

Profile of Visit

Theme of Visit : Teaching Styles and ICT
Country/ Region Visited : Mbale Uganda
Dates of Visit : 20th- 30th July 2007
Type of School Visited : Secondary School
Age of Students observed : 11- 19 yrs

Visit Aims

- To look at teaching styles and record good practice where there was less reliance on written activities and text base resources. Any multi-sensory learning methods which use chants or other oral methods would add to our strategies for Assessment for Learning. This is a key focus in UK schools with the use of effective starters and plenary sessions.
- To establish effective communication links between the students at both schools with a view to cultural exchange and increased awareness in all students of global citizenship.
- To establish a vertically grouped Enterprise Working Party in line with Government guidelines and the UK school Team Improvement Plan. This group will take responsibility for project management, email links and other communication methods with a corresponding group at the school in Uganda. They will be looking at sponsorship and sustainability through enterprise. This will teach our students economic responsibility, problem solving and team work skills.

Expected Outcomes

- Strong working links between the UK and Ugandan schools with effective communication between the students.
- An overview of teaching methods in a school where there are large classes and a lack of text books and teaching resources.
- Extending the work of our enterprise group to manage communication and raise funding for resources for the Ugandan School.

Record of the Experience

The Ugandan Secondary School with nearly 4,000 registered students is situated just outside Mbale town on a large campus comprising single and double storey buildings.

Our partnership school is seen as a high achieving school with a commitment to support the local community. The head teacher is committed to the increased use of computer technology and the benefits this acquisition of hardware and skills bring to the students and people in the local area. However, the 20 computers at the school are too few to serve the school community and this lack of basic ICT equipment has hindered attempts to bring students together in the partnership schools. The school is also committed to ensuring high standards of behaviour and commitment to work from their students.

We found the students to be quiet, almost passive and well motivated academically. They are smartly dressed, in school uniform, which they wear with dignity and pride. Students are expected to arrive at school by 7am with significant numbers walking

considerable distances. The main gate is locked between lessons and reopened to allow latecomers to join their classes. It was acknowledged that although parents pay fees, some students would become side tracked on their way to school which put them at risk. This inevitably weeded out the less able and the less academically motivated. Class sizes ranged from 50 – 100 students.

Visiting UK teachers took classes in letter writing. This was to enable letters to be taken back to the UK School to which students could respond. The letters were taken extremely seriously by the Ugandan students who produced some poignant accounts of their everyday lives. The standards of literacy were high and the letters written in formal English. No students in these classes of 80-100 students asked for any assistance. It is the intention to use these letters with our students in English lessons to annotate for writing style and content and to enhance global awareness. The aim will be for students to write to a specific audience. These letters will also start the ongoing student to student communication to enhance their cultural awareness.

In order to demonstrate the way forward with communication, a video conference was demonstrated to the staff in the host school using Flashmeeting. Some training was given to the ICT technician and it is hoped that students will be able to share ideas and projects in the future. A virtual learning environment was set up for collaborative work between staff and students.

The lesson observations revealed a single teaching technique which was necessary in view of the numbers of students in the classes and the lack of resources. The teacher delivered the lesson from the chalk board using key words and information. There were also dictations. The only student participation was in the form of collective responses to reinforce learning. The students were remarkable in their attitudes to learning. The students were totally committed to keeping on task. There was no low level disruption, chatting or poor concentration and they demonstrated effective listening skills. When set a written task students worked on it to the exclusion of any distraction and produced work of a good standard. Despite the absence of clocks or watches all the students had finished their letters by the end of the lesson. Every student had brought their own pen and an exercise book to work in despite the poverty stricken nature of the area. From the content of their writing it is obvious that the students are conscious that their families are paying fees that can be ill afforded and that education is the key to a better life. Having observed some Ugandan toddlers it seemed that passivity was evident from an early age but necessary when parents worked long hours. The students were not generally encouraged to ask questions and found it difficult to respond to the more interactive teaching style of the UK teachers.

One of the classes observed involved students making beaded necklaces from triangular strips of used calendars. This gave the idea to use these for UK students to help raise funds to provide resources for the school in Uganda. Some of these beads have been brought back to be managed by the Sackville Enterprise Group along with helping to maintain regular and effective contact with the partner school. This will encourage team work in our students as well as economic responsibility and problem solving. The production of the beads demonstrates the importance of Fairtrade and recycling.

Evaluation

Key Educational Outcomes, Strategies and Conclusions

- The importance of nurturing a love of learning in our students and giving them a clear idea of the relevance and rewards of working hard at school.
- The time wasted in classrooms by low level disruption and the impact this can have on teacher student relationships and learning. Achieving a balance between having articulate students who are able to question and debate in class but also have an awareness of the importance of listening and concentrating.
- All the students present at the school were there because they valued education .It would appear that those students who lacked motivation or the skills to thrive in the system ‘fell by the wayside’. Perhaps more thought and resources should be put into those UK students who need an alternative curriculum.
- Collective oral responses during lessons seemed an effective method of reinforcing learning and keeping all students alert and involved in the work.
- Using local Fairtrade products to enable students to involve themselves in an Enterprise activity for the mutual benefit of students involved.
- Using the traditional form of communication ie letters to enable students to write for a specific audience while enhancing their sense of global citizenship.

Participating Sackville staff represent the British Council and F.C.O. as Learning Together Ambassadors and have regular opportunities to talk to teachers about the benefits of international partnerships. There is a website which supports details of this work. There are to be regular assembly slots to update Sackville students.

The visit has cemented strong links and great commitment to this partnership and an additional visit to Uganda by Sackville teachers some time in the future is important. It is so much more effective to move forward with a partnership through personal contact. Some of the money raised at Sackville by selling the beads will be used to provide a yoghurt drink for students in Ugandan who cannot afford to eat during the day and whose school performance suffers accordingly. During the trip we visited the Dubana Project that is producing this yoghurt supplement to enhance nutrition in the community .In order to set up this Enterprise Programme there has had to be mutual trust and it is essential that this responsibility is honoured

General Advice for Teachers visiting Uganda

Uganda is in the heart of sub-Saharan Africa and is not generally a tourist destination. However, it felt relatively safe and we were extremely well looked after by our host teachers. While travelling we were never pestered for money and despite being some of the first Europeans some of the people had seen close to, we were regarded with only passive and fleeting interest. The two most dangerous aspects of Uganda are the mosquito and the possibility of having a serious road traffic accident. It is not advisable to hire a car and self drive as the road conditions are extremely hazardous, often full of pot holes and best negotiated by a local driver. Traffic often moves at high speed wherever there is a space on the road. Food in hotels appeared to be freshly cooked and as long as the usual recommended guidelines are followed everything should be fine. Before visiting Uganda an extensive range of injections is recommended. If payment for these has to be met by the individual then it can be extremely expensive.

We would like to thank our host headteacher and her staff for making us feel so welcome and taking such good care of us during our visit. We would also like to thank Rachel Nicholls and the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust for the efficient processing of our application and the support and valuable advice given.

Anne Jakins and Nicholas Falk

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