

Pangani: School Experiences

The historic 18th and 19th century buildings of Pangani, built by African, Omani and Indian merchants, are testament to the vibrant networks of trade which once existed between Africa, India and Arabia.

Pangani, one of several such entrepôts along the Swahili Coast, ideally situated at the river mouth, saw goods trans-shipped from ocean-going vessels to river craft and caravans for dispersal inland. Similarly, goods from the African interior arrived for loading and exporting afar.

ArchaeoLink is working with the UK Arts & Humanities Research Council-funded *Co-Production Networks for Community Heritage in Tanzania* (CONCH) project researchers and Pangani community members to develop educational programmes showcasing this facet of the Swahili Coast's rich cultural heritage.

When we met the MP for Pangani, the Honourable Jumaa Hamidu Aweso, he said, "Education here needs a lot of help!" So it was with some trepidation that we visited our first school, Pangani Primary.

State primary schools teach in Swahili, so I was accompanied by Monica Shank Lauwo (who joined the project as a British Institute in Eastern Africa attachment student) to interpret and assist. Some private primary schools teach in English; while all secondary schools teach in English.

We had been told that teaching methods were "chalk and talk" and learning was by rote. This was hardly surprising with most classes numbering between 60-80 children and utterly devoid of the materials and equipment available in most developed countries' primary schools.



Patricia looking at Activity Sheets with teachers from Pangani Primary School.



A class at Pangani Primary School.

At a brief introductory visit we arranged to return the following day for lengthier chats with the teachers. Our purpose was to discover what, if any, teaching took place regarding Pangani's built heritage; would teaching materials to assist such be welcome; if so, how should they best be delivered ?

At Uzikwasa's request, we'd prepared a number of Activity Sheets of puzzles which youngsters could use in their museum.

These were themed on archaeology; trade; buildings; and building materials. We thought we'd show them to teachers as diverse examples for encouraging the transmission of knowledge. Two presentations of photographs, one of historic buildings and the other of the archaeological process, were also prepared to facilitate discussions.

We were warmly welcomed at Pangani Primary and spoke with two groups totalling 8 teachers. They were keen to have any additional teaching material we could provide, but with no computer, or printer, our usual method of electronic delivery of material was superfluous.

One of the teachers, Harieth, was busy making a poster to illustrate a teaching point and we were shown others they'd produced. So short of paper were they, that a couple had been drawn on discarded sacks! This gave me the idea of producing posters to stimulate discussion. The teachers enthusiastically described how they would use them and asked that we should also provide teachers' notes and a sample of appropriate questions to ask.



Harieth from Pangani Primary prepares a poster showing various settlement types.

We also discussed producing some laminated cards with the puzzle activities whose answers could be written by pupils in their exercise books, while other of the puzzles could be put onto posters for class work.

I reluctantly told them that all would be possible only if funding became available. They assured me it would be found... We were then invited into one of the classes to chat to the children who, while lively, were extremely well behaved; and we took the opportunity to invite them to the site excavation open day.



Teachers at Funguni Secondary School wanted to discuss Evolution and Africa's role in the peopling of our planet.

We spent the best part of the next day at Funguni Secondary school and spoke with 20 teachers in several groups. All were young and enthusiastically received us. None were from Pangani so most were only dimly aware of its cultural heritage.

They wanted to know our thoughts on Evolution unsure of how to equate the "fact" we were descended from chimpanzees with the fact that chimpanzees were in existence who had not become human.

Using Goggle to find pictorial examples I acquainted them with early hominids as well as various recent extinctions. We moved on to discuss the development of Homo sapiens from central East Africa out into the rest of the world. One teacher asked if we could let him have “any historical films” by memory card or stick, which he could use in his class. My thoughts turned to the many BBC productions which would suit his purpose and made a mental note to pursue his request.

Returning to the subject of encouraging a greater awareness of Pangani’s heritage, it soon emerged that were we to write a number of comprehension texts with appropriate questions focusing on trade, historic buildings and even archaeology, they would be very welcomed and used, not only in English lessons, but also in Civics and History classes. Comprehension exercises form an important part of examinations and we were shown exam papers to better understand the standards expected. While the school had 3 computers and two printers, they lacked ink and paper: factors again relevant to our delivery methods.



Funguni’s Secondary School’s motto is “Forward Ever, Backward Never.

After several hours talking with the teachers, we were invited to speak to one of the classes. Again the class was large, with 3 pupils often squeezed into a desk made for two. We observed for a while as the class was

taught how to write a speech; this included their working in groups to produce one. After which, to stimulate discussion, I showed them photos, on my computer, of some of the historic buildings and of the dig in progress, and invited them to the Open Day.

Over the next few days I visited five more schools and made return visits to three of them to deliver the Activity Sheets, discuss how they can be used and to talk with classes.

The topics were archaeology, with questions

about how an archaeologist might know where to dig; and historic buildings, and what they can tell us about Pangani’s past. From the warmth of our reception, and the breadth of the smiles, the visits were interesting experiences enjoyed by all.



Class of lively engaged children.

My visit to Choba Primary also resulted in the head deciding to immediately take as many children as two jeeps could carry to visit the site: 18 children saw the excavation !



Lack of resources means even discarded sacks are made into posters,

The poverty of the area is reflected in the schools, and even the teachers who told me they had, “all the gadgets,” sat in breeze block classrooms with bare walls.

It was clear that any additional teaching materials would be gratefully received, however all schools were eager for comprehension texts and a few posters.

Yes, education in Pangani, as the Minister had said, and perhaps in Tanzania, as in many places, needs a lot of help ... but the dedication, enthusiasm and passion of the teachers we met is second to none.

Patricia Hart, Project Director
ArcheoLink

Note:

Schools visited: Pangani Primary, Funguni Secondary, Choba Primary, Al Hijra Secondary, Funguni Primary, Istiqama Primary, Al Hijra Primary. Discussions also took place with teachers from Bishop Henry Gogarty Secondary, Arusha, when they visited Pangani.

