reduced to the formula 'I am because we are' (Prinsloo 2000). Moreover, this is just the latest of a series of collectivist notions such as Harambee in Kenya and Kagisano in Botswana, which stress the importance, and excellence of community in African society.

Evidence of this is seen in the way that support systems in African families are complex and far-reaching. Distant relatives will make great sacrifices in order to look after members of their family in ways that people from Europe find hard to comprehend. However as with all seemingly altruistic behaviour it is more complicated than meets the eye and importantly the money expended on distant relatives is seen only partly as an obligation since it is also an investment. A relation who has been enabled to live in North America or Europe can be a very useful source of support.

All in all, then, the notion of community engagement in rural education appears to satisfy the desires of all of the most important drivers of policy: for the economists it is cost effective, for the educationalists it is theoretically sound and for the African nationalist politicians it is ideologically attractive. It offers the dream of an effective form of indigenous schooling.

However, our experiences in Akurase and elsewhere suggest that this is what it is – a dream, because like many dreams it is based on a romantic pre-colonial view of community rather than the post-colonial conditions that shape Akurase[19]. If education does not work in Akurase and places like it, even when policy is one of 'best practice' community involvement, once again the victims of the situation, the ill-educated rural school graduates will be blamed for their plight.

The core problem is that, just as the notion of communication only begins when 'other consciousness' exists, so the concept of community depends on 'others consciousness', where an individual owes allegiance to a community. The central problem with Akurase is that it is not a community to which its occupants owe allegiance. Instead, it is a settler community. People live there because previous generations from the 1930s onwards left their hometowns to carve out cocoa and citrus farms in the forest. People are here to farm but again and again we came across people who said that Akurase was 'not their home town' or else they just referred to 'my place' meaning the community that they owed their allegiance to. Thus, one of the parents on the subject of PTA dues asked why he should contribute to the school in Akurase when he did not even have enough money to give to the school in his home town?[20] This is a situation, which is not unique to this village but is replicated in other parts of Ghana

[19] Romantic views of African collectivism are not without their critics (see for example Gyekye 1988, cited in Ansu-Kyeremeh 1997, who maintains that communality was always balanced by a strong sense of individuality).
[20] This attitude is of course not confined to schooling. When asked what he thought people in the village would like money spent on, one community leader said that people did not really want it spent collectively here but wanted individual loans so that they could improve their lives.

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and is an example of how the research made the team aware of something they had always known but had never formalised.

Therefore, the situation is that community involvement in schooling is not really working. In our analysis, we are treading a rather precarious path between the myths of community that proliferate in thinking on community participation in African education and the deficit view of rural Africans which sees their lack of success in educational advancement as some kind of collective moral failure rather a structural one. Sometimes the lack of involvement is not because the villagers are personally deficient, but because there is no accessible community for them to identify with. In Akurase and other areas like it, community is fractured and the premise on which community involvement in education is based is therefore flawed. It might work if the old matrilineal system with localized agriculture were still in operation but the mixture of matrilineal inheritance with patrilineal obligations along with the displacement of traditional community allegiances means that it does not.

Unlike some successful ventures in community based education (e.g. the original Escuelas Neuvas in Colombia (Torres, 1992)) community education in Ghana is not really a bottom-up innovation but an idea that is being pushed from the top, indeed largely from the donor community.

As Bray (1999:199) points out "the organizational structure of some [communities] is more conducive to self help activities than others." and therefore difficulties with community involvement should be seen as structural, rather than being laid at the feet of the villagers. Moreover, this whole situation is a post-colonial one, where the policies of the former British administration and the way that an independent Ghana has been inserted into the subsequent economic order have interacted with traditional practices to produce the current attitudes (Fuller 1991).

This argument does suggest an answer for one aspect of our data that we found puzzling. Every one in the village seemed to acknowledge that of the three schools, the Roman Catholic one was the worst. The head himself acknowledged that at a School Performance Appraisal Meeting "the parents said that some of my teachers are drunkards and they do not want their children to come here." Nevertheless, in contrast to the enrolment figures at the other schools, over the last year this school appeared to be growing. One of the teachers at the JSS told us that there had been a lot of mutual recrimination within the school: the teachers had reported the principal to the local manager and he in turn had reported the teachers. However when faced with any criticism from outside "the Catholics stand against you". When talking to parents it was clear that they felt under an obligation to send their children there. So, there may not be much sense of engagement with the school, but the sense of it belonging to them was certainly higher than for the other schools. However this does sit well with the finding of Miller-Grandvaux and Yoder (2002) that of all the projects included in their extensive literature review of community schools only one - SCORE in Ghana - (Price et al. 1998)) reported any consistent increase in pupil performance.

5.10 Conclusion

Government policies and many donor-driven initiatives operate from premises that do not correspond with those of the people of the village. We have attempted to give a thick description of people's understandings of education at village level and how wider social movements may be implicated in what we found. In particular we have identified the disruptions to communities caused by migration and the disintegration of matrilineal family structures. Both of these are structural conditions of postcolonial situations. We have shown how these affect the dispositions of rural people to schooling, an important way in which the modern world impacts on their lives.

We believe our research yields important understandings that may be developed into recommendations for local policy makers. However, it makes a wider contribution for, as Stake (1995) points out, single cases may not be a strong base for generalizing about a wider population of cases, but when they provide new insights they offer general knowledge by enabling people to modify old generalizations.

As a final suggestion concerning the interaction between schools and communities we would agree with Redding (1999:27) who points out that perhaps it is less useful to consider what the community can do for the school rather than what the school can do for the community:

> In many societies, bonds of community no longer envelop the families of children who happen to attend… A school that views itself as a community of its constituents (school personnel, students, families of students) rather than an organization, is more likely to encourage the social interactions that lead to the accumulation of social capital.

Given what we observed at Akurase, this would be a very difficult enterprise to manage. However, if the school were seen much more as a community resource e.g. as a library (possibly of more than just books), as a centre for community forums (Serpell 1999) and shared facilities with other agencies such as health centres, then, whatever their allegiance to the village people might begin to identify with the school itself and this kind of community building might begin to happen. In other words, if you want to build a community round the school, start with the school, not with the community This might then circumvent the cycle of top down intervention whereby decentralization is just the latest of a series of signals of concern from a standardising and centralising state (Fuller 1991).

5.11 Summary

- Education is not an aspect of village life that is seen to be particularly important by the majority of the adult population.
- There is a general perception that village schooling is failing and that standards are declining.
- Teachers' lack of regard for the villagers is mirrored by the villagers' low opinion of the teachers.
- Many villagers consider that education in Akurase is not worthwhile because:
  - It is not relevant to the children's future prospects as farmers
  - The schooling in the village is not of sufficiently good quality to warrant investment of

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time, energy and economic resources.
- People are too poor to afford the relative luxury of schooling.
- Some are indifferent to the progress of the children in their care

- Migration and the policy of successive governments have eroded traditional matrilineal family structures, so that the responsibility for children's care and education is blurred.
- Poor families often rely on child labour to survive, and even when they do not, expect a strong contribution from children who are often only loosely connected to their guardians.
- Many people question whether there are any returns to education for children who do not leave the village and gain post-basic education. Many are also contemptuous of those who 'waste' education by returning to engage in farming.
- Successful education is seen purely in terms of examination passes and migration out of the rural context.
- The failure of the system to address problems raised by parents is seen as a disincentive to parental participation. For example, parents, especially resent the fact that two habitually drunk teachers have remained in post despite long-standing and numerous complaints.
- Parents therefore feel that schools and teachers are responsible to the state, not to them.
- Many parents do not pay school fees and PTA dues, whereas a minority is keen for contribution levels to be increased.
- Wider community involvement in schooling is not working because the notion of community on which it is based does not conform to experience. Many people in Akurase are settlers and owe allegiance to other places. They are therefore not keen to invest in the school or any other village structures.
- People's lack of identification with the place where they stay and educate their children appears to be more common in Ghana than is generally recognised and militates against community participation.

Chapter 6 Information & communication technologies & village life

6.1 Introduction

This chapter turns to the issue of the information and communication technologies. The previous three chapters were aimed at capturing a 'still' snapshot of the village people's understandings of education and particularly of schooling. This chapter and the following one, by contrast constitute more of a 'movie' in that the attitudes to ICTs were dynamic and subject to change as the Development Awareness Project took place in the village and gave people access to and experience of technologies that they might not otherwise have encountered. These two chapters therefore reflect this changing scenario. This one considers first the way people expressed their attitudes to ICTs before any intervention took place; second, it analyses their responses at the time to the filming in the village that was done by DA Project. Chapter 7 then goes on to investigate the interaction of people in the village with the ICTs supplied by the DA project and the effect this had on their perceptions of technology and its role in their future.

6.2 Villagers' Experiences of ICTs

As a rural village with no electricity, one might think that experience of ICTs was very limited in Akurase. To an extent, this was true, but the penetration of modern technology even to the most remote parts of the world, has been very great in recent years. Thus, one can safely say that there was nobody in the village whose life had not been touched by information and communication technologies of some sort.

6.2.1 Electricity

During the course of our fieldwork, we were aware of a number of development priorities in the village. We were told for example that a meeting had taken place where it had been decided to levy a sum on every adult inhabitant in order to bring electricity to the village. The sum in question was ¢15000 for men and ¢13500 for women. While this does represent a much larger amount for subsistence farmers than it would do when translated into hard currency (¢15000 = approximately £1.50) people considered it reasonable and did not think that for many people it would involve a great deal of sacrifice to pay it. Indeed, where the village people thought that spending money was important (for example purchase of funeral cloths or donations to funeral expenses, such sums and indeed much greater ones were routinely found). However, the number of people who had paid the levy was extremely low. We asked several people about this and the consensus was that, as with contribution to school activities, most people did not feel that this was their 'home town'. They felt much more allegiance to other towns or villages, which they returned to occasionally but where they did not live. Therefore, they felt that the money should be provided by those few inhabitants who were truly indigenous.

We therefore decided to investigate this through a ranking exercise. Based on what people had already told us we compiled a list of possible developments in Akurase and drew pictures of them on cards. We then went about the village asking people what they thought would be

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the best thing to improve the village, using the cards to produce a rank order. The sample was a small random one (n= 27, but was well balanced for age (adults aged 20-67) and gender (14 male, 13 female). The table below gives the results of the ranking.

Table 3: **Development priorities in Akurase**

1 Electricity
2 Tarred Road
3 Hospital
4 Senior Secondary School
5 Better Water Facilities
6 Market
7 KVIP (more hygienic toilets)
8 Telephone

The results were quite conclusive with electricity coming out as by far the most popular choice. Indeed some of the people who made other selections as their first priority (e.g. hospital) said they had not chosen electricity first because if the hospital came it would bring electricity. However, more important was the fact that many people said electricity would bring further benefits, seeing it as a prerequisite for other development. The main benefit was that it would create employment as businesses - car fitters, machine plants and shops with a cold store were mentioned - could be set up. This would mean that young people would also stay in the village and not seek to move to the town.

At an individual level then, compared to education, electricity was seen as a much surer route out of the stagnation that people felt happened to them living in the village. However, at a collective level it was seen as very important. At a formal meeting with the elders of the village we were told that Kuro had once been less important than Akurase and it was only since electricity had come that it had gained more prominence. A perusal of older maps suggests that the relative prosperity of the two settlements is not much different than it was before electrification. We encountered several times a jealousy about Kuro from the indigenous elders, but interview data reveals that settlers also subscribed to this idea. It all points to the conclusion that although there may be strong objections to paying the levy, electricity was seen as a very desirable but not at the moment attainable development objective.

6.2.2 Radio

The most obvious and ubiquitous form of ICT is the radio. There is a fairly typical spread of radio ownership probably with one per compound, (just below the average for sub-Saharan Africa of one per household). The radio sets are not all working at the same time as they rely

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on batteries (dry cells), which are expensive and are not always available in the village. We encountered one wind up radio, which could also run on solar energy in the daytime.

Our impression, confirmed by specific questioning was that the main use for radio was to listen to music. Apart from this, the main listening was to the news in Twi. The reception of FM stations in the village was very poor and therefore more locally focused programmes with phone-ins and discussions in Twi were not often listened to. Despite the fact that Twi is the most spoken language in Ghana and the village is located in the heart of the Ashanti (Twi speaking) region, much of the talk radio available and the DJs' patter on the music programmes were in English. Children reported that at home, adults took the decisions about what was listened to and English language programmes were not listened to. Also, there was no use of radio at school. Thus, radio was understood by adults and children in Akurase as primarily a medium for entertainment rather than information or education.

Ansu-Kyeremeh (1997) whose fieldwork took place in a similar Akan village in 1987 observed that *anansisem,* the telling of traditional stories, usually by older people was still a popular form of communication. We never encountered it personally in Akurase but did ask about it. Two theories were advanced for its demise by both the young and older people we spoke to. The first was that on occasions when it might have happened people now listened to the radio or watched television. The second was that the young people in the village no longer revered the old people and looked more towards younger role models. In this, the influence of modern mass media was seen to be important.

6.2.3 Television

The number of television sets in the village was not large, however we found great difficulty in determining how many exactly. From asking children to name compounds where they had watched television we gained an upper figure of 16, whereas whilst we were there, there seemed to be no more than 5 in use. These are run on car batteries, which can be taken to Kuro for trickle charging when they are run down. The family headed by the Chair of the SMC owned a taxi and had several batteries. They were thus able to watch television whenever they wanted and ran a refrigerator. This family also had an electricity generator but it was temperamental and therefore was not used very frequently. One other television was run off a generator in the village. This was owned by a man who also possessed an amplifier and offered a news service. Every few days he would 'broadcast' announcements to the village at the period when people were getting up just before dawn. For a small fee, it was possible to access this service, usually with details about funerals, the major social events in the village. The amplifier could also be hired for music for large funerals.

The usefulness of television to most people in the village was also restricted by the language issue, as almost all air time is devoted to English language programmes. Once again, what children reported about television watching habits confirmed our observation that people did

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not usually switch on for the news in Twi as it was broadcast in isolation, surrounded by English language programmes. However the programmes that were most popular were football matches, especially when the national team was playing and the small number of soap operas broadcast in Akan languages, the most popular being the regular Akan Drama slot.

Different TV owners had different practices with respect to the openness of their compounds to visitors. Thus people who lived in a compound where there was a TV set would be fairly regular watchers whereas those who did not, had to rely on invitations to view other people's. Nevertheless, it appeared that virtually everybody in the village seemed to have experience of television to a greater or lesser extent.

As with radio, TV was seen as a means of entertainment and we encountered virtually no notion of television as an educational medium. The one exception was a child who had stayed with relations in the city and talked about the fact that there it was on all the time so as a child you got a choice about what you watched, whereas in Akurase it was always an adult who decided when to watch and it was always for specific programmes. He said that watching television in Kurokese helped him with his English, but that this function was not available in the village. He also compared it favourably with radio:

> TV is much better than radio for learning because it can show much more because of the pictures. (Interview)

6.2.4 Video

Video was the most controversial form of technology in the village. The village had been served, like many rural communities by a travelling video mounted in the back of a vehicle. This came in the evenings when people had returned from the farm and could play to quite a large audience. Films shown were in the genre of all-action blockbusters with a lot of violence and some sexual content. Although payment secures a place close to the screen, it is also possible to get a distant view without payment. The videos had been very popular with young people. However, there were no screenings while we were in the village. According to one of the headteachers the shows were controversial and offended the sensibilities of a section of the village community. The schools through the SMC had lent their support to calls for restrictions on these showings and the elders had acted to prohibit them. Allowing children to attend video shows was given by teachers as a prime example of bad parenting not only because following the shows children often came to school tired but also for the moral laxity that they were said to induce. On this point, an interesting finding of Leach et al (2002:37) elsewhere in Ghana was that boys said one reason why sexual molestation of girls took place was 'to practice things in films'.

Concern about the adverse effects of this type of video is not new in Ghana. This can be seen in Duke (1988) where they were described by the then Minister of Information as "a tool for acculturation with antisocial results, such as the recent spate of armed robberies, rapes and murders." (quoted in Ansu-Kyeremeh 1994:30).

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Another use of video was that there are now companies, which will make film of public and private events, most notably funerals. In Akurase the assemblyman had received a copy of a video of the funeral of one of his relations in Brong Ahafo region and was able to play it to his family in the village.

6.2.5 Telephones

Apart from what it indicates about electricity, the ranking exercise (table 3) is interesting because the telephone was placed by almost everybody at or near the bottom of the ranking with only two younger women putting it as high as second and third. Buckley (2002) cites Yankah, (1999) in claiming that there is deep hostility amongst Akan peoples to ICTs in general and telephones in particular[21]. However, this was not our experience and the issue at this time seemed to be more one of little interest in communication with the outside and the feeling that a telephone would be irrelevant to people's concerns.

There is no telephone in the village. The nearest public call box is in Kuro but this is frequently out of action. However, there are communication centres there, which allows anyone visiting the town to make telephone calls. The one frequent user of the telephone was the son of the Chair of the SMC who used it to transact business for his father.

When we took a group of villagers to visit a computer suite in Kurokese, we first determined how many of them had used a telephone before. Apart from the headteacher of the JSS, none had ever made a call. Indeed most of the children had never seen a real telephone, although they all knew about them from television. However, because recently mobile cell phones had featured, there was some confusion about these. One child who had stayed with relations in the city knew that mobile phones needed to be charged up in order for them to function. The activity of using the internal telephone to give each participant a chance to talk to each other was greeted with much delight and some mentioned this later as almost as exciting as using the computers.

6.2.6 Computers

People knew even less about computers, as unlike telephones, they did not feature as important items in the televised dramas. Similarly though some had heard about the internet they had very little idea about what it was.

The one person who was supposedly well informed was Albert the senior secondary school graduate whose case is elaborated in chapter 3. At school, he had taken science, which now includes computer science whose syllabus includes some 'hands on' experience. There is no

[21] Yankah even goes as far as to claim that the Akan word for telephone ahomatrofo means 'wire that conveys lies'. According to the Department of Ghanaian Languages at the University of Cape Coast *trofo* can mean either a liar or something that is slippery and therefore fast. The name for telephone stems from the latter (a line that carries messages very fast) Yankah may mean that some people misinterpret the etymology of the word, but nothing in our data suggests this. Moreover the word used by people when speaking Twi was 'telephone'.

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computer in the whole of Kuro so during the computer science lesson the pupils were taken in a bus to a bank in the district capital to be shown how a computer worked. Unfortunately, on the day they went, the person who was supposed to do this for them had not come to work, so they all got back into the bus and went back to Kuro. In fact as far as the examinations went, this did not make much difference, as the questions were very general such as "what is software" and "what is hardware."

The people who might have been thought most likely to have had computer experience in the village were the younger teachers. Although they had been talked about and they knew people who used email, none of them had actually had any computer experience before the DA project.

6.2.7 Summary of attitudes and experience to ICTs

In summary, the position with ICTs in Akurase before any intervention from the DA project was that, unlike the saturation achieved by many more technologically advanced parts of the world, there was little experience of them. Nevertheless, they were having a profound effect. They did not appear to be aware of the possibilities of ICTs for active use for education; this may be because they seemed to exist as separate and outside other forms of social contact. Thus, one of the JSS girls when asked to appraise the possibilities for learning from ICTs said "if I see something on the T.V. or hear it on the radio and I do not understand, nobody is there to explain it to me." The people were consumers on a small scale of mass media and this was affecting their cultural attitudes. Television particularly gave a window into a more sophisticated and attractive urban world. However, because of the language issue this was not North America or Europe, but the cities of West Africa. When we engaged people in conversation about how they thought that the further development of ICTs might impact on their lives they were fairly negative. Modern technology was associated with electricity, which they did not have, and with the cash economy to run the machines and pay the bills. Thus, it seemed that at best the development of ICTs was irrelevant for most people; at worst it represented yet another way in which they were falling behind the people in the towns and especially the big cities. For them, the most important digital divide was between them and their urban compatriots (cf. Lewin 2000; Hall 1998). Industrialised countries were seen as glittering and uniformly rich, but pockets of that richness were to be had in Ghana and the accessibility of ICTs, which connected a Ghanaian elite with global society, only emphasised this.

6.3 Responses to Filming

Questions raised by people in the village about the intentions and objectives of the DA project were obviously of far more consequence and importance to that project than to this research. However, discussing this was particularly useful to the research, as they yielded important insights about the villagers' image of themselves and the way in which this might impact on their communication with the outside world. This issue is at the centre of what research such as this might provide. Whilst questions of connectivity and people's responses

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to actual technological artefacts are important, all such considerations are embedded in potential users' sense of their purpose. As Leonard and Dorsey (1996) recognise, barriers to successful use of ICTs work at two levels; and the second level, concerned with attitudes and understandings, is ultimately more important than the first, which deals with hardware and infrastructure. The DA project personnel - for most of the initial filming period a black/mixed race Briton, a white Briton and a Ghanaian - acted as representatives of the global world and brought sophisticated digital technology into the village. They stayed in rooms in a house owned by the village assemblyman and shared the compound with the headteacher of the JSS and his family. Their accommodation was therefore not much different from other people in the village, however, they did have a diesel generator so that the equipment could be charged and, once the filming had started they spent most evenings viewing, analysing and editing film.

Throughout initial filming done by the DA project a consistently problematic issue was the understanding of the village people of the purpose of this project and the notion of cultural exchange. This had been an anticipated problem and therefore a great deal of effort had gone into explaining it. This included preliminary briefing as to potential activities and purposes some months before the project began and then at the start of the filming. A clear statement of intentions was translated and read out to the villagers. This stressed that the project was committed to presenting positive images of Africa. Opportunities to reiterate this were taken and logged and a very gradual approach to the filming had been planned and adopted. Also, putting cameras in the hands of local people was also seen as a way of furthering this agenda. Nevertheless, the idea of cultural exchange proved remarkably difficult to instil.

There were two misconceptions. The first was that the DA workers were there to provide development aid (one story that went about was that they intended to build a private school in the village). The fieldnotes of the DA workers stress that no matter how frequently villagers accepted the notion of cultural exchange, they always returned to their conviction that development was at the heart of the project. This seemed still to be a dominant view amongst adults and most of the children when the first period of intensive data collection was taking place. The exception was some of the JSS pupils who had been most intimately involved in authoring the text and video for the project, who talked in terms of having done this for 'children in England'. Even adults whom we thought might be most aware (such as the educated son of the Chair of the SMC) although able to talk briefly about cultural exchange saw development work in the village as far more important. This was to a certain extent a reasonable assumption since members of the project team had contributed money, which was given to the village and was being used to provide materials for the repair of the JSS. They always stressed that this was an extra and not part of the central mission of the project. Nevertheless, the notion of development and its outcomes is concrete and cultural exchange is abstract; development is familiar whereas cultural exchange is unfamiliar and because of this, development is emotionally understandable, whereas cultural exchange is not.

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Moreover the very idea of cultural exchange presupposes experiences of a cultural 'other' and thus may be a difficult concept to grasp for people whose experience of other cultures is hazy and limited. White people might be benevolent towards the people of Akurase, but the idea that that they might wish to learn from them was incomprehensible. Thus, there is a paradox in that one of the intentions of the project is to get away from the deficit view of poor communities, yet to do so one risks being insensitive to the perspectives of the Ghanaians. Over and above anything else, they recognised a power differential between the two ends of the exchange, whose key distinguishing feature is the extreme difference in wealth. They can only be assured of good intentions by being able to see some material benefit accruing from the exchange. Otherwise the interaction is seen in the same way as most North – South transactions, namely, that whatever the overt intentions the beneficiary is the northern partner.

Another way that the DA project attempted to reassure people was screenings of work in progress so that people could see what the images looked like. However, when this happened, some people in the village became very worried about how the images might be used. One man questioned whether the film being made was a way of the DA workers making a lot of money. Much more pervasive was the view encapsulated by one girl, who said:

> Most people in the community are happy with the photographing except one man who feels that the *Obruni*[22] want to make a mockery of the inhabitants of the village. (Interview)

This view held that wealthy people would take some perverse pleasure in comparing their lot with the impoverished rural people. This idea was reinforced by a visitor to the village, a relative of one of the people living there, who had been resident in Europe. When he discovered about the filming, he found the DA workers and started to remonstrate angrily with them. The debate sobered down when project personnel agreed with him that much portrayal of Africa in the North is reprehensible. Although he left favourably disposed to the project, the incident may have reinforced the doubts of some of the villagers.

A variation on this view of malign intent was also articulated in an interview with a school child.

> Some members of the community are happy about the project, but others are not happy with it. Those who are not pleased with it are of the view that the whites will carry our "spirits" to England if we allow them to take the pictures. (Interview)

This may be seen as an unsophisticated idea rooted in animist religion and out of touch with the realities of modern technology. However, in some respects it is not far from the truth. Generally speaking, the tourist gaze is not a flattering one for people in developing countries, but most importantly it is not one where the subjects have any control (Linnekin and Poyer 1990). Photographs and film are created and are then removed from sight so there is no come back on them. The 'spirits' contained in the images can be edited and used without reference to those portrayed. This is what Stuart Hall (1999:259) drawing both Foucault's

[22] Obruni, literally means people from beyond the horizon. It is generally translated as 'white people' though it is also applied to African Americans who are quite numerous as tourists in some parts of Ghana.

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notion of régime of truth calls a 'régime of representation' which in the context of Africa stereotypes the subjects, 'classifies them according to a norm and constructs the excluded as 'other'."

Nor indeed is this condition restricted to the touristic uses of images about Africa. Although Africa is largely absent from global news, when it is covered it is largely in negative terms, where 'political conflict [is portrayed] in terms of a binary opposition between primitive and modern'. (Hawk 1992:9). Even where there is some advocacy of Africans generally Northern media that speak for the subordinate Africa (Mitra 2001) As Borgartz (2002) maintains, the media's construction of Africa functions to perpetuate feelings of Western superiority and to provide legitimisation for existing relations of dominance. It also explains African poverty 'with reference to their own cultural lack'. (Stevenson 1999:138).

Although the role of these portrayals in maintaining the cultural superiority of the North has received attention, what is more important for this discussion is their impact on people from the South and specifically those from Akurase. Until recently this issue surfaced only for Africans who migrated. Villagers were not consumers of global culture and did not have an opportunity to see the way that they might be portrayed. Now, as demonstrated in the previous section, the reach of global media has extended to Akurase and, although there is as yet little purposive viewing of the kind of television, which portrays the rich North, people are nonetheless exposed to it. For example, CNN is shown on Ghanaian domestic terrestrial television in the gaps between locally produced programmes. Thus, it is possible for villagers in Akurase to view a romanticised picture of global culture as exemplified by the advertisements for hotels on CNN but they do not see their own realities reflected. For the consumers of these media on either side, the other is seen through a distorting lens.

The deficit view of the village and village life that has been shown as articulated by the urban teachers in chapter four was not hard to find in the data from the villagers. Repeatedly the DA workers found that people expressed surprise that people elsewhere should have any interest in the village. A typical extract from their field notes states that it was always very difficult for the people in the village:

> to see any kind of potential for UK schools or audiences to learn or gain anything from Ghana, since a tremendous cultural inferiority complex was evident from the comments and attitudes revealed.

Thus, for the people of Akurase, it seemed that the interaction of their own low technology world with ICTs could only result in portrayal that would be to their disadvantage.

However, the ramifications of cultural dissonance did not stop there, since some of the practices of the Project were extremely challenging to some of village society. Many of the fundamental aims of the DA Project, for example, the notion of empowering individuals,

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particularly the less powerful such as children and women, through providing access to media as tools of self articulation and representation were always going to be difficult for many in a highly conservative, hierarchical community to engage with. Also, in Ghana, as in many other settings, the use of technical equipment is the exclusive province of men, yet the three project workers were women who, for almost all of the time, were working alone in the village. Moreover, as a deliberate policy they worked particularly with girls giving them also access to the equipment. They reported that one elder asked why they were wasting the cameras on children and girls, whether their husbands minded them doing this and why it was only women there. In particular children are expected to be compliant and unchallenging in relation to adults so encouraging them to articulate aspirations, reflect on power structures, school dislikes, and talk of familial problems is not at all usual. Given this brief, the task of the two Project workers was delicate.

In summary, the mystification of the village participants in the DA project might be ascribed to the factors listed below:

- They had a deficit view of their own society, reinforced by the opinions of others such as urban Ghanaians.
- The penetration of outside culture via ICTs had been such as to reinforce this view.
- They therefore viewed the cultural exchange project either as benign but linked to philanthropic development efforts, or malign and seeking to exploit or mock them.
- Although the DA project had at this stage attempted to make their engagement with the ICTs active, because they had not been able to see the way that the images would be used they were still powerless and fell back on understandings derived from their passive consumption of media.

Chapter 7 Information & communication technologies: the Effect of the project

7.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the effect of the DA project on the understandings of ICTs of the people of Akurase and the role that modern technology and in particular digital media might have on their future. At the start of the previous chapter, we contrasted the snapshot of the educational and community issues in chapters 3 to 5, with the dynamic quality of the response to ICTs in chapters 6 and 7. However, we need to qualify that. The project found that the effect of the village's interaction with technology was more profound than we had anticipated. In this chapter, we therefore revisit the issue of community. In retrospect we should not have been surprised at the way the two sides of the project interacted, for social process are complex and often unpredictable. As Gleick (1988) points out, within complex systems, very small events can give rise to very large outcomes, though, as in this case, patterns of cause and effect may be difficult to trace. Changes to the community of Akurase following the DA project, may yield important insights into the way that difficult issues, which appear to have been unsusceptible to huge efforts at planned change, might be tackled in future.

7.2 First view of Akurase on the Internet

As the argument in the previous chapter has suggested, the turning point in the effect of the ICTs on the village came not so much when they were first introduced as when people were able to see more clearly the use to which they were being put.

This happened first when, as part of the *Understandings* project, we took a group of teachers, pupils and adult villagers from the village, to a computer suite in Kurokese. This was attached to an NGO that has been actively involved in the promotion of ICTs in Ghana and we were able to draw on staff there to introduce the computers to the participants. Here they were able to work on the computer and finally to access the DA project website. The people chosen included some of those who had been active in producing the images and text that had been used in the website.

The session was carefully structured so that they first had experience of talking to each other on internal telephones. Next they were divided into mixed groups of three or four with where possible one English speaker in each, and a researcher available to supervise. With hindsight, it would have been better if the researchers had been less involved in facilitating the groups, though we would have needed more staff and more functioning computers. Each group then had a period of working on basic tasks on the computer, so that they were able to use the mouse and keyboard and form a general, though rudimentary impression of the way that it functioned. The notion of the internet was explained with reference to the idea of the telephone whereby instead of people talking to each other it was the computers that were communicating. This then enabled us to lead into the idea of the computers in Kurokese being connected by telephone to a computer in England on which the DA project's website was housed. It was important that the participants were able to understand that the data they

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were accessing were not just available on the computers in Kurokese but were accessible world-wide. The fact that visitors to the website had left messages was helpful in getting this over.

Whilst the whole experience was met with a very positive reaction, the part that delighted participants most was when they saw their village and themselves on the computer screen. One man who had taken a series of photographs of himself and his farm kept laughing and smiling and pointing at the screen. One of his group partners commented that what was especially important to him was the fact that he remembered 'snapping the photos' but never realised that he would see them again on a television screen.

When we returned to the village, there were several reactions. We attempted to use the experience to get people to think about how computer technology might impact on their lives in the shorter and longer term. However, possibly because the timing of the visit had not allowed us sufficient extra space to let the experience sink in nor to construct more specific data gathering activities we found that it remained difficult to get people to think beyond the immediate experience. Issues of connectivity and access seemed to lend this single experience a degree of unreality. Although in the medium term photovoltaic and satellite technology may be more influential in extending connectivity to rural communities they are even more difficult and remote for people to conjecture (Vanbuel 2001; Topu 2002). Questions as to what might happen if these technologies were more available to them, were then still at this stage at a double remove.

There was still therefore a lot of scepticism about how computers might affect people's lives. One of the teachers commented that the computers were very exciting and useful but, again, they would be beneficial to people in towns and emphasise the difference between urban and rural people. Unsurprisingly there continued to be little appreciation of their possible educational uses, because we could not get people to engage with the idea that rural, basic education schools might ever have access to them.

However, the possible impact on education was unexpected and was exemplified by a mother, whose son, Felix, had just dropped out of school. Had we known this we may not have chosen to take him on the visit since his role within the group was a representative male primary school pupil. The day after the trip she came to us to say:

> Your interaction with him has made him express a desire to go to school. Yesterday's journey has served as a booster for him. (Informal interview)

In other words, following the trip, he had changed his mind about dropping out. This appeared to work in two ways. First, was the idea that the computer and the internet were of themselves very attractive. In order to get to work with them one therefore had to continue education and progress to senior secondary school and beyond. The other was that working with the computers

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had demonstrated another use for literacy. Although all the participants had had access to the images, making sense of the website had depended on those who could read the written text.

As far as education went, this brief experience of ICTs had acted as a motivator – participants and those to whom they talked, had got a window onto a world of opportunity, but this opportunity was linked to education. The ICTs offered another reason to be literate and to be educated. This technology therefore became an incentive to educational achievement.

Another important response to the internet session was that this seemed to be a turning point in terms of the worries about the possibility of the images being used to mock the villagers. So, whereas there had been concern about the vulnerability of being put on display this had been turned round completely and the response was one of happiness about being recognised. As one child commented:

> Before no-one knew I existed, now the whole world can see me. (Interview)

Others who had not made the visit, especially the village elders, expressed similar feelings. During the formal leave taking of the research team from the village the chief stressed how out of all the places that could have been chosen it was his village that had had this distinction.

Part of this appreciation seems to be very practically based as the chief went to say that "through their work many good things will come to this town[23]." He appeared to have in mind that this might either bring wealthy tourists to Akurase or else would attract external assistance to help develop the community. Nonetheless, as we have seen before, people in Akurase had a fairly negative view of themselves and of their village. The effect of this recognition through what is an extremely prestigious medium should not be underestimated.

One other thing that was done at this stage was a screening of film that had been made in the two primary schools during the previous intensive data collection period. These screenings yielded some useful data that fed into the general understandings of education including the point that children from two schools were able to identify some differences that they did not know existed between the two schools[24]. However, few insights into ICT were obtained from these activities.

7.3 DA project Final Phase

Several months later, at the end of the DA project those involved returned once more to Akurase. The main objective of this visit was to share with people in Akurase the work that had been done in UK and thus to further the cultural exchange process.

[23] The village elders were always reluctant to describe Akurase as a village, despite its lack of facilities and population. This is a further example of the way that rurality is seen in a negative light even by those who express pride, like the chief, at their engagement in agriculture.
[24] For example, there were differences in the rules of playground games.

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7.3.1 Screenings in the schools

Two main types of activity took place. The first of these was a screening of film made both in Akurase and the UK to each of the schools.

Following the experience of previous school screenings more time was taken and a project worker with the aid of the teachers was able to set a context for what the children were about to see. She then stopped the video frequently and through the teacher was able to get children to volunteer observations about what they were seeing on the screen and to make overt comparisons between what they saw from both countries. She noted:

> This would have been even more productive with more time and with smaller groups of children, although a desire to be inclusive made it necessary to include large groups (i.e. the whole school) in a screening. (Fieldnotes)

Three things emerged strongly for the DA workers in these sessions. First was the idea that what most interested and excited the children was seeing themselves in front of the camera, especially the activities where they had been most active in planning and authoring the work. Second the children were very interested in the similarity in games (specifically clapping games) between the primary school children in England and in Ghana. Finally there was a passage where both English and Ghanaian children said what they like to eat:

> The food footage led to some interesting awareness about the similarities between what children eat, helping the UK appear closer to children in Akurase. (Fieldnotes).

At first sight these responses especially the second and third might appear surprising in that one might expect more awareness of differences than of similarities. However, given the goals of the DA project they are less surprising, since not only the editing but also the design and planning of the activities were aimed at emphasising similarities. Although the primary concern with development education in high-income countries is about raising the level of esteem with which people might view their fellows in low-income countries, these same materials might be expected to have the reciprocal effect of raising self-esteem in the South. Thus the screenings reinforced the effects noted in the previous section – they accorded recognition, but in a way that emphasised the positive rather than the negative. However, the fact that they were able to do this was a product not so much of the technology itself but of the way that it was used. This is an idea that will be taken up later.

7.3.2 Internet sessions

The second type of activity involved more opportunities for people to interact with the internet. This time a commercial internet café in Kurokese was used as it had much better connections and faster machines. There were two trips to an Internet café, the first involving 11 children, 3 teachers and 2 other adults (Wednesday 13th February 2002). A follow-up visit was then arranged later with smaller numbers in order that the possibilities could be explored in more detail. This time two children and two teachers took part.

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On the first occasion, building on previous experience, more time was spent in preparing participants. In particular the 3 teachers, none of whom had come on the previous trip, were given an introduction to using the computer the day before the first trip. This enabled them to play a more active role at the internet café and gave them confidence about assisting the children the following day. The importance of this from the perspective of the DA was emphasised later when some of them accompanied by two of the local teachers later joined a British Council workshop discussing ICT based links that had happened as part of a millennium exchange programme. There, participating Ghanaian teachers complained that the links had had limited value in promoting ICT use in Ghana, because the UK agencies had offered insufficient training to teachers, concentrating instead on teaching school children.

Once again, the internet sessions were very well received. One of the DA project workers commented:

> The experience was a fascinating, wholly productive, one which contained some surprises such as the ease and competence with which the children dealt with web navigation (i.e. using the mouse) and everybody's (particularly the teachers') unbounded, insatiable desire for more exposure to the internet and computers in general.

The teachers who were involved in this activity were particularly enthusiastic and set up e-mail accounts which they continue to use. They particularly valued the fact that they were used to help others make sense of the internet. They recognised how the internet might have great educational potential. One stated that if pupils had access to such technologies on a regular basis it would be good for many aspects of their studies, including generating an interest in computer science, "But we need to make financial progress before that happens." However, for this man, one of the young teachers from an urban background, the allure of the technology was likely only to reinforce his desire to leave the village at all costs and relocate somewhere where these glittering prizes might be more available, after the end of the project.

In a debriefing session after using the internet the other teachers largely concurred with this, saying that they saw being able to use a computer as an essential part of being skilled in the twenty-first century. They were surprised by the fact that not all teachers in the North would be using the Internet as teaching resource. The fact that they had this opportunity even once or twice made them feel very good. Their analysis was both pessimistic and optimistic. On the one hand more access to the internet might enable Ghanaians to catch up with the developed world, but at the same time they could not see this happening because of the lack of resources which would always put African countries at a disadvantage. This was interesting as these teachers were articulating two of the three main theories that are found in the literature of ICT use in low income countries, 'leapfrogging' and 'marginalisation' (Yates 2002:6).

Following these sessions, the children were able to say that they had learnt a lot about life in the UK schools. However even at this stage it proved difficult for all the participants to

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understand how learning about Ghana could be of educational value for the children in the UK. This attitude was later reflected when one of the DA project workers gave a seminar to communication students at the University of Ghana[25].

7.4 ICTs and Community galvanisation

The most dramatic effect of the DA project in Akurase echoes the motivational effect on Felix, the boy who had dropped out of school in the case described above. However, this time it was happening at a collective level. In chapter 5 our analysis suggested that the reason that community involvement in schooling in Akurase was not working was because there was no sense of community, or rather that many people's community affiliations were directed elsewhere. Our case study which demonstrated this most forcefully was that even outside the field of education the development priority that most interested the population of Akurase, the procurement of electricity, was not being enacted precisely because the sense of community which would have enabled concerted action, was lacking. This analysis was contained in a paper that we wrote after the official end of the *Understandings* project, but before the conclusion of the DA project. We were therefore surprised when we discovered that following the final visit of the DA project team and the activities described in the last section the village decided to press ahead with plans to bring electricity to Akurase. Although they were hoping to gain support from outside - sponsorship by the large gold mining company which operates not far from the village was mentioned though as yet we have heard of no developments on this front[26] – the main engine for this was to be community action. The chair of the SMC had donated 30 acres of land as the basis of a community farm and the village was organising communal labour. All the profits from crops going towards the purchase of electricity poles and the village was now seeking other ways of getting further contributions.

Several months later the headteacher of the JSS[27] in a letter reported on progress:

> They have planted about 30 acres of maize and it is striving well. I do recommend them for this seriousness now. Work done is quite impressive… The community spirit gathered is quite extraordinary and is my first experience. (Letter)

Emails from the JSS teachers later confirmed that the work had progressed well and that following a good harvest the school had helped by threshing some of the maize. At the time of writing the corn had not been sold so it is not possible to tell how successful the farm has been in furthering the cause of electrification.

[25] One commented in her field notes: "Middle class Ghanaians such as these students did not appear to be totally comfortable with the idea of a cultural exchange project which centred around a rural 'non electrified' community. In fact, they would have preferred an urban middle class depiction of life in Ghana, despite the 'untypicalness' of such a lifestyle in Ghana. A lecturer in history who also attended the seminar, expressed some impatience with this attitude but saw it as fairly characteristic of the insecurities of middle class Ghanaians. It also seemed characteristic of a distinct and pervasive rural/urban divide evident from the responses of urban dwelling middle class Ghanaian to material which attempts to value and find positive qualities in the lives and experiences of rural dwelling Ghanaians. Urban Middle class Ghanaians appear to be 'ashamed of the village', and disdainful of Ghanaians who live in the village, despite the fact they all have relatives who come from a rural setting.

[26] Ideas also included seeking additional funds from the DA project personnel and contacts made in the UK.

[27] The endorsement is all the stronger in that his use of the third person 'they' shows that he still sees himself as outsider in village affairs.

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The communications from these teachers confirmed the impression gained by the DA project that the change in attitude was linked to that project:

> [the DA project's] work has made Akurase people wishing to get electricity."
> (email from JSS teacher).

The lack of community spirit seems to have generated little 'push' towards this development, but the interaction of people with ICTs seems to have exerted a strong enough pull to counter the lack of community spirit. The cultural exchange screenings and the visits to the internet café by small numbers of village people were very well received. What is more, if what the teachers say is true, they appear to have reinforced and amplified people's notion of the potential benefits of electricity coming to the village.

It is important to add at this point that one cannot generalise from this small project to claim that the exceptional circumstances could be generated elsewhere with similar effects. However, an identification and analysis of just what these exceptional circumstances are may be useful in suggesting the kind of direction that policy might take. Furthermore, although the nature of the ICTs and the practices adopted by the project have much potential for having a positive effect on other communities like Akurase, the particular effect they have had, is to do with a project that is almost certainly not replicable on a scale that would have a significant impact. The rest of this chapter will therefore attempt to tease out and look critically at aspects of the Akurase experience that have had a particularly positive effect.

7.5 Visibility and exposure to the outside world

A way of viewing this *volte-face* is in terms of social capital. Bourdieu (1986:249 talks of a social capital as a network of relationships being "the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously, aimed at establishing or reproducing social relations that are directly useable in the short or long term" (Bourdieu, 1986:249). The network of relationships of people in Akurase was not based in the village and therefore they did not invest either in economic or in symbolic terms in the community there. Social capital in the village was not directed towards Akurase itself and thus the village did not act like a community. It appears therefore that ICTs through the DA project have acted as a catalyst in creating the 'extraordinary community spirit'. People who were beforehand reluctant to do so, have invested in the community and social capital might be said to have been generated[28].

The comments of the chief and the schoolgirl[29] cited earlier show that on a personal level the visibility and exposure accorded to Akurase was important. However, this recognition was less about individuals and more about the community as a whole. At some level it was calling

[28] Nevertheless as Fine (2000) points out the notion of development projects producing collective capital accumulation in this way tends to make the concept somewhat "chaotic, ambiguous, and general … that can be used as notional umbrella for almost any purpose. (Fine 2001:155)
[29] Before no-one knew I existed, now the whole world can see me. (Interview)

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the community into being and shaping the way that people thought about themselves in relation to the outside world. The fact that the website had emails addressed to them from different parts of the world enabled people to feel connected and thus to access some sort of social capital derived from being part of the cyber network created by the website.

However, recognition is a double edged sword. On the one hand it can give a sense of community, on the other, as we have seen with the initial apprehensions, it can expose the village to invidious comparisons.

The significant feature, as we have seen, was that here the material people were exposed to was unusual. It was controlled and participants' interaction with the ICTs was carefully managed by the DA project. Everything was therefore specifically designed and manipulated so as to bring out the similarities and to foster solidarity. Given other circumstances and other internet materials, particularly those that are fostered by commercial interests, it is likely that people's experiences with ICTs might only have worked to emphasise the extent to which they are economically deficient compared to the rich urban world.

The implication of this is that any initiative to make the internet available should give thought to the type of website that is made easily available. This is an issue that is picked up in the concluding chapter.

7.6 Interactivity and agency

Closely linked to this is the idea that the villagers were cast in the role of active users rather than consumers of ICTs. Thus, the whole method of introducing digital technology into the village was activation and the stimulation of reflection on community life (see annex for a résumé of the DA project's methods). Thus, we have the obverse of the situation we described at the start of the project. Unlike their experience of television they were able to decide what was relevant to them and to confront the rich world on their own terms. As Mitra points out, the internet, as an essentially interactive tool is…

> accessible to a large number of subordinated people, [who can now] voice their individual… discourses… [and] hope to enter into a dialog with the dominant in interconnected cyberspace. (Mitra 2001:31-32).

This has undoubtedly happened within the DA project, but again one might argue that this was a special case. The project, constructed by a small group of like-minded activists created a protected environment. Moreover, the access of these villagers depended on the serendipity of their village being chosen to participate.

However, the implications of this are that when making decisions about how investment in rural connectivity should be achieved it would be important that any non-commercial interests such as governments and donors think not just in terms of consumption but also of construction of digital media.

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This has the added dimension in that, when thinking about the kind of digital resource base that was suggested in the last section, it would be the rural users who contributed to this rather than just the global, urban elite. Thus, in hardware terms, digital cameras and scanners might be just as important as the computers themselves; similarly web construction software would be vital. Methods of achieving this, presumably through some sort of animateur, would need to be the subject of much further research – possibly action research.

7.7 ICTs and pedagogic practice

Aspects of the pedagogic practice of the DA project are also worthy of some discussion. As we have seen in earlier chapters, current classroom interaction in Akurase does not appear to be giving even minimally acceptable outcomes. Although reasons for this are complex, one conclusion that was drawn was that pedagogic practices were not appropriate. Yet approaches to teaching and learning are notoriously difficult to change as they are embedded very strongly in classroom cultures. Faced with a desire to change the way that teachers teach, policy makers in Singapore have recently identified that using ICTs can disrupt established patterns and enable teachers who are entrenched in different patterns of interaction to become more versatile (Shanmugaratnam, 2002). What the DA project did with the children in Akurase when making the materials for the film and the internet were very similar to techniques that have been developed by Parry (2001) in the UK. Using the technique of 'storyboarding' students were able to collaborate on the creation of text. This involved them in finding information and planning ways of presenting it. In both cases, although the products depended on publication or uploading using sophisticated technology the actual classroom work involved using very low-tech materials and was accessible to all children (for details of this see Appendix 3). The use, for example, of storyboards, drafting/editing and reflective role play, all potentially very valuable in terms of constructivist learning, might be difficult to implement in Ghanaian schools if merely advocated by the centre. However, faced with the possibility of producing web-based materials these become obvious techniques. Moreover, they enable teachers to tackle aspects of content, which are otherwise hard to approach. This is also noted by Leach et al. (2002) who found that difficult issues such as abuse of children were not coped with well by current curricula but were much more accessible when alternative media were used. Yates (2001) also found that courses developed in face to face settings or for more conventional print-based distance learning situations do not necessarily transfer easily into online virtual learning environments and that therefore new approaches were needed.

All of this points to the idea that opportunities, even limited ones for interaction with ICTs, if accompanied by suitable training, might operate as a means to drive much needed changes in the way that teachers and pupils go about the process of learning. This would depend on ICTs being seen as an opportunity to do something different rather than replicating what had always been done (Blurton 1999).

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7.8 ICTs and teacher retention

Of all the people involved, the reaction of the younger teachers in Akurase to the internet was the most enthusiastic. As we have seen, email was immediately embraced as an important medium by younger teachers and they have subsequently decided to make it a priority to use these accounts almost on a weekly basis since then. This raises the issue of how access to ICTs might reduce their isolation and help to keep them in the village.

The World Bank (2001) claims that there are three particular strategies which have worked well so far in Africa within the field of ICTs and education: teacher development, quality enhancement in primary schools and modes of increasing access to tertiary education. The example they give is systems that support teachers as they work in rural schools. It is clear that they are talking here about initial teacher education and with the move in Ghana to the new system of the third year of initial teacher training being school-based this will obviously be appropriate; the difficulties in supervision of remote rural trainees might be alleviated by contact through email.

However, although there may be an issue about the competence and training of newly qualified teachers, our data suggest that there is a much more important issue about their continued motivation, professional development and retention in rural posts. At the moment the reasons that most students go into teacher training is that like Albert who featured in the pupils' perspective chapter, it is their only possibility for eventual access to higher education (see also Akyeampong et al. 2000). If the route to a degree were through village-based distance education involving practical activities grounded in their classroom practice and in facilitating community involvement with campus-based courses in the holidays, this might begin to make a great deal of difference. It might attract the better and more ambitious teachers to rural situations where it was on offer for extrinsic reasons but potentially also begin to interest them intrinsically in the issues that they were confronting. Such a programme, supported by ICTs would be expensive initially, but with the costs of the technology constantly falling might be a useful pilot for future developments.

The important thing would be to make the job of village school teacher more attractive. Sponsorship connected with communication might enable teachers to construct a sort of joint identity, whereby they embrace their rural identity and background, but are kept in touch with many of the benefits of the towns. This would have to include electricity. This is the kind of thing that Ess (2001) is advocating when he argues that participation in global society involves becoming 'dual citizens in both thick local cultures and a thin global culture'. (Ess 2001:25). Pupil teachers might be an initial source of recruitment since they have shown their commitment and in such a scheme one might look to sponsor these people over others.

The problem with all forms of capacity building strategy is that it runs the risk of creating a brain drain. When the capacities that are built are highly desirable and sought after on a global scale then that is almost inevitable. However, people are also prepared to pay a price

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to acquire them and structures might be introduced to ensure that a minimum time was served, possibly linked to a qualification. Such a policy might train a cadre of teachers with thorough knowledge of rural realities who would be in a good position to take up the senior posts in the decentralised education system which present policy in Ghana, as elsewhere, is advocating. It would also fall very neatly within the sensible parameters suggested by the World Bank (2001:45) whereby:

> National strategies for using distance education and ICTs in education are likely to be most effective when they are conceived not as plans for the procurement and distribution of technology, but rather situated within an enabling framework to develop the education sector as a whole.

They go on to suggest that these strategies be made part of sector-wide approaches and include locally developed and tested structures and content.

7.9 ICTs, Social Capital and the implications for schooling

Returning to our analysis in Chapter 5, the assumption that the community might work towards its own development was flawed by the disruption to community caused above all in this case by migration. This meant not only was community involvement in schooling very limited, but also people were not working towards their stated aim of electrification. An antecedent condition for community action was therefore some kind of catalyst that built community. In Akurase to some extent this was provided by an interaction with ICTs, but in the context of a project that is certainly not replicable on a large scale, though as we have discussed above elements of it might be incorporated into other initiatives.

As a final suggestion in this chapter we will ask the question whether ICTs in schools might begin to be seen as the catalyst themselves. Concerning the interaction between schools and communities we would agree with Redding (1999:27) who points out that perhaps it is less useful to consider what the community can do for the school rather than what the school can do for the community:

> In many societies, bonds of community no longer envelop the families of children who happen to attend… A school that views itself as a community of its constituents (school personnel, students, families of students) rather than an organization, is more likely to encourage the social interactions that lead to the accumulation of social capital.

Given what we observed at Akurase, this would be a very difficult enterprise to manage. However, if the school were seen much more as a community resource e.g. as a library (possibly of more than just books), as a centre for community forums (Serpell 1999) and shared facilities with other agencies such as health centres, then, whatever their allegiance to the village, people might begin to identify with the school itself and this kind of community building might begin to happen. This case study has shown that ICTs can exert a powerful pull effect on community development. Some sort of public access to digital technology

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through the school might therefore be a very potent catalyst in creating a community, and in interesting it and involving it in schooling. The idea of telecentres, sometimes located in and with schools (Community Learning Centres) is being tried in a number of places in Africa, not least in Ghana (Whyte 2000; Fontaine and Foote 1999; Greenstein 1998). This issue is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

What we are suggesting is that if you want to build a community round the school, start with the school, not with the community. This might then circumvent the cycle of top down intervention whereby decentralization is just the latest of a series of signals of concern from a standardising and centralising state (Fuller 1991).

7.10 Summary

- When participants encountered the internet, an important consideration was that it was mediated through the DA Project and contained text that was familiar to them and that they had produced themselves. Their sense of recognition had an effect in counteracting feelings of inadequacy both at personal and collective level.
- Because using ICTs is attractive, the prospect can act as an incentive to continue schooling. This is not only because formal education is seen as a means of access, but also because literate people are better able to engage with the text on the internet.
- Digital media offer powerful ways of creating images that emphasise common features between people in different settings. However, this is only likely to occur as part of a deliberate editorial policy.
- People are particularly enthusiastic about the internet. Teachers who had been unenthusiastic about the educational possibilities of other ICTs were able to see the possibilities of the internet.
- Experience of the way that text produced by local people was being used on the internet, appeared to act as catalyst for community action in the village. Factors which may have been influential in this are:
  - People's experience of the ICTs was active rather than passive.
  - 'Recognition' via the internet called the community into being, shaping the way that people thought about themselves in relation to the outside world.
  - Connection with the outside world seemed to offer possibilities for external assistance.
- Even limited access to ICTs might be used as a lever to more interactive yet culturally appropriate pedagogy, particular through 'low tech' approaches such as storyboarding.
- Greater access to ICTs will potentially enable schools to tackle parts of the curriculum that are difficult (e.g. health education around HIV/AIDS).
- Access to ICTs might act as an incentive to retain teachers as well as a means of continuing their education.
- In many places, a sense of community needs to be generated before effective collective action will take place. Centres providing public access to ICTs might, in suitable circumstances, act as a catalyst for this process.

Chapter 8 Conclusions and recommendations

8.1 Aims of the research

In this section, we will briefly evaluate the extent to which the aims of the research have been fulfilled. We will then, in the subsequent sections, discuss in more detail conclusions arising from the research under the headings of the original research questions.

This has been a small-scale project, which set out with quite ambitious aims. Within the constraints that it was under it has however met its goals. The research has enabled us to investigate young people's, teachers' and other community members' understandings of and attitudes to schooling in Akurase and to present them in a critical way, which respects the problems they face as human beings. The involvement of the DA project acted as a entrée to the village; it provided us with a great deal of observation data that would otherwise have been very time consuming and costly to collect; and it gave us materials that we were able to use as the basis for further data collection. The findings of this part of the research were not startling in that they were not discordant with what is already in the literature about village schooling in sub-Saharan Africa and Ghana in particular. However, we have managed to provide a rich picture which is grounded in a considerable length of time spent in the village and in a great deal of collaboration from insiders, outsiders and those who occupy a middle position. Our confidence in the quality and usefulness of this picture has been reinforced by the responses of those with whom we have already shared our findings and analysis. This has included fellow researchers at conferences on International Education in both Europe and North America and students and faculty members at our respective Universities. Especially encouraging in this respect has been the response of students at Cape Coast, most of whom are teachers with experience of village schools.

We also set out to explore the possibilities and problems afforded by ICTs as educational tools in a rural African setting. This we have been able to do, particularly with respect to finding themes that might be pursued in further development work. This might form the basis for a larger scale piece of work that would explore specific issues more thoroughly. Gathering together teachers and other stakeholders might do this better from a number of villages and running a series of workshops with supported activities to be followed in the field. It would thus be a combination of INSET and action research (see for example Steadman et al. 1985 for a model).

Our aim of generating knowledge about the appropriate development of information literacy in developing countries was also met largely through the positive experiences that the DA project was able to generate. Again, this was really only a start, but that was the advantage of the situation that the *Understandings* project sought to exploit, namely that we had access to people who were at the beginning of their interaction with sophisticated ICTs. However, as we discovered, the village had already been touched by modern technology and the notion of 'beginning' is relative.

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Finally, we set out to increase institutional research capacity at a Ghanaian university particularly with respect to qualitative research and the use of new media. Again, this was achieved, though slightly differently than we had expected. Practice with the use of video images as research data and time spent in the editing suite were limited because of the nature of the video data collected. However, the experience of the research has been useful to those who participated[30]. Also the project has raised the profile of qualitative research at the University of Cape Coast, with the result that some faculty members are actively seeking ways of extending their experience and thus becoming more versatile in their approach to research[31]. Undoubtedly there is still a desire for more work of this nature and projects such as this, where the experiences and expertise of researchers from both North and South are central to the approach, are a good way of enhancing capacity.

8.2 How do children, young people and educators in a Ghanaian rural community choose to represent their lives and educational opportunities?

The main conclusion that we can draw from this research is that overall, people in Akurase see themselves as being at the bottom of a very large and weighty heap. Although their lives are all connected to wide networks mostly formed by familial structures, the fabric of the net is not so strong as it might be. Over the years, migration and the gradual erosion of traditional family structures have weakened the ties that bind people together. Successful family relatives are those who have moved to the towns and cities and thus the feelings of isolation and stagnation of those left behind have been extended. The only people who talked more enthusiastically about village life tended to be more elderly and established. Whilst those in school might still hold out hopes that they would do sufficiently well to access desired jobs, they all accepted that only a very few achieved this aim. Younger people that had left school, either by dropping out or at the end of basic education, were not optimistic about their prospects.

Nevertheless, the human spirit is strong and people in Akurase were getting on with their lives and attempting to make the best of what opportunities were available. However, schooling featured strongly in this for only a very small minority. Some planning works on the assumption that one can make a distinction between the achievement of access and quality, with the second taking central stage only when the first has been achieved[32]. The evidence of this project suggests that this is a false premise, since it is not the lack of schools and classrooms that is adversely affecting enrolment and retention so much as the rational decision of families not to invest in worthless goods. UBE in Ghana will only be achieved when people are convinced that what is being offered by the schools is of sufficient quality to make attendance worthwhile. Thus a fundamental notion of human capital theory, that

[30] One of the associate researchers has subsequently moved on to the work with the Ministry of Science and Environment originally called Ministry of Science and Technology.
[31] One of these people who identified herself to us at an early seminar on the methodology of the Understandings project was subsequently recruited to replace a researcher who dropped out in the team of another DFID research project.
[32] A good example for this is World Bank (2001:46) "many of these countries will have achieved UPE and are approaching USE. Their problems are not of access but of quality"

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education is the means to a better life, was not subscribed to by many of the people of Akurase. For them the returns to education were only seen in terms of the examination success achieved by the very few. Moreover, school knowledge and outside knowledge were so tightly classified that indirect returns were minimised. Neither intrinsically nor extrinsically did the quality of the schooling on offer merit continuing effort and commitment by many parents and children. Rather than being an investment that would accumulate interest and mature, it was more of a gamble that one of the children in the family might be amongst the lucky ones.

Obvious conclusions to be drawn from this are that what would make matters a great deal better is more effective schooling that delivers basic literacy and is relevant to the concerns, needs and future lives of those that it serves. Whilst curriculum reform might be in some respects a means to this, without a change in patterns of classroom interaction little is likely to change. Attempts to move on making the curriculum more relevant and the pedagogy more interactive and accessible have been encouraging elsewhere (see for example Mulhall and Taylor 1997; Ravi and Rao 1994). What is abundantly clear from observation and from the perspective of the pupils is that the social relations of the classroom need to change. However, in Ghana the motivation of teachers to effect change in village schools is not good. The conditions of service of rural teachers need to be improved. At the moment, placement in a rural school is seen as detrimental to one's career and chances of further education despite the promise by the GES of quicker access to study leave with pay. If government policy could reverse this situation, possibly through a system of bonding and qualification explicitly linked to rural service and to study combining reflection on practice and active school improvement, then much might be achieved. This might then engage teachers emotionally and intellectually in the task of ameliorating conditions in villages since it would bind their own self-actualisation to that of the village.

At the moment, the conditions for this are not in place[33]. The lack of supervision of rural teachers may seem to them a positive factor in that it allows them to 'work the system' and to be absent for considerable lengths of time. However, it also means that they feel isolated and ignored so that good work goes unrecognised. More supervision might then be in their long-term interest. Current efforts towards decentralisation may well be useful in that by moving power downwards to district and circuit levels, supervision should in theory get better. However, currently there is little sign that this is happening. Only when people feel empowered at lower levels and therefore do not send awkward decisions upwards, will matters improve. For the people in the village this will mean action being taken on matters such as incompetent teachers.

[33] An Access course as part of poverty alleviation has been mounted for prospective teacher trainees. However, this has been limited in scope and open only to women this year.

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Our experience would suggest that these issues are not isolated but rather are intimately connected. This means that single initiatives are unlikely to succeed. Instead, macro and micro level change need to go hand in hand. National reforms, which remove impediments to local initiative and enable holistic change promise much more and ideas such as (Whole) School Development would seem to have great potential. However, this will only happen if the different levels of the system are in close contact. As we have seen in Akurase, although one of the schools was involved in WSD, the local interpretation was preventing it from having the intended effects. Once again, in principle, decentralisation should be helpful but only if power and resources are seen to move from the centre to the periphery.

So far, each successive reform seems to raise spirits and induce a little optimism. However, this is quickly lost. The example of the School Performance Appraisal Meeting in Akurase where 'the whole town turned up' and drunken teachers were criticised is a good example. Because nothing was seen to be done, people soon lost interest as the enhanced accountability of the schools to the people was shown to be very thin. Policies such as SPAMs will only work when they are seen to be effective and not just signals of some distant aspiration. The problem is that, faced with the continuing inertia of the educational monolith in Ghana, not only teachers but the whole of society lacks a sense of their own agency and capacity to make changes (Pryor 1998). The situation is similar to that described Leach et al. (2002:viii) with respect to violence in schools in Zimbabwe, Malawi and Ghana, it is seen as "just 'how things are'" by all of the stakeholders.

The central plank of current decentralisation policy, community involvement, however is not in place, because of a misplaced, over romanticised view of community. Elsewhere in Ghana, the Community School Alliances project was able to correlate aspects of community factors with the success of community schools (EDC 2001). Within this project successful communities tended:

- to be small, isolated and cohesive;
- have only one primary school;
- have access to local resources (not necessarily financial) and be willing to contribute; and
- have strong local leaders devoted to supporting education.

On the other hand, less successful communities tended:

- to be larger and more spread out urban, peri-urban or commercial centres;
- to have more than one school; and
- to have a community of diverse backgrounds and professions.

These are important findings, which mesh well with our work. Unfortunately, one cannot design communities and it is necessary to work with what is there already. As we have noted already Akurase is small and isolated yet it otherwise does not fit into the other 'successful' categories. Many communities are like Akurase and liable to have a mix of 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' characteristics and good education is no less important in such a place than

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elsewhere. It is important therefore to see how success might be engendered in a less favourable environment. This is where the beginnings of some movement were visible in this project and also where the ICT dimension begins to become important.

Our conclusion is that straightforward antecedent causes cannot be operationalised to produce consequent effects. If one wants to stimulate community involvement in a school, one has to encourage at the same time school involvement in community. As we argued in greater detail in previous chapters, the two are only likely to develop in tandem.

Nevertheless, some concrete changes can be made to the mechanics of school governance. School Management Committees, are the chosen means by which community accountability is to be effected, yet if they are to be effective they must be more representative. The inclusion of those in leadership positions in the community is important, but so is it important that other people are able to develop leadership skills. In particular we saw the lack of women on the SMC in Akurase because membership was based on existing positions in the community and the school. It would be easy in principle to include minimum requirements for female representation on SMCs, though possibly less easy to ensure that they had an equal voice. Similarly, parents and other community members should be in the majority rather than teachers.

SMCs, PTAs, and others need to have higher expectations about standards of behaviour and attendance of staff. Better understanding of the rules and procedures would help this to happen and this might be accomplished by more training. Various guides and manuals have been produced. However, they tend to be very complicated and off-putting. We would suggest that the kind of detail contained in, for example, the one produced by Community School Alliances would be useful for reference but only following face-to-face training. Indeed, if one accepts the claims made by projects in Ghana, community involvement seems only to increase where there are specific and sustained interventions (Agarwal and Hartwell 1998; Price et al. 1998; Odonokor 2000; EDC, 2001; Miller-Grandvaux and Yoder 2002:19). As with supervision of teachers, support for SMCs need to be built into on-going decentralisation efforts, since sustainability of these projects is questionable:

> Evaluations… expressed doubts about the sustainability of their community management efforts. In the Community School Alliances project, the Education Development Center (EDC) measured the sustainability level of participating schools and communities; only 53 percent of the first two cohorts of communities indicated high or moderate sustainability (Education Development Center 2001). In evaluating the SCORE program of CARE/Ghana, the existence of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) teams indicated that communities would retain the planning skills learned but they might not be able to sustain inputs for maintaining and developing infrastructure. (Miller-Grandvaux and Yoder 2002:27-28)

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Returning to the point about holistic solutions, it is only when parents can see that schools are becoming responsive and that education is worth investing in that they will commit themselves more whole-heartedly. Then, too, other problems we have noted, such as the provision of lanterns and the reduction of children's chores might be addressed. Similarly, a school that was seen to be achieving good results might also be the focus of collective activity such as the community farm, which is being used to support the electrification project at Akurase. This would, as Suzuki (2002) points out, have the effect of enhancing equity in educational access.

One further point that emerges from the research is that the language policy as it has been operated is not working. Although in other places it has proved to be better to establish early education in the mother tongue, this policy is not popular in the particular circumstances of Ghana and for a variety of reasons, does not seem to have worked. In these circumstances, it would be better for early years education to establish fluency in what is the medium of instruction for most of schooling. Pupils might then be less likely to become lost and experience the kind of incomprehension that we observed and was reported at all levels of the basic education system.

To summarise our conclusions with respect to people's understandings of education, Government policies and many donor-driven initiatives operate from premises that do not correspond with those of the people of the village. In our analysis, we have drawn on other sources to show how wider social movements may be implicated in what we found. In particular we have identified the disruptions to communities caused by migration and the disintegration of matrilineal family structures, both structural conditions of postcolonial situations.

8.3 What is the impact of rural people's access to ICTs?

The interesting thing about the period over which we collected data was that there were two sorts of access to ICTs and there are therefore two answers to this question. At the start of data collection, before any major intervention by the DA project the situation we analysed in chapter 6 existed. At this stage access of people in the village to ICTs could be characterised as limited, passive and unmediated. Nevertheless, as we discovered, they were already having a strong impact on people in the village. When the DA project began to work with JSS pupils on using digital video cameras it became obvious to them that they were not dealing with children who were completely naïve. Although their total hours of television watching would amount to a tiny fraction of their counterparts in urban areas and in the North, they had acquired sufficient media literacy to be able to plan their offerings in a recognisable genre. Thus, they chose to confront some of the difficult issues facing young people via a soap opera, in the style of the weekly Akan drama on Ghana television. As one of the DA workers commented, there can now be very few people in Ghana who have never seen a Star beer advertisement on TV.

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However, the impact of ICTs in this village could not be said to have been positive. Radio, television and video appeared to have interrupted some of the traditional forms of communication, such as story telling. The video available for example, contained high levels of violence and sexually dubious messages, which were offensive to the sensibilities of many adults in the village. Television allowed a window into a world of material plenty and invoked invidious comparisons between urban and village life. The consequence of this was that their sense of dignity was diminished. Most people did not exercise a great deal of power in their consumption of electronic media. Though many families had radios, few had television and were therefore reliant on their neighbours' goodwill for watching. Thus, their opportunities to watch tended to be rather random. Their choice of programme was very limited by the small number that were comprehensible to them as non-English speakers. Moreover, they were also disempowered in that people living in villages like them were infrequently portrayed and then in a negative way.

Thus, the answer to the question was that the impact of their limited, passive and unmediated access to ICTs was that they were sufficiently involved to be drawn into the periphery of the global media world. However, both the means of access and the nature of the texts only emphasised their sense of inferiority and exclusion.

By contrast the way that Akurase people were exposed to ICTs through the DA project, although still limited, was active/interactive and mediated. These features contributed to the ICTs having a much more positive impact. We have identified three factors that seem to have contributed to the delight expressed by those who took part in the screenings and the internet sessions:

- Recognition
- Association
- Appropriation

Recognition is derived from the fact that people were able to see themselves and their way of life reflected in the website. This sprang from the fact that through the DA project they had been actively involved in generating text, rather than just consuming it. However, one could speculate that other rural people from low-income countries coming across this website might experience a similar, though slightly less pronounced, effect.

Association is the notion that once people have crossed the hurdle of logging on, they enjoy a measure of equality. Rich and poor can rub shoulders and talk to each other in cyber space in a way that is rarely possible in the material world. The internet as an interactive medium allows people to communicate and associate as part of a prestigious global community.

Both recognition and association seem in Akurase to have contributed to raise morale and enhanced dignity. In this case, they seem not only to have enabled people to see themselves as a community, what we called the push, but also to have generated sufficient interested in

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joining the wider world of electrification (the pull) to provoke community action where there was none before.

The active methodology of the DA project also enabled people to appropriate an enhanced understanding of the way that media worked. We would contend that development of skills and awareness in producing materials via digital media demystifies the process and makes the producer a more critical consumer. The appropriation of media skills enables a meta-perspective and a deeper understanding. We have noted that the people of Akurase already possessed some media literacy before the project started. Though one should be wary of exaggerating this effect, those who took an active part in it undoubtedly had extended this literacy by the end of the project. Sayed (1998) in defining information literacy, differentiates between two aspects: on the one hand, narrow or specific notions, concentrating on mastery and understanding of information technologies, on the other, global definitions, which emphasise access to, location and critical evaluation of information. We would suggest that the active methods of the DA project would put people in a good position to gain both aspects.

One might argue that this sense of dignity would be very important if people in Akurase continued to have more exposure to the internet. It might enable them to look more critically at other aspects of life that they see in the outside world and to reflect on how they might make changes to their own. An important development of this might be that by opening up the community to outside norms their expectations might rise. Pupils' and parents' low expectations of education in rural Ghana might be disrupted by knowledge of what was going on elsewhere, particularly if this were good examples in Ghanaian villages.

Isolation inhibits people from making demands, being active in shaping their destiny and standing up for their rights. Every child has a right to a decent education. If this is not to be just a platitude that is mouthed every ten years at EFA conferences, then those who are at present shut out by their apathy must be given an opportunity to speak out. Bureaucracies create inertia and the inertia is fed by the apathy, powerlessness and isolation of those whom they administer to. Extending the pushing and pulling analogy, if ICTs can help to open up the practices of village education to a wider world, then not only might this exercise a pull on those who work at village level, but also exert a push on the system to get problems such as ineffective teachers sorted out.

These three concepts, recognition, association and appropriation, might form the basis for a conceptual framework for further research in ICTs and media. It would be particularly useful in appraising and analysing developments with people in low income countries and other marginalised groups.

However, the factor of mediation is important. The interaction with the ICTs was via the DA project whose aims and practice were concerned with the bolstering of village self esteem.

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Although there are many sites that might also contribute, they form a tiny proportion of what is on offer. If given much further time to surf then people would undoubtedly come across less positive material. It is neither possible nor desirable to be thinking in terms of censorship, so if one were thinking about extending access then the construction of a virtual learning environment or at least a locally produced portal with links to appropriate sites, might be a priority.

8.4 What role do the people of Akurase see for ICTs in the development of education and employment in their village?

This was the research question on which we were able to obtain the fewest data. With respect to education, at the initial stages of data collection, the universal conceptualisation of ICTs as media for entertainment rather than learning mean that the question as to how they might be developed was met with blankness. This may say as much about concepts of learning as it does about understandings of the potential of ICTs. It was very difficult to get people to engage with them as anything more than a distraction from education. At the next stage, issues of connectivity and the idea that the expensive equipment needed would always be beyond the reach of village schools meant that the question still remained in the realms of fairly pointless speculation. As we continued and the people actually encountered computers and the internet, they were more taken with the immediacy of the experience. The constraints put on the planning of the project with respect to time for data gathering meant that we were not able to do any intensive research later when they had absorbed and reflected on what they had done.

Having said this however, we were struck by the fact that the teachers were most excited and enthused by the possibilities of ICTs. They pointed out that they had no access to libraries; moreover the information in even University libraries in Ghana was not necessarily very accessible to them or up to date. With the internet, they were able to find out about things that would make a huge difference to their own learning and potentially to those of the children they taught.

With respect to employment, questions about ICTs did not seem relevant for many for the same reasons. However, one of the main reasons for the general desire for electrification was that it would have a beneficial effect on jobs. As with education, a further period of intensive research would be needed to gain a better picture of the specific thoughts of people in the village on this issue.

8.5 What are the potential problems and benefits of ICTs on rural education in developing countries?

Before making a tentative answer to this question we need to look at what form the access to ICTs might take. An interesting aspect of this project is that it derives from what is an anomalous situation. The data was collected to add extra authority to speculative conclusions around the question 'what if people in rural African villages did have enhanced access to

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ICTs, especially to computers and the internet?' Because of this 'what if…?' question, some of the issues that surround connectivity and the 'digital divide' have been to a certain extent skirted.

Our experiences in Akurase would suggest that although we cannot actually tell which way things will go, some developments would appear to be far more beneficial to rural communities than others. Lewin, in the piece we quoted at the start of this report, is pessimistic about the prospects of rural connectivity:

> Many developing countries, especially the poorest will not leapfrog to widespread connectivity in the next decade and the impact of ICTs on learning will be limited. (Lewin 2000:320)

Undoubtedly internet connection is very expensive and the current level of infrastructure that is available in Africa is low. Nevertheless, in the past decade following deregulation, there has been a very striking growth in telephone usage in Africa, driven as elsewhere by the profits to be made both at the large end of the market by telecommunications companies and at the small end by people running a couple of telephones from a roadside booth. Although the isolation of small towns has been broken, as we have seen, this has not reached as far as the villages. We would suggest that if connectivity is seen in conventional terms, then villages such as Akurase, and those that are more remote, will always be at the back of the queue. However, current advances in photovoltaic technology and satellite communication suggest that these may be cheaper and certainly more practical options for rural areas. Solar power is beginning to come onto the agenda in Ghana with several private sector initiatives and community based initiatives funded by Danida (Simonsen 2000)

Hall (1998) describes plans for *Phone Shops* in southern Africa providing connections to the Internet initially via established cellular networks but eventually using satellite connections. He goes on to describe Community Information Development System (CiDS). These aim to:

> provide on-line access for communities with no fixed-line infrastructure by means of a low-cost, high speed wireless network. A central node, connected to the Internet through a fixed line, can support a web of base stations by means of wireless point-to-point links. In their turn, the base stations serve schools, community centres, health clinics and other facilities within a radius of about 10 kilometers, again using wireless connections. A pilot project in Mamelodi, outside Pretoria, has demonstrated the potential of this system to support distance learning programmes. In Zimbabwe, a solar energy project is planned to bring electricity and the Internet to rural areas at the same time. (Hall 1998)

Vanbuel (2001) highlights the promise of satellite technology and stresses the fact that satellites, although initially very expensive cover huge areas and may thus ultimately bring down the cost of connection, especially if cross subsidisation takes place.

> Internet connectivity can be combined with traditional broadcasting technologies such

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> as digital TV and Radio, enabling content providers to select the most appropriate delivery means according to the type of content;

Different forms of hardware may also change the situation. One example of this among several is the Simputer, a low cost (US$200 maximum) computer, developed in India with the needs of developing countries in mind (www.simputer.org).

It is actually impossible to tell at this stage whether the effort to bridge the global digital divide will create a wider gulf within low-income countries. Hall (1998) suggests that digital technology in Africa is simultaneously bringing into being both new forms of privilege, and also new forms of individual power and mass participation. He argues that:

> while digital communications are clearly part of the ways in which new elites are being marked out in Africa, developments within the same technology are simultaneously supporting the opposite trend … [and] technical innovations will bring connectivity to marginalised communities.

This highlights the idea that connectivity might be a much less important problem than other issues. Whilst these projects may be only in their infancy and be examples of the kind of advocacy preceding evidence that Lewin (2000) describes, there are many further examples on the internet of projects either mooted or actually being carried out.

What would be needed are small-scale pilot interventions that are carefully monitored financially, and evaluated both summatively, so that actual costs and benefits may be appraised, and formatively, so that they take shape in ways that are most sensitive to local needs. Within these evaluations, it would be important to include a consideration of the way that the public and private sector might interact and also of the role of regional, continental and international donor co-operation.

Our research highlighted the desire for more access to ICTs in education and emphasised the potential for development in this area to act as a catalyst for strengthening links between formal education and the community. Our conclusion in chapter five was that if you want to build a community round the school, start with the school, not with the community. Following Serpell (1999), we suggested that the school should be seen much more as a community resource, as a library (possibly of more than just books), as a centre for community forums and shared facilities with other agencies such as health centres. These conclusions would suggest that a version of what have become known as telecentres or community learning centres might be indicated.

Once again there is great deal of advocatory writing available on these but less in the way of critique. One example of this however, is Benjamin (2000), who gives a cautious evaluation of the achievement of telecentres in Africa and concludes that they have been successful in

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many respects. His definition of telecentre is very wide and he includes the commercial internet café, which have proliferated since he was writing in 2000, as well as the kind of computer suite that we used for the first internet session with this research. What he calls type B telecentres, larger and sponsored by donors, are typified by an example in Uganda, the Nakaseke Multipurpose Community Telecenter, which opened in 1999. It sought to test the impact of such ICTs on rural development and proceeded in the light of a baseline survey of community information needs.

> The telecenter has eight computers, two printers, a scanner, a photocopier, a VCR/TV, a video camera, and a projector. However, frequent power cuts are a problem. In addition to phone, fax, and Internet use, there are a paper and digital library; computer training; and an interesting Indigenous Knowledge program whereby center staff are building a resource of local health and crop experience. (Benjamin 2000)

Although capital costs were shared between the national government and international donors, recurrent costs were being recovered partly through charging and partly through a tax of US$0.59 cents per school child. However, he states that:

> The center has proved that ICT can be useful for development in a rural area. The center is just about covering operating costs (subsidized by the community), but there is no expectation that the center could generate enough income to replace equipment in a few years (depreciation), let alone repay the major capital investment. This center required great external support (financial and organizational) and so is unlikely to be a model that can become widespread. (Benjamin 2000)

Not all these centres are linked to schooling though Benjamin goes on to suggest that connections with education and health would help to make them more successful and would legitimise some government expenditure. This has happened in Mexico where the issues of inequalities in education and an internal digital divide are being addressed through a large scale programme of *Community Learning Centres* based around ICTs and funded as a key strategy in the government's regional development policy (Gallegos 2002). However, compared with Ghana, and indeed all sub-Saharan African countries, Mexico is a very large economy. Capital costs and depreciation mean that in the short term it would not be feasible for Ghana to invest in such a large-scale plan.

Nevertheless, these prices are likely to continue to fall drastically and it may not be long before the cost of centres is very different. It would therefore be very beneficial for policy makers in Ghana both to keep under observation what is happening elsewhere, and to continue to institute a number of smaller scale pilot projects, which might be adopted from elsewhere and adapted to local circumstances. We are suggesting this not because we see ICT based learning centres as so unequivocally a good thing, but because they are very promising even though they are likely to be extremely problematic to run successfully. Any locally grounded knowledge that can be gained from pilot projects would therefore be most

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valuable. Here we are not referring just to financing, though they may be able to try a variety of approaches to this[34]. Mansell (2002) identifies three issues that are high on the 'ICT for development' agenda:

- *Access* - promoting equitable access to ICTs as tools for the effective generation, exchange and use of information for development;
- *Empowerment* - identifying ICT tools for empowering individuals and communities to use information resources effectively;
- *Governance* - exploring how the use of ICTs may enable more efficient, transparent, and participatory forms of governance. (Mansell 2002)

This fits in with the insight from this project, that the planning of any such centres would need to consider much more than just the provision of the receptive hardware. A conclusion of the *Understandings* project is that the essential variable in all three of Mansell's items will be skills - it is likely to be skill shortage more than anything, which will mark the digital divide. However, we would suggest that, important though these are, it is not just technical skills that will be crucial. Initiatives will be needed that develop skills for empowerment and governance. Here also there are some important conclusions to be drawn from our research.

In terms of empowerment, the whole emphasis of the DA project was on the active skills of authoring rather than just on the passive skills of being able to move around the world wide web. We would argue that this was the most important factor in the success of that project. Access to ICTs will generate some kind of information literacy, however, we would argue that the kind of critical abilities that we argued for in section 8.4 can best be promoted through giving people the opportunity to reflect on their lives through creating digital media.

> The whole experience suggested how different the experience of using new technologies is for people 'on the margins' if the process of discovery that technology enables you to see yourself and your own experiences represented, rather than just other people's. (DA worker's Fieldnotes)

Thus, any learning centre set up in a situation such as Akurase should be seeking not just to download but to upload as well. A digital camera and a scanner should therefore be a necessity as well as training in how to use them. Here the link with education should be of use as within distance education a lot of thought is currently going into virtual learning environments (VLEs), which emphasise student participation and peer interaction. The active creation of each centre's own website would also facilitate communication between villages and with the wider world, so although we are not talking about large numbers of centres in the first instance, a shared virtual environment would be very helpful in this respect. This might address not only parts of the Ghanaian national curriculum, but also link

[34] Robinson (2002) suggests that they could be financed by being linked to microbanks, which would handle the international transfer of money from North to South, which is such an important part of the economy of most low-income countries. He goes on to suggest that migration to the North might even be encouraged by programmes based in these telecentres, by providing the skills needed for employment in the high income countries.

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with people's core interests - social such as funerals, and keeping in touch with widely dispersed family, or professional, for example sharing ideas about farming and the state of prices for crops in different market centres. A central VLE also will be useful in promoting further skills development through courses, which take people on in the use of the ICTs themselves. The idea of teacher training and continuing professional development has already been discussed. Setting clear targets for who use the centre and who gains from access would also help empowerment. In the Ghanaian context gender monitoring would be particularly appropriate (Gadio 2002)[35].

One of the most important issues in governance would be the way such a centre was itself run. The problem would be to set up the structures that facilitate the relationship between school and community, for as we have seen, solutions based on a romantic view of community are unlikely to succeed[36]. Some overseeing body would be needed, but it would be very important that it was more representative of the community than the Akurase SMC was, including, for example, a minimum number of women representatives. People involved in these roles would need support and training. The staffing structures of a village learning centre would also have to be worked out carefully and again several models might be tried. The role of co-ordinator could possibly combine with that of headteacher and this would be an attractive post. Our experiences suggest that teachers would be very keen to work there.

One other reason to be sceptical about telecentres is that in some places they have not received as much patronage as was anticipated. There may be a number of reasons of this; for example the efforts of Africaonline's *Email For Everyone* project which was curtailed partly by cheaper competition from free providers such as Yahoo and partly because the services offered were not wide enough. However, partly also there is an initial lack of demand because of insufficient understanding about how the services might be made to benefit people's lives. It would be foolish though to think of this situation as static. The lack of enthusiasm for telephones in Akurase is similar to that which could be seen in African towns until the advent of communication centres, which are now ubiquitous and do excellent business[37].

In summary, we can now return to the question of the potential problems and benefits that ICTs might have on rural education. If development is allowed to continue unabated in the towns and cities, it is likely that the digital divide within low-income countries will exacerbate the large differences between educational achievement between rural and urban

[35] Gadio (2002) evaluated computer labs in secondary and tertiary institutions in Senegal, Mauritania, Uganda and Ghana. This study recommended that policy should be to: •Encourage/incentivize schools to develop "fair use policies" for their computer labs, which would ensure girls' access proportional to their representation in the overall student body. •Organize awareness sessions on gender and development, in order to lift obstacles linked to traditional beliefs and practices that constitute barriers to girls' education. •Develop new policies, particularly in boarding schools, to relieve girls from household chores that they perform during evenings while other male students enjoy more lab time. (Gadio 2002)

[36] Simonsen (2000) gives a pertinent example of how a supposedly collective solar energy project in the north of Ghana had been taken over by commercial interests. Those with the necessary technical expertise had capitalised on the skills shortage to create a profitable business.

[37] According to Benjamin (2000), the average income in Dakar, Senegal is $200 per month per line.

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areas. Where there is the opportunity, use of ICTs is growing very fast and they are likely to act as magnet. For all their users they give access to a much greater amount of knowledge and entertainment than was ever available before, and this is especially so in low income countries. Without greater access to, and use of ICTs, there is a real threat of exclusion, not just from global trade, but also from the 'virtual' communities that are beginning to connect localities within and between developing countries (Mansell 2001). It will therefore become ever more difficult to attract and retain teachers and the levels of achievement in village schools are likely to remain low.

However, if some way of allowing access to ICTs can be found, the potential gains are great. The notion of community learning centres based around ICTs currently seems the most realistic way of achieving this, though the issues of connectivity, and capital costs are still major stumbling blocks. Whilst it may not be possible to institute large-scale implementation of these centres, pilot projects are needed to experiment with the methods of financing, managing, skills development and evolving suitable day-to day practices. Giving both school and community a stake in these centres might have beneficial effects on both parties. The mission of these centres should be media literacy of a kind that emphasises people's active role in creating and not just consuming media products. This is a most important consideration in equipping and providing training. Greater access to ICTs will potentially enable schools to tackle parts of the curriculum that are difficult and also they may help to change the social relations of the classroom which currently do not promote learning (UNCSTD, 1997). Though it is not possible to turn the tide of ICT use it is important that they should not be seen as a benefit in themselves, but a means of pursuing development goals including those that relate to education.

8.7 Recommendations

- Current efforts at educational decentralisation should be encouraged. However they are only liable to improve the running of schools when power is actually moved downwards to district and circuit levels. This will involve local officers being empowered to act and being responsive to parental and community representation.

- Macro and micro level change need to go hand in hand. National reforms, which remove impediments to local initiative and enable holistic change, will work only if there is close communication between the various levels of the system. Ideas such as (Whole) School Development should continue to be developed.

- School development activities should also include continuing school based in-service training, based on reflection on practice and analysis of actual classroom events. Workshops would need to be followed up by headteachers and circuit supervisors giving support on pedagogical and curricular matters.

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- The education authorities should encourage a view of the school as a place where children can model desired adult behaviour, rather than accept a similar role to the one they play in the home. This might result in more effective pedagogical practices.

- School Performance Appraisal Meetings are a good idea, but structures need to be implemented to ensure that they are followed up.

- Structures should also be put in place to ensure that School Management Committees are more representative. They should include those in leadership positions in the community, but also other people who might develop leadership skills. In particular there should be minimum requirements for female representation on SMCs, so that approximately half the members are women. Similarly, parents and other community members should be in the majority rather than teachers.

- There is a need for more training of SMCs and PTAs, so that they have higher expectations about standards of behaviour and attendance of staff and knowledge of procedures to ensure these are conformed to.

- SMCs should also be involved in schemes to provide lanterns for children in non-electrified villages and in urging parents to structure chores around school work rather than vice versa.

- In promoting community involvement in schooling, more thought should be given to the activation of community. Developments that make the school a centre for community resources and action should be considered.

- The new policy of allowing English medium from the start of schooling should be encouraged, though possibly with extra time devoted to learning a Ghanaian language as a school subject.

- Experimental and pilot work in using ICTs in schooling should pay great attention to teacher training. This would provide opportunities to develop suitable pedagogic practices both to counter unproductive pedagogies currently in use and to tackle parts of the curriculum that are difficult to deal with.

- Telecentres or community learning centres provide one means through which communities and education can be brought together. Whilst it may not be possible or desirable to institute large-scale implementation of these, pilot projects are needed to experiment with methods of financing, managing, skills development and evolving suitable day-to day practices. They should be carefully monitored financially, and evaluated summatively so that actual costs and benefits may be appraised. However, formative evaluation should be the priority so that they take shape in ways that are most

sensitive to local needs. Within these evaluations, it would be important to include a consideration of the way that the public and private sector might interact and also of the role of regional, continental and international donor co-operation.

- The mission of these centres should be media literacy of a kind that emphasises people's active role in creating and not just consuming media products. Equipment available at these centres should reflect an active approach, including a digital camera and a scanner along with training in how to use them. To facilitate this the construction of a virtual learning environment or at least a locally produced portal with links to appropriate sites, might be a priority.

- Some of these centres should be run on the basis of photovoltaic and satellite communication technology since these may be cheaper and certainly more practical options for rural areas in the near future.

- Pilot centres should aim to construct knowledge about developing:
  - active skills of authoring and uploading for presenting and reflecting on peoples' lives through ICTs
  - virtual learning environments (VLEs), which emphasise student participation and peer interaction
  - communication between villages and with the wider world
  - staffing, management and governance structures that facilitate the relationship between school and community.
  - ways of linking with people's core social interests such as funerals, and keeping in touch with widely dispersed family, and professional concerns such as sharing ideas about farming and the state of prices for crops in different market centres.

- The Ministry of Education and Universities should give serious consideration to the development of a degree in education through village-based distance education. This should include practical activities grounded in classroom practice and in facilitating community involvement. Campus-based courses could also be held in the holidays. Support by ICTs could be built into the pilot for some or all students and might provide important lessons for future developments. These activities would have to be backed by a system of bonding that was enforced.

8.8 Concluding comments

Although this Project was participatory in terms of its data collection, the design did not allow us to go back and work with the conclusions with the people in the village. What would be needed therefore would be further development work with villagers. The people in Akurase were concerned most of all about what research can do for them. They may have been thinking mainly about it attracting specific investment to their village, but, we would

Conclusions and recommendations

claim, ultimately it is knowledge that is likely to have more effect on the forces that shape their lives. Here it is not just a question of more research getting better results, but the nature and the approach of the research, its methodology, which drives the kind of knowledge that is produced. This project like all research has been about producing knowledge; however, through its focus on ICTs it is also concerned with what is known as the 'knowledge society'. It marks an attempt by research to value local knowledge by attempting to listen to the perspectives of the people of Akurase and through dialogue to give them a voice. However, we recognise that this knowledge is not discovered so much as created. This theme is also there in our findings: both the emphasis on the need for the children and teachers of Akurase to collaborate actively to construct knowledge, and for the ICTs to provide a chance for rural communities to contribute to, rather than just hear about, the global knowledge society. In carrying out the research, we have sought to "find local solutions to local problems and involve local people and institutions in the process." (DFID 1997 section 2).

Finally, Kwame Anthony Appiah (1991) describes an exhibition of African Art co-curated by a number of people from the USA, from Africa, and from the diaspora. He takes issue with the colonial attitude of many of these curators and indeed with the self consciously but shallowly postcolonial attitude of others. He expresses distaste at the mélange of romanticism and condescension that characterises much of the labelling of the images. However, the one that most attracts him is a Yoruba sculpture of a man on a bicycle, chosen and described by James Baldwin. He concludes his article by saying:

> It matters little *whom* the work was made for; what we should learn from is the imagination that produced it. *Man with a bicycle* is produced by someone who does not care that the bicycle is the white man's invention: it is not here to be other to the Yoruba self; it is there because someone cared for its solidity; it is there because it will take us further than our feet will take us; it is there because machines are now as African as novelists. (Appiah 1991/1996: 69-70, original emphasis)

We would argue that as we move forward in the twenty-first century information and communication technologies too are as African as bicycles. It is worth a great collective effort to ensure that they too take the continent and its inhabitants where they want to go.

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Appendix 1: Booklet producedfollowing workshop with teachers

AKURASE PROJECT

Improving Teaching and Learning in our Schools

A practical guide produced by teachers in the Akurase cluster of schools at a workshop held 31st March to 3rd April 2001

The workshop was led by
Dr. John Pryor, Centre for International Education University of Sussex, UK and
Mr Joseph Ghartey Ampiah, Institute of Education, University of Cape Coast, Ghana.

The work was part of a development awareness initiative involving cultural exchange between Britain and Ghana funded by the United Kingdom
Department for International Development (DFID)

Appendix 1: Booklet producedfollowing workshop with teachers

At the workshop we thought about the times when we had taught really well and the children had really understood and learnt most. We used these memories to decide what was most important.

When people learn best ….	
Very important	… they ask questions … they give their own opinion … they make decisions about what is important and what is not … they find answers to questions … they know more.
Important	… they discuss things with other people … they do things more quickly … they make sense of the things they do. … they make sense of the things they know. … they get help to do things that they would not be able to do by themselves.
Not so important	… they memorise facts … they agree or disagree with other people … they practise until perfect … they repeat the facts when asked … they try out new ideas

Appendix 1: Booklet producedfollowing workshop with teachers

WHAT CAN A TEACHER DO TO MAKE THESE THINGS HAPPEN?

How to get children to ask questions

1. Teach them the words
2. Teach them the sentence structure for asking questions
3. Demonstrate questions and answers
4. Practise questions and answers as whole class, teacher as questioner, pupils as answerer, then pupils as questioner and teacher as answerer.
5. Practise in twos: pupils take it in turn to ask questions (teacher assesses)
6. Teacher chooses pupils to demonstrate
7. Teacher, praises, encourages and gives marks for asking questions.

Remember:
school should not be like home life. Children do not need to practise being children; they need to practise being citizens.

Just as a good chief consults his subjects, so a good teacher consults their pupils.

HOW TO HELP CHILDREN MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT WHAT IS IMPORTANT AND WHAT IS NOT

- Get children to work and talk together
- Give assignments where there are many different answers
- Take the children to different places close to the classroom (e.g. school farm, market, primary healthcare centre)

Appendix 1: Booklet producedfollowing workshop with teachers

HOW TO GET CHILDREN TO GIVE THEIR OWN OPINION

- Start by finding out what they know already – don't ask 'yessir' questions.
- Make sure the right level of language is available to the children (teach it if it is not)
- Get them to act out in small groups something that goes with the lesson (no script)
- Ask questions that where there are different answers not just facts
- Make the lesson interesting, different and lively.
- Encourage children to learn by doing through open assignments.
- Make situations where children are not afraid to speak – encourage them, praise them and look for what is good in every answer.
- Accept their answers, opinions and views.
- Remember, every time a child speaks it is a chance for you to learn how to teach them better.
- Plan opportunities for them to contribute to lessons at different times not just at the end of the start of the lesson.
- Get children to share their own experiences and tell stories.

Now look at the other very important and important ideas.

Work out what you can do to make them happen for all your pupils.

Help children to understand by starting with what they know and moving to what is new:
from the practical to the theory
from the concrete to the abstract.

Appendix 1: Booklet producedfollowing workshop with teachers

WHAT IS A CLEVER PUPIL LIKE?

A clever pupil:

- contributes by asking questions,
- participates actively in class,
- shares ideas with others,
- does exercises and corrections,
- has a good memory,
- has a retentive memory,
- is attentive,
- is curious,
- is creative
- makes connections between different ideas.
- respects him/herself, fellow pupils and teachers,
- is punctual, well disciplined and neat,
- thinks about and acts on instructions,
- organises other children,
- accepts responsibility,
- and is ready to learn wherever they are,

Look back at these ideas.
Match them with the ideas about how children learn.
Answer the question:

How can I plan my lessons so that I make more of the pupils behave like a clever pupil?

Appendix 1: Booklet producedfollowing workshop with teachers

As Teachers We Can Change Our School For The Better

What want	What we will do
Children speak English more	We will set a good example by using English as a medium of instruction We will speak good English to pupils and to each other We will encourage children to practise their English
Time at school is used well	We will arrive punctually and not leave until the end of the day. We will be regular in our attendance We will observe the contact hours as expected.
There is a good relationship with the community	We will invite parents into he school more (e.g. for PTA meetings) We will make sure that PTA meetings are effective. We will show respect to members of the community
Children are interested in school	We will provide different and varied activities to cater for different pupils
activities and learning	We will advise pupils of the benefits of learning

Appendix 1: Booklet producedfollowing workshop with teachers

What want	What we will do
Greater use of teaching and learning materials	We will be creative in improvising
The children are God-fearing	We will make school worship more effective and practical.
The pupils are neat	We will dress smartly We will advise pupils of ways to improve their dress.
There is a good relationship between pupils and teachers	We will respect pupils' views.
The pupils are well disciplined	We will be orderly and abstain from drinking and sexual relationships with pupils
There is a teacher for each class	We will start a recruitment drive.
There are good buildings and equipment	We will seek help from the community, the Assembly and the GES.

Appendix 2: Example of recording of informal interview

PI-KB-1	DQ:	*He is a farmer.*
PI-KB-2	DQ:	*He is illiterate.*
PI-KB-3	DQ:	*He has seven children.*
PI-KB-4	DQ:	*Abena is the eldest daughter.*
PI-KB-5	DQ:	*Five of his children are in school.*
PI-KB-6	IQ:	*Three of his children are not schooling at Akurase.*
PI-KB-7	IQ:	*Teaching in the village is not effective.*
PI-KB-8	DQ:	*Could not give any reason why Abena dropped out from school.*
PI-KB-9	IQ:	*No plans of letting Abena to school again.*
PI-KB-10	SI:	*"Nobody forced her to stop school"*
PI-KB-11	SI:	*Abena does not help him in farming activities.*
PI-KB-12	DQ:	*Present education at Akurase is not effective.*
PI-KB-13	IQ:	*Some of the teachers at R/C primary school do not teach well.*

DQ = *Direct Response to question*
IQ = *Indirect Response to question*
SI = *Supplementary information supplied by collaborator without direct prompt. Words in inverted commas represent a direct translation of words recorded verbatim.*

Appendix 3: Pupils likes and dislikes - work done with children

The following words and photos are by class JSS1 (year 1) of the Akurase Junior Secondary School, who were asked to document what they disliked about school.

1. We don't like it when the teacher canes us.

2. We don't like having to fetch water for people to drink during the school day.

3. We Don't like it when people start fighting in class, usually over pens or something stupid.

4. We dont like it when people start gossiping, for instance when a boy gives a girl money, they say you're boyfriend and girlfriend and it's really stupid.

5. We don't like it when the teacher doesn't turn up, it's really boring, you just sit there with nothing to do.

6. We don't like it when people nick things, usually pens, from your bag during the break.

7. We don't like it when people tease you, like when a boy helps a girl with her work for example.

8. Boys don't like it when they have to sweep the school compound. At home, sweeping is something that only girls do.

Appendix 4: The method used by the DA project

Using ICTs for Development Awareness

The Project has spent the last two years using a range of information and communication technologies (including video, photography and the web) to help create a dialogue between communities in a town in Ghana called Akurase and the city of Brighton in the UK… This document demonstrates some of the approaches that we used, and shows how ICTs can be used meaningfully to promote cultural awareness between communities in the "North" and "South." These approaches can be adopted by schools or teachers involved in school linking, or by organisations working in development education.

Rule 1 **- Technology is not enough**

ICTs can be used for creating powerful communication, meaningful content and user involvement across communities in the North and South. It can bring communities closer together, and create opportunities for dialogue and cultural exchange. However technology on its own will not produce these things. It has to be used thoughtfully and appropriately. Having the equipment isn't enough, you have to know what to do with it.

Rule 2 **- The value of ICTs in development education**

As well as acquiring skills, using ICTs in development education enables people to publish their own information via the web and represent themselves and their lives, sharing that experience with people all over the world. It gives people in the South the sense of inclusion, of learning 21st century skills, and not just 'catching up' with the North.

Rule 3 **- You should develop your ICT project with an audience in mind**

All websites should be designed with a particular audience in mind and having a partner school or community makes this easier. Otherwise there is a danger that the website can become the end in itself, and building a website becomes a 'narcissistic' exercise with the final result being of little of interest to anyone except those people who made it. ICTs are about communication and creating opportunities for dialogue.

Rule 4 **– Use Old Media and New Media!**

Use a range of media as part of your linking activities including low tech media such as disposable/Polaroid cameras, drawings and scrapbooks:

- low tech offers greater opportunities for involvement and participation because it is cheaper, and therefore allows more people to get involved
- low tech helps the link come alive for those who don't have regular Internet access
- low tech enables the youngest and even the illiterate to contribute (ie. drawings etc)
- new media is particularly useful as a means of distributing your work.
  The Internet makes the significance of these exercises much greater for participants, with activities visible to the whole world! Organise the web publishing through a 'editorial team' consisting of all levels of participant, e.g teachers and students. This can be handled formally or informally, and offers opportunities for inclusion because:

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- It increases the learning for students who are given responsibility in a democratic process
- Being involved in editorial teams is valuable for those underachieving in mainstream subjects but who may have good computer skills and can thrive with the new found responsibility and sense of achievement.

Rule 5 **– Have an editorial team to coordinate the ICT activity**

Jointly undertaken, easily graspable activities help create a common basis from which partner organisations can explore explore cultural commonalities/differences. This can be particularly valuable in North/South Linking where material inequalities are frequently highlighted between developing and developed countries. Doing the same thing as the other community and then reflecting on the other community's contribution provides obvious scope for discussion and critical reflection on other cultures, and it also means teachers are equipped with strategies for deploying activities using ICT, as well as acquiring technical skills. The following pages give some examples.

Rule 6 **- Choose simple reproducible activities in which both communities can quickly engage**

Example 1 - "What I don't like about school" disposable camera exercise

The children of Akurase photographed, using disposable cameras, what they disliked about school. These photos were then shared with children in Brighton who responded with their own photos. Both were then published on our website. This exercise worked because:

- Children in both locations were able to feel a shared sympathy bringing them a sense of closeness and familiarity through a universal experience (i.e. disliking school!)
- The exercise was participative and fun, involving role play and group discussion.
- Use of disposable cameras gave children ownership of the images
- Discussion about the differences between living in both cultures arose naturally from comparing images.

"We don't like it when people steal from us during break."

Example 2 - "Our schools"

This simple exercise got children in the UK to photograph aspects of school life which 'mirrored' as far as possible the routines of the school photographed by children in Ghana. The simplicity of the activity belied the impact gained from of putting photos alongside each other. It challenged children's perceptions of the South and the North as being very different places and helped children move away from the material comparisons which are usually made.

Example 3 – Interactive Maps

Interactive Maps are maps of particular locations displayed on web pages which use 'hotspots' or clickable links to pages showing places within the map area. They are an excellent means of getting participants to think about their own community and how to represent it to another community. They can also be built upon and are a great tool to stimulate involvement since:

Appendix 4: The method used by the DA project

- Any number of clickable links can be added on a ongoing basis.
- A variety of media (text, photos, video, drawings) can be used on the link pages.
- They enable participants to focus on their community and articulate their views about the environment they live in, making it a excellent vehicle for a consultation exercise about a community, town or school.

Rule 7 - Have girls groups

Without a conscious effort to put women at the centre of technology based projects, there is the danger that your ICT activities will be dominated by males (both students and teachers). It's important to create a safe non-threatening environment for girls and women to use ICTs. This was achieved in the Akurase Project by setting up dedicated "after school" groups for young women in both Akurase and Brighton that used female facilitators.

Rule 8 - Use humour and media conventions to make your work easy for young people to relate to

Sometimes development awareness work is accused of being rather 'earnest', making it hard for young people to engage with. You can avoid this by using humour wherever possible. For example, role plays of soap operas were used in the Akurase Project to bring groups of young women closer together. They enjoyed making the soap operas and then were able to look at gender conventions of the other culture by examining each others' videos. Spoof adverts and newspapers are also useful methods for exchanging cultures with another community, whilst enabling you to reflect on its norms and issues of globalisation at the same time. Using ICTs in development awareness requires building in time for the following:

- **Action:** making your own materials
- **Viewing:** work from the other community
- **Reflection:** discussion about that work and the issues it provokes Building all three components into the process increases the educational value of the activity. Building websites is not enough since using ICTs appropriately in development awareness relies upon making, viewing and discussing either your own or exchanged work at all stages.

Rule 9 - Time for reflection is crucial

Rule 10 – Develop a strategy to use your web site once you've built it

Make sure you start the ICT project with a strategy to use it. This is best led by a key figure with a commitment to the project and to incorporating it into the life of the school or community. Websites won't be accessed unless you create opportunities for their use (i.e. guest books, public events, competitions, etc). After you've set up your ICT presence, provide activities to encourage its continued use.

Rule 11 - Have a cultural guide

When interpreting the work of the other community via their web site, it's necessary to have a cultural guide (somebody who has made themself familiar with the other culture) to help

Appendix 4: The method used by the DA project

others interpret the contributions and concerns of the partner community, and provide a context for its reception in the other culture.

Rule 12 - Cultural exchange using ICTs can happen anywhere!

Cultural exchange using ICTs can happen anywhere, between urban and rural communities in the same country or across ethnic or social divides. Joint participation and communication through mediabased activities can happen in the same country. It enables people who lead seemingly very different lives to reflect upon their own and other cultures and this can happen anywhere!