

March 13, 2006

Here is an email from one of the two UVic students who are in Zomba and Magalasi as part of a practicum. These are their impressions of our project.

“Sorry it has taken us so long to get back to you, we have had some problems with email, and for some reason did not receive your email until Lois forwarded it to us. Nevertheless, we would be more than happy to share with you our brief experiences with the Magalasi program and staff. Keep in mind, however, that we have visited the program only twice and met with the staff for their training once at Chancellor College, so our impressions are not as fully informed as they might be. The biggest thing that has impressed us is the incredible dedication of the staff (I hear they are mainly volunteer) to the program, the children, and to their own learning. When they came to visit the on-campus preschool program (Chirunga ECE Centre, where we are doing our practicums) and do a brief informal training, they were very open to new ideas and eager to learn and improve their own program. Lois has reported that they have put much of this learning into practice already, despite their limited resources.

The other thing that stood out for us very strongly was the sheer number of children in the program and their own eagerness to learn. The staff-to-child ratio is far lower than early childhood programs in Canada, and yet the few teachers there are are somehow able to maintain order and control, packing the small thatched



classroom full to the brim with eager children reciting numbers and singing songs. But because there are so many of them and they range in age so much and there is a severe shortage of resources it seems to us that it is hard for the teachers to be able to offer all the ideal learning opportunities that the community would like to give their children. Also, as all of you involved in the program have noted, the nutrition needs of the children also have been standing in the way of their learning, and healthy development, and have rightly taken top priority in the aid agenda. We were impressed with the community's dedication to their children, with women from the community taking turns to come and cook the porridge for the children. Even so, there are many children who look like they have suffered malnutrition

for some time, and several of the older children had their infant siblings in their care while there. And yet, these children were all shy smiles and eagerly gathered around to learn and hear anything we had to say or see what we were doing (though this was partly due, I'm sure, to the strange colour of our skin, and the shiny cameras in our hands!). We took some pictures which we would be happy to share with you. Also, we will be going back again before we leave and I'm sure will have more to say.

Hope this is informative in some way, let us know if you have any questions. Also, I (Nashira) will be coming back to Victoria at the end of April and would love to get involved in that end of the project if there is any area that needs some more hands or ideas!

Warm regards,  
:) Nashira and Chelsie"

