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Cultural congruence and unbalanced power between home and school in rural Ghana and the impact on school children[*]

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ABSTRACT

This ethnographic inquiry examines the cultural congruence between home and school in rural Ghana, exploring the cultural norms of child-rearing practices within families and the institution of schooling. The data illustrate both the agreement between home and school in regard to discipline practices and instruction in morality, while simultaneously highlighting a power differential between home and school. The authors highlight the power dynamics between home and school, and discuss the burden children bear in managing the home–school relationship in rural Ghana.

Introduction

The basic premise underlying this research is that in any society schooling is a function of childrearing. Schools and families work side by side to shape children into the adults that are necessary for any given society to progress. School functions in societies to shape citizens (Dewey [1916] 1997) and to transmit cultural knowledge that becomes too complex to be passed down through the family or community (Ohene-Okantah 2003). Agbemabiese (2010) recognises that this 'large and varied, even chaotic' (2) goal of education in a given society is complex because it reflects the history, culture, and values of a country. This research examines the cultural congruence between home and school in rural Ghana, exploring through ethnographic methods the similarities and differences in cultural norms of child-rearing practices between families and the institution of schooling. The research exposes power differentials between the home and school and examines the complicated nature of congruence in a postcolonial West African context. The data illustrate both the agreement between home and school in regard to discipline practices and instruction in morality, while at the same time highlighting a power differential between home and school. We will discuss the burden children bear in managing the power differentials of the home–school relationship in rural Ghana.

This article begins with a discussion of the model of education used in Ghanaian schools and a review of the literature of how the model is implemented in Ghana. We

will then discuss our research methods and our findings. We will conclude the article with a discussion of the implications and suggestions for further research.

Literature review

Ghanaian education model(s)

Anderson-Levitt (2003) asks if there is a global culture of schooling, as world culture theorists imply. Do individual nations or communities craft their own individual culture of schooling, or through the effects of colonisation and globalisation, is there a global model? 'The historical fact is that primary educational enrolments and mass organization of schooling became a modal world pattern at the end of the 19th century and this has had major global consequences for schooling as an institution ever since' (LeTendre et al. 2002, 22). While there is no doubt that through historical colonisation and contemporary globalisation as a neo-colonial force, the systems of schooling have been shaped, ethnographers have been able to gain insights into how global models are enacted on national and local levels (Anderson-Levitt 2003; Coe, 2005). Coe (2005) suggests that while the common belief that state-sponsored schooling practices with national curriculum and common structures produce common practices is not necessarily wrong, it is certainly not a complete description of schools. Indeed, Anderson-Levitt (2003) proposes 'that teachers and other local actors sometimes resist and always transform the official models they are handed' (4), hence arguing that anthropologists play a critical role in determining this notion of global culture as compared to local culture.

Ghanaian schools have been described as a conglomerate of American and British models (Lundgren 2007). Schooling in Ghana, as elsewhere in the world, is largely based on the Western structure, which was historically imposed on them by colonial powers and contemporarily by neo-colonial powers such as international donors. For example, between 1987 and 2007 there have been over 20 multilateral and bilateral donors involved in Ghana's education sector, including the World Bank, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, the Danish International Development Agency, the UK's Department for International Development, and the US Agency for International Development (USAID), among others (Casely-Hayford et al. 2007). All of these donors require progress reports, often written by foreign consultants who use American or European standards of education to measure the success of Ghanaian schooling. In a USAID report (Kraft 2003), the goals of the education system in Ghana were declared to include both the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, and 'skills in problem solving, critical thinking, and the work habits of diligence, creativity, and personal responsibility' (3). In reports published by USAID (Kraft 2003) and other donor organisations, emphasis on rote memorisation, for example, is criticised as a poor practice, similarly to how it would be in Europe and North America. However, one must question the cultural context of Ghana in making such a claim. Oral tradition has a strong historical and contemporary presence, and memory plays a crucial role in the transmission of knowledge in an oral culture. Yet, memorisation is relegated to a marginalised knowledge in these reports. We would argue that the importance of memorisation cannot be minimised in this context, simply because it is considered a poor teaching and learning strategy in another cultural context (such as North America and Europe). This is how it becomes

marginalised, and perpetuates a hegemonic view of knowledge. On the other hand, it is also probable that the emphasis on rote learning is a hold-over of colonial schooling practices of the last century, reinforced by an assessment system that relies almost exclusively on memorisation and not on understanding (Kraft 2003), and hence should be challenged as ineffectual for a deeper understanding of the world that is necessary for children to grow into engaged citizens involved in the difficult work of nation-building. Finally, practically, the reliance on rote memorisation may be a response to an English language curriculum and assessment system in a nation where English is the second language of everyone. A combination of all of these factors influences the structures of schooling in Ghana, and hence makes for complex and complicated discussion of home and school cultural congruence.

Agbemabiese (2010) warns Ghanaians that as they embark on another step to restructure their education system to conform to that of western systems, they should be cognisant that their continent is 'dominated by academic institutions shaped by colonialism and organized according to the European model' (3), and that while each educational system comes with certain cultural baggage, Ghanaians might be wise to pause and consider the 'long term impact it may have on the country's intellectual and human resources as well as the socioeconomic and cultural experience' (3). He asks, 'When our ancestors formulated the concept that "it takes a village to raise a child," … upon what praxis did they base their educational pedagogy?' (3).

While these authors make clear that there is a global influence on schooling, namely a European and North American effect, carried out through conditions of funding educational programs through organisations like the World Bank, USAID, and UNESCO, among others (Agbemabiese 2010; Anderson-Levitt 2003; Mfum-Mensah 2002; Stambach 2006), there are also local practices and lifeways that are infused into schooling, sometimes as resistant practices and sometimes as practical and philosophical transformations that align with local cultural beliefs and norms. In fact, Agbemabiese (2010) points out that it is difficult to untangle the influences of the various historical and contemporary power structures on the Ghanaian system of education:

> It is hard to say whether Ghana's education system has moved further from the western versions of European education inherited at independence. It is also difficult to ask whether education reforms have retreated from (i) the formal school introduced by English representatives of trade in Cape Coast, (ii) mission schools instituted by English and Swiss Christian Missionaries, (iii) formal education systems implemented under British colonial policy. (4)

Interestingly, Quist (2001) has crafted a model that describes Africa's triple heritage (African, Western, and Islamic) that attempts to isolate the various pedagogical and curricular responses to the 'peculiar socio-cultural and politico-economic realities that have arisen out of the triple heritage' (303). For example, he categorises African and Islamic influences on education to be community-oriented, but Western influences to be individual-oriented. He also isolates African education as requiring a commitment of knowledge to memory, and Islamic education having a focus on rote learning, both in contrast to Western education which relies on written texts (2001), yet Kraft (2003) suggests that the reliance on examinations, imposed during colonial times and carried over into present-day Africa, is the culprit for the emphasis on rote learning rather than

comprehension. The challenges isolating the effects of a triple heritage (Quist 2001) or colonial and neo-colonial influences (Agbemabiese 2010) become clear when analysing the model of education employed in Ghana.

In fact, this intermingling is such that Stambach (2006), in her review of Coe's (2005) and Weiss's (2004) books, suggests that the discourse on world cultures needs to move beyond 'thinking about schools as the opposite of, or an antidote to, traditional culture and instead to see school and communities in Africa as historically and culturally conjoined' (290). Stambach (2006) problematises this discourse of modernisation, suggesting that such binary thinking of 'modern' versus 'traditional' and the resulting placement of schools as the institution that could transform undeveloped (code for 'traditional') nations into developed (code for 'modern') ones pits youth against elders, the schooled against the unschooled, and knowledge of literacy and numeracy against knowledge of spirituality and other cultural information. This binary often alienates educated Ghanaians from their villages and families (Addae 2003) and causes mistrust between communities and schools (Mfum-Mensah 2002). These notions of distrust and alienation are supported not only by social science research but also by fictional narratives produced by African authors (see Aidoo 1997; Ngugi 1988).

Home and school relations and conflicts

In order to provide a conceptual framework, we need to discuss the research on the relationship between home and school. There is limited research on this topic within the Ghanaian education literature, and so we will discuss a framework based on a Western model of democratic education, drawn from European and North American scholars. While not an ideal framing, we are confident that providing a conceptual grounding allows for deeper discussion of our findings, particularly in relation to how the power dynamics between home and school in Ghana speak against the Western framework. We recognise that children learn about how to operate in their world(s) through 'informal socialization, including the hidden curriculum of regular school practice, [where they] inescapably develop some understanding of their community and its needs, and of how (or whether) they should act in relation to these needs' (Bickmore 2001, 137). Phelan, Davidson, and CaoYu (1993) suggest that when cultural components in one world are viewed as inferior to those in another world, sociocultural borders are created, which means that some youngsters experience two everyday realities: one at school and one at home (King, Chipman, and Cruz-Janzen 1994). School failure festers in classrooms where there are incongruities between home and school, particularly if the school cultural norms and values are in contrast to those of the home and community (Delpit 1995/2006; 2013; Ladson-Billings, [1994] 2006; Phelan, Davidson, and CaoYu 1993).

Andersson (2002) posits that one condition for teachers to be successful in their teacher role is to have good relations with the parents of the students, which should be characterised by mutual trust, in which there is an acknowledgement of each other's competency, and space for both bridges and gates between home and school. When mutual trust is at risk is when there are cultural incongruities (Delpit 1995/2006), and when cultural components in one institution are viewed as superior to the other (Phelan, Davidson, and CaoYu 1993).

Power in schooling

Foucault (1982) describes his work as the study of subject, not necessarily power, and then goes on to say, 'It seems to me that, while the human subject is placed in relations of production and signification, he is equally placed in power relations which are very complex' (778). He explains that while there are theories to address production (economics) and signification (linguistics and semiotics), the study of power 'is not only a theoretical questions but a part of our experience' (779), and as such needs to be explored through studying resistance and attempts to disassociate power relations (Foucault 1982).

In a Swedish study about home and school relations, researchers found that children whose parents perceived positive relations between home and school performed better in school, and that those whose children experienced social problems, including bullying, perceived negative relations with the school, and their children performed worse (Andersson 2002). Interestingly,

> power is a common theme in the interviews. The parents in the positive group felt that they had more power than the parents in the negative groups. They had a higher status and were able to influence the school situation for their children. The parents in the negative groups often perceived themselves to be at a disadvantage towards school. They had to struggle to make their voices heard, to gain respect, to get information from the teachers about the children's weak and good sides, to get their children investigated and to get special education support for their children. This fight gave little result, the children had to wait long for the analyses and according to the parents most children received extremely little support in relation to their needs. (Andersson 2002, 1)

Delpit (1995/2006, 2013) discusses unbalanced power in regard to African American children and families in American schools, which Ladson-Billings ([1993] 2009) adequately describes as an historical distrust of schooling by African American families. As Dei (2005) rightly points out, there is limited research in the Ghanaian context about inclusive schooling, ethnic and language equity, and asymmetrical relations of power based on difference.

This article seeks to understand the phenomenon of historical and cultural intermingling, as described in this literature review, as well as the power dynamics at play in Ghanaian schools. This ethnographic account integrates 'the macro into the micro, combining accounts of impersonal systems into representations of local life as cultural forms both autonomous and constituted by the larger order' (Marcus 1986, 170). Our ethnographic research asked the question, 'What is the cultural congruence between home and school?' Our hope is that this research will shed light on this critical question by examining two major influences on the Ghanaian child: the home and school.

Methods

We conducted our research at three different rural villages near the University of Cape Coast. Two of the schools were public government schools and one school was a private Catholic school, operated by a village elder. Amy attended classes three days each week at two of the villages for one academic year. She was a participant observer, taking careful notes of the daily life of the Ghanaian classroom, while participating as a student, an aid, and on occasion, the teacher. In addition to the extensive immersion

into the setting, Lawrence and Amy together interviewed four children and four parents at each school, as well as each of the three teachers who welcomed us into their classrooms for the year.

Additionally, Amy visited a remote-rural village, located about one hour east of Cape Coast, on three separate occasions to interview students. A total of nine students from Form 3 were chosen. Owing to this government school's more remote location, it was not possible to be immersed in the setting, like the other schools. However, we felt it was beneficial to include the school population in this ethnography because, in addition to its remoteness, it also had a large Ewe population within a Fante region. We were interested to find out if there were any nuances to home and school relations that might be revealed through this special immigrant community.

In all, 17 children were interviewed, 8 caregivers, and 3 teachers (*N* = 28). In addition to the interview and observation data, we also collected artefacts, such as copies of the school curriculum. The data were coded hierarchically into topics, categories, and finally into themes (Creswell 2011). The data were displayed visually in order to look for trends and patterns, as well as to be able to triangulate the data across participants and methodological techniques (Creswell 2011).

We used low-inference descriptions and participant voice in the write-up, although it should be noted that most of the interviews were conducted through translation. While the observational data were collected verbatim, the interviews were conducted in the participants' local language on most occasions. Our process was for Amy to ask the question in English, Lawrence to translate the question into Fante, the native language of nearly all of our participants, and the participants to respond in whichever language they felt most comfortable (English or Fante). On most occasions, the participants responded in Fante, which was then translated into English and recorded. The two researchers were very careful to translate as clearly as possible, while keeping the participants' phrasing as close to the original intent. At times, the participants responded to questions in English, in which case their words were recorded verbatim. This may account for some variation in voice as one reads this article. We recognise that some nuances of meaning may be lost in translation, although both researchers regularly discussed this issue and attempted to maintain as much of the meaning as possible, and to check with participants to clarify meaning in order to address the trustworthiness of this research (Creswell 2011).

Research context

The University of Cape Coast in Cape Coast, Ghana is situated along a beautiful stretch of road along the ocean. Palm trees line the entryway into the university, as well as the road that meanders in front. Within this beautiful, sprawling campus are an estimated five villages. Two of the villages, within walking distance of the bungalow where Amy lived, are sites for this study. The third village is a remote-rural village, located over an hour's drive from campus.

Village one

The first village is located north-east of the campus community. There are several private hostels that house university students on the edge or just inside the village boundaries.

The school is located on the outskirts of the village, an easy 15-minute walk from campus. The buildings, like most schools in Ghana, are constructed from cement blocks and built in long rows with classrooms next to each other. The classrooms' windows, with wooden shutters that are closed at night, open to a veranda on each side of the block of classrooms where students can walk. While there is electricity in this school, there is no need to have the lights on during the day due to the open windows and doors. This open-air atmosphere also allows the classroom to be relatively cool and breezy in the hot, equatorial climate. There is no play equipment on the school grounds, and while students have breaks, they typically eat, talk, and play football with an orange, nut, or other small round object they can find. This government school has a kindergarten located in the centre of the grounds, as well as two blocks of primary classrooms, Block A and Block B, and a Junior High School (JHS) located on the outer periphery of the campus. We observed in classes 4A (ages nine and above) and 6B (ages 11 and above). Each day begins with an assembly, as is the norm in Ghanaian schools. Two to four children play the drums, both Western snare-drums and traditional African drums, which call everyone to the centre of the school campus for a lecture by the headmistress or an appointed teacher. Prior to the assembly each day, the children clean the school grounds. They work in teams of students, mixed by age, to sweep the compound, pick up the rubbish, sweep the classrooms and veranda, dust the desks, and wash the chalk boards. They line up at assembly in their work teams first, and the headmistress typically comments on the appearance of the school compound. Then they move to line up by classrooms. They sometimes receive further information about their daily or weekly schedule, such as examinations or a sports day, as well as moral advice, related to learning, attitudes, or behaviour. The children are also inspected for clean uniforms, and general hygiene such as hair length, fingernails, etc. After the inspection, which happens to varying degrees each day, the children are led in a Christian prayer and then the drums are played and they march with swinging arms to their classrooms, singing one of several marching songs. The teachers, typically standing together during the assembly, follow the children, usually within a few minutes to their classrooms. The school assembly routine was similar for all three schools.

Village two

The second village was located north-west of campus, near the university farm. It was approximately a 30-minute walk from the bungalow where Amy stayed. This village housed a private Roman Catholic school, which had a relatively good reputation compared to government schools. The school served the children living in the village, but also children living in the other four villages on campus as well as from surrounding towns, who did not want to attend the government schools located in their home villages. Additionally, children of some of the staff, such as security guards, as well as the children of the 'house girls' who stayed with faculty members and took care of their houses, attended this school, as well. Amy walked to school with the two children of her neighbour's house girl.

The school also comprised long row-buildings of classrooms. There was no electricity in this school, and unlike the Village One school, there were no shutters on windows or doors that closed. The classrooms had smaller windows, which meant that airflow was a little

more restricted, compared to the other village school. The school had a larger student body than the government school in Village One, owing in part to the children attending from nearby villages and towns, as well as the fact that the village was larger. Children sat three pupils to a desk, with the two on the ends having to turn their bodies sideways. The classrooms were overcrowded in this school.

Village three

All three villages were rural. However, owing to the proximity of Village One and Village Two to the University of Cape Coast, as well as two nearby towns with large markets, residents did not face some of the challenges of finding work or other difficulties of rural life that people in Village Three faced. Village Three is located a short taxi ride from the main Cape Coast-Takoradi coastal road. The taxi drove the bumpy dirt road through the bush to the small village, where a market sets up once per week for the villagers to sell and buy their goods. The school was located uphill, along a walking path that meandered through the bush and through the village. We did fieldwork at the JHS, which consisted of only a handful of classrooms. Each classroom had fewer than 20 students, each with their own desk.

All of the schools, both private and public, align with many of the same institutional structures, such as beginning and ending each day with the assembly and marching, providing scheduled breaks for students to eat or talk, and following the same government-issued curriculum.

Findings: cultural congruence between home and school

Our findings show the complicated nature of cultural practices, imposed or adopted systems and structures, and the intermingling of the two. On the whole, we found great cultural congruence between home and school, in terms of child-rearing practices. Parents and teachers, in general, were in agreement about how children should behave, the responsibility children should have, how children should be disciplined, and the moral values that should be imparted to children. On the other hand, we found parents to have little knowledge or understanding of the school curriculum, and significantly less power than schools in the relationship. We also discovered that children carry the burden of negotiating what knowledge of school should be shared with the home. Hence, children bear responsibility for managing much of the home–school relationship, particularly in regard to conflict.

Synchronous relationship

In many ways, schools were seen as building on the values taught within the home, and vice-versa, as the following quotes from caregivers indicate:

> I know they don't teach social vices in school, like pick-pocketing and these things. But what I hope they teach him is wisdom. How he can get knowledge himself and how he can develop. (Grandmother/Primary Caretaker of Class 6 boy)

> There are differences, but in the end it's the same. In the school it adds up to what is taught in the house to make him complete. (Uncle of Class 6 boy)

> The school and the home, we are together. (Anthony's (Form 1) father)

> What we teach here is a continuation of what the school does. (Joseph's (class 4) mother)

Teachers, too, indicated that there was general agreement between the home and the school about how children should behave. All of the teachers reported that they had no conflict between themselves and parents. Only after significant probing did teachers acknowledge a time when there was disagreement, and in each case the disagreement related to a teacher's decision not to promote a child to the next grade.

Moreover, the children point out the similarities in the values taught at home and at school:

> The teacher tells me I should do good things. When I go home, my father tells me I should do good things. When I come to school, they teach me a moral lesson. When I go home, my mother, too, teaches me good things. (Anthony, Form 1)

> How I am treated at home is the same way at school. When I do something, they correct me and show me how to live a good life. (Frank, Form 1)

Children, caretakers, and teachers were in agreement that there is congruence between the values taught at home and the values taught in school. There appeared to be societal agreement on how children should behave in Ghanaian society.

Shared views on discipline

There are shared beliefs about discipline between the home and school. In the three schools where we conducted this research, caning is a common practice. We witnessed caning in several different ways, and for several different kinds of infractions. Children were caned for talking in class, for tardiness, or for not knowing the correct answer to a question posed by the teacher. Children were caned in groups and individually, and were hit on the palm of the hand, the buttocks, the back of the legs, and on one occasion, the back. Most often, however, the cane was used to hit the wall, blackboard, or the desktop, which had the effect of eliciting fear among the children, and certainly getting their attention. Children were also assigned work as a form of punishment. As Anthony (Form 1 student) describes:

> At home, if I am bad, I have to clean the bowls. If I am [bad] at school, they have us sweep the compound.

Generally, parents were in support of the kinds of discipline that occurs in school. One mother said,

> In terms of teachers, I don't see anything wrong. The teacher corrects them if someone misbehaves; the teacher corrects them with punishment.

During our questions about types of conflict between home and school, we often used discipline methods and the severity of discipline as a potential scenario to inquire when and for what reasons parents would intervene with school discipline. We asked questions like, 'If your child came home with bruises on their body from the cane, would you go to the school?' Philomena's aunt, her primary caregiver, replied:

> I would go to the school and ask. If I ask and the teacher says she beat her, I wouldn't do anything because if she did the right thing, she wouldn't have been caned.

This answer exhibits the trust between the parents and the teachers, and the congruence of discipline practices between home and school. While many children reported that they were not caned at home, but instead given work as punishment or simply advised as to how to correct their behaviour, the parents supported caning at school. In fact, one mother told us that once when her child misbehaved at home, she punished him and then the next day brought the child to school, told the teacher about the child's infraction at home, and asked the teacher to also punish him. The teacher caned the child for misbehaving at home. This phenomenon was supported by Felicia, the Class 6 teacher:

> Sometimes they (parents) freely tell me that the child is disobedient. Maybe they've been telling the child to go to school, but they have not been coming. So they say I should advise the child.

In these cases, the home and school worked together to discipline the child.

Aligned moral values

In nearly every interview, whether it was with the children, the parents, or the teachers, there was consensus that the school and home imparted the same moral values. Many children echoed the sentiments of these girls:

> My father used to tell me that I should study at home. My madam [teacher] also tells us that. (Gladys, Class 6)

> They all give similar advice. It's the same. At home my mother tells us we should study and we shouldn't take bad friends. They tell us the same thing at school. (Gifty, Form 1)

While the children focused more on the shared value of studying at home, parents focused on social morals such as stealing. We visited Frank's mother, a seamstress, at her work. As she sat at her sewing machine, we talked. She said,

> Whatever I teach him, they teach the same thing at school because a teacher cannot ask a child to go and steal.

Other parents concurred:

> Well, I give him good training, but it's not everything that he picks or abides by and I know that in school, too, they teach him good morals. In school, they teach the child respect, and it is expected that when the child comes home, he'll practice the same thing. [Solomon's Mother]

> What happens at school is different. Initially, her behaviour in the house was no good at all, but now because of school, she is picking [up good behaviour]. In the school they teach her how to say please and how to respect. If you compare that to someone who doesn't go to school, it is quite different. (Philomena's Aunt, Primary Caregiver)

The focus on moral values, such as not stealing or keeping ethical friends, may be due to the fact that most parents we interviewed did not know the curriculum taught in schools.

> I don't know what he learns at school. (laughs) I don't actually know what he is learning, but when he grows up, he'll determine the kind of job he'll do. (Anthony's mother)

> I know he is learning at school, but the exact thing he's learning, I don't know. (Kingdom's grandmother, primary caregiver)

Indeed, parents seemed to entrust the content of the curriculum almost entirely to the schools. This may be due, in part, to the fact that many parents are uneducated in formal settings themselves. While schooling, an imported institution from the British colonial rule, was a high priority of the post-independence government in 1957, it did not guarantee that every child would be educated. While it is officially mandatory and free, as stated in article 39 of the 1996 revision to the Ghanaian constitution, and is considered one of the most ambitious pre-tertiary education programs in all of West Africa (U.S. Department of State, Bureau of African Affairs, 2011), it is still difficult for many people to obtain an education. There are nominal school fees, which are nearly impossible for some families to provide, as well as a limited number of teachers to be deployed throughout the nation, most specifically in rural areas (Mulkeen 2006). So, while it is officially mandatory, it certainly is not enforced. And prior to 1996, education was even more limited, which would contribute to the fact that fewer than half of the parents whom we interviewed had finished school as children. This is likely one contributing factor for the lack of knowledge about the curriculum.

Power differentials between home and school

We have described how there is agreement between home and school on corporal punishment as a form of discipline, as well as moral teachings for children. In this section, we will complicate the notion of congruence by discussing issues of trust, fear, and power.

Trust

In large part, the Ghanaian parents trust their children's teachers. Many children reported that their parents liked their teachers, which is a sentiment supported by the parents we interviewed. When asked what he would do if Daniel was disciplined to an extreme and perhaps injured at school at the hands of a teacher, Daniel's grandfather stated:

> If it happens, I would go see the headmaster. If a proper explanation is given, then I would be OK. If he was caned, perhaps he deserved it. It would be in the hands of the headmaster.

Parents trust the schools to educate their children and to be fully responsible for them when they are there:

> If he is not at home, he is at school and the teacher takes responsibility for him. (Frank's mother)

> So far as the child is in the hands of the teacher, I don't have any problem. (Anthony's father)

Schools in Ghana operate *in loco parentis*, where parents trust the school to take care of their child when the child is in school. There does not seem to be a critical eye on the school or a lack of trust in teachers' judgment. The shared power between home and school is clearly delineated. When the child is at home, the parent is in charge. When the child is at school, the teachers are in charge. This trust appears to be built upon the shared values in morality and discipline between home and school. However, as we will see later in the data, the shared power between home and school is not always balanced. In fact, it often falls upon the children to negotiate the power

between home and school by determining what information to share about school with their families.

Fear and apprehension

While parents typically agree with schools on the forms of punishment, such as caning, this agreement is not simple. Several parents and children talked about apprehension or fear in talking with the teacher about anything they may disagree with, including discipline. One mother shared this story:

> When I was in Form 2, there was a girl who the teacher caned and there were some bruises. The mother went to the school and [complained to] the teacher. From that time on the teacher wouldn't teach the girl. He wouldn't open her exercise books. The girl was just left to roam. I learned something from that. If your ward is punished, you don't have to go to the teacher.

During the focus group interviews at the remote village school, the following story was told within two separate focus groups (one focus group of three girls, and one focus group of three boys, all in the JHS). The story resulted from probing the students as to why they would not complain to their parents about their teachers, something they all reported that they would refrain from doing:

> About four years ago a boy had bushy hair and failed on several occasions to trim it. So the teacher decided to use the scissors to start. Then she told him to go to the barber. The teacher told him not to come to school the next day with that bushy hair. The boy refused, so he came the next day. The teacher caned him. So he went to complain to his father and the father came to the school. The teacher, too, became annoyed and told the father to take the child, that he wouldn't teach him again. The headmaster had to intervene. (Form 3 boy)

The children concurred with the following sentiments expressed by Emmanuel (Form 3):

> [I wouldn't bring home school problems because] the issue that boy made [referring to above story], so we are afraid.

Power resides with the school

It is clear from the two stories shared by both children and parents about teachers who refused to teach children who complained of their teachers to their parents, that the power resides with the school, not the home. While it is not common, these parents and children know of instances where a teacher refused to teach a child, and the teacher was not punished for such a decision. The following vignette of an observation in Class 6 illustrates another way that teachers exert power over students:

> Felicia was walking throughout the rows of desks marking students' exercise books, as they finished their mathematics exercise. One student held up his paper and said, 'Madame, mark.' Felicia was on the other side of the room, and was continuing to walk throughout the rows. She did not respond to this boy. He stood up and repeated his request: 'Madame, mark.' He remained standing, as she continued to ignore him. Finally he sat down. A few minutes passed, as she continued walking through the room, marking papers. She came to him, and he stood again. She held up his paper and said, 'I didn't mark this boy's work because he wrote it on a piece of paper. He will throw it away. I don't want to waste my pen.' The boy sat.

An exercise book is a bound notebook that students buy in the market for 25 pesewas (about US$0.15), at the time of this research. The students complete their work in their exercise book, which is collected each day and stored in the classroom. In contrast, a piece of paper can easily be lost or discarded, hence Felicia did not determine it to be worthy of marking.

In the Ghanaian school context, the child is accountable for their learning, more so than the teacher to teach. Once, following examination week the teachers were talking outside while the children lined up for the morning assembly. They were complaining that the 'children do not learn well'. Amy asked for clarification, and one teacher explained that they were discussing the poor examination scores the students earned and discussing that the children do not learn well. There was no consideration among the teachers that they might not have taught well (see Masko and Bosiwah 2012 for further discussion of this issue). When one holds most of the power, the mistakes are made by the powerless, in this case the children.

Lack of power of children

As discussed earlier, children fear that their teachers will not teach them if they exert their power of critique. Additionally, children are aware that their parents often will not support their critique. As Gifty explained,

> My parents are not such that if you go to tell them, they won't go to the school and find out [about it]. They are not that kind of people. However, they tell me if [my classmates] insult me, I shouldn't mind it. I prefer it like this. If your parents come to school talking about you, people will start to hate you.

Gifty describes her understanding of the social norm of separation of school and home in Ghana. There is social pressure for parents to stay away from school, and if they get involved, the child risks being socially ostracised. Other times, children appeared to want the help of their parents in navigating these school relationships, but knew that they were not going to get the support. Olivia described what would happen at home if she complained about the school:

> If I tell my mother, she won't say anything. (Her voice cracked.) Even if I tell my aunty that something has happened in the school, she would insult [scold] me.

A boy in the remote village concurred:

> Sometimes they [our parents] are angry with the teachers, but sometimes they say it is our fault. So, our parents would support the teachers.

The children are cognisant that they do not have the power to intervene in their treatment by the adults in their lives. While one might argue that all children lack power, we would argue that in some cultures and in some circumstances children may go to a parent to complain about the way that another adult treated them, and a parent would intervene. However, in the case of teachers, children rarely reported telling their parents of treatment that they deemed unfair. In fact, only one child, Frank, reported complaining to his parents about unfair treatment at the hands of teachers:

> I don't usually take complaints to them [my parents] about what happens in school, but sometimes if they cane us unnecessarily, then I do tell them. For example, sometimes [if] they cane on our back, they can damage our spinal cord. For that, I tell my parents so when they attend the PTA [Parent Teacher Association] meeting they can bring it out.

The children in this study demonstrated both their lack of power, which indicates a sort of reliance on the adults in their lives, both parents and teachers, to assure their education, as well as their autonomy in managing much of their own school life. Part of their autonomy includes the management of the home–school relationship. They are cognisant of what information to bring home to their parents, and what information to keep to themselves. They are aware that, while there is mainly agreement between home and school, if the balance is tipped too far in one direction, they may suffer the consequences. This is a heavy burden for children to carry.

Children negotiate the home–school relationship

It is not only the schools that hold the trust of the parents. Parents also trust their children. Gifty's father, a farmer, said,

> Generally, we depend on the teacher and child relationship. If they are able to do it well, there will be no problem.

The parents seem to intervene very little in this relationship. They trust both the teacher and the child to develop and maintain a relationship, so that there will be no problems in which the parents must intervene. This presents a potentially difficult power dynamic for children to maintain.

Perhaps in order to maintain a balance of power between home and school, children reported that they do not share information about their school day with their parents and vice-versa. The following quotes all come from Form 3 boys in a focus group interview in Village Three:

> School issues are not to be sent home.

> If our father tells us something at home, we don't say it at school. So, if your teacher tells you something at school, there is no need to bring it home.

> When it is time for sport, I don't tell my parents. They [would] say [that] they send us to school for learning, not for sport.

> Our headmaster told us, whatever happens at school, don't bring it home.

Indeed, children carry the burden to manage any potential conflict between the home and school, deciding what information is worthy of reporting to their families and what information should remain private. John, a Form 3 boy said,

> I wouldn't bring home something that would cause conflict.

Gifty echoes that sentiment when discussing how she decides to tell her parents about corporal punishment:

> If I tell them[my parents], it isn't something that would benefit them.

So, she decided not to tell them. Anthony further explains the differentiation between home and school:

> It's not everything you tell your parents. If certain things happen at the school, and it's not good, I will tell my parents so when they attend PTA; they can talk about it. If it happens that they [other children] beat me, I will tell my parents and they would come and report

to [the headmaster]. He will discipline the children and tell them not to do it again. If people talk in class, I don't tell my parents. When a certain thing [happens], like I am disciplined for not cutting my nails or having a dirty uniform, and I am caned, there is no need to tell my parents.

Implications and summary

There is no doubt that there are shared values and cultural practices between the home and school. This is due, in part, to community agreement on child-rearing practices, including how children should be disciplined and for what infractions, as well as shared moral values. Even if parents and schools do not use the same techniques for disciplining, they clearly respect each other's methods for discipline, and have similar expectations for how children should behave. Agbemabiese (2010) asks us to consider on what pedagogical praxis his ancestors based the concept, 'it takes a whole village to raise a child'. While these data do not necessarily determine the pedagogical praxis, they certainly illustrate the level of agreement among the village, including the village school, as to how children should be raised.

However, this research also revealed a lack of knowledge that parents have about school curriculum. While parents expressed satisfaction with the content of schooling, they also revealed their unfamiliarity with what is taught. Parents simply may not be cognisant of what happens every day in school, and therefore appear content with formal schooling practices in Ghana. The postcolonial context suggests that people have been both explicitly and implicitly told that schooling is something that is good, refined, high-brow, special, and hence above their standing, therefore inappropriate to question or challenge. In fact, there is a saying in Ghana that parents often speak to their children. When a child uses bad language or has poor behaviour, a parent says, 'Aren't you the one who goes to school?' indicating that schooling acts as a sort of refinement of character. It is this separation of classes, the schooled and unschooled, the modern and traditional (Stambach 2006) that may allow for unbalanced power between home and school. Indeed, as Andersson (2002) reminds us, the interactions between the family, the child, and the school are very complicated and not easily explained.

Dei's research examining inclusivity in Ghanaian schools (2005) suggests that 'in Ghanian schooling today, (unequal) power relations exist, as seen in the differential allocation of, and access to resources among social groups and economic sectors, as well as regions of the country' (270). Our research further illuminates power differentials between home and school. When power is too heavy on one side of a relationship, there is potential for corruption. It would behove researchers to further examine this power dynamic, and to make specific recommendations to the government on educational policy in order to balance the power and create a more democratic nature of schooling. Unbalanced power has the potential to lead to corruption. While we did not see this with our research, we are cognisant that the potential is present.

This research also highlights issues of teacher accountability. If students are to succeed in education, the teachers must have some level of accountability to successfully teach them. While we did not see teachers refuse to educate students, both parents and students had personal stories in which they did see it. This caused them to tread lightly around the school–home relationship. Refusing to teach a child because you are angry with his or her critique or refusing to mark a student's work because it is composed in

an inappropriate notebook is problematic unchecked behaviour. We recommend that Faculty of Education at universities in Ghana address this issue. Teacher attitudes, whether it is refusing to teach a child, mark their papers, or uncritically examining a testing situation, can change through teacher education. When teachers hold their pedagogical practices or the curriculum or the actual test accountable, they may instead question one of those three areas rather than only the children's ability to learn, when discussing achievement. Through teaching the practice of critical examination of all areas of the teaching–learning process (curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and learner ability), a natural balance of power may be struck. Foucault (1982) reminds us that

> in a given society there is no general type of equilibrium between finalized activities, systems of communication, and power relations. Rather, there are diverse forms, diverse places, diverse circumstances or occasions in which these interrelationships establish themselves according to a specific model. (787)

Our research suggests that there is an imbalance of power, where schools, particularly teachers, hold the power to teach a child or not. The child, in determining what should be shared with the home and with the school, is in a sense resisting the power of the teacher. There is a negotiation of the power relations between home and school for the purpose of avoiding any consequence towards the child. While this is a burden for the young child to manage, it also highlights one of the diverse models of power that Foucault addresses. Power is identified by its resistance (Foucault 1982), and our research illustrates the Ghanaian child's resistance to the imbalanced power between the home and the school.

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