

Caitlin Burbage

Studying educational and cultural practices in Rural Ghana, 2009

Caitlin studied Geography at St Peter's College, Oxford. In 2009 she went to Ghana and worked in village schools in order to study the effectiveness of the UNICEF Curriculum.

Below is a summary of Caitlin's project and photos that she took whilst carrying out her research in Ghana.

'Current development politics lacks a clear cultural vantage point. Within the context of the UN Millennium Development Goals, this research seeks to understand the importance of a cultural lens in achieving development goals successfully. Located in a small village in Ghana called Besease, the research assesses both the socio-cultural dynamic of a small village community, as well as identifying educational needs. Comparing the educational achievements of children and adults, the research analyses the relationship between school and home. Through an analysis of the 2006 Kindergarten one and two curriculum implemented by Ghana's National Government in partnership with UNICEF in 2007, the researcher is able to assess whether the curriculum is culturally appropriate and able to meet the needs of the community of Besease.

The main methods of analysis were based upon participatory observation which required the researcher to spend one month living in Besease village, Ghana, conducting structured and semi-structured interviews, partaking in classroom observation, conducting a drawing exercise influenced by thinking in children's geographies and other general observation from within the community. The key findings, formulated during this intense and qualitative process of research, identified a significant divide between top down strategy and effective implementation at the grassroots level. The curriculum makes token references to culture which undermine the cultural richness of this community and accentuate the shaft that exists between home and the schoolroom. UNICEF has failed to create a curriculum which is suitable for its recipients. The curriculum is intimidating to the under trained teachers required to use it, and there are no resources available for the effective implementation of this resource rich document. The strategy has failed to engage with and mobilise the dynamic culture of this community.

The research concludes that the curriculum needs to harness the potential of the 'cultural resources' available amongst the people of Besease in order to be effective at meeting the current socio-economic challenges. Development policy requires a cultural vantage point in order to bring international strategies to meet the needs of people it intends to help.'









