

(Update 4) July 2011

Jambo tena from Tanzania,

Update on “experienced 1st graders”

Mama Shayo and the teachers decided that a few of last year’s first graders who struggled a bit would be better served by repeating 1st grade this year. We checked in on our “experienced” students to see how they were doing and learned the story is mixed. One of the young girls is doing super well – she has emerged as a very confident class leader and is well on her way to continued success. This is such a change from her struggles and shyness last year and it is a beautiful thing to see.

Remember that our goal is to change the course of the lives of these children through providing an effective education – an English language based education that will enable them to be accepted into secondary school and thus acquire the skills necessary to gain meaningful employment. While the government primary schools are overcrowded (>90 students per teacher), the essentially free government secondary schools (high schools) are actually quite good. But there’s a catch – there’s only enough secondary schools for a small fraction of the population. As these high schools teach in English, the challenging entrance exam for determining who will be selected is naturally in English as well. So the children who attend the overburdened Swahili-based government provided primary schools have essentially zero chance to progress. The secret to success in the Tanzanian educational system is to learn English very well and to start to learn it as young as possible.

I mentioned above that the results of our “experienced 1st graders” were mixed and only elaborated on the success story (clever, eh?). However, not all news is good news, and two of the children have decided that even on the second try, learning English is just too difficult for them at this time and have decided to leave our school and attend the nearby government run Swahili school. Their experience at our school will no doubt give them a leg up on their new peers. We will continue to offer any food or assistance we can and are looking at how we could fund an after school English learning program that could help these two as well as potentially many others.

Meetings, meetings, meetings...

We conducted several meetings during our week in Moshi including: interviewing a potential guest house manager candidate, discussed planned completion of the guest house with the architect and our construction manager, reviewed and provided feedback on furniture being built for the guest house by a local vocational school, and held discussions with Fr. Riziki on future plans for the school to mention a few. It is in conducting such meetings that you realize how different our cultures can be. “Meetings” are viewed more as a chance to meet and to talk about anything and everything except business. You have to sneak in the occasional work-related question or request amongst discussions of weather, politics, water, government, friends, etc., etc. It makes meetings longer, but a heck of a lot more fun.

Plan ahead

With the Guesthouse construction nearing completion, the architect spent some time with us walking through each room and developing a “snog list” (what we would call a “punch list”). The architect is an outstanding professional in his craft and gave the foreman an excellent list of finishing touches to get done quickly. A review of the guestroom bathrooms revealed that the local workers were perhaps not familiar with installation of “western” toilets – what we call, well, “toilets”. Of particular note was the consistent placement of the toilet paper holder high up on an opposite wall several steps away from the toilet itself -- sparking us to refer to these as, “plan ahead toilets”. Not to worry, the architect chuckled and explained the customary and more convenient location to the foreman.

Kwaheri mpaka kesho.