

October 3, 2010

Hello!

This week at the school, Ayla and I tried to find ways to make our classes more efficient and effective for the students. For instance, while school is supposed to dismiss at 1:30 p.m. each day, the Ghanaian teachers almost always cut the classes short and tell the kids to leave early. This can be extremely frustrating because Ayla and I follow a timetable and teach certain classes at certain times. Because there is only so much we can do to control when the Ghanaian teachers tell the kids to go home, Ayla and I have begun combining classes when possible. For example, one day we were scheduled to teach Creative Arts and Religious and Moral Education in the afternoon, but we knew that day that the teachers were going to cut us off early. Our solution was to combine the classes by giving a Religious and Moral Education lesson on the importance of caring for animals and having the students draw different types of animals and how people can take care of them.

Ayla and I have also modified our teaching strategy for Mathematics. Because the students vary so much in their math abilities, we have started making math worksheets tailored to each student's skill level. We give the students individualized math worksheets at the beginning of the class period and have them try the problems while we walk around the class and give help when needed. This seems to be effective because it allows us to give the kids the individual attention they need. We also give the kids individualized math homework.

We have also continued to give the students spelling tests at least twice a week. Ayla has been keeping

track of which words the kids are improving on and which words they are consistently missing. Each time a student misses a word on a spelling test, we require him or her to copy the word three times, and Ayla or I talk with the student about why the word is spelled the way it is. The students do seem to be improving their spelling each week, which is very encouraging.

Teaching Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is still very challenging, and I am always trying to devise ways of illustrating computer functions without actually using a computer. This week, I was trying to explain what it means to open an icon on a computer desktop, and Ayla had the good idea of using one of the student's bags to illustrate that when one double-clicks on an icon, it opens the contents of that icon. I had each student tap on the girl's bag twice and then open the bag to see the contents inside. I am hoping to charge my laptop this week so that I can possibly bring it in to class to let the students actually see what I have been teaching them.

This weekend, three other volunteers and I traveled to the southern part of Ghana to explore some of the smaller towns along the coast. This trip was less planned out than other trips I have taken in Ghana, but it was probably the most interesting weekend I've had so far. We left on Thursday evening for Takoradi, a fairly large city in Ghana's southwest corner. We didn't arrive in Takoradi until after midnight and had no hotel reservations, so we ended up wandering around Takoradi for half an hour, until we found a room for two that the four of us shared. The next morning, we took a tro to Nzulezo, a "stilt village" that consists of wooden houses elevated above water on wooden poles. I helped paddle on the one-hour canoe ride to the village (which can only be reached by boat).

After spending the night at a hotel we found with the help of a couple of locals in the junction town of Agona, we made our way to the small village of Egyambra. We had read that Egyambra was known for a sacred crocodile pond and that, for a small fee, visitors could see the village fetish priest feed a live chicken to one of the sacred crocodiles. This sounded too interesting to miss, so the other volunteers and I woke up at 5:30 am. so that we could hopefully make it to Egyambra by 7 a.m. (we had also read that this ritual only takes place in the morning). As we would soon find out, however, 7 a.m. wouldn't be nearly early enough.

When we arrived in Egyambra, our taxi driver (who actually became very important to our eventual success in seeing the crocodile feeding) told us to follow his lead as we walked into the home of the chief of Egyambra. After introducing ourselves to the chief and several of what I believe were village elders, a long discussion ensued among the elders about whether or not a crocodile should be summoned. Ultimately, the chief decided that, because the crocodile had already been summoned that morning for another group of Obrunis, we would have to come back before 5 a.m. the following morning to see the ritual. After agreeing to return the next morning, the other volunteers and I bought and shared with the chief and elders a customary bottle of liquor.

After saying our goodbyes with the chief and village elders and returning with our driver to his taxi, we realized that it was still before 9 a.m., and we had no idea what we were going to do until 5 a.m. the next morning. Our taxi driver recommended that we make our way to Busua, a small fishing village with an

apparently amazing beach. He called his friend, a characteristically friendly Rastafarian who worked for a very small accomodation in Busua called The Black Mamba. After arriving in Busua and realizing that staying at The Black Mamba meant staying in a pleasant (if un-airconditioned) chalet right on the beach, and that we would be paying less than \$5 a night each, we decided that hanging out on Busua Beach until the next day sounded like a pretty good idea.

After spending the day exploring the beach and visiting a colonial slave fort in the neighboring village of Dixcove, we returned to our chalet to sleep for just a few hours — we had to wake up at 2:30 a.m., because the same taxi driver was returning to pick us up at 3 a.m. in order to get us to Egyambra in time for the crocodile feeding ritual. Upon arriving in Egyambra for the second time, we made our way to the sacred crocodile pond, where it seemed everyone in the village had gathered to watch the feeding. The fetish priest approached the pond and began singing out to the crocodiles, while pouring a bottle of Coke into the water (the significance of pouring Coke into the water was never really explained to us...). Soon we could see a crocodile swimming toward the priest, and it took only a few minutes for the crocodile to walk onto the pond's shore, and for the priest to feed it a live chicken. The people in the village clapped and cheered, and after the crocodile returned to the pond, villagers rushed into the (now

apparently sacred) water, which they drank and used to bathe their children.

Our weekend spent exploring less touristy villages along the Ghanaian coast was definitely more spontaneous and less conventional than the weekend trips taken by many of the volunteers I've met, and it was probably my most interesting weekend yet. This weekend definitely makes me wish I had more time in Ghana, so that I could explore more of the country's less-traveled areas.

All the Best,

Abby