

## **Teaching Experience in Sub-Saharan Africa**

*Elaine Bigham – Luton Teacher reporting on Ghana - April 2010.*

As this was my first trip to Ghana and the first time that a teacher had been out to a school whilst working for Motec. I was very unsure of what to expect and of what my role would be. Before I went I had been told that I would be working in an all girls' boarding school in the village of Agomanya which is about 15 miles from Akosombo. I would be teaching English but other than that I had no other details. It was therefore hard for me to know what resources I should take as I had no idea of age or ability of the students.

Once there I was told that I would be teaching one hour sessions of phonics to the students in classes 1- 5 (ages 6-11). I would be required to teach the students the pronunciation of English letters and sounds. A fairly broad area, which should have been quite simple but was actually harder than it sounded. Although I had many ideas, I quickly realised how limited I was in terms of resources and equipment. The classrooms were extremely basic. There were enough desks for the children to sit at but apart from that the only other thing in the room was a blackboard and chalk. The children brought their own exercise book and pencils and I quickly learnt that they were used to listening and copying notes down from the board. Very different to what I was used to. I was told that as the children paid fees to attend the school it received no monetary help from the government, this meant that most of the resources etc. had to be provided by the school or the parents.



The teaching 'environment'.

My first few days of teaching were a challenge, the staff and children were initially unsure of me and I found it hard to get them to interact and join in the lessons. However, after a few days of getting used to my teaching style they were soon enthusiastically joining in with games and activities. They quickly picked up on the sounds and soon the older children began correcting the younger children on their pronunciation. On seeing how quickly the younger children picked this up, I went onto teach them some spelling patterns that are not usually taught there until they are a year or two older. They seemed to cope well and enjoy the challenge of this. Maybe this is an area that could be developed more with the teachers. My main concern was that whilst I was asked to teach phonics and teach the English pronunciation of letters and sounds this was not how they had been taught previously and not how they would be taught when I left. I also found out from the teachers that although they were teaching phonics it was not daily as they often did not have enough time to fit it into the timetable. I wonder therefore if it would have been more beneficial to work with the teachers instead of the children on how to teach phonics in short sessions each day so they could continue the practice when I left.

I was also asked if it would be possible for me to work in the school library. The school had received a donation of books in October and was unsure how to arrange them etc. So I was asked to sort them out and arrange a loan system so the girls would be able to check out books to read after school as up till now they were only able to read the books during school hours in the library. This involved sticking in labels to every book in the library-a task I managed to get both staff and pupils involved in! I worked in the library each day after I had finished teaching but much to my disappointment time ran out and I was unable to finish the task. When working on the books, I discovered that some of the books that had been sent over by Motec were either very out of date or not suitable for the school. Hopefully future books that get sent over can be checked beforehand to ensure that that they are appropriate.

During my stay, I found that the children were extremely well organised, respectful and very enthusiastic. They were quick to pick up on what I was teaching them and also eager to learn about the school I had come from and any new songs and games I could teach them. The staff, after some initial wariness were also friendly and interested in hearing about how we teach here in England. I also enjoyed day trips out getting to know the surrounding areas and finding out more about day to day life in Ghana.



### Memorable moments in the re-organised school Library in Ghana

From what I have seen and heard I am now more aware of the resources and requirements that are needed by the schools which will be helpful in the future if I get the chance to return.

Although I was only there for a short time I feel like I have made friends and memories that will last a lot longer. I learnt so much and it has given me a lot to think about since my return. My challenge now is how to turn these thoughts into actions!