

Ku-punzitsa Apunzitsi: Developing a Professional Skills Program for Teachers
Zambia
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Section I.

This project aimed to improve the teaching skills of Zambian high school graduates working at Special Hope Network (SHN). SHN is an organization that provides education and motor development programs for children with intellectual disabilities. Our goal was to improve the services offered by SHN, and, in turn, provide a better quality of life for the children and their families while also combatting social stigma against disability in Zambia. In addition to a generous grant from the Davis Foundation, our work was funded by multiple grants from our institution, the University of Virginia: the Jefferson Public Citizens program, Center for Global Health Scholar Award, the Rodman Innovation Fund, and the College Council fund.

Our team, which also included a graduate student mentor and a faculty advisor, collaborated with SHN for over a year before arriving in Zambia. Administrators at SHN requested that our team develop a project that would increase the independence and professional confidence of their teachers, all of whom are local high school graduates. The teachers were struggling to plan ahead for lessons and frequently sought the support of administrators, which was decreasing the potential efficiency of the organization. SHN felt that their teachers had the power to improve their professional skills and the services that they offered to students, but need to be given the tools with which to do so.

We researched and developed a training program that was intended to provide SHN teachers with the practical knowledge that would allow them to grow their confidence and independence, better plan and assess lessons, and improve the overall quality of offered services. Working closely with our faculty advisor, a professor of Special Education, we presented six training modules that focused on interactive, collaborative work with the teachers while delivering direct training in lesson planning, skills progression, and assessment of mastery. We demonstrated examples of effective lessons and assessment. The program was built around the phrase: "I do, we do, you do," which translates to demonstrating a skill, helping a student to perform that skill, then assessing as the student performs the skill independently. This phrase was used to create the framework for the teachers' lesson plans and assessments.

The funding provided by the Davis Foundation allowed our team to travel to Cape Town, South Africa to meet with a highly successful NGO with whom another professor from our university works closely. The Nal'ibali project, which falls under the umbrella of the Project for the Study of Alternative Education (PRAESA), is a campaign that promotes reading for enjoyment and provides reading clubs and literacy promotion in children's mother tongue across many underprivileged communities. Nal'ibali is largely volunteer-driven, and trains local volunteers to implement many of their services. We saw many similarities between the work that Nal'ibali is doing and the goals of SHN. Nal'ibali has a strong training program, has spread to communities across the country, and is now working with the South African government to improve educational offerings for students. Furthermore, Nal'ibali regularly sends home materials with students to encourage involvement of family members in each child's education - a goal also very important to SHN. We met with a director of Nal'ibali as well as the director of Nal'ibali's training program, and discussed the successes and challenges their program has seen thus far, as well as its parallels with SHN. We are hopeful that the relationship between Nal'ibali and our university will continue and grow, and that their successes will teach us new ways to bring benefits to SHN.

We faced several unanticipated difficulties. The baseline planning skills of the teachers were lower than expected. Teachers were not equipped to consistently assess students or follow skill progressions. Furthermore, we found that within Zambian culture, education focuses on rote learning rather than creativity and independent thinking. As a result, teachers were hesitant to try to new, creative activities to meet children's needs. Once we arrived in Zambia, we realized that a public service project should focus on service. We were there to serve SHN in any capacity we could, even if it required us to adjust lofty goals. We discovered that collaborative trainings were most successful because they allowed a safe environment for teachers to exercise creativity and take risks. Instead of utilizing lecture-style training, we focused on collaboration, discussion, and hands on learning. This was a process that developed throughout our time in Lusaka. The collaboration resulted in the development of a cohesive,

themed unit that included scope and sequences, lesson plans, and activities for academic, gross motor, and fine motor skills. Each activity was part of a lesson plan, which was part of a larger scope and sequence that helped the children reach further developmental milestones. The lesson plans were co-developed after observing the children, the environment, and the culture. The project culminated in unit binders left at each of the SHN centers for the teachers to reference.

This project will have a long-term impact on several stakeholders: SHN administrators, SHN teachers, students with intellectual disabilities, and the families of these students. SHN administrators will benefit from having more independent and confident employees that are better able to meet job expectations and provide high quality services to students and their families. Teachers gained knowledge essential to their ability to succeed in their job and experience the joy of seeing their students progress and achieve more. Teachers will also feel less overwhelmed because they are better able to plan ahead and have resources available to help them to do so. Because the teachers will be providing improved services to students, we expected to see positive results in terms of students' mastery of skills and higher levels of achievement and confidence. As students learn to perform more practical and academic skills, they will have a higher quality of life due to increased independence and ability to partake in activities with typically developing family members and peers. This will translate to improved well-being of the whole family; as a child becomes more independent, care-takers have more time to manage the household, care for other children, and earn an income.

It is our hope that this project is the beginning of a sustainable teacher-training program at SHN. We would like to see other students from our university develop a relationship with SHN and continue to work towards developing a comprehensive program that prepares new employees for their job at SHN and also functions as a refresher course for existing employees. From a broad perspective, we hope that such an endeavor will be reproducible for other NGOs that employ local adults as employees, particularly in educational settings.

Section II.

We define peace as the freedom to feel safe, comfortable, and secure throughout one's daily life. Freedom from discrimination, violence, and oppression are each an important aspect of peace. Our project contributes to peace by providing children with intellectual disabilities the freedom from discrimination and oppression, and the ability to feel safe and comfortable in their own country, as well as access to what is now believed to be a basic human right: education.

In the short-term, our project will provide the SHN teachers with the confidence and ability to creatively lesson plan and flexibly tailor lessons for children of different ability levels. This will enhance not only the children's academics and gross and fine motor skills, but more importantly, their ability to be contributing members of society. Our hope is that, in the long run, our training program will help SHN serve more children, further contributing to eliminating the stigma against disability that is pervasive in Zambian daily life. While developing and implementing the project, our team realized how essential contextual awareness is to any research, development, or training program. A further understanding of SHN's existing organizational structure and cultural context changed how our project was implemented.

Education creates opportunity for upward mobility, leads to better health outcomes, and improves overall quality of life. This project changed our perception of global education. We have now experienced, first hand, lack of adequate public education and its effects on a community. More specifically, we have witnessed the complete lack of opportunity for children with disabilities. While the United States education system may not have perfect educational services to those with intellectual, physical, and learning disabilities, there does exist an acknowledgement of the necessity of education for children of all ability levels.

"The greatest impact our project had was SHN's teachers' increased confidence in lesson planning." Lauren Baetsen. "Our project emphasized quality over quantity and equipped the teachers to lesson plan independently for the remainder of their careers." Amanda Halacy. "We learned that global development isn't a macro-level process. Instead, it is a series of individual actions and close relationships that transcend national boundaries and create positive social change." Emily Nemec

Appendix: Pictures



Nal'ibali: During our trip to Cape Town, we were able to schedule a meeting with Nal'ibali, a "reading club" program in libraries, schools, and community centers in six provinces in South Africa. We were very impressed by their communication network, outreach programs and training and were able to take some great ideas back to Lusaka with us.



Training Sessions: Pictured here is Lauren working with teachers from the N'gombe compound during one of our teacher training sessions. Teachers worked together in break-out sessions on appropriately placing students on the correct step of a fine motor scope and sequence.



Gross Motor Room: Pictured here are Emily and Lauren working on stretching with mothers and children at the Garden compound. We would often work with the teachers at the compounds to help implement techniques we were teaching during their training sessions. This was a great time for us to observe and learn from the teachers.