

The Open Classroom

Newsletter January 2009

Our School-based NGO at Essence International School 20 Kashim Ibrahim Road, Kaduna, Nigeria

The Open Classroom Teaches in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil



Here we are with our wonderful class at Escola Parque. The children have just completed a maze, and for that they deserve stickers! We're surrounded by happy faces. Can you pick us out?

In this issue:

Our public-private partnership with LEA Unguwar Rimi yields dividends for some hard-working students. See page 3.

Happy New Year

Black and Proud The Brazilian Style

By Rosalind Diane Ede

Salvador, Bahia, Brazil is an exciting, interesting and friendly place to visit and all of this can be seen in the faces of the children at the Escole Parque which we were privileged to visit.

As part of the Open Classroom initiative to take education beyond the classroom walls to the people of the world, we visited a school located in the densely populated black community in Liberdade, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. This area is said to be the largest Black community outside Africa.

Education is free and compulsory from ages 7 – 14. Children in this group constitute the school student body. The emphasis is on art with the concentration on the African influences. You can see this the moment you enter the campus with sculptures in every available space. One such sculpture was particularly impressive. Located in front of the theatre complex, it had three heads each representing the different shades of the Brazilian people reminding one of the poem on the many shades of Black.

The school was established in 1950 as a model school by Dr. Anisio Teixeira whose philosophy of education was, “the student will practice in the school community all that in the adult community he will have to be: student, worker, artist, athlete, community member” (From letters and on-line article/Ilene Pe, 1967, p.6.). The school is funded by the Brazilian government.

The location of the campus in itself was very interesting. Right in the heart of the community. We drove into a small graffiti walled driveway right into a large campus with the busy city life on-going around it. The campus had a basketball court a library, an outdoor theater, woodshop, pottery shop, and beautiful gardens.

The main administration building was like walking through a museum. The children’s artwork was on display everywhere. There were two mannequins dressed in African costumes and masks showing people of African descent in different national costumes.



Communication was facilitated with the help of our interpreter. We taught a lesson about locating 3 great rivers in Africa. The children in our class asked many questions about children in Africa.

The children were given a lesson in geography showing the African – Brazil connection plus the names of the major rivers of Africa and finally the African – North American – Brazilian connection. Their eagerness was so heartwarming. When it came to the question and answers period, the beauty of their natural curiosity and eagerness to know about African children was overwhelming. They wanted to know what African children like to do. What African children like to eat? What religion do African children practice ?

After about three hours, the children were sent to lunch and the teachers took over. They had the same concerns the Open Classroom has about adult education and teacher’s training. They are now required by law to teach African History and Culture and every subject teacher is required to find that connection in his or her subject area.

We were then presented with history and geography textbooks and we promised to network with the teachers to help them fulfill their African Heritage requirements.

Outstanding Spellers Receive Incentives

M. Emmanuel Eymard, the Director of Alliance Française, Kaduna, attended last year's Spelling Bee at LEA Unguwar Rimi Primary School. Impressed with the students' performance, he decided to buy them some educational supplies as an incentive to continue studying and behaving well in school. The Open Classroom organized an award ceremony for the presentation of the gifts. Below, read M. Eymard's address for the occasion.

It's a great pleasure and honor to be invited to make a speech on this occasion. Thank you Mrs. D. L. Mohammed for your invitation.

Good day Board and staff of this school, invited guests, teachers and pupils. You are all welcome to this occasion where excellent students will be awarded prizes in spelling, reading and writing.

Congratulations and may this good collaboration of over 20 years continue between Essence International School and L.E.A U/Rimi. Occasions like this provide opportunity for parents and various families to know more about their roles in the academic performance of their children in primary schools.

The family plays a very important role in the socialization of a child and as the first agent of socialization; the family is where a child is born and spends his early years learning about his or her language and cultural norms. It is the responsibility of the parents therefore, to teach the child not only the social ways of the society, but also the acceptable norms of behaviour.

A child learns a lot from his/her family and at an early stage of his life, he seeks for knowledge, he learns the vocabulary and does some household jobs which help his imaginative power to develop and get ready for learning outside his or her family. All these initial experiences have an enduring impact on the



Here M. Emmanuel Eymard, Director of Alliance Française, Kaduna, delivers his speech during a Spelling Bee prize-giving day at LEA Unguwar Rimi Primary School

physical, moral, intellectual and personality development of the child. One of the social factors to have bearing on the student's will and ability to perform well in the academic field includes the family. Apart from bringing children up in the right ways, the family has a lot of roles to play in order to enhance the academic performance of the child in school through these ways:

Early attendance to school

Punctuality in school

Provision of books and other materials

Encouragement in school education by the parents

Show of love and affection from the family

Monitoring the child's character

M. Eymard's Speech continued...

Unfortunately in our society today, it can be observed that many parents are not playing their roles properly. Some parents don't care to know whether their children are doing well or bad at school. They don't give them time to read or to do their assignments at home.

I would like to use this medium to emphasize the importance of Guidance and Counseling in the improvement of academic performance of our children right from primary school. Similarly, some parents always disagree with the teachers and Headmasters of their school. This is not a good relationship. Parents and teachers should always agree on decisions over the children.

Early learning at school has its own peculiar challenges. One of the major challenges is getting and maintaining the interest level of the young learners. The teachers also have to make learning dynamic so as to ensure a long lasting impact in the lives of the children. When this is done, it will give the children a

platform to build upon and lead to a more solid decision of what to study at a higher level.

The teacher has to spark interest in the children, giving them a real desire to learn. He can do so by looking for innovative ways, methods and materials.

For all the children participating in today's prize giving day, I say well done and keep up the good work. For the others, be assured that it is possible to get up here on stage to collect your own prize, so go for it! To the teachers, I say more kudos to you. You have got the toughest job of all and though your reward is in heaven, I believe that there is no better reward than to see a pupil you have instructed excel. For the pupils, we know we have to let you go, so we ask you to spread those wings and fly. The sky will not be your limit. You must aspire to get to infinity and beyond.

Good luck future leaders, parents and everybody present here today. Thank you for coming and please enjoy yourselves.

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M. Eymard presenting a prize to one of the good students at LEA Uguwar Rimi Primary school



M. Eymard with Hakimin Gabasawa, Board of Directors of Essence International School and some Spelling Bee prize winners of LEA Uguwar Rimi Primary School



Spelling Bee Champions at LEA Unguwar Rimi



Using the portable sprinkler to wash hands before meals is part of teaching sanitation at Rugan Fulani

Our Projects



Student Teachers from Essence International School take charge of a class at Rugan Fulani



Good spellers receiving special prizes for a mid-year spelling, reading, and writing contest at LEA

Acquiring Western Education at the Dusk of Life

By Kerchiri Seth

It is hard to imagine how a grown up man or woman would enroll himself or herself in a school, sit in the same classroom with his children, in some cases grandchildren to be taught the science of holding a pencil or crayon.

How would you fancy it if you were to be put in the same situation with the last of your six children to be taught A, B, C, D ----- and 1, 2, 3, 4, -- --. Would there be any psychological effect on the parent or on the child?

I posed the above question to a number of people aged between 35 and 40 years old and nine out of ten of them would rather think of what to do to bring food to the home rather than wasting the same time in the classroom with babies learning what would not bring any economic benefit to the family. To majority of those interviewed, there is no wisdom in the exercise considering the present economic climate in the country where even the youth are jobless and still dependent on their parents.

The reality is that no nation can develop without the development of the human resources in the country. To harness the available natural resources, manpower must be developed and it doesn't matter at what time or age. History has shown that the developed countries got to where they are because they considered human development as paramount. The challenges facing our country today are enormous yet the training and grooming of the mind cannot wait.

The supporting role of The Open Classroom has been to increase awareness, train the young and teach those who missed being educated at tender ages to become more enlightened and educated.

DETERMINATION

Our heart goes to the husbands, uncles and fathers who chose to brace up the odds to learn with their grand children. The zeal to learn to manipulate the pencil at the dusk of life is wonderful to behold.

The road of Open Classroom to achieve the goal as stated herein has been a lot easier due to the determination of those mothers with sucking babies strapped to their backs and is in class and fathers who dropped their farm tools and replaced them with pencils and pens.

The unquantifiable sacrifice for the project is holistic. As a matter of fact how many people can have the mental strength to go through what these gallant men and women have gone through and still remain focused and optimistic? These special people deserve more support and a pat on the back.

Reflecting on their determination reminds me that there is no age barrier to education. Though difficult and discouraging as it may seem, these men and women at Rugan Fulani are determined to grab all the benefits there are in the acquisition of knowledge.



Our oldest student at Rugan Fulani shows remarkable determination and a zest for learning.

Against All Odds

by Nasiru Musa

Once upon a time here in Kaduna, I was a care free child attending Sabon Gari Primary school. I received quality education from dedicated teachers who worried and dotted over us. Our success was their success, our failure was theirs. I remember when we were about to graduate from Primary school. We were being prepared for the common entrance examinations. The teachers spared nothing in seeing to our success in the exams. When the results came out, they were ecstatic.

During our days in school, we were given free books and two sets of school uniforms each. Our classes were neat and our playground adequate for the number of children then. That was the era of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) the precursor to the present day Universal Basic Education (UBE). Three decades later what do we see? The same structures, which housed our precocious minds, shelter today's confused lot. The same classes that accommodated twenty five of us now welcome over one hundred children in various states of dishevelment. Where did this general lack of care emanate from? Why do we toy with our future in this way? I am of the belief that billions are budgeted every year to education especially primary education. The question is "where does this money go to?" Clearly not to the schools and children that need them. The stark reality that hit me when I visited the primary school where I was tutored brought home all my fears. The structures were still the same way they were when I was there some thirty years ago. Not a single block was added. Everything was in a state of dilapidation. There was a huge gaping hole in one of the roofs where children of the poor are expected to sit and receive a semblance of education.

How about the teachers in those classes? They are a far cry from what is expected of a teacher that is

trained to mould character and intellect. I wonder how these teachers are recruited. Is it based on merit or the Nigerian factor that has succeeded in crippling and blinding us? I ask this because some of these teachers cannot speak English let alone teach the children in the classes. Recently in Kwara State, a test was conducted to test the competence of teachers in Primary and Post Primary schools in the basic subjects: Mathematics and English. NCE and degree holders were tested with questions prepared for primary four pupils. Can you believe that the majority of those tested scored a big zero!? Zero means he or she could not answer **any** of the questions correctly. What an outrage. How did they get there? I have a councilor friend who removed his children from public primary schools to a private school the moment his status changed. Many like him have done the same. Tell me how will they care about the poor who don't have the means to take their children out of public schools? How will they care about the state of disrepair of public schools within their purview? You see one school, you've seen them all.

Within these rotten structures are children, leaders (?) of tomorrow, cramped like sardines in classes meant for 30 children, with one teacher shouting at the top of his or her voice with a horse whip in hand, ready to set any child straight with it. In this state of fear and confusion, the child cannot and will not understand anything being taught by the teacher. The cane in the hand of the teacher will not allow the child to ask questions for fear he may receive the painful end of it. These children get promoted automatically from class to class with merit set aside. They graduate from primary school knowing very few words of English and having scant knowledge of numeracy. They become ready tools for use in times of crisis because they have not developed the intellect to think for themselves.

The Open Classroom

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The African Heritage Village, Kaduna, Nigeria

The Open Classroom is dedicated to teaching Africa's children and linking up with other educators around the world in pursuit of the goal of Literacy for All. We operate a school in the bush at a community settlement called Rugan Fulani, off Airport Road, Kaduna. Our community development plan for this area includes education and environmental restoration. It also serves as a site for our student teachers to engage in community service. We also partner with LEA Ungwar Rimi Primary School for The Spelling Bee and quality education. The Open Classroom is also involved in designing and producing educational materials for teachers and students.

Fortunately, The Open Classroom has been able to connect with teachers and students in Niger Republic, Kenya, and Brazil. Everywhere we go, we learn something new and rededicate ourselves toward the research and planning of the best instructional activities for this new century.

We Appreciate Your Donations to The Open Classroom

The PTA of Essence International School, Alhaji Lawal Idris, Councilwoman Jannie L. Blackwell, Alh. Muhammad Yusuf Lere, Sa'in Lere, Mrs. Ajisafe, Mrs. Ubogu, Malam Abdu, Mrs Balaraba Garba, Mrs. L. Fayomi, Teams 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 and Nursery at Essence International School, Mr. Aliyu Mohammed, Bev Auslander, Diana Miller, Leslie Brown, Lisa Newby, Hajiya Bilkisu Makarfi, Alh. Sule Umaru, Honorable Jibrin, students of SS3 class of 2009, Mrs. Natalya Palanca and many others.

Against all Odds continued...

Children being what they are, are oblivious to all that is around them. They do not see the dilapidation around them. Like any child, if you give him the room to play 24 hrs, you will be his hero. Look carefully at their faces and you will read a hidden plea. They want an education so they can be better than their parents. They want to be emancipated from the monstrosity of crushing pain of illiteracy. They are fighting against all these odds and more.

Lifting our education rests with you and me. Let us in our own small way, assist where we can, to see that these children are not left to their own devices. The Open Classroom has been doing its bit by adopting LEA Ungwan Rimi Primary school in Kaduna. Why don't you spare time and visit one of these schools and see what assistance you can render. It takes a village to raise these children, our future.



Children fight against all odds for a good education.