

A Day at School

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Thirty minutes before the school day begins children gather at school and enter the classroom sweeping and cleaning following the model, "can not learn in a dirty class." Cleaning of the school grounds outside is daily practice, as well. Teachers demand to see an accumulation of paper and other debris, by the pupils each day. Sweeping the ground and watering flowers yields the school an inviting aspect.

GONG, GONG, GONG, GONG The school 'bell', an iron wheel hanging from a tree on a rope and stricken with an iron bar, announces the start of class. Pupils line up outside short to tall, boys in one line and girls in another. The teacher examines each child and pronounces cleanliness or not, of teeth, hair, skin, and clothes.

Once inside, "Good morning, sir/madam."

"I am very fine. Sit down."

"Thank you sir/madam," and down sit all 46 pupils.

The teacher verifies who helped clean and maintain the class and school grounds. The pupils, who did no cleaning or maintenance, "You go outside."

To those remaining in the classroom, "Hi, Children, Take out your exercise books, for math. And, get your pencils." "Find your partners. We have no math textbooks in this grade, so look to the chalkboard and I will write the long division problems".

Boys and girls in uniforms of black trousers and white shirts or black dresses and white blouses scramble and clatter desks getting exercise books and pencils ready.

The teacher writes on the blackboard with white chalk. Without direction pupils begin copying the long division problems in their own math exercise books. Even with good attention and copying skills, it may take 30-minutes for a pupil to have a page of 10 practice math problems, before instruction or attempting math exercises. Of course errors in copying create a new degree of confusion. There are no textbooks, workbooks, copy machines or money to provide necessary teaching resources.

When the pupils begin copying from the chalkboard, the teacher goes to the pupils sent outside and directs them to some cleaning activity. As they finish, these pupils return to class and begin copying math exercises from the chalkboard.

Pupils at other schools wear red, blue, green, or brown uniforms. Ties are worn that match the uniform color. Black shoes are standard with uniforms. Some exceptions are allowed to slip by, even flip-flops. As the year goes by, uniforms can become old, worn, misshapen, and outgrown. At the more rural schools, children do not wear uniforms. Everyday clothes, usually one's best

but often torn, misshapen, or dirty, are worn and many families do not have enough money at all for shoes and children go to school barefoot.

Pupils can start school in Grade-1 at age 7, so Grade-4 pupils are usually 10-years old. But, some pupils do not start at age 7, nor attend continuously, so can even be nearly 16-years old. Passage through school carries a degree of honor in Zambia, so effort is expended for progress through the grades until ideally completing Grade-12, at whatever age. Grade 1- Grade 7 falls under the "Free Education" mandate, while for Grades 8-12 there is a fee for qualifying examinations and for each of 3 terms per year.

More than forty children in each class (a class can even have 70 pupils) sit ten together, at desks facing each other to make one table. Four groups, perhaps named "Orange", "Banana", "Apple", "Paw-Paw", thus work together in the Grade-4 subjects: Bemba, English, Math, Religious Education, Health, Social Studies, Science, Music, and Physical Education. In class Four-A "Banana" and "Paw-Paw" are weak and slow skilled, while "Orange" and "Apple" are sharp and advanced. Classes Four-B and Four-C are in a like way assembled.

After the teacher finishes supervising the pupils outside, s/he calls for a 'star' pupil from the "Apple" group, to "go to the board, and work problem number one. Show us what we learned to do yesterday."

A multitude of hands wave in the air and the teacher randomly calls the name of one pupil. The pupil goes to the board, takes a piece of chalk from the teacher and stands with a vacant look in the eyes.

Suddenly, the entire class bursts into laughter. The teacher chastises the child for "wasting time" and calls for another volunteer, warning that there should not be a "repeat of such foolishness."

Teachers and adults speak quite frankly to children as if they are small versions of grown-ups, or mannequins nearly, who do not react to brusque words. Amid more laughter, the pupil gives the chalk to the teacher and returns to the desk. Another pupil goes to the board and begins the long division problem. Pupils in the class watch and talk between themselves, but not so loud as to distract.

After 90 minutes of class, the teacher announces "Break" for 30 minutes. The pupils stampede for the door calling to one another and pushing their way outside. Once outside they gather in groups to talk and play. Many walk to the market and others gather around vendors selling ice, biscuits, and sweets on the school grounds.

A teacher asks one pupil to, "run to the market and buy sweet potatoes, for me. Here is 2000 kwacha. That is how much I want." Children are utilized as extra hands, in this manner. At school, though, it can be a stamp of honor to be so entrusted.

After break, pupils are called back to class by the 'bell' and enter the class for Social Studies or English Literacy. While pupils begin assignment of work from the chalkboard, the teacher calls attendance.

Through the school day, about 3-hours, lessons progress as such. Three or four of the subjects each day, alternating between the nine subjects with each subject covered at least twice and many more than twice in a five-day week.

The school structure is small brick and concrete with a metal roof, all on one level. With one classroom for each grade, Grade 1 – Grade 9 and nearly 140 students registered for each grade 1 – 7, 'Free Education', there are three sessions each day, beginning at 7:00AM and ending 10 hours later. A different teacher for each session follows the same basic lesson plan. Pupils in Grade 8 and Grade 9 pay for entrance-exams and school, and so with similar numbers of pupils yet longer daily classes for more technical subjects, have two sessions each day.

"Good-bye Class"

"Thank you teacher for working today"

The children, some running and others meandering, drop school at the conclusion of class. Many play until dark after changing from the school uniform, many have chores at home including younger brothers and sisters to tend. Some are sent to the market to buy food for the family's night meal. Some to work at the market stall, and some to do piecework for meager family income.