

Friendship with Japan grows at a primary school in Namibia

May 2018

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Opuwo, a town in Northwestern part of Namibia, is the residence for the Himba tribe who are known worldwide as the most beautiful tribe, and other unique tribes such as the Hereros, the Zembas, and the Ovambos. You may be surprised with the fact that there is a school in Opuwo where learners can greet in Japanese, “*Ohayogozaimasu!*” (Good morning!).

The school, named Kameru Primary Eco School, has been nurturing friendship with Japan since 2012 when its laboratory was built with the support from the Government of Japan through the Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects (GGP). Subsequently, first JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) volunteer was dispatched to the school in 2014, and the third one will be dispatched soon.



Women of the Himba tribe



Laboratory Built with the GGP

I, as the second JICA volunteer for two years from December 2016 to May 2018, teach Arts and Mathematics at Kameru. I also support Namibian teachers to plan lessons and to create teaching aids. When I first came to Kameru, especially Arts lessons seemed challenging at the school, because of lack of materials and little experience of the teachers. Being a non-promotional subject was not helping either. It looked a bit difficult for teachers to put efforts to make Arts lessons more interesting for learners, and learners were consequently looked not confident enough with what they were doing. Learners used to say “I don’t know how to draw.” and they often did not tried their best.

Thus, I tried to give lessons which make learners “want to express”, by introducing more learner-centered teaching approach and using different materials. I also tried to link Arts to other subjects, such as Mathematics, so that learners’ interests could be drawn deeper. One of the examples is “Tangram”. “Tangram” is a puzzle that uses seven geometrical shapes which make up a standard square. While learners try to solve puzzle of compositing a particular shape by moving and rotating those seven shapes, they study characteristics of geometric shapes and can be more creative in

compositing his/ her own shapes. Through the process, learners likely deepen understanding of shapes, become more creative in compositing different shapes, and to be more willing to express. Teachers have now shown more willingness to teach Arts, as I see many teachers have inquiries. These learners-centered teaching methods are being implemented to other subjects by Namibian teachers in the school, and even being shared with teachers of other schools in the community. I also arranged some opportunities to exhibit learners' art works both inside and outside the school. Such exhibitions have cultivated greater interests of parents and community members in Arts as well as in learners' activities at school.



Arts Lesson Linking with Maths

Other than daily lessons, an ICT teacher and I started managing SNS pages for the teachers to share idea of lessons and other activities among them and with the community. I can sense growing motivation among the teachers, as I witness some changes in teaching approach. Teachers tended to teach by copying textbooks on the chalkboard, and as they master “learner-centered approach”, they now teach more by letting learners try and think. Such changes are well seen especially among Natural Science teachers. A lot of practical lessons were conducted last year, and learners learnt through experience utilizing the laboratory built with support from Japan's GGP. For instance, as part of science lessons, students grew spinach in the school garden, cooked eggs with experimental solar cookers. The water facility and spacious shelves at the laboratory have given extensive opportunities for various learning activities.



A lesson in the Laboratory



Growing Spinach to Eat and Sell

Furthermore, I conducted club activities after school for learners to experience Japanese culture and to communicate with learners in Japan. It is notable that Kameru learners joined a collaborative learning project called “Japan Art Mile.” (<https://artmile.jimdo.com/info-in-english/>) Through this project, learners worked together with Hara elementary school in Ako city, Hyogo, in Western Japan. The learners of both Kameru and Hara schools learned and shared respective culture and tradition by exchanging videos via internet. After presenting culture and tradition each other, they jointly created a mural as a final product of the project. First, Hara learners drew half of the mural. The half completed mural was shipped to, and arrived at Kameru after one and half month. Then Kameru learners completed the other half. Various pictures were jointly drawn under one big tree, aiming at delivering a message of “We all have beautiful culture”. The mural was now sent back to Japan and is going to be exhibited at different places and occasions, including Tokyo Olympic & Paralympic Games in 2020. Through the project, Kameru learners not only have gained interests in Japan but also have become more proud of their own culture and tradition. They commented “It’s very exciting that people will know us through the mural!”



**Wednesday for Japanese Club
“Beautiful Origami Crane”**



The Mural Created with Learners in Japan

Japan which is physically located very far from Namibia seems to be getting closer to the minds of the people in Opuwo, especially learners at Kameru.

I hope that the Namibian learners keep cherishing their beautiful culture and tradition, and grow up through the friendship with Japan.