

Glenn Edwards, Politics. Tanzania 9th July – 5th August 2012

As I had hoped, my trip to Tanzania during the summer of 2012 appeared to be of great benefit both to me and to the children my team worked with.

Firstly, we engaged in several activities in order to give the students maximum exposure to the English language. As mentioned in my original pitch, English is becoming an increasingly essential skill for most Tanzanian professional occupations, ranging from doctors, teachers, businessmen and politicians. This is because Tanzania is becoming increasingly globalised and Kiswahili, for all of its virtues, does not provide the necessary academic terminology required to master a school discipline as it is primarily an agrarian language. This is the reasoning behind the Tanzanian State requiring that school exams be completed in English.

In order to achieve our goals, my team took to volunteering to teach in English alongside DCT Mvumi's staff in a number of lessons including Biology, Physics, Civics (taught by myself), History and English Literature. This allowed the opportunity for the children to hear their subjects communicated in fluent English and helped to prepare them for their exams. My team quickly became aware of any potential hurdles that arose and responded to them. For instance, in the classroom we noticed that many students were shy and didn't want to respond to questions and would not tell us if they did not understand what we were talking about, also some students were blind and could not see the board. This problem was overcome by integrating the practice of speaking slowly, loudly, asking as many questions as possible, striving to make classes interactive, repeating difficult sentences in three different ways to explain our points, asking the class to repeat and using paralinguistic methods.

Outside of the classroom we strived to deliver the students maximum exposure to English in their extracurricular activities. This took the form of setting up and running English conversation classes for after school hours which allowed for the students to talk about their individual interests and ask questions about our lives and anything from music to global affairs. The intention of this was to provide a more personal approach to learning English and cater for individuals' needs, rather like Oxbridge supervisions! The classes proved a success as quite a few students turned up, ranging from about 10-20 per session. Further to this, my team participated in the school's debating society in which involved both us and the students in debating matches that ranged from the existence of God to political interference in education.

As for being academically beneficial, my trip to DCT Mvumi provided me with plenty of opportunities to think about my current dissertation, entitled 'Is women's empowerment in development too radical a political project?' Tanzania provided plenty of food for thought over the summer which allowed me to come to terms with my own opinions about various concepts such as culture, patriarchy, and empowerment. With regards to the culture, one phenomenon I noticed was that there was no such thing as one homogenous 'culture' or cultural fabric in Tanzania, and Mvumi, but actually what existed was a more complex and plural mosaic of beliefs and opinions. For example, historically polygamy has been quite a widespread phenomenon in Tanzania, and I did encounter cases of it, but there were some who had conscientiously taken principled positions against it. On my visit to Dar es Salaam, a local artist told me that "some people believe in having many wives, but me, I believe one wife is good, it is right..."

Crucial to my dissertation thesis is the idea that culture is more complex than traditionally made out and it seeks to play down notions of 'cultural relativism'. As for patriarchy- experience of violence and aggression towards women; the disproportional ratio of male-female employment in professional occupations and the school's staff; the existing relics of Tanzania's past such as the traditional role of males as head of the household and women's separate routes to respect- served to shed light on my preconceptions of feminism. These observations allowed me to observe both similarities and differences between British and Tanzanian patriarchy and develop my opinions that there are many different and varied struggles against men that women take but also women are often complicit in patriarchal cultural norms in order to fulfil social obligations and increase their social standing in the eyes of others.

Finally, in consideration of the concept of empowerment, the teaching itself provided me with some insights into the nature of the concept. Most importantly I learnt that empowerment must come from within and that my job as teacher was primarily the role of the facilitator rather than indoctrinator. During the teaching I took great care to lead

and not to simply lecture, to develop student's personal confidence and provide multiple responses to different issues that came up in the classes. In the English conversation classes, I also took great care to allow the student's interests to be explored and to always stress 'in my personal opinion' when discussing a potentially controversial topic, and strove to provide suggestions rather than definite answers to questions. During the English conversation classes, one student told me that 'Tanzanians don't know their rights' and this observation inspired my reading into the role of 'internalised oppression' in different cultures, which has become essential to my dissertation.

As for the running of the trip in general, we encountered no serious problems and engaged very well with the staff of DCT, with the village and with each other. Generally we were all very pleased with ourselves and we also wrote follow up reports in order to indicate how future volunteer expeditions could be improved.