

John Myers Visit to Bo 22/11/02/ to 9/12/02 (including time in Freetown at either end)

This was a multi- purpose visit.

This report refers to School Linking only

Some reflections

- I was only able to scratch the surface of what needs to be. Ideally two people with educational experience (secondary and primary) should visit Bo for at least 3 weeks to set some aims and parameters for linking either end (framework) - this then should be followed by visits from educationists from Bo to Warwick
- The teaching pack which we see as an essential tool for teachers who engage in school linking has not yet been revised by people the Bo end. Maybe it is too much to expect them to do in isolation; and this could be one purpose of an educationist visit to Bo to revise and develop the pack together
- Maybe the pack does not depend on Bo based revision. Maybe we know enough and can find enough materials to recreate an initial pack which could be developed and refined over time
- One driver for the teacher pack has been the need to make linking relevant to the National Curriculum. Although there is danger in a straight jacket; this imperative does at least concentrate the mind on thinking why school linking may be valuable educationally.
- I found that although there is more desire for linking at the Bo end, not much thinking has been done at the Bo end about what schools and teachers might hope to achieve in educational terms. Nevertheless English (British) education is valued highly, the teaching medium is English, and there is no doubt in my mind that there will be educational benefit in Bo
- I stressed to teachers in Bo that linking must be more than about children writing to each other if for no other reason than that there are at least 3 times as many children in every Bo school and at least 2 times as many in every Bo class. However towards the end of my visit I met an adult who told me how much he valued the correspondence he had had with someone in a Warwick school, feeling it had made a real difference to his outlook.
- I encouraged teachers and schools to think about what they wanted to get out of a link educationally, and what kind of information etc they want about Warwick District. What about a teacher pack for Bo teachers? This could be a valuable objective for an education focussed visit from Warwick to Bo.
- I think that there are teachers in Bo who could be identified as being able to play a key role in developing methods and objectives for the link. This would be supportive to them individually and could have a beneficial effect on a somewhat run-down school system
- I hesitate to be too negative about the state of schools in Bo. I would think it is true that teachers do have aspirations, students value learning; and a brief impression is that the schools are positive places. The West African Curriculum is followed as in most anglophone West African countries. Sierra Leone may have a very high illiteracy and low attendance rate, but the Bo schools are packed out. One school has two sittings each day, each with its own set of staff
- Drama and music should not be neglected. One primary school put on a show for my visit with singing and a playlet about post war reconciliation. I have a video of this. I hope that their link school maybe able to send a video of some of their music and drama. Bruce Knight has gone to Bo to learn traditional Mende songs; he will be willing to visit schools (at a fee, but grants may be available) to relate his experiences and teach the songs. This could be a productive area of linking. More AV equipment will be available to Bo schools as time progresses, and there will be opportunities for sharing.
- Some of my observations are aspirational. As a start I think we should develop our own initial teachers pack, and our own initial framework for linking, and promote it. We should

also encourage those schools who already have a link to enter into a dialogue school to school, and teacher to teacher. There is much that can be learned from these links.

Visits to Secondary Schools

Bo Commercial Secondary School. When JohnMcFarlane visited in the summer he stayed with Raymond James the Head Teacher. On his return John mooted the possibility of a link between Warwickshire College and BCSS. Since then Raymond has suddenly died and John has moved to another college in Birmingham.

I met the Acting Head. He stressed that as a Commercial School, specialising in Administration and Commerce (including Information Technology as a top priority) they serve the whole country not just Bo District. I also had discussions with various staff and took video of their very sparse science resources. They believe they have sufficient expertise to teach Information technology and basic computer hardware maintenance if only they had the equipment. In particular, they need two hardware maintenance kits, UPS to protect computers from power failure, scanners and OCR software. Dot Matrix printers are preferable.

In terms of typewriters, they appreciate the manual Imperial typewriters, but need spares, and teaching manuals. A few electric typewriters are useful too.

For teaching English Language they would appreciate some audio visual aids.

I learned later that DFID will be making science resources available for schools; but how this is to be allocated or shared I do not know.

I met S.B. Williams a teacher who has visited Leamington in connection with scouts. He is now Regional Chairman of the SL Scouting movement.

Christ the King Secondary School. Met the staff and had a quick tour of an almost empty school (exam time) They are suffering from increased numbers and difficulty in retaining staff in competition with the better salaries that NGOs pay.

They do not set a limit on numbers because they feel that they have a duty especially towards students who come from areas most devastated by the civil war (they have a boarding facility)

They do get some support from the CKC Old Boys Association in UK but wish it were greater.

They would be interested in student and teacher exchange programmes..

A few days later I had a discussion with J B Taylor the Link Liaison member of staff. He confirmed that some response letters to the cards filled out by Castle Kenilworth students would be delivered to me to take back and more would be sent with Bruce Knight. He was interested in the possibility of audio/video exchange; but CKC does not have a video camera (but Bo OWL does). We tentatively discussed its application to media studies - e.g. a journalistic sound picture of each school done by its students. I also suggested that CKC might make specific educational demands of Kenilworth e.g. a map of the school surrounds and Kenilworth (geography) or background information about Shakespeare - virtually local to Kenilworth - (English literature).

Ahmadiyya Muslim Secondary School.

A brief visit. A T Jalloh the Head Teacher was at a local head teachers co-ordination meeting; but he returned just before I left.

It seems a well run school. My impression is that they could make constructive use of a school link without much prompting. They stress that they are a mixed faith mixed sex school who achieve above average academic results.

They would really appreciate any science text books whatever the curriculum.

If we have a Secondary School come forward from our end I would definitely suggest this school as a strong candidate. Unfortunately I did not have much time to explore further and I was also wary of raising false hopes.

In a subsequent discussion with A T Jalloh he identified a shortage of teachers in science maths and english. It would be helpful if VSO returned to Sierra Leone, and perhaps we could enquire about this. We also discussed the question of global citizenship as a subject area

Queen of the Rosary Secondary School

I had a tour of the school, including a smart looking home economics department. I had a discussion with Alice M M Musa the Headteacher. She said that she has written to Kingsley School but have had no reply. I promised to follow up on this.

Milton Comprehensive Secondary School

Headteacher Mr Abu. They also stressed lack of science equipment. I told him that there should be some chemistry equipment for Milton in the container shipment requested by David Ngombu quite some time ago when he still taught there.

Mr Kaitibie, sports teacher here, was quite prominent at OWL meetings during my stay. He would like contact with a counterpart sports teacher our end.

I believe that Milton School ran out of funds but has been taken over by the 7th Day Adventist Church

St Mary's Technical Centre This is on the same site as Holy Rosary Primary School. It provides skills training to young women in typing, and in traditional crafts such as sewing and gara dying. It receives some outreaches support from Development Initiatives - an NGO managed by Joe Kobbah's wife Safie. They need more equipment, and also have a problem establishing a market for their products. (The sale of imported cheap and/or second clothing and cloth undercuts local production)

Other Secondary Schools Visits to UCC (St Andrews) and Methodist High School were listed on my programme but not accomplished. I understand that the Anglican Bishop of Bo wants to start a new secondary school in Bo. I tried to visit him but he was out of town

Bo Teachers College

Short visit in the afternoon, no students around. I had a meeting with the Vice-Principal S J Amara who sadly died suddenly only a few days later. He said that the intake has increased since the war. He admitted that had led to some quality problems; but that has improved due to the extension of the training course to three years. He said that the Principal is committed to "non-grammar" teaching.

Some days later I was the luncheon guest of the administrator Mohammed Lappia and wife; and learned that new building has been going on; but other things e.g. the meteorological station have been neglected

There is a distinct possibility that BTC will become part of a "University of the South", amalgamating with other HE colleges, as a separate institution from Fourah Bay

Visits to Primary Schools

UBC Primary School (United Brethren In Christ have an indigenous church in Sierra Leone and run a number of schools)

I made sure I spent time at this school because of its nascent link with Brookhurst Primary. I had completed a questionnaire with the 2 year 5 classes at Brookhurst, and I gave the same questionnaire to the UBC year 5. However the reception I got at this school was one of the highlights of my trip. The children sang welcome songs and then performed a "skit" about post civil war reconciliation, which I have recorded on video. The school want a copy of this.

The contact person is the headteacher Mr V V Bockarie PO Box 96 Bo tel:076660726. I also met the "Director of Education" whose name I have mislaid.

I have asked Joe Kobbah and Bruce to try to get a response to the booklet produced by Brookhurst which I took to the school, and a transcript of the skit and song to help Brookhurst children understand the video.

I received a gift of traditional African dress (A garment that reaches the ground with matching trousers)

Holy Rosary Primary for Girls Headteacher Mrs Cecelia Kargboi. This school also put on a skit for me on the subject of Girls' rights to education. I have this on video too.

This is the school where Teresa Bangali teaches. At least one other teacher would like to have a correspondence with a UK teacher.

St Mary's School Warwick sent some money towards a water tank. Now they need a well so that they can keep it full. Calculators would be useful for the teachers.

St Francis Upper Primary (boys) A large school. I must have visited about 19 classes. Joe Pyne the Head Teacher is a long standing stalwart member of the link. We discussed the difficulty of communication. He felt that if things are sent to the Catholic Education Service, that should work. However there are also benefits in having just one route of communication. (further discussion would tend to favour trying to get the British Council route to work in the first instance) The visit was a bit hurried; but I attended a meeting with the staff, and was presented with a country cloth top, hat, and a ceremonial walking stick. There is a video shot of this presentation.

St Francis Lower Primary. An even more hurried visit here. The headteacher, whose name I have failed to note, gave me a written copy of the speech that she did not have time to speak. I met her again at Kayoma Women's group (Teresa Bangali); and I was given a bed sheet and two pillow cases.

Tansi Blessed Model School. This is where some of Moussa's children went when they were little. I visited some class rooms and had a chat with the head teacher. I discovered that the school has a link with St Edwards Junior Catholic School Liverpool; though they were disappointed that they have not received a response to letters sent to St Edwards. I explained we were not in a position to link them to another school in Leamington at present; and I would follow up with St Edwards. Since my return, I have spoken with Sue Kirby who has relevant contacts, and she will take that on board. She believes that the link is still active from St Edwards viewpoint.

UMC Primary New Site This school has a new head teacher. They are coping with the high demand for school places by running a morning and afternoon shift with separate staff; but I think class sizes are still quite high by our standards. They have also erected a temporary building. Picture taken of nursery class. I would have liked to spend more time here to get a clearer idea of educational philosophy, how they have resources to staff two shifts etc. I think they may have another link through the church.

UMC Upper, Lower, and Nursery, Njaboima. Headteacher Mr Brima. This school has a wide expanse of ground and there is some new building. I did not meet teachers or pupils in my short time there. The Head appeared to take my point about class interaction having some advantages over individual correspondence.

Njai Town Primary School

After some discussions following my suggestion of a semi-rural school for a link with Ferncumbe Primary as it is semi-rural but also emphasis that it is also important that the school should be ready and willing to link, I paid a visit to this school on the back of Joe Kobbah's motor bike. Our visit was not fully expected or prepared for; but that is not wholly surprising given the difficulties of communication and transport in the area.

Njai Town is definitely separate from Bo. Although nearer to Bo than Hatton Green is to Warwick it would take just as long by motorised transport because of the state of the road which is more like a bumpy track. The school is much larger, commensurate with town schools, with 653 lower and pre-school children, and 465 upper school. Maybe a more rural school would be smaller in numbers; but I think that at present there would be great communication problems. At least Bo OWL committee think Njai Town to be suitable.

I think that the school will definitely be willing to engage in a link; but I am not sure that they have given much thought to it. They have received the brochure and letter from Sarah Davies, and we will have to see what response they give, as I did not have time to make a follow up visit during my short stay.

I met with the head of the upper school Mr Sulaiman S Woobay and the head of the lower school Mrs Josephine A Komeh, and had a preliminary discussion about what might be involved but this went into little depth as they were not prepared; but I got over the point about teacher liaison and group interaction being important. While Joe explained some of the local arrangements re linking I asked to take some photos.

Most schools in Bo consist of one story buildings along three sides of a rectangle leaving ground in the middle for assembly, play and other outdoor activity. While in the headteacher's room some curious children had been hanging around outside; when I stepped out on to the raised platform outside the room holding a camera a lot more children appeared. By the time I had set and raised the camera and taken a photo, there were even more. The ones and the

front were being pushed and jostled, and I felt worried for their safety. I announced that I would take a picture of everyone but only in their classrooms. With some persuasion from their teachers most children eventually went to their classrooms and I took or pretended to take a photo of each. Each photo resulted in a great cheer. Some children ran ahead of me to try and get into several pictures. Only in the most senior classes was there a more orderly scene. This is in some contrast to my other school visits, where I visited classrooms under control where everyone stood up together to speak a formal greeting in unison. I think this school gets many less visitors, especially white ones, and I was a novelty. Apart from photos of the children, I have one of the staff group.

Other Schools I also visited the nursery school at the St Francis site where they sang me a song. At a Government building, I bumped into some pupils and teachers from Bo Blind School. I thought that in my luggage I had a tape of English bird song which I said I would drop in. Much to my chagrin I could not find it, and later found I had failed to pack it.

Discussions with Bo OWL Committee.

Most meeting time was spent on the Community Centre.

I did explain the difficulties we were having in engaging schools at our end, especially secondary. I explained that the demands of the National Curriculum have made schools have to justify how they spend their time, and we in OWL are having to think how we can assist schools to find educational value in the link and assist them with useful material to that end. I raised the question of what educational needs Bo Schools have that the link with us could satisfy both at committee and at other times and in schools. It was mainly me asking the question rather than getting any immediate answers. I also stressed the importance of linked schools conducting their own dialogue to define within their relations what objectives and activities they will want. In my final feedback session, I said I would take back the idea that 1 or 2 teachers from UK should possibly visit to help take school linking forward. As well as or failing that, we need to have professional links between teachers. I also wondered whether there was a role for "Directors of Education" these people seem to exist in Sierra Leone, but I am not clear who they are or what they do. I encouraged Bo teachers to make demands of us and our schools in terms of what they need educationally to make sense of the link. This provoked some discussion. Johannes Mallah suggested that National Curricula could be exchanged. The question of student exchanges was raised.

ACTION POINTS

- Follow up Kingsley School re QRS
- Sports teacher link for Mr Kaitibie (Milton CSS)
- Follow up with Chichester Diocese re Bishop of Bo
- Ask VSO what if any plans they have to return to Sierra Leone
- Query interest from Warwick University Education Department
- B T Smith (teacher at a secondary school wants news of John Holliday) tel: 0023276652870
- Send a copy of the video of the skit to UBC School, together with the questionnaire
- Seek teacher penfriends for Bo teachers

