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Organizational Linkage in Basic Education in Ghana: The Costs and Uses of Monitoring and Evaluation

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August 1999. This paper reports on a study conducted in July 1999, involving interviews and document reviews in the Ministry and other educational centres in Accra, and also involving observations and interviews in regional and district offices and in schools around the country. The latter activities were conducted in a collaborative study tour with Esther Amoah-Ahinful and Christian Vandyke from the Ministry of Education and Michael Sowah from The Mitchell Group. Their observations and interpretations were most useful in developing the present report, and I appreciate their insights and helpfulness to an outsider, and also the willingness of Patrick Yiriyelleh (Director, PBME, Ministry of Education) to support the tour. Lynn Evans (USAID) and Elizabeth Barcikowski (The Mitchell Group) provided arrangements and guidance, and Sally Tetteh-Ashong and Frank Kwaasi gave logistic support. I am grateful to all these people for their help, but also for the help of the teachers and administrators who cooperated in the interviewing/observation process. They remain anonymous here, but their help was crucial to the study.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In order to study linkages between the organizational levels of Ghanaian education, classrooms, schools, district offices and regional offices were visited, and participants interviewed. Interviews were also conducted in the national centres in Accra, and policy reports reviewed.

Organizationally, Ghanaian education is stretched across a great gap. On the one side are high national/international policy pictures of what education should be like and what it can contribute to national development. These ideals and standards are dominant in policy, and the perspectives involved penetrate far down into the system, so those interviews can easily evoke them from teachers and head teachers. On the other hand, local reality and achievements are very inadequate by those same standards.

Organizational decoupling and inconsistency result. Another product has been wave after wave of reform; much of it centered on creating tighter management and information arrangements. This tends to create some fragmentation, organizationally, which further loosens coupling in the system.

Loose coupling of this sort has obvious costs, but has also had advantages for Ghanaian education. It has permitted educational policy to track high national and international standards, gathering much legitimacy and many resources from national and international bodies: new international fashions and funds arrive in Ghana quickly. It has also permitted Ghana education (though of a very different quality than the standards) to penetrate very far into Ghana society, and something regarded as a school appears almost everywhere with surprisingly high participation.

Given the great gaps between ideals and practical reality, orientations to information are not searches to improve decision-making. They tend to become vertically bureaucratic in character, emphasizing inspection of failures from above and claims for reasonable resources from below. Participants do not consider themselves decision-makers, but organizational functionaries trying to conform to, or create conformity to, the very high standards.

In this context, improved information systems are somewhat costly, calling attention to inconsistencies. The system has tended to resist enhanced information, the participants tend to use concrete rather than abstract information, and few participants have questions to which improved information would be an answer. A partial exception here may be the newly empowered district schooling organizations, for which information is an aid in dealing with their lateral relationships with district and community groups.

International efforts to push the development of better national educational information systems may be less effective than would be efforts to support those groups that really want information. And continuing efforts may be useful to strengthen the local forces for which education has become a core value may be useful. The great success of the decoupled Ghanaian educational system has been that its values are surprisingly widely shared in society. The hopes and expectations derived from this source operate as main forces for improvement: national or international programs that link the schools in to these forces clearly make a difference.

Organizational Linkage in Basic Education in Ghana: The Costs and Uses of Monitoring and Evaluation

John W. Meyer, HIID/The Mitchell Group/USAID

I. Introduction

All the participant groups tend to see Ghanaian education as filled with problems of organization and management, monitoring and evaluation, and information and communication. Criticisms along these dimensions come up at every level of the system, from parents and teachers through several administrative levels to the Ministry of Education and international organizations. Organizational reforms to improve coordination, control, and capability are epidemic: failures along these axes are seen to partly account for failures to make rapid progress on the substantive educational goals of education, which are to expand and equalize educational access and to improve the quality of the teaching and learning produced in the system. Indeed, the major national reform effort of recent years - the program for establishing Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (or fCUBE, Ministry of Education 1996) -- added to the core goals of expanded and equalized access and teaching and learning achievement a third national focus on improved educational management and organization.

The present study examines the informational, or monitoring and evaluation, side of the organizational problems involved. The idea is to look at the linkages between the various levels of basic, and particularly primary, education, from classroom to school to district to region to the national and international centers. The focus is in part on information and communication flows, in part on the informational "needs" of the components of the system, and in part on the possibilities for expanding relevant organizational capacities.

To accomplish this, thirteen interviews were conducted with national-level (and international) participants, and many policy documents reviewed. Officials in three regional and six district offices were interviewed. Eighteen schools were visited, ordinarily involving interviews with head teachers or their deputies. And eighteen classrooms were observed, with teachers, where feasible, interviewed. The study depended entirely on the cooperation and help of these various people. Observations and (paraphrased) interview responses are reported (anonymously) in indented paragraphs in the text below. The data on regions, districts, and schools were amplified by the observations and interpretations of three study trip colleagues -- Michael Sowah, Esther Amoah-Ahinful, and Christian Vandyke -- and their help, and comments are gratefully acknowledged. It should be noted that over half the schools and classrooms visited were linked to USAID-supported programs for community and instructional development (six schools), or to Catholic Relief Service food assistance (five schools). This produces observations that have some bias: the aid programs tend to pick somewhat more organized and more accessible schools (The Mitchell Group 1998), and have clear effects that improve schools. On the other hand, we tried to visit mainly rural schools, to counteract the bias.

This report begins with matters of perspective and background. We then shift to substantive issues about organizational linkages, and information needs and uses, in Ghanaian education, and then to recommendations for useful changes.

II. Perspectives

Organizational reforms tend to depict a future of effective and coordinated rational action against a past and present of sloth and sin. Sloth here means a mixture of ignorance and weak motivation, and in education refers to unclear goals, techniques, and systems of control. Sin means suboptimization -- concealment, self-protection, and the use of information for purposes of personal power and control, by which persons or groups accomplish their own ends at the costs of collective ones. In the case of educational systems, this turns out principally to mean that local teachers and administrators work uninspected to avoid the needed sustained efforts.

The point of reform is to transcend these limitations, integrating individual activity and information around unified organizational purposes. Reforms may be centralizing, putting information and control in the hands of central collective actors (in education, usually Ministries), or they may emphasize decentralization and empowerment at various levels (e.g., teachers, schools, districts, and sometimes

students as individuals or groups). In either case, advances in information and coordination are advocated, so that activities are more tightly coupled to each other and to common goals.

Modern organizations theory takes a more sophisticated view, seeing the lack of information and coordination, not as reflecting only inertial tradition or private deviance, but as potentially serving collective ends. The phrase commonly used is "loose coupling" (see the reviews by Weick 1976, its Orton and Weick 1990 and the early interpretation by Meyer and Rowan 1977). The core idea is that the lack of information and coordination may be collectively useful and purposive, rather than the result of sloth and sin, under a variety of conditions. Prominently, these are two: first, if people are trying to organize activity around very unclear goals, uncertain technologies, and unclear or unstable environments, coordinative imprecision and weak information may be advantageous, permitting the continued mobilization of sustained and shared effort and resources without too much negative or uncertain feedback. Second, if organizations are trying to function in highly variable environments, and even more in fragmented environments containing sharp inconsistencies, lack of coordination and information may permit simultaneous adaptations to the inconsistencies and turbulence involved.

Both of these conditions are met in modern educational systems, and much contemporary organizations theory starts from the study of education. The schools have sweeping goals, covering every aspect of individual and societal development. Technologies to accomplish these goals are unclear and uncertain. Environments within which standard education is to be produced are extraordinarily variable and uncertain. And environmental inconsistencies of the most dramatic kind are found everywhere -- between the expectations and pressures of various constituencies, but especially between policy and practice, or hope and possibility, or needs and resources. Everywhere in the modern world, exorbitant expectations about educational needs and goods are institutionalized as instrumental in accomplishing all sorts of goals. And everywhere, practical resources and possibilities are very constraining. This situation, as we emphasize below, is most extreme in developing countries like Ghana.

Organization, in education, arises in part to fill these gaps. In this sense, organization is not tightly coupled information and activity, but is rather a rhetoric of policy rationality -- what Brunsson (1989) calls talk. Good organization is better talk -- more coherent and more rational. This can better be accomplished if there is some decoupling with organization as a mundane system of action (Brunsson 1989). A core observation in the present report is that many forces in Ghanaian education decouple talk or policy from practical educational activity in the classroom, and resist efforts at information and coordinative linkage that decrease decoupling. A further observation, developed below, is that decoupling has some real advantages for the system, as well as the more obvious disadvantages.

We do not need to take these theoretical ideas too seriously. But they have one real use in providing perspective. Rather than treating problems of information and coordination in Ghanaian education as mistakes in need of correction arising from a limited or perverse past, we can see them as products of active educational mobilization -- indeed of mobilization in which international forces are currently involved. They are products of modern action, of reform than tradition, and of great collective goals rather than suboptimization. Taking this view may help us understand the difficulties and costs involved in change, suggest strategies to produce change, and alter our conceptions of what changes are most needed.

III. Background

As with most other societies, and certainly developing ones, Ghana has a great deal of built-in commitment to education. And it has sustained this throughout, and before, the period of independence. The commitment has several dimensions, which can be collapsed for our purposes here.

First, there is the commitment to national development, with education as a crucial ingredient. This is a prefabricated script in the modern world, and essentially all societies incorporate it: it is almost impossible to find national polities or societies that do not explicitly subscribe to the goal of national development -- political, cultural, and especially economic development (Meyer et al. 1997). National development has meanings standardized at the world level, and includes both national incomes and individual ones. It is important to note that every available model of how to generate national (and individual) development puts education at the center. Social, political, and economic development all

require expanded and improved education. This doctrine is found everywhere, and is certainly prominent in Ghana.

National development is itself a worldwide model, with surprisingly common meanings everywhere. And since the uses of education for national development are also world doctrines, it follows that the picture of education adopted around the world shows surprising homogeneity (Meyer et al. 1992a, b; Meyer and Ramirez 1998), despite enormous variation in resources and culture. This means that the conceptions of education adopted in Ghana, as everywhere else, tend to reflect extraordinary standards. These are not, typically, the practices of developed countries. It is more extreme than that. They are the models or ideologies, often unrealized, obtaining in or about such countries. They are carried around the world by professional communication (e.g., theories about continuous assessment), governmental and non-governmental organizations (e.g., curricula dealing with AIDS), social movements (e.g., curricula and instruction for gender equality), and processes of social modelling (e.g., copying "the Cambridge," or A-level exams).

Second, thus, education itself is a valued commodity that tends to be directly organized around world models (Meyer and Ramirez 1998). It is a virtuous dimension of development, for individuals and for societies, in its own right. It is a core social good, and has become an individual human right. Models of what it should look like are shared world goods. They provide powerful and unrealistic standards for developed countries, let alone developing ones.

Ghanaian models of education, very much paralleling world-wide ones, stress two dimensions of education: these in fact are the two main areas of substantive goals of the national educational reform policy (i.e., fCUBE, Ministry of Education 1996). First, there are the dimensions of educational access, with the goals involving overall expansion and equality of access (in general, and across such distinctions as region and gender). The aim is to have more education, and more equal educational opportunity. The imagery involved stresses democracy and expanded socioeconomic participation: this has been a world-wide stress in the entire period since the second World War, possibly reflecting the dominance of liberal or American models which stress the virtues of expansion rather than fixed "manpower" needs. Second, there is the goal of improved instruction and achievement, which takes on special urgency because expansion is thought to threaten achievement. These goals are found everywhere, though with somewhat different emphases in different countries: in the liberal post-war period, the first goal has tended to dominate the second, and educational expansion has been rapid (Meyer et al. 1992a). There are some inconsistencies between the goals, since expanded participation is likely to mean somewhat lowered standards, and higher standards are likely to imply blockages to access, and probably to equality of access across social strata. These inconsistencies tend not to be emphasized in policy discourse because to do so would be to recognize limitations in the realization of extremely important ideals. Policy is talk, not action, and educational talk has moral significance that might be undercut by too much emphasis on practical trade-offs.

The combination of extraordinary and urgent goals of both national and educational development and very limited practical resources in Ghana has led to wave after wave of perceived crises and programs of reform (see Asare-Bediako et al. 1995 for a brief but forceful sketch). Reform means the expansion of organization in the space between ideal models and practical reality. Reform has meant both the expansion of participation and the expansion of quality of performance: the goals appear again and again. Further, participants at every level of the system subscribe to both of them:

None of the teachers, or of the district, regional or national administrators interviewed in the present study showed any tendency to resist the main national fCUBE goals. The need for improved achievement is a truism, and expanded and equalized access or attainment is not the focus of doubts. Nor do the interviewees note the inconsistencies between the two sets of goals. Dropout is never treated as appropriate, and the repetition of grades is supported only discreetly.

In fact, on the expansion front, Ghana has achieved a good deal, with rather high educational enrolments at the basic education levels. Achievement or performance levels have apparently not risen, though it is difficult to find good data on the issue. Almost all informed participants believe that achievement standards at any given level of the system (e.g., junior secondary graduates) have declined substantially over the years of expansion (particularly since this expansion has gone on with very limited resources).

IV. Information and its Formal Organizational Uses: The Various Meanings of Monitoring and Evaluation

Modern educational systems tend, everywhere, to stress the importance of the informed and choosing individual person. Education is not to create a better conformist, but rather a better decision-maker. Democratic polities are understood to require this, as are market economies and free sociocultural systems (e.g., family arrangements). It is certainly the case that educational goals in Ghana stress something like the free and expanded personhood involved.

Ideas and goals of these kinds have increasingly been emphasized at supra-individual levels in recent periods. At both the national and the local level, the idea of the active participatory choosing polity is stressed. And, quite dramatically, modern ideologies of formal organization have stressed, not controlling and standardizing bureaucracy, but organization as empowered and active problem-solver. Such models have even been extended to public organizations, which are no longer to be agencies of the state, but instead are to be active centers of decentralized decision-making serving the public "customers" (see Olson et al. 1999 for comparative examples).

Decentralized empowerment is part of the panoply of goals adopted in Ghanaian education. And with it comes a model of information as useful for active decision-making. The individual is to be an informed policymaker, as is the school (and its management committee). So is the district, with its director, chief executive, and district oversight committee, and certainly so is the central Ministry (the region has been more or less excluded from this model, especially in southern regions – see Sowah 1999).

The ideal of an information system involved, here, is an abstract and general data system providing relatively continuous feedback and leading to general and abstract decisions and policy changes. This is one kind of concept of monitoring and evaluation: information for decision-making. And this kind of information system is stressed in a variety of reform efforts -- an educational management and information system usable at several levels of the educational system. It has been understood that expanded capacity to process and use such information is needed to promote active decision-making at school and district and national (and perhaps regional) levels. Progress remains very slow, and successes have been halting and symbolic, with computers appearing occasionally in offices, and with some training in statistical work being provided.

The Ghanaian educational system appears in practice to resist modern forms of abstract decision-making, though it very much subscribes to them as a theoretical or policy matter. And it seems to resist modern forms of data utilization and analysis, though again policy supports change. We need to understand the logic behind the resistance.

This logic is embedded in the meanings of terms like "monitoring" and "evaluation" in the context of Ghana education. Far from their connotations as information for decision-making, stressed in contemporary models, in Ghana they tend to mean bureaucratic control. An office monitors its subunits to see that they conform to standards, and it evaluates how well they do so. A teacher monitors students in the same way, and evaluation has the same character. The idea is enforcement of rules, not effective or empowered decision-making. Indeed, the spirit is to subordinate activity to rules rather than to the choices of participants – to eliminate rather than support choices, which are conceived to reflect deviance or incompetence (sin and sloth).

One may argue that this bureaucratic approach expresses something of Ghanaian traditions, or that it reflects leftovers from colonial forms (such arguments are common in the literature, and employed fairly frequently in Ghana). From this point of view, the future, with more decentralization and better information systems, will change the system (see, e.g., Vandyke 1999). But thus far, modern decision-making and information processing models have made so little headway in Ghana (and perhaps elsewhere in education in developing countries). In fact, emphases on rule enforcement, and on information for the control of deviant behaviour, are reinforced by contemporary processes.

The arguments above provide leverage, here. Ghanaian educational ideals are built around world models, extraordinary aspirations, and very high standards. Nothing less is good enough -- the

standards and goals must be maintained. Doing so sustains the legitimacy of the whole enterprise, and retaining the most advanced aspirations mobilizes internal and external support and funding.

But compared with the ideals and aspirations, every aspect of educational reality is utterly deficient. From the point of view of any higher level of the organizational pyramid, likely to have some cosmopolitan standards, everything below is dross, and information both shows it and is an aid in controlling it. From the point of view of any lower level of the pyramid, likely to have some linkages to local reality, everything above is making demands without providing the required resources or even feedback. Information will show the injustice involved in this inadequate or mal-distribution. From both sides, then, information has a bureaucratic and (in modern eyes) punitive character. It reveals deviance from standards, seen from above, and unfair demands, seen from below. Information is thus bureaucratic power rather than decision-making empowerment.

This is the conception of monitoring and evaluation that runs through the educational system. And there are many layers of it, reflecting wave after wave of reforms filling the obvious gaps between world- and ideal-level aspirations and limited and impoverished local realities. We briefly review the situation:

a. Information and Assessment Viewed as Inspection:

Ideologies of instruction in Ghana put modest stress on forms of instruction that encourage empowered participation by the students. These are not much found in practice. Teacher-centered instruction is the rule. The issue is giving the child correct answers, getting these correct answers copied down in an exercise book, and getting the students to repeat these answers whether or not they understand them. Feedback is about right and wrong answers, not understanding:

About half the classrooms observed were in schools involved in the USAID-supported programs encouraging active community involvement and instruction. In these schools, teacher commonly grouped students (by ability, or randomly), and desks were put together in-groups rather than lined up in rows. However in no observed instance was activity performed by groups working together. Assignments were worked on by individuals, and inspected for correctness by the teacher.

A common classroom pattern is for the children to be at desks crowded into the back half of the room, while the teacher (sometimes with desk) occupies the front half, surrounded by empty space. Everything centers on the teacher.

In only one observed classroom (in a special demonstration school attached to a local teachers college) did the teacher ask questions that did not have single fixed correct answers, thus encouraging open expression. "What sort of thing might you write to someone asking for? What could you request of a friend? And what explanation would you give?" (Classroom 1.2.1.1)

The teachers are to use continuous assessment – a system intended to encourage individual attention and responsiveness. But in practice, elaborate formal records (possibly quite removed from the actual understanding of the student) are maintained, and are to be checked by head teachers and inspectors (circuit supervisors).

It is customary to be very critical of the teaching methods commonly used in Ghana. But consider the fact that quite an advanced curriculum (world standards apply) is set up to be taught by a marginally trained and equipped teacher to ill prepared students who are not remotely equipped to have a broad "understanding" of what is going on. Under such circumstances, teachers may become policemen, checking proper conformity and the correctness of answers rather than broader comprehension. Consider the problem faced by such a teacher:

"When I came here, the performance was very poor. The P6 class [sixth grade] students could read letters but not words. Now they can read words of three or four letters. No, not sentences. Almost none of them." (Classroom 3.1.1.1)

Moving upward, the expected relation of the head teacher or circuit supervisor to the teacher has something of the same character. The existence of lesson preparation notes is to be checked, as is teacher attendance. And the formal progress of the teacher through the year's required syllabus is recorded, along with the number of exercises the teacher has given to be entered in the student's exercise book. The same responses to the question of what the circuit supervisor (often called inspector, the title employed in the past) pays attention to appear over and over in the interviews:

"He looks at our work. Lesson notes, number of exercises, units covered, punctuality and absences," (Head Teacher 3.1.3)

A regional officer takes the same general view, in evaluating how good a school is:

"I'd look at enrolments, attendance, teacher qualifications, staffing ratios, classrooms, furniture, texts and materials, teacher lesson plans, PTA functions, exercises, teacher absence." [And as an afterthought] "And of course results." (Officer, Region 3)

In fact, results on achievement measures are not much used to assess schools (see Sowah 1999 for exceptions). The stress is on a school's conformity to the standard rules or models. This sort of approach characterizes all educational systems, in view of the extraordinary ideals in which they are embedded and legitimated. But it is especially characteristic of educational systems in developing country contexts, in which the gap between reality and ideal is very great. How can one assess subtle matters of educational performance if the elements understood to be basic requisites are not present? At this point, assessment goes to inspection, and measurement goes to the dichotomous distinctions between presence and absence, conformity and deviance. Thus:

In the present study, two of the seventeen schools visited had no teachers present, though students were present or nearby. In three other (small rural) schools only one of the 2-4 teachers was present. For logistic reasons, schools visited tended to be near the beaten track, and many have the advantages of links to USAID or the Catholic Relief Service. It was clear that a study visiting schools further in the periphery would show even lower teacher attendance.

Several schools visited had unfilled teaching positions or needs. This was a special problem in small schools in northern areas. The problem would have been more severe had more peripheral rural schools been visited, since a major problem in the system is getting teachers to accept positions in rural locations with problems of accommodation, transportation, and basic necessities (e.g., markets).

Textbooks were in short supply. This was especially true of English texts (math books are little used by the teachers, and thus wear out slowly). Classrooms in USAID-supported schools often had enough texts – others essentially never did.

Buildings, classrooms, and furnishings were inadequate, and poorly maintained. More or better classrooms were needed almost everywhere, and a common community project (often USAID – supported) was to construct an additional classroom block.

In the Ghanaian context, educational information thus tends to follow a logic of categories (March 1988), rather than a logic of efficiency or effectiveness. The existence, more than the performance, of basic elements of the needed system is in question, and information focuses on questions of the existence of such elements.

b. Views From Below:

Almost exactly the same perspective characterizes the views of Ghanaian educators when looking upward in the hierarchy. They share the widespread models of ideal education, and have a powerful sense that basic elements are simply missing – not provided by the hierarchical centers of the system. Thus:

"We have no English readers for P6 [sixth grade]. . . And there aren't any for P3. Math is ok." (Head teacher 3.2.1)

"We are supposed to inspect schools. But we have no transport. We finally got motorbikes, but they broke down. And there's no money for fuel. We'd have to use private transport." (Official, District 1.1). . . "We plan to inspect the schools on a regular basis . . . But there are problems. We have only one broken-down car." (Regional Officer, 3)

"We need at least one more teacher, and the Circuit Supervisor keeps promising one. Finally, maybe, one will show up in September." (Head Teacher, 3.1.3)

"We are to monitor the schools. But Accra hasn't released any funds." (District 3.1). . . "Decentralization is a good idea, but it's not really being done. We have to get approval for all kinds of expenditures from Accra." (Region 3)

This last complaint runs through many of the interviews. Even with contemporary decentralization, many basic activities (especially involving expenditure) require approval from the center. And this is usually not forthcoming on a timely basis. Thus the basics become a problem: new teachers are not paid at all for months, crucial expenditures must be delayed, and the like.

The larger point, in summary, is that essentially all Ghanaian participants in education have available in their thinking an ideal model of education that is quite advanced. Essentially all can adopt a posture looking at the practical situation as lying outside any legitimate frame: inspection rather than assessment is thus called for.

c. The Nature of, and Needs for, Formalized Information

Models of information for continuous and effective decision-making – that is, information systems – tend to be fairly complex, since they must parallel the interdependencies built into the organizations being managed. And as principles of accounting, for instance, expand beyond simple financial accounting into models for management decision-making, they acquire a great deal of elaboration. Models of information for inspection, on the other hand, tend to be quite simple, and have the character of bookkeeping.

This characterizes the sort of information Ghanaian educator's use in practice. Teachers keep records of exercises and lesson plans, and elaborate sheets on which continuous assessments of student progress are recorded. Head teachers keep logbooks and registers and simple accounts. Matters of student enrolment and teacher attendance and textbooks and official visitations are recorded, and consulted when relevant in interviews. These things are taken quite seriously. District offices, similarly, keep traditional educational records of school staffing, teacher qualifications, bookkeeping, and the like.

These are all the materials of a system organized around inspection and control. It all looks very traditional, with piles of written records scattered around offices. Many reforms have treated the arrangements involved as calling for modernization.

But it was difficult to find, in the interviews, any actual demand or stated need for complex information and analyses – any questions that a sophisticated data system would answer. One or two of the best informed district officials noted some theoretical possibilities according to which resource allocations could be determined by abstract data analyses. But these officials, in practice, made the allocations on a traditional rule-based case by case way.

Considerable interest, on the other hand, was displayed in the extension of traditional inspectional information. From the top down, this is monitoring and evaluation in the classic bureaucratic sense:

"Our role, with decentralization, is monitoring, not action. We are supposed to monitor the districts: do they carry out their responsibilities. If books are sent out, are they there? Is there implementation? But we cannot carry out our duty if we do not have information. Reports now go directly to Accra: we do not have information. And financial allocations from headquarters go directly to districts. We need to be informed so we can monitor. For example, donor funds go directly to districts. We do not know about them, so we cannot

monitor them I don't care about controlling the finances – let the money go directly to the districts. But we must be informed.” (Official, Region 1)

“Some mistakes were made in the decentralization. We now have a monitoring role, mainly. But we do not get the information required to do the monitoring.” (Official, Region 2)

“It's sometimes hard to get information on what is going on in schools, especially most rural or distant ones. Circuit Supervisors don't have transport, and can't get out there. So we don't always find out about problems.” (District Director, 3.2)

Sometimes, this approach seems, as with some classic inspections, punitive in intent:

“We had poor results in the last [Junior Secondary Leaving] exams. So we're doing a mock exam now. I've had the teachers make exams – in every subject – and we're giving it next week, starting Monday and going all week.” (District Director 1.1)

Interestingly, a second district director (2.1) reported exactly the same effort and rationale – perhaps a model has spread around the system. Equally interesting, both these directors are new men coming into the role from outside: perhaps what is being displayed is the classic tough approach of the new boss. Finally, of direct relevance here is that neither director had any plans for analysis or use of the data to be obtained. The exercise, apparently, was a control system in its own right – a strategy for improving test performance through repetition (this is the inference Vandyke 1999 makes about it), or perhaps a punitive response to failure. In any event, the model was the inspection with a vengeance (Sowah 1999 points out, however, that these directors are using actual performance information to take action, unusual in our observations).

The focus of most comments in the interviews is on the need for information for direct control, to make sure funds or other resources are not misappropriated or mishandled. The people lower down in the organizational structure have some parallel interests in information. They send reports and data up the ladder, and rarely get much back in return. And they have few demands for, or interest in, complex information. They are, however, much interested in information for inspection – for one thing, as a control on the resource allocations and decisions of those above them:

“Yes, I'd like to know what the other districts get. How many teachers, and enrolments, they have. How many textbooks. Furnishings. Classrooms. We know what we get, but not what the others get.” (District Director 3.2)

Similarly, there is a general interest in comparing one's district or school or region with others, in a similar inspectional mode:

“It would be good to get the results for other schools in the district, too, so we would know how we are doing.” (Head Teacher 3.2) . . . “We could better judge our progress if we had information on results in the other districts, or around the country. And we might learn something about how they do things better.” (Official, District 3.1)

This last phrase is one of the few in the whole set of interviews that takes a more formative, or decision-making, approach to evaluative information. Many other comments, however, express interest in comparative data on various tests or on other 'outcome races.'

Overall, the interviews revealed no perceived information needs of any general sort, and relatively little interest in having more information: the main exceptions involved information directly related to inspection, and comparative success rates. This may explain the relatively poor reception of international efforts to build stronger information systems. District and regional officers take pride in having a computer around, and some trained personnel, and they make comments about things one might do with them hypothetically, but they show no real need or interest:

“We have a computer now [from an international program]. And we can process some of the data, to send on to the regional office, then Accra. . . To make a decision about a new school, we would rely on direct requests from head teachers. Not the data. They are for Accra.” (District 1.1)

"I have some training, and we now process the data on the computer. We can analyze the data. . . No, we haven't done so, but it's all in the computer." (Officer, District 2.1.1)

"The data are for Accra." (District 3.1)

One can argue that complex information needs are not perceived because information has not been part of the traditional pattern to which people are habituated – that an improved information system, and training in its use, may generate uses (Vandyke 1999). Historically, the local role in the information system was to fill out forms and send them on up the ladder. The local officials were trained to do this, not to use data, and not to think of themselves as users of data. Eventually the data would produce reports at the top, totally out of date (at least three years old, in the case of fairly simple enrollment data), and in any case not fed back down the ladder.

From this point of view, improved information supply, in the future, will help generate demand, and indeed many reformers promulgating expanded information systems argue that these systems will produce a new world full of empowered decision-makers. An alternative view has it that contemporary decentralization may produce more decision-making attitudes in schools and districts, and that more demand for information will result. Perhaps these arguments will turn out to be correct in the future, but this does not alter our basic observation that there is little present demand internal to the Ghanaian educational system for much more information. At present, the demand seems to be external, not internal.

A further observation might suggest that information is not only not demanded, but is costly and resisted. Given high world-standard Ghanaian educational models and ideals, any elaborated information system will display massive failure. Criterion-referenced tests show very poor results, and so do analyses of actual teacher competence or of essentially every educational resource (buildings, materials, and furnishings). Given a great gap between expectations and realities, information has a rather punitive and inspectional quality. It is useful in imposing controls from above and supporting equity demands from below, but it is not exactly inspirational. We have noted that Ghanaian educators, as a general matter, are able to see their system from a posture of high standards, and then to report it as a failure. But there are considerable costs to this, as we discuss below, and emphasizing this perspective activates those costs in morale and commitment. Education is a matter of very high ideals: experience in the most reputed educational institutions in the world (e.g., American elite universities or European gymnasia) suggests that even under these conditions educators have urgent needs to keep their heads in the sand and to resist "information systems."

Three exceptions can be observed to our generalization about the lack of interest in having or using an improved information system in Ghana. They lie outside the focus of our study. And each is involved in a set of lateral rather than vertical (or bureaucratic) relationships with Ghanaian education – the sorts of organizational relationships that generally encourage information searching. The first is the international donor community, which is most interested in evidence about what produces improvement and what doesn't. These groups have questions in mind that call for general answers:

"You should realize that we donors have to answer to parliaments and committees. We need evidence of progress." (Donor representative, Accra)

Second, there is the research community, mostly international in character. Educational efforts in Ghana have much variation. It is most interesting to researchers to explore the sources and effects of this variation (e.g., between different donor programs, between private and public schools, between radically distinct communities, and so on). It is notable that this research community is weakly developed in Ghana – a matter we take up later.

Third, and most interesting here, it seems from scattered comments in our interviews, that the Ghanaian groups with the new decentralized lateral relationships with the schools are interested in information of a general kind. Here we have the empowered School Management Committees, and the more highly supported Parent-Teachers Associations. And in a financially empowered sense, we have the District Assemblies, Chief Executives, and Oversight Committees. These groups all have an interest in information, and it apparently shows:

"At the meeting last week [a SPAM meeting at which test results were discussed] they were most interested in seeing the results." (Official, District 3.2). . ."The District Assembly likes to see evidence that something is being accomplished." (District 3.1)

A number of school- and district-level comments suggested local interests in simple comparative information, more in the nature of a scorecard than a general information system. The interest expressed is clearly related to the decision-making empowerment of local communities in the new decentralized system, and may suggest changes in the future (Vandyke 1999).

In formulating recommendations later on, we reflect on the possibilities inherent in this situation.

d. The Penetration of the Inspectorial Perspective

It would be a considerable mistake to imagine that a top-down perspective on the gap between educational ideals and educational reality in Ghana is a property only of elites in the system. Elites, of course, have great skill at maintaining such a perspective, and seeing the system below them as radically beneath reasonable standards in resources and output. But so do ordinary participants in the system. These people have some knowledge of the high national and international standards, and can judge the failures of the system from this perspective. Teachers can judge the community as uninterested, the students as ill-prepared and sporadic in attendance and understanding, the materials, furniture and classrooms as unacceptable, and so on. They can also be quite severe in judging other teachers -- though they tend to be very protective of themselves and their immediate colleagues (e.g., in providing acceptable excuses for absences). In the loosely coupled world of Ghanaian education, educational ideals of advanced sorts -- and the corresponding negative judgments of actual practice -- are very widespread. They penetrate far down in the system. We discuss the implications of this later on. For now, an example:

No teacher was at the school, though many students were present. One teacher showed up from the village, on a bicycle, clearly in response to our arrival. After brief exculpatory explanations (he himself was sick, one colleague had been sick for a while, another was away on school business -- a workshop is the customary story) the teacher immediately took the high ground. In a very professional way, he assessed the various dimensions on which the school was utterly inadequate and determined to be a failure. He covered the terrain well, from building to furnishings to classrooms to materials to student preparation and community support. (School 3.2.2)

This case was typical. Even under conditions of some embarrassment, local participants could identify with the wider high educational ideals and view with great disapproval the deviant local forms of which they were so clearly a part.

V. Information in the Real World of Educational Practice

Ghanaian participants learn to take the high road in looking at their system, making the judgments of the inspector and identifying with ideal models. They also learn to take the lower road and to deal with practical reality. The ability to do this characterizes not only lower status participants, but all the parties in the system. Functioning in the system requires one to have a keen sense of the unacceptable, but also to understand the unacceptable as normal and to deal with it as routine. It also requires one to be fairly well informed, while at the same time avoiding what we discuss above as information.

Thus education, like other institutions built around high moral commitment, requires the capacity to sustain what might look to the untutored as hypocrisy (a term Brunsson 1989 uses to characterize the logic of much modern organizational structure) -- great inconsistency between principled and practical judgments. The greater the gaps between ideal and reality, the greater the disjunction between these perspectives.

a. The Properties of Practical Information

The worlds of abstract decision-making and general policy involve information systems -- abstract and general variables and their relations. Even when reduced to inspection, as with Ghanaian education,

general rules are involved distinguishing the acceptable and the unacceptable, the correct and the incorrect.

In the world of educational practice, such judgments move to the side, and a different sort of information appears. This is built around cases -- concrete situations -- rather than variables or standards of a more abstract kind. And a quite rich information system appears:

The small group of District officers hears about the schools the interviewing team has visited. It turns out that one or another official knows quite about each of the schools mentioned. Even though the District has two hundred schools, knowledge of each one as a particular case seems to be available. (District 2.2)

In such discussions, a rich set of norms appears, rather than the cleaned up standards associated with administrative rationality. Thus:

"It is impossible to keep a teacher in some of these places. I had a young teacher in here yesterday crying. He was assigned to a very rural school, which had needed a teacher for months. But he simply couldn't live there, and was going to leave education. So I found another place for him. But now that school will still lack a teacher." (Officer, District 3.2)

"The teachers live in town, and often don't show up in the school. But if we got rid of them, the school would have no teacher at all. . . There are problems of accommodation -- the village community is closed, and people build only for relatives, so there is no place for the teacher. And transport -- female teachers won't ride many miles on a bicycle. And there is no market in the village, so if they do live there they can't buy anything. And there is no bank, so they go to town to get their salary -- sometimes they stay away for days." (District Officer, 3.1)

So on the question of teacher absence, the real world -- especially of rural schools, and perhaps especially in the north (Sowah 1999) -- has somewhat variable and conditional rules. It is understandable if teachers frequently stay away, for a variety of reasons. Female teachers have families, typically in town, and need to live there: further, at least in the North, they may experience some harassment in the village. But any teacher, male or female, may have problems finding places to live that are remotely acceptable. And transport is likely to be a problem, difficult and relatively expensive: particularly in the rainy season, roads may not be passable.

So informal customs arise -- standards that may be at great variance with official ones:

It seems that in some rural areas, an informal norm of 'three days a week' may be a kind of limit of acceptability. A number of interviewees mention this number. None mention two days a week, or four days a week, as any sort of prototype.

Customs also arise around what it means for a teacher to be present:

"They sometimes come in the morning and register, then do errands during the day . . . On Fridays, they may take off for the mosque." (NGO officer, 3.1)

And, if present, there are variable customs about what it means to be teaching:

On a number of occasions, in visits to rural schools, teachers were present but talking to each other, or sitting under trees, or eating, outside their classrooms. This seems to be regarded as acceptable, and teachers did not hurry back to class when the very-official project vehicle arrived. Meanwhile, the students were usually sitting passively in class. Most were doing nothing, but a few were working on copying down an exercise. This was apparently seen as adequate teaching work.

It was notable that on visits to rural schools teachers felt very free to leave their classrooms to talk with visitors for substantial periods of time.

The available and practically legitimated techniques of teaching make it unnecessary for teachers to spend much time in the classroom:

A conventional technique is to run through an exercise, get students to repeat some correct statements (without necessarily understanding them), and then to have the students copy a version written down on the blackboard. Since many students copy extremely slowly (some do not comprehend the words, and copy letter by letter, which takes a great deal of time), the teacher can legitimately leave the classroom for long periods of time and still be seen as 'teaching.'

Examples of these types are more characteristics of rural and peripheral schools than of more urban schools better linked to educational centers. But they are found everywhere in the system.

b. Monitoring and Evaluation in the World of Practice

As we have discussed, the Ghanaian educators interviewed can readily decry the quality and resources of their schools, adopting the perspective of the formal standards and models. But it is also true that they can shift perspectives, and rather favorably judge their work. In other words, the internal role perspectives available to the participants are decoupled enough to make it possible to normalize circumstances they can otherwise see as completely unacceptable.

This shift in perspective appears throughout the interviews:

Almost all participants are able to see the performance of their school, district, or region as better than average for their context. Some sorts of examples, or indicators, or reported scores, tell a very favorable story for each organization. Only two district directors and three head teachers reported negative comparative data. And even these participants also tended to report positive information.

"Our performance is fairly good. We do better than the other regions in this part of the country . . . Not as good as in the well-endowed districts in the south, but better than others around here." (Regional Officer, 3)

This tendency to find or report information is facilitated by the fact that the educators tend to have little information on the performances of other districts, regions, or schools. Information reporting comparisons is not usually given to them. And when it is, they are not especially skilled at interpreting it. This may help them report test comparisons that sometimes seem highly unrealistic.

Even in extreme cases, this normalization of the success of the school occurs:

The head teacher reported the disastrous history of the school -- a marginal village school that had collapsed completely in the past. The teachers had all left in response to a very threatening and indeed murderous ethnic conflict in the whole area. Finally, the school got two teachers (for six classes), and recently a third. But there were almost no texts or materials, and facilities were very poor, and performance was obviously a problem. The head teacher handled combined grades 2 and 3, but in another room also handled simultaneously grade 1 (in which over half the students -- apparently attending in order to get Catholic Relief Service food -- were enrolled). But there were now three teachers, and the prospect of a fourth. And the head teacher was professionally very committed. He found indicators that perhaps the school was ok. "We used to have students transfer to other schools. Now a few transfer into our school Yes, perhaps it's to get the [CRS] food, but I like to think it's our teaching too." And on the recent comparative tests "we were 170th out of 227 schools -- better than some of the town schools on the list." (School 3.1.3)

Almost all the participants were able to cite some basis on which their school could be considered good enough, better than others, and so on. Enrolment was rising, indicating that the school's reputation was good. Or students from town transferred into the school. Or some success could be taken as indicative:

"It may be self-praise, but last year one of our students placed second in the essay contest. And this year, third." (Head Teacher 1.1.3). . . "We have spelling bees with other schools. And we've done well." (School 2.1.2)

There was a pronounced tendency to argue that the *international interventions* in over half the schools had really made them better schools. It was almost as if the existence of the interventions was an indicator of success. Thus, in a school that in fact seems to have a poor reputation for performance:

"Achievement is high here. It's because of the [USAID – supported] project. In fact, they say they're *learning from us, now*. And the Curriculum Inspector comes more often to see. The District Director himself came here" (Deputy head, School 1.1.4)

"We're doing well. There is a big improvement since these [USAID – supported] projects came. Especially english and math." (Head, School 2.1.1)

Test scores of some kind were cited by a few teachers. The scores cited were those on which the school had done fairly well. Only one head teacher -- in a formerly prestigious and successful school now grossly oversubscribed and in decline -- cited test performance she thought weak.

Sometimes, the judgments seem stretched beyond the usual:

The teacher who appeared at his teacherless school upon our arrival had a long and clinical list of the school's *dimensions of utter inadequacy and failure*. But when asked, he was able to suggest that performance wasn't all that bad: "The Catholic Relief Society, even, came to inspect us. And our test scores aren't worse than other schools around here." (School 3.2.2) Apparently being rejected by the CRS was a badge of some honor.

The larger point is that decoupled assessments characterize the whole system. Participants are able to adopt the perspectives of the central standards. Or they are able to normalize their situations. They can shift back and forth between these perspectives in the same interview contexts. The story seems to be that we are in terrible condition, but better than average.

c. Bargaining in Monitoring and Evaluation

Participants maintain high professional standards, and can assess their schooling resources and performances *from such points of view*. They also maintain a sense of the practical reasons why behaviour according to these standards might not be necessary. Mental bargains are reached since the educational system doesn't provide the needed resources, one might be justified in not making too much effort.

Thus notions like the "three days a week" understanding:

"There are a lot of problems keeping teachers in village schools. Community problems: no place for teachers to stay. So the teachers – especially female teachers – live in [town]. Then it rains, and they don't come. Maybe they come three days a week." (District 3.2)

Or the understanding of several teachers lounging around while their students were mostly sitting passively in the classrooms:

"We need more incentives. It's hard, here. [Eyes USAID vehicle.] We need incentives." (Teacher. 2.2.2)

Or the explanation of a head teacher in a quite demoralized school:

"The conditions make it impossible. Look at the head teacher's bungalow [points to a very small one-room building]. You can't have a wife and children with a place like that . . . One main thing needed here is a better head teacher's bungalow." (School 1.1.2)

The process of bargaining with the larger standards characterizes both teachers and their supervisory head teachers and circuit supervisors. The evaluators and evaluatees both understand the situation. As

a consequence, it seems that relationships among these people are less problematic than might seem from that fact that essentially all of them are unable to live up to the high expectations to which all formally subscribe. Few instances of reported conflict between teachers and head teachers, or between school personnel and the circuit supervisors, appear in the interviews and comments. Indeed, head teachers and circuit supervisors seem to be regarded as helpful by the teachers. The inference seems to be that these people work out informal standards by which they can get along. Since these bargains tend to violate the official high standards, they generate some suspicion in the higher-ups:

"It is important to have some outside monitoring. The Monitoring Assistant helps. These people get too much accustomed to each other. The Circuit Inspector knows the Head Teacher too well. He should live in the circuit, but that means he gets in the habit of thinking everything is ok." (District Director 1.1)

Given the uncertainty about what standards really apply, it seems predictable that the participants have to work things out. "Working things out" means more loose coupling.

VI. Mechanisms of Decoupling

It is useful to consider a number of structures, in Ghana, that facilitate the maintenance of great gaps between models or standards and practices -- for instance, between curricula that seem quite respectable in world terms and actual student performances that are extremely low. Ghana education succeeds in maintaining very great disjunctions along these lines, and it is useful to consider how organizational integration, information coherence, and internal consistency are avoided. Later, we review some of the costs and benefits of doing this.

a. The Mythic Use of Teacher Professionalism

One great accounting, in Ghana and worldwide, of how high educational policy will turn into practice (without close inspection or control or measurement) is the tale of the teacher as a professional. Despite very weak evidence on a number of dimensions of professionalism, this basic structure survives and grows, and is employed essentially everywhere, because it provides a plausible accounting of the translation of high ideals into practical action without organizational control. There are many specific components.

One is teacher training. When asked what his organization is doing to prepare teachers for working with classes combining different grades, which is necessary in rural areas:

"We don't have a program for that. We assume trained teachers are prepared to handle that."
(Officer, Region 3)

Preservice training seems to be weak, in Ghana, in part because of some elements of negative selection in the recruitment process. In any case, it is generally found to be a poor predictor of teaching performance or style (in contrast with knowledge of the subjects being taught). But it provides an answer to the question of the integration of policy and practice.

A second aspect of teacher professionalism, seen as mythic, is inservice training, and references to it run through the interviews:

"It is my duty to provide inservice opportunities for the teachers." (Head teacher, 3.1.3) . . . "If the circuit supervisor notices some problem, he will suggest an inservice on it." (Head teacher, 3.1.2)

A common form is the workshop, and workshops are found quite frequently (and even more frequently cited as ideals about how problems should be dealt with). They made be held in the school, but are more likely to be held in urban or training centers. Many teachers or head teachers had been involved in them. In part this was because about half of the visited schools received USAID support, which involves workshops, but workshops were commonly reported in the other schools or districts, too. Workshops without sustained follow up have not been demonstrated to do much to alter teaching practices, but they do provide an organizational accounting that can help maintain or legitimate a

decoupled structure. The workshop, essentially, permits the educational system to maintain or adopt very unrealistic policies and standards related to instruction and learning.

A third aspect of teacher professionalism involves the idea of the professional or leader. References to these figures (usually, the Circuit Supervisor) run constantly through the interviews. They can and should, in the tales told, deal with every sort of teacher problem. This is practically unrealistic, since they have many schools (often 15 or 20), have very limited transportation and thus great problems in getting to many rural schools, have almost no resources to use, and have mainly bureaucratic duties related to inspection. They are trained as teachers, but in a teacher-centered training system that does not prepare them to use the more modern instructional techniques now emphasized in policy. They are usually highly experienced, but have little or no training in educational leadership, and appear to be selected on criteria of seniority.

Other references, in the interviews, are to Head Teachers, as professional leaders. They should fix the problems, and provide future coupling between policy and practice. But they have little time (in smaller schools, they are themselves full-time teachers), little special training or experience, and no special knowledge of educational matters (again, seniority is a main criterion of selection).

b. The Institutionalized Separation of Policy and Practice: Bureaucratic Professionalism

The term 'professional' has notoriously variable definitions. In modern usage, it often connotes a competent and committed decision-maker, using special skills and dedication to accomplish needed tasks. Responsible and effective choices are emphasized, and are thought to be needed on a very widespread basis (as in Wilensky's, 1964, phrase "the professionalization of everybody"). This usage is common in modern doctrine, and is certainly present in Ghanaian educational ideas and policies.

There are other, and perhaps older, usages. When Weber, thinking of classic bureaucracy, talked about the bureaucrat as professional, he meant a trained and skilled, and loyal and dedicated, special servant of the sovereign (in public life, the state). This usage is built into Ghana's educational system. It is almost inevitable, given the great gaps between goals and ideals, on the one side and local realities on the other. The professional, in this context, represents the needs of the community as defined from outside, not the practical choices of the community defined from inside. But reflecting the gap between models and realities, bureaucratic professionalism also helps sustain it.

The professional educator as bureaucratic servant is deeply institutionalized in Ghana. The core form is the sharp separation of sovereign decision-making, or policy, in the Ministry of Education from the professional executors of those policies in the Ghana Education Service (GES) which in fact contains almost the whole educational establishment from Accra down into the schools. Unusually, only the Ministry employees are civil servants (though many seem to actually be transfers from the GES, and by reputation loyal to it). The GES is a distinct and corporate body, analogous to the army of a modern state – professional servants of the state, but not part of it.

The Ministry – GES distinction is very important in Ghana, and is a main mechanism permitting the decoupling of policy and practice. The distinction appears again and again in the interviews, particularly with regional and district and national officers. It blurs as one moves down into the world of the school and classroom (where participants see the whole system above them as the policymaking authority that they obediently serve). And it blurs as one moves north (where distance leads participants to distinguish their world from a generalized policy sovereign called "Accra").

District and regional officials are often vehement about the distinction:

"No, we do not make policy. The Ministry of Education makes policy. And the GES carries it out. I report to the Director General of the GES. I do not report to the Ministry. If the Ministry asks for information [e.g., on a local scandal or other crisis] I send my report to the Director General." (Official, Region 1)

As in classic corporate military bodies, the GES is conceived as a unified organizational hierarchy, structured around the myth of an all-competent Director General who incorporates in his person great capacity and authority:

"We do not maintain separate communications with the different departments of the GES, though it sometimes happens in practice. We send our requests and reports to the Director General. He opens the letter and decides where it should go." (District Director, 1.1)

The unified corporate character of the GES is often cited, as limiting its ability to incorporate needed organizational specialties. The strong tendency, as with traditional military or bureaucratic organizations, is to rely on trained teachers, and promote by seniority.

The stress on policy as set outside the system, in the Ministry (or more generally, "Accra") runs through all the interviews. We found no regional, school, or district interviewee who adopted the main posture of a policymaker or decision-maker, which helps to explain (1) why there was so little interest in monitoring and evaluation for policymaking, and (2) why policy and practice are so disconnected in the system. When asked about instances of discretionary policymaking, the interviewees provided only one clear example (dated 1975):

"Our job is to carry out policy. Accra sets the policy. Unfortunately, they do not give us the resources needed . . . Once the regional director here did create a new pattern – to link the Islamic schools to the secular ones in the English/Arabic model. It worked well, and has now been adopted nationally. . . That was in about 1975." (Officer, Region 3)

"We don't adapt the curriculum. The teachers go through it unit by unit. They sometimes have trouble getting through it. We meet at the beginning of the year to discuss the problems: how many units to cover each term to get through all of them." (Head teacher, 3.2.1)

"The inspector [Circuit Supervisor] checks how many units we have covered." (Classroom 3.2.2)

These last remarks may take on more meaning if one realizes that the students are very unlikely to have actually learned the material in these curricular units (though check-offs may be recorded in the required continuous assessment sheets).

The adaptation of policy to practice takes on, in Ghanaian education, the connotation of corruption or decay, since the local world is conceived to be inadequate and impoverished. Adaptation to it in practice may be necessary, but not in policy or principle. Interviewees often mentioned local factors (e.g., economic, religious, demographic) that provided resources (or more often constraints) on educational performance. None mentioned any adaptation to local culture as virtuous. The matter really comes up only in a USAID-supported community development program (CSA), which includes the incorporation of local culture as a goal.

Most of the classrooms visited were in the early grades (1-3). In none of them was instruction going on in a local language, though it was clear that many students did not understand English. Interviewees differed in reporting what national policy on the question actually was or would be in the future. The matter did not seem important to them, since educational success critically depends on English and since parents and students know this.

Overall, decoupling of policy and practice is facilitated by the sharp separation between Ministry and GES, public policymaker and professional educator, decision and action, or talk and activity. The local educators do not conceive themselves to be decision-makers.

A possible exception to this may be noted. The current decentralization program, for all its inadequacies, does strengthen lateral relationships between the school and its PTA and School Management Committee, and the district and its local District Assembly, Chief Executive, and Oversight Committee. When these relationships are strong, and resource flows are substantial, head teachers and district leaders begin to have some real discretion and opportunities for enterprising action. The situation puts them – as intended – in a new and more active posture. This on occasion seems to produce some explicit and legitimated decision-making:

"The District Assembly built a teachers resource center, but now there's a controversy because there was no money to fill it and now the roof has blown off in a storm. We have to work out what to do about it." (District Director, 3.2)

Other references to local decision-making as something other than corrupt appear in connection with the new institutions of decentralization.

c. Organizational Elaboration and Fragmentation as Assisting the Decoupling of Policy and Practice

Differentiated and rationalized organization is a main modern way to accomplish collective tasks and to achieve integration around standardized patterns. It is also a way to decouple elements from each other and policies from practices. In Ghanaian education, many features of organizational structure seem to serve such ends.

Planning, for instance, can sometimes be a device to produce an outcome. It can also be a way to organizationally locate a needed activity that will not be done, by putting it in the future, and for this reason plans are renowned for their lack of implementation. After all, if something is really going to happen anyway, why plan it? This produces a situation in which plans are virtuous things that will not happen. In the interviews, this commonly occurs in matters related to information and its processing. In the future, a region or district office will have all the needed things – basically computers and training – and will be able to process and analyze data.

A similar effect is produced by lateral differentiation, and here lies a major feature of the Ghanaian organizational system. Waves of perceptions of disjunction between ideals and policies and current practices have produced waves of new arrangements for forcing integration through one or another kind of information system – typically organized, as noted above, in highly inspectorial or bureaucratic rather than decision-making forms. These all lie adjacent to each other in the modern organizational system – layer after layer of organizational history encoded in present structure.

It is not possible, in a short study, to unravel most of this – and the interviewed participants tend to have very limited (and varying) understandings of how it works or doesn't work:

“The District Monitoring Assistants were created by the Ministry as an outside control – some people said to spy on GES. But anyway, they are GES people, and now they are reporting to GES, not the Ministry.” (District officer, 1.2) “They are part of the Ministry and report to it, not to the GES. That's going to change.” (District officer: 3.2)

In any event, a search for positions with titles reflecting functions like inspection, monitoring, evaluation, accounting, auditing, statistics, budgeting, planning, and so on, would generate quite an array of structures, located at different points in the system. These have sources in historically distinct reform waves, and reflect somewhat different organization theories and fashions. The theories involve vary over time because of internal political and organizational changes. But external factors are involved too. (1) Worldwide fashions of preferred organizational models vary over time, (2) different external environments (i.e., countries or consulting groups) generate different models, and (3) Ghana's linkages to the wider world change over time, generating different inputs. There is a shift over time, in every aspect of management from accounting to information control from models emphasizing inspection to models emphasizing feedback and empowerment. But as we stress above, Ghana's huge gap between high aspirations and limited realities drive every model of organization toward the bureaucratic inspection mode, since basic issues of conformity and deviance, or presence and absence, are involved. Working with a teacher who may talk too much involves different patterns than working with one who may or may not be there.

So the system contains many different and inconsistent control systems, in response to past failures. None are really enforceable, providing much room for play or bargaining or simple uncertainty -- in short, loose coupling.

A current example of this is the newest control system -- a reform wave with an elaborate accounting system built around goals, and with persons and units held in place by with quite elaborate 'performance contracts.' The accounting system has activities linked to clear goals, a very implausible thing given the technological uncertainty of educational systems. This system is very difficult to follow. It will generate many workshops and much inservice training, but it is not plausible that participants up and down the line -- trained as teachers, not technical specialists -- will really follow

and use it. Further, there are very elaborate performance agreements, not easy to follow. And this system is put in place on top of many previous control systems, which remain in the organization.

The concrete result is that by July 1999, Regional Directors have signed performance agreements with the Director General, who has recently signed with the Minister. In late July, the Regional Directors will sign performance agreements with District Directors, who may later sign them with Head Teachers. But the performance agreements, and associated budgets, are for the calendar year 1999, so the whole exercise has a highly ritualized character. Funds, as of midyear, were not released to permit the required expenditures leading to the committed performances:

"its all just paper. They will have to simply shift the 1999 goals over to 2000. They can add a few new ones." (Regional Director, 3)

"The decentralization is only on paper. The policy was good, but implementation is not. Basic things like texts and other resources: That's all controlled by Accra." (District officer, 3.1)

We may note that the delays in funding and signing the 1999 agreements result from control systems put in place as a result of previous reform waves. In this fashion, elaborate organizational structures, particularly when fragmented, facilitate decoupling. We can consider how this works, by reflecting on what will happen at the end of 1999. Nobody will have much interest in going back to look at the 1999 performance agreements, since subordinates cannot meet them and superiors will not have provided the specified resources. The performance agreements will probably become one more partially dead letter in a system full of them.

These comments, of course, have a disparaging quality, but it is important not to take this too seriously. In a system with great gaps between ideals and realities, reform waves are important assertions of vision. Even if unimplemented, they sustain morale and ideal norms and great claims. So several interviewees, despite the surreal quality of the performance contracting situation, nevertheless clearly experienced it as very positive -- taking the majesty of the situation and documents (serious meetings with signatures on elaborate and well-produced documents, taking a very formal form) as indicative of commitment:

"We've never been properly organized. Now finally we're getting somewhere. I signed a real agreement with the Director General, and the District Directors will sign with me. We'll have something to really monitor. We can demand performance!" (Regional Officer, 1)

The performance appraisal exercise, like so many before it, may have the ritual function of asserting the high ideals and goals that permeate the educational system. This leads to the issue of the overall effects of loose coupling.

VI. Benefits and Costs of Decoupling Policy and Practice

We have stressed the great gaps between ideals and reality in Ghanaian education, and some of the organizational elements that create it. We turn now to an assessment of the loose coupling involved -- the advantages and disadvantages of the system.

a. Costs

The disadvantages of the gaps between policy and practice that we have emphasized seem obvious in a world committed to organizational rationality. Some of these are quite real. Others are not.

1. If one starts with the perspective that educational ideals and policies ought simply to be implemented and that all the gaps involved represent failure (a perspective available in Ghanaian education and in international thinking), the system is a disaster. But this is extremely unrealistic: to show this, take, hypothetically, the opposite point of view. Suppose that given all the limited resources (funds, teacher supply and competence, buildings, materials, student family backgrounds and resources) Ghana's educational system is about as good as one could expect. Now given this hypothetical starting point, is it better that the ideals are high or that they come to terms with limiting realities? Most thoughtful people would probably argue for high (i.e., unrealistic) ideals and policies.

In other words, the gaps may arise because of the surprising emancipation of educational ideals and policies, given realities, rather than because of the entirely predictable failure to achieve them. From this point of view, loose coupling should be seen as a success rather than a failure. We return to the matter below.

2. On the other hand, a fragmented and decoupled system filled with high policy and goals that will not be carried out is clearly administratively costly. First, there are the direct costs of the administrative overhead involved. We do not know the financial costs of the current performance contracting and budgeting exercise, as reformers rarely fully 'cost out' reforms themselves. But they must be considerable. Second, there are the indirect costs generated by the administrative burdens associated with redundancy. Third, there are the even more indirect costs generated by ineffective management: the supposition is that a more effective or efficient system would be created if goals and standards were lower and simpler.

b. Benefits

The great benefits of policy-practice decoupling in Ghana, as elsewhere, lie in the ability of a decoupled system to come to terms with inconsistent realities.

1. At the level of practical reality, decoupling has permitted the extraordinary expansion of the Schooling system throughout the whole country and across substantial age groups. By inattention to actual performance, standards of buildings and materials and furnishing, teacher quality and attendance, and student preparation, the system has expanded greatly, and continues to do so: some of this is organizationally planned, but some of it comes from community demands.

By greatly lowering the standards of what a school is, schooling has been able to penetrate through the whole system. This is a matter, not only of enrolments, but of attitude too. Remote populations in Ghana are thought to have limited commitments to education. But from a more realistic point of view, the surprise is the height of their expectations as well as enrolments. Illiterate villagers are criticized for pulling their children out of school: the surprise is how often they keep them there, and for how many years and how much hope they have for education.

One can visit rural areas where it seems the school is not really happening, but the norms are there, as is indicated in the discussion above. Students know they are to be there, even if they are not, and even if the teachers do not show up. Even if effective, an institution that is clearly thought of as a school is present: in the extreme case, with classes meeting under a tree. Education, as a symbolic structure, is clearly kept alive. Perhaps a more tightly controlled and coupled system would be more effective in distributing real goods: it would probably be less effective in distributing symbolic ones.

One might argue that the extension of schooling so weak as to be useless would generate long-run alienation and reaction. There is little evidence anywhere in the world that things work this way, despite decades of theoretical predictions. The modern stratification system, for better or worse, gives great benefits to even the most marginal educational credentials, and peripheral groups are usually aware of this. Even limited links to central culture are more advantageous than no links.

2. The benefits of decoupling are also visible on the central, or policy, side. If policy is not tied down to the realistic or possible, it is freed to conform to more environmental pressures, and to obtain environmental resources and legitimation.

Thus, Ghana's educational programs and curricula tend very much to conform to world models and standards, even if they cannot be implemented in the learning of the students. This sort of conformity brings domestic and international legitimacy: modern education is going on. It also brings resources: domestic structures are more likely to fund something that looks good, by every international standard. And international sources are likely to take similar views.

Emphasis on Basic Education: Reforms in Ghanaian education can, given the decollate character of the system, more effectively track fashions in the wider world (whose professional standards are also likely to reverberate domestically). Reflections of this are everywhere in the policy system. For instance, the fCUBE reforms, built up in the late 1980s and early 1990s, reflect the focus of the period on basic

education: access and quality, and were very successful in mobilizing external support. They also reflect worldwide foci on organizational restructuring and effective management in education.

Decentralization: And after a long period in which central policy and controls were thought to speed educational progress (and Communist systems were thought to have advantages), the 1980s brought liberal and market models and decentralization, worldwide. The Ghanaian system was free to adopt this policy too. Our interviewees disagree on whether much has happened in reality. (Some think nothing has happened because of central financial control, others think mistakes have happened because of the exclusion of a regional role, and still others think a great deal has happened because of the empowerment of local Committees and Assemblies.) But the success of the policy as policy is great – nobody we talked with questioned the virtues of decentralization. Everyone was on board with this world-certified policy. The international community, also on board, provides much support.

Recent decentralization movements have emphasized management information systems, and expanded accounting arrangements, as instrumental in empowering organizations to take effective action. Both of these themes, of course, are alive in recent developments in Ghana. Sweeping accounting reforms are under way, and receive active international support.

Gender: The Ghanaian system has also been free to pick up on another major world-certified movement: concern about educational equality for females (Ramirez 1987). Increasingly, added onto the fCUBE goal of access, recent documents add a specification about gender. This provides much legitimacy, and any domestic group that gains strength from this world movement will find quite a gender-friendly audience in educational policy circles. Very substantial international support is also pulled in.

The policy rhetorics involved reach down in the system. Thus despite the relation of gender roles to local cultural identity claims, "correct" policy language about gender runs through all our interviews: wider perspectives on such educational matters, as we have stressed, penetrate the culture of educational talk. Practices, of course, differ. In southern areas, female participation in basic education seems to parallel male involvement. But especially in the northern and Islamic areas, female students tend to drop out in large numbers by the sixth grade. The point is that participants interviewed subscribed to correct policy:

Everyone we interviewed treated the situation of the "girl child situation" as a real problem to be worked on, not as natural. Explanations were given in terms of culture and economics, but the pattern was treated as something backward to be overcome.

The (probably illiterate) leader and School Management chair, of a poor Islamic village was asked about female participation. His translator, a secondary school graduate, tried to 'stonewall' the question, asserting that the girls did not drop out. But the leader broke in, defined it as a real problem (related to family needs for the work of the girls) and something to be overcome. He had adopted the perspective of the wider system on the problem. (School 3.1.4)

A similar approach is taken to modern standards about equality for female teachers, head teachers, and administrators. Our interview questions were answered from the perspective of equality and equal opportunity, despite local customs in practice. The wider policy perspective remained intact:

The interviews involved about twenty administrators in nine regional and district offices. Only one of these people was female. And only a few head teachers were female. But all discussions of the issue treated the problem as resulting from a backward past and on the road to correction.

Science and Technology: World educational models, starting in the late 1980s, picked up on science education as crucial to national development (evidence on the question is still weak). The impetus seems to have been American interpretations of weakness compared with Japan in technical production as reflecting educational failure. But the movement involved has spread worldwide, and been taken up by world institutions. An earlier wave of concern arose in the late 1950s around the Soviet success in producing Sputnik, and seems to have had some impact in Ghana. The recent wave has very clear impact in Ghana, and improvements in science and technology education have become major national

policy goals (Ministry of Education 1999). This may successfully recruit external support, and should be domestically fashionable. Implementation seems likely to be quite problematic.

The rise of a special science and technology focus seems to be quite recent (Ministry of Education 1999), and the theme received only very minor attention in our interviews:

“We need help in so many areas. Materials. Furnishing. Transport. Our teachers need training in the new areas. Methods. Science.” (District Director, 1.1)

But our general observations suggest that this theme will become more prominent in the future.

Manpower and Vocational Training: A smaller world movement concern vocational training, and the need to prepare students for realistic jobs. This concern is generally subordinated in the liberal (e.g., American) models of education, which stress the advantages of expansion rather than fitting graduates into an extant structure. Thus, vocational training has declined relatively over the whole post-War period (Benavot 1983). The concern tends to be greater in corporatist models of education and society (e.g., Germany, or the socialist world). And it rises to prominence in periods of high unemployment (to which more appropriate schooling is putatively a corrective). The recent wave of world concern may reflect rather high levels of unemployment in European countries.

In any event, the concern recently reappears as a major national focus in Ghana (Ministry of Education 1999), and has mobilized some external support. It does not, however, appear as a prominent focus in our interviews. Perhaps it is too new. More likely, our study focused on basic, and especially primary, education. The basic goals at this level are literacy and numeracy, not occupational preparation. Vocational instruction is gradually introduced in junior secondary schooling, and given emphasis at the senior secondary level, which was outside the focus of our interviews and project (Vandyke 1999).

c. The Success of Education as an Institution in Ghanaian Society

We have stressed that decoupled structures have enabled Ghanaian education and educators to maintain elaborate and practically unrealistic visions over long periods of time, and supported (with domestic and international resources) great expansion. In this sense, education is a great success in the country. This wider success, we have argued, is sustained by – and continually reproduces – pictures of education as an organizational failure. High visions sustain expectations beyond the possible, generating conceptions of failure and motivating (with international resources) wave after wave of reform.

This pattern is clearly an organizational one, but it extends far beyond the organizational system of Ghanaian education. A broader study than the present one would obviously show this. There is extraordinary commitment in Ghanaian polity and society generally for expanded and improved education, and rather elaborated standards of what this education should in reality be. This is demonstrated by large numbers of utterly impoverished people putting up resources to send their children to school (while the policy, incredibly and very idealistically, criticizes that too few of them do). And it is demonstrated by the fact that District Assemblies give large fractions of their local resources to the schools. And the national polity devotes its budget principally to education. (In qualification, it should be noted that the budgetary allocations may reflect the political importance of teachers in district and national politics.)

Ghanaian society is thus surprisingly wired in to world standards, and a model of development in which education is central. An educational system, maintaining unrealistic ideals and policies, and spreading decoupled arrangements as schooling under the banner of these ideals, has successfully penetrated far into Ghanaian peripheries.

d. The Advantages of Programs Linking Schools to an Education-Oriented Society

The impact of linking into the wider social commitments to education in our data is very striking. Any school that is effectively tied in to Ghanaian (or international) society comes under all sorts of community pressures and expectations to improve. And the linkages of local and wider society, in Ghana, expand all the time. In this context, thus, embeddedness in the wider community is a main

support for improved schooling. It is probably more vital for improvement than anything a more tightly coupled bureaucratic educational system could possibly produce.

The point is obvious, but needs emphasis anyway, since it suggests criticisms of modern emphases on organizational rationalization. We can stress it in several ways, and it would be useful if empirical research focused on it:

It is obvious to everyone that schools that are more accessible are better: teachers show up, better teachers are willing to take positions, students appear, circuit inspectors appear, and other local and international officers and programs appear, and communities have higher expectations. Further teachers in schools on or near the main road are more likely to be actively in the classroom and teaching. The schools, in our visits, that were not in operation or barely operating were all more remote.

Further, all these factors affect each other – the general point is that in a supportive cultural context, embeddedness is generally valuable. Thus, it was notable that USAID-supported schools tended to be better schools on obvious dimensions. So were schools supported with food aid by the Catholic Relief Service? There may be subtle aspects to such effects: perhaps techniques of instruction are better. And there are material aspects to the effects: USAID contributes very meaningful funds and materials to these schools, and they have more and better textbooks.

Attendance rates go up in the food-aided schools for obvious reasons. But they go up in the USAID – supported schools too, as do teacher attendance rates. These kinds of effects are embeddedness effects. They reflect linkages that make “school” more likely to happen.

District officers (not to mention international visitors as with the present study) are also much more likely to come by:

“I visit my project school more than the others. Something is happening there.” (District official, 1.1). . . “It may be unfortunate, but Circuit Supervisors like to see a little success.” (Nongovernmental representative, 3.2). . . “Now the Circuit Inspector comes more often.” (School 1.1.4)

And the Circuit Supervisor is obviously more likely and more able to bring in some resources, if outside projects are doing so, and if the linkages involved enhance expectations. And if the Circuit Supervisor comes, the teachers are more likely to show up, too.

Communities get mobilized, too. The USAID - supported schools have extra available funds for projects, and direct community organizing help in strengthening management committees and PTAs, but the programs obviously have other effects too. And where communities mobilize, District officers and Assemblies are much more likely to take action.

It frequently happened in visits to USAID – supported schools that School Management Committee or PTA members or chairs were on hand or nearby, or showed up after our arrival. This rarely happened in other schools. Part of the effect arose because these leaders were working directly on USAID – funded activities, but the effect seems to reflect a more general mobilizational process than that.

Educational improvement in Ghana probably rests more on such processes than on changes in the decoupled organizational structure. Our point here is that the high educational aspirations sustained by decoupling probably reinforce the more indirect effects of community expectations and schools’ embeddedness in them. The extra impetus provided by international linkages is noted here mainly to exemplify the larger point.

A Caution: Our observation that the USAID programs (and the Catholic Relief Society program) are clearly associated with much better schooling on obvious dimensions would be difficult to contest, since the differences are so great. But our interpretation that this represents a causal effect would require much more careful examination. The schools these programs select tend to be better than others in the first place – they are nearer the main roads, meet various criteria, and so on. It would be

most useful to have a substantial multivariate longitudinal study that examined the effects involved, and to see how they work.

Our interpretation is that over and above important variation in initial conditions (e.g., the accessibility of the school in the first place, and the related resources of the community and parents), the external programs have substantial effects. And that they do so, not through subtle educational processes (e.g., new teaching techniques), but through the basics: they don't make the schooling so much better as they simply make it more likely to happen. Thus the mechanisms are primitive – teacher and student attendance and attendance in the classroom; classrooms and materials and other resources and the improvement in the school's ability to mobilize such resources from its own context; expanded community support and social control; and the like. But note that in making this argument, we have in no way proved it, and it would be a substantial methodological task to do so.

VI. Summary and Recommendations (for USAID, and The Mitchell Group) on Monitoring and Evaluation

We have observed that the Ghanaian educational system maintains ideals, policies, and goals of high quality, and has schools and teaching and learning performances of vastly lower quality. It has done so with an organizational structure that successfully decouples policies and activities. This has continually permitted policies and models to track evolving world and national ideals, thus generating much legitimacy, and also to obtain international and national resources. And it has permitted local practice, and low levels of standards and resources, to flow essentially everywhere in Ghanaian society, in which education – activity understood as schooling – has become a basic national institution.

In this situation, information systems linking top and bottom are organizationally costly, and are resisted (or at least conspicuously not sought). They produce embarrassment. They also activate zero-sum contests between subordinates claiming lack of resources and superiors observing lack of performance.

In practice, given the great gaps between models and realities, authority is exercised through more traditional systems of (often-qualitative) inspection from above and claiming and bargaining from below. And by great decoupling between formal structures and informal patterns. Many features of the organizational system facilitate this: among them the separation of policy from execution, and the fragmentation of organizational controls in waves of inconsistent reforms.

The system successfully generates much cultural commitment, at every level, to education (in some sense and of some sort). Linkages to this, internationally, nationally, and locally, have produced a great deal of educational expansion. And they may be a better source of educational improvement than organizational or policy changes.

Some recommendations (addressed to USAID and to The Mitchell Group's role Ghana) in the special areas of monitoring and evaluation follow from these reflections:

Recommendation 1: Focus efforts at improving monitoring and evaluation on groups and interests that want them and perceive needs for them.

It is probably a mistake to try to use a new data system as way to enforce change. A new computer may be prestigious for a regional office, but will probably not serve as – almost literally – a *deus ex machina*. This may also be true of statistical training for an occasional officer.

The present observations suggest that there is strikingly little interest in improved data systems in the Ghanaian organizational system. Responding to such interests as arise may be more efficient than pressing technologies on uninterested parties.

Recommendation 2: Support the development of a modest Ghanaian educational research community.

It seems striking how weak such a community is at present, despite much national interest in education. There seems to be the expectation that educational research is to be a function of the official establishment. This does not work well, worldwide: good educational research is rarely directly conducted by Ministries, and rarely is the work directly conducted by Ministries widely cited.

It might be useful to develop some modest research funds for non-official educational research, and for outlets for such research. This could be quite inexpensive. And it would help take advantage of the widespread commitment to education in Ghanaian society: anything that improves this society's capacity to reflect on its educational system would be likely to be beneficial.

At present, such studies as are done by units of the educational establishment or by international groups tend not to be circulated. Some critics are suspicious that classic bureaucratic concealment is involved. In any case, media to share information more widely are needed, as are mechanisms to encourage more analysis of the information that does exist.

Recommendation 3: Support information arrangements that respond to demands from communities and districts.

Decentralization has generated an emphasis on lateral relationships between schools and their communities, and districts and their oversight committees, executives and assemblies. In these relationships, which involve real choices and the allocation of real resources, the parties become something more like decision-making actors than bureaucratic professionals, and information becomes useful to them. It would be useful to see what kinds of information they want, and to support modest arrangements to facilitate it.

Further, the strong commitments to education (though not necessarily to their present schools) in typical communities and districts mean that any informational linkages activate pressures for educational improvements. In some ways, such linkages operate as more effective social controls than do rather more expensive systems of formal inspection.

The present study did not investigate the types of information that are demanded in local dealings, but illustrative examples certainly came up in the interviews. Simple concrete comparative data are useful: a more general information system would probably not be much used.

The question of what kinds of information get used, or would get used, by local management committees, PTAs, and district oversight committees, assemblies and chief executives, merits more investigation.

Recommendation 3: Support demands the national political community makes for educational information.

Past efforts have emphasized an information system for the educational hierarchy itself. Our observation is that this organization, like many others, does not want an information system. Organizations often do not want to investigate themselves, and this is especially true when they are highly decoupled. External forces are more likely to support demands for information: perhaps they can best be attended to with something like an independent body rather than an internal structure.

Recommendation 4: Support research of concern to international groups, including donors.

The donor community is clearly interested in more information: a mistake has been to pretend that the Ghanaian organizational structure really "needs" it. Information that would guide donor thinking, in Ghana and elsewhere, would be most useful. This recommendation supports that of Chapman (1999; Barcikowski and Chapman 1999) for an emphasis on special studies rather than an information system.

The impact on Ghanaian research capabilities of this approach would be greater than the strategy of spreading computers and a bit of mechanical statistical training around the country. Real projects, even small ones, can generate experience and training around meaningful purposes.

Recommendation 4a: In particular, the USAID-supported interventions in Ghana have been innovative and interesting, as have some other interventions, and the impact of these should be investigated more. It would be valuable to have research on them that would be publishable in educational research journals and thus available to a wider audience. This calls for a research venture separate from the service-delivery organizations themselves. And it calls for something more than an inspectorial approach to monitoring and evaluation: broader research perspectives would be necessary.

The main intellectual issue for such studies is rather clear. How much difference, in educational performance (i.e., learning) and access (i.e., retention and graduation), is produced by narrower and more focused instructional interventions as compared with broader and more organizational and social ones. On the more focused side, we have efforts to improve the preservice and inservice training of teachers, the supervisory skills and roles of head teachers and circuit supervisors, and the teaching styles and techniques employed. On the broadest side, we have efforts to mobilize families and communities. In between, we have efforts to improve such educational resources as texts, materials, furnishings, and classrooms. In more developed countries – perhaps because their baselines on educational resources and on instructional technologies are fairly high, and the remaining variation may be modest in importance – the biggest differences come from family and (to a lesser extent) community mobilization. In developing countries, past analyses and arguments suggested that basic educational resources like texts, materials and teachers in the classroom make the major difference (Heyneman and Loxley 1982).

The argument of the present report, supported only by illustrative observation, is that variation in teaching technologies and competencies may, in Ghana, be less important than basic resources and linkage to mobilized and controlling communities. The wider society has great expectations for education. Changes that link the school more closely to these, in this context, may be effective, getting teachers and students together in classrooms, actually working together in whatever style.

Looking at the various factors that vary so greatly in Ghana would help analyze the question. Variance is further increased by the – apparently very substantial – effects of the current USAID (and other) programs that get teachers and students working in classrooms. Empirical studies that convincingly showed these effects would be most useful. Doing them would help train Ghanaian researchers to do research on important issues.

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