

## Chapter 5 Malawi 2005

This chapter provides a description of what happened in the field.

### 5.1 Location in Malawi

My research involved ten schools around the area of Domasi, about 15 km north of Zomba in southern Malawi. I was most grateful to Mr Grames Chirwa and his family, as I stayed with them in their home for four weeks and Mr Chirwa moved with me virtually at all times. He was a most willing and able research assistant. His home is on the compound of the Malawi Institute of Education (MIE) and he normally works there. Therefore I am also most grateful to his employers for allowing him the time to travel with me. I hope and believe that he learned a lot from the experience. MIE is quite close to Domasi College, the only secondary teachers' college in Malawi, and this also proved a useful contact. MIE and Domasi College are in rural countryside about 15 km from Zomba, in Malawi's south, but on the main road to Lilongwe. Since Mr Chirwa had no car, I hired one and drove to all locations.

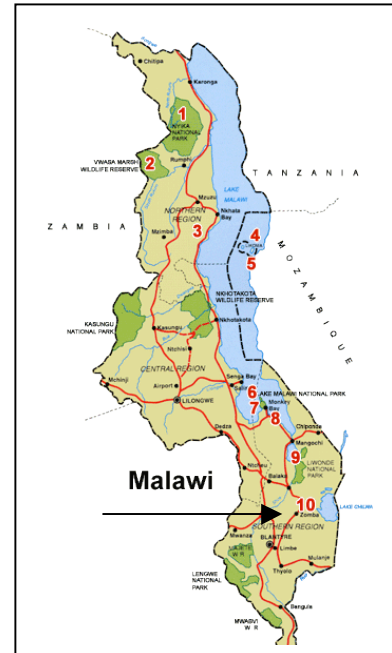


Fig 5.1

### 5.2 Distribution of questionnaire

We took the questionnaire copies and permission forms to ten schools. These are shown on the map in [Appendix 1](#). At each school I met the principal and explained, with Mr Chirwa's help, who I was, why I was there, and politely requested them to complete the forms within a day or so. We returned to all schools in the next day or so, and were eventually able to obtain 83 responses, out of 85 questionnaires left. The missing ones were due to teacher absences. There was almost no missing data. At the most rural of the schools three of the five teachers were absent (including the principal) on the day we visited. However we left five forms and eventually received five responses.

#### Sample schools

The locations of these schools are shown 1 to 10 on the map below. (A larger version is in [Appendix 1](#).)



Fig 5.2

In numerical order on the map, these schools are:

- 1 Msambainsa Primary School had 3 male and 4 female teachers caring for 608 pupils.

- 2 Mchengawedi Primary School is behind a mosque in a very Islamic area and had a large population of 1335 pupils in the care of 6 male and 2 female teachers.



Photo  
5.1

- 3 Malemia Primary School is in a very Islamic area and was another typical school, with ten teachers (evenly spilt) and 701 pupils.



Photo  
5.2



- 4 Songani Primary School was the largest in the area, and housed the Teacher Development Centre. There were 13 teachers (6 males, 7 females) caring for 1587 pupils.



Photo  
5.3

- 5 Domasi Demonstration Primary School is located next to Domasi College. Although the population was still rural, it had the appearance of a 'town' school. There were two male and 6 female teachers dealing with 631 pupils. The principal (Ms Alippo Ussi) was female and was selected for observation, along with a male teacher (Mr Gift Kawiza).



Photo  
5.4



- 6 Domasi Government Primary School, is also near Domasi College and was a much more typical primary school, with six each of male and female teachers dealing with 1278 pupils. Two teachers from this school were also selected for observation (principal Ralph Chikhwaya and Mary Kungwaya).



Photo  
5.5

- 7 Ntondo Primary School is a junior school (Standards 1 to 3 only) having only recently started. Its rooms are made from bamboo. Three teachers cared for 287 pupils. The only female (Patricia Fundi) was selected for observation.



Photo  
5.6



- 8 Naisi Primary School had 848 pupils in the care of a totally male staff of 8 teachers. The principal (Brenard Mtalimanja, shown by my hire car) was selected for observation.



Photo  
5.7

- 9 Matandani Primary School was rather more rural, and had 6 male and 3 female teachers, dealing with 859 pupils.
- 10 Kanjedza Primary School is a very new school, the most rural and inaccessible of the ten, to Standard 5 only. There were 4 males and one female teacher, dealing with 222 pupils. It used this church hall as its only classroom. Its classes were consistently smaller than other schools.



Photo  
5.8

### **5.3 Selection of teachers to observe**

Once the surveys were returned, on one evening I entered the data on a laptop computer, using a pre-designed Excel template. This enabled me to prepare a summary of the responses to distribute to the teachers, as promised, and this was duly delivered over the next two days, with thanks.

I used the data to help me to choose seven teachers to observe. The intention was to be able to visit four schools each day for three days, and to see two teachers in each school at pre-arranged times. This was going to be possible, with the teachers' permissions of course, because in this second last week of term primary schools always hold examinations. There is normally no teaching at this time; children who are not in the exam room play in the school ground. I could fit all the planned observations in each of three mornings as the lesson length in Malawian schools is 35 minutes.

I used the following criteria to select the teachers.

- Where possible, two at each of three or four schools, to enable the visits to take place;
- Several types of school, some near MIE and Domasi College, and some well away from them;
- A wide spread of Standards, but some at the same level for comparison;
- An interesting spread of responses from the teachers to the items on the questionnaire.

I selected seven teachers from four schools, two close to MIE and Domasi College and two others.

### **5.4 Negotiation with teachers**

I took one day to visit the four schools and negotiate with the teachers. One teacher (a 60-year-old male Standard 1 teacher) was not able to be observed as he was individually testing his 198 pupils orally on Chichewa and English during exam week and had no time to run lessons for me to observe. This reduced my sample to six teachers at four schools with only one teacher at two of them. However I discovered that the chosen Standard 2 teacher also taught the mathematics to Standard 1, so I negotiated with her to observe both classes, taught one after the other. Each teacher agreed in writing to let me photograph and digitally record three mathematics lessons over three days, and to take notes. They also agreed to a recorded half hour interview on the fourth day.



Here are the six teachers in their classrooms. *Patricia* in Standard 1 is teaching the basic numbers (nambala) to about 80 children. The room is made from bamboo, and the one portable blackboard is moved around the school when needed. Her Standard 2 classroom was very similar.



Photo  
5.9

*Mary* is teaching multiplication of money to Standard 4. ('Masamu' means 'mathematics'.) The room is old rendered brick, with a concrete floor and no furniture.



Photo  
5.10



*Alippo* in Standard 5 is teaching about drawing circles using string as the radius. The school is a modern brick building with plastic chairs.



Photo  
5.11

Three teachers teach Standard 7. *Gift* is teaching in the same school as *Alippo*

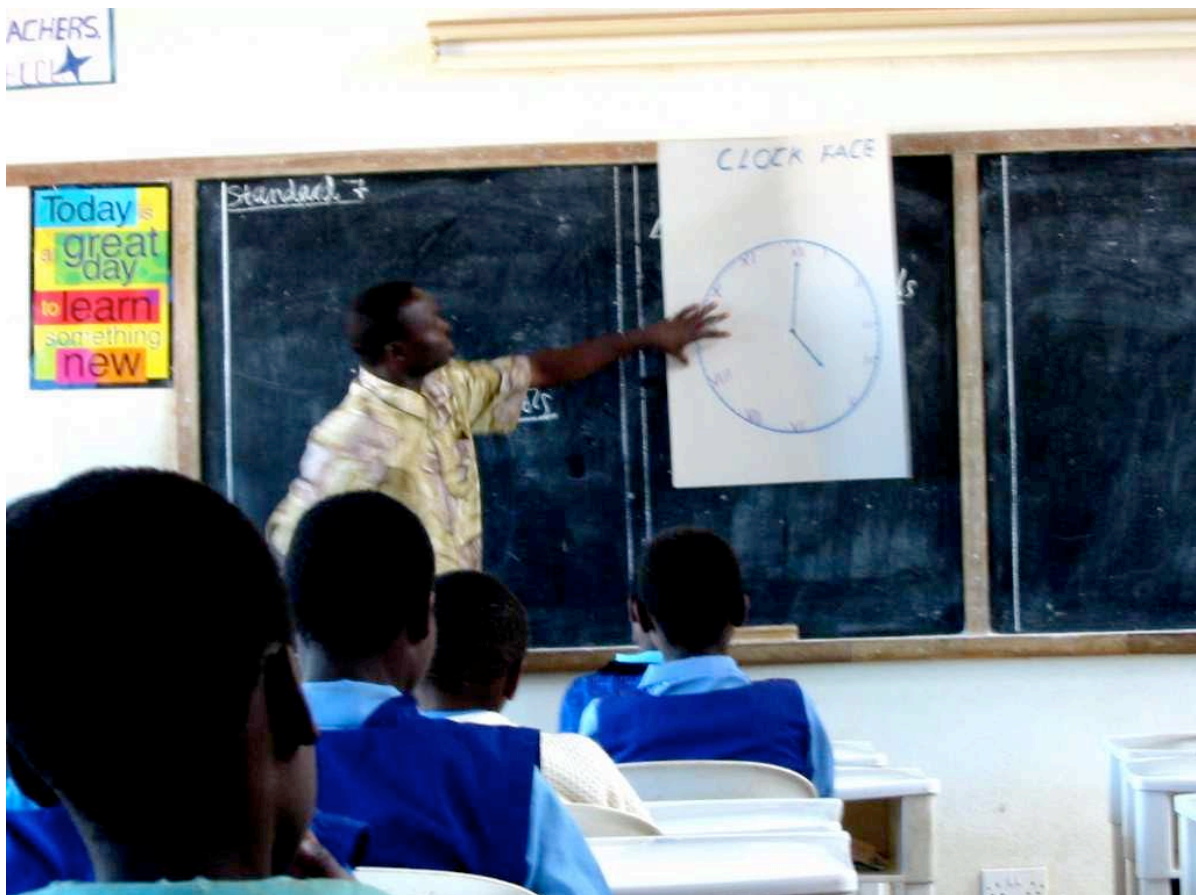


Photo  
5.12



Ralph is teaching ratios to Standard 7 in the same school as Mary. Standard 7 gets furniture.



Photo  
5.13

Brenard is teaching a crowded Standard 7 in a very common style of rural school – very run-down rendered brick with concrete floors and gaps for windows.



Photo  
5.14



## 5.5 Observations

For each observation Mr Chirwa and myself sat at the back of the classroom. The lessons were digitally recorded, with the tiny recorder held by Mr Chirwa. In the case of three lessons per day (Standard 1, 2 and 4) he simultaneously translated from Chichewa into English, speaking quietly into a recorder. This was of great assistance, and avoided translation later.

While he did that I took notes and photographs of what was happening. The notes were recorded on previously prepared sheets, with specific cues so that I remembered to observe specific categories of information.

- Identification (time and place, numbers of pupils)
- Sketch of room layout
- Description of lesson plan
- Spaces for observations of general teaching skills (language, gender matters, socialization, locale of examples, management, interruptions, awareness of all students, use of talk and marking)
- Cues about mathematics teaching methods (content knowledge accuracy, style, type of learning, any assessment, use of materials, group work, textbooks, notebooks)
- Any significant events that might be later discussed in interview.

I used most of these in most lessons and occasionally added other notes later about things I did not have time to record during the lesson.

For a sample of an observation of a lesson, see [Appendix 4](#).

## 5.6 Teacher interviews

As agreed, on the fourth day I met with each teacher for about half an hour and asked questions on selected topics derived from that person's questionnaire responses and my lesson observations. I did not use the same questions for each person, as my aim was to understand why each did what they did. When I was interviewing Patricia, Mr Chirwa translated my questions and her responses and this was all recorded.

In the next week I revisited Patricia to ask further questions about language, and also asked the local chief about the language used by the children in their homes.

After I had prepared the results of this research, I sent the comments about each teacher, including quotes from their interviews, to that teacher (through Mr Chirwa) asking for comments and a decision on whether or not I could use their real name. All teachers were happy for me to use their real names, and I received some very useful reactions from five teachers that serve to further explain why they did what I observed. These have been identified as 'clarifications' and are quoted in the discussion in Chapter 6.

## 5.7 Interviews with educators

At various times, usually by phone, but sometimes personally, Mr Chirwa and I made appointments with administrators, academics and others, and then interviewed them, always recording with written permission. Mr Chirwa's personal knowledge of 'who knew what' was of immense value in this process. An alphabetical list of persons interviewed is in [Appendix 6](#). The following is a list of the institutions they represented. It is revealing that only three of these are females.

- Domasi College of Education
- The German Aid Program (GTZ)
- The Government of Malawi (Ministry of Education)
- Malawi Institute of Education
- Malawi National Examination Board



- Ministry of Education (Primary Education Advisor)
- Ministry of Education (Department of Teacher Education and Development)
- Ministry of Education (District Education Manager)
- Teachers' Union of Malawi
- University of Malawi (Blantyre Polytechnic)
- University of Malawi (Language Research Institute)
- University of Malawi (CERT)
- Youth Net and Counselling

## **5.8 Writing workshop**

Fortuitously, I was able to be present for most of a writing workshop at which the 2005 primary course was further developed and the new Teacher's College programs to support this new course were being designed. This gave me many opportunities to work alongside ten tutors from the several colleges, and become aware of the constraints under which they were working.

I was also able to attend presentations about the trailing of the Malawi Breakthrough To Literacy and Literacy Across the Curriculum programs, and to hear a presentation on Continuous Assessment. Since this was one of the regular inservice programs on offer at Malawi Institute of Education, I was able to see for myself the style of presentation involved.

I was also able to visit one presentation of the Malawi Teacher Training Activity at a venue 50 km from Zomba to see a workshop on the teaching of division for Standard 3 teachers.