

THE EDUCATOR'S EXTRA

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Growth and Reflection in Namibia

Landing at Hosea Kutako Airport outside the capital Windhoek, the landscape is spotted with camelthorn trees and dry riverbeds. In the distance, one can see the undulating terrain of the Auas and Eros Mountains. The sun appears larger, more intense; an organic heat lamp brightly shining down on Africa's hidden gem. January 3rd, we began our two and a half week trip across Namibia. It is the middle of summer in Namibia and temperatures can reach up to 106 degrees Fahrenheit (41 degrees Celsius). Sunscreen and hats are not recommended, they're a necessity. After getting settled in Windhoek, acquiring the two new Cisco devices intended for two new participating schools in the Building Cultural Bridges program, we began our drive to the North...no, not the Game of Thrones North, the Namibian North, or affectionally known as [Ovamboland or O-land](#). Roughly a seven-hour drive to Ondangwa, we encountered a heavy amount of rain. Typical for this time of year as it is the rainy season in Namibia. The substantial amount of rain was evidently followed by an immense amount of greenery. An auspicious sight for farmers and livestock in the North.

After our arrival in Ondangwa, we made the short drive up to Ongwediva to meet with our participating Namibian teacher, Sarafina. Bright and ambitious, Sarafina provided us directions to the school where she taught, Hashiyana Primary School, and her journey on becoming a teacher at the school along with her fascination with classroom technology. Upon arriving at the school, we were fortunate enough to meet the Principal of the school, Amon Ndeitwa. The first term of Namibian schools had not yet begun (classes begin on January 15th), so Principal Ndeitwa was in his office prepping for the upcoming term. After a successful Cisco DX installation and training in Hashiyana Primary School along with feedback from Sarafina and Principal Ndeitwa on what can make the BCB program better, we were off to the coastal city of Swakopmund.

Driving south, through Etosha National Park, into the town of Outjo and then past Karibib and the Uranium mining town of Arandis, we became engulfed by the briny sea air of Swakopmund. Our stop in this German-influenced and highly visited tourist city of Namibia was to meet with teachers from two participating schools, Westside High School and Festus !Gonteb Primary School. American student response letters in hand, we were warmly greeted by three teachers at

Westside High School. Ingrid, Tamara, and Grizelda, provided a comprehensive assessment of how the Building Cultural Bridges program had been operating in their school. Discussing their interactions with American teachers, new ideas for projects that Namibian students could present to their American counterparts, and steps to incorporate STEM education such as coding and programming into videoconferencing sessions, the amount of enthusiasm could be tasted in the air. Closing out the meeting with Westside High School, we headed out to Festus !Gonteb Primary School – only a few kilometers away.

Arriving at the school, pre-school preparations and admission were in full swing. Administrators moving swiftly between offices, parents patiently waiting to enroll their child in school, and an element of eagerness lingered amongst it all. Delivering response letters to the Principal of the school, our time was brief but we were left impacted by the vision of the school communicated by the Principal. This was the second school he would be operating as Principal over due to a vacancy recently created in a neighboring school. Undaunted by the challenge, he emitted confidence in his students' and teacher's participation in Building Cultural Bridges and establishing a rapport with their American counterparts.

Maintaining the tight schedule, our time in Swakopmund came to an end and we got on the dusty scenic back roads toward the inaugural town of the Building Cultural Bridges program, Oranjemund. Some 11 hours of driving through majestic and surreal topography that only Namibia can offer, we arrived in the town juxtaposed between the nourishing Orange River and mighty South Atlantic Ocean.

With only a few days to spend in Oranjemund, we reconnected with students, teachers, and principals to identify new engaging classes and perform maintenance on the videoconferencing devices located in the two respective primary schools. In addition to the maintenance and class identification, our colleague Vern, was able to interview a teacher and a principal about their experience in education in Namibia. A short video documenting these interviews is currently in the making!

Oranjemund felt akin to a homecoming. Navigating one's old neighborhood, remembering the sights and smells, encountering friends of past, reliving the moments that brought the Building Cultural Bridges program to what it is today; it is appropriate to admit a sense of sentimentality. Bidding adieu and heading north to Oranjemund's coastal cousin town...**[click here to finish reading the rest of our trip to Namibia.](#)**



This is Steve.

**Steve didn't plan
Professional Development.**

Steve is having a moment.

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Coming up with a Professional Development Plan for your Teachers?

Here are 7 Helpful Questions to Ask First

1. What are your top instructional goals for the year, both at the school or at district level?

Your staff learning goals must be driven by your goals for students, so be sure to check with everyone involved. This includes district and school leaders and more importantly, teachers. Check data from all sources available including summative and formative assessments, attendance records, and curriculum maps. The more information that goes into the planning of teacher professional development, the more aligned it will align with your goals and vision.

2. How do our instructional goals translate into learning outcomes for teachers, specific teams, and all individuals involved?

Decide what achievements everyone should strive for, then flush out and determine what goals might suit specific teams and individuals. You may find some teams or individuals, such as special education or subject specialists, will likely benefit from targeted goals of their own.

3. What teacher professional development options are already available, both internally and externally?

Take full stock of all options already offered by your district staff or assessment providers and take advantage of those that can help you achieve your instructional goals and objectives.

4. How can we make sure we have time for teacher professional development?

You need to proactively carve out and plan the time necessary for meaningful professional development. Successful professional development is a regular and ongoing activity that must be taken into account when scheduling activities, events, and meetings.

5. What can we do to make the learning practical?

Take the appropriate measures to connect learning activities to teachers' daily work. Professional development sticks when it can be used daily. Teachers should leave their development sessions with insights, strategies, and the right tools that they can use to be successful and implement in the classroom right away.

6. How will we know if our teacher professional development plan was successful?

In order to determine success, the question must be asked of "what metrics will you use to measure success?" Build those into the program to continually evaluate progress, and be prepared to adjust or refine it based on the results you see.

7. How can we engage staff through the three phases of professional development: planning, implementation, and evaluation?

Ensure your staff members see professional development efforts as a process which lets them actively identify, participate in, and work towards their learning needs. Staff have to have buy-in in the entire professional development process, from planning to evaluation.

Interview with Raj Sundaram

Secondary School Teacher

Engineering Lead Mentor of the FRC

Robotics Team

Eduprize Schools - Gilbert Campus

MicroGrant Program Awardee

How you do approach STEM education?

By taking into consideration my students' skills, their abilities and available materials in conjunction with current resources and learning objectives. I will design the lesson plans accordingly with all of that in mind.

What kind of lessons or curriculum do you use with your available technology?

I find a lot of assistance in following Project Lead the Way's established curriculum for Gateway and Engineering courses.

Where do you see technology in education and in the classroom moving forward?

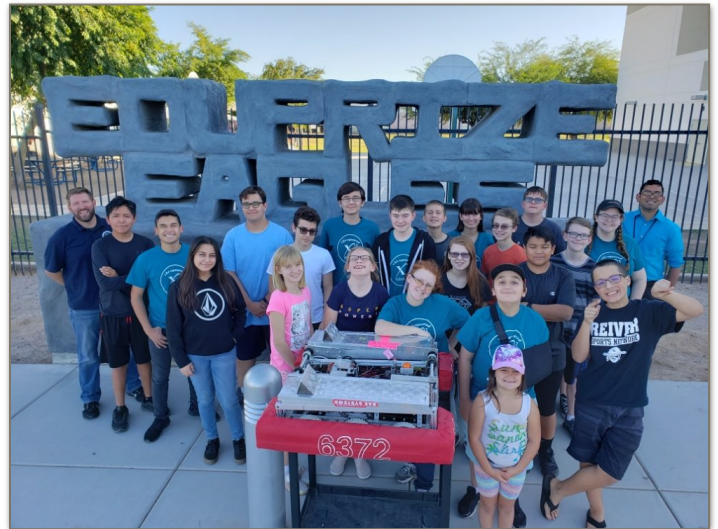
I believe that the future of tech in education is going to become more intuitive, interactive and accessible for students. With this happening, there will be a reduction in paperwork and whiteboard materials while becoming more and more electronic and digital.

What is your favorite part about teaching?

I really enjoy seeing the sense of accomplishment and effort put in by the students. Witnessing them achieve their goals is something that makes teaching worth it all.

How has winning the Microgrant affected yourself and your students?

Winning the Microgrant has helped our Robotics program greatly by designing and getting necessary parts, prototyping them, and producing them in a much faster way! It's been a huge help to the Robotics program.





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"Nine-tenths of education is encouragement."
- Anatole France