

Tanzanian teachers learn new skills at South Arbor Academy

Posted by [Diane Brandt | News Special Writer](#) June 15, 2009 10:59AM



Lon Horwedel, The Ann Arbor

NewsSouth Arbor Academy music teacher David Middlin leads a campfire sing-along for the kindergarten and first-grade classes,

James Bitesigirwe has noticed a few differences between classrooms in America and those in Tanzania, where he teaches social studies, vocational skills and the Kiswahili language.

But the biggest one is this: "In Africa, kids are there for listening," he said. For the most part, classrooms in Africa are not interactive. There are no projects or hands-on learning opportunities.

And that's something he and his colleague, first-grade teacher Adlicta Mgelwa, hope to change. They are spending more than six weeks at South Arbor Academy, a charter school in York Township, as part of a teacher exchange program.



Lon Horwedel, The Ann Arbor NewsTanzanian school teacher Adlicta Mgelusa sits with kindergarten and first-grade students during the campfire sing-along at South Arbor Academy.

Later, two teachers from South Arbor will spend three weeks working with teachers at the Kibangu English Medium School in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, to help improve proficiency of students and teachers at the East African school. They also hope to set up a library there.

"About every country in Africa uses a teacher-directed approach," said Marilyn A. Meell, coordinator of graduate studies at the Concordia University School of Education in Ann Arbor. Meell is a volunteer helping out with the teacher exchange.

She said one of the goals of the program is to help the Tanzanian teachers move away from lecture-based teaching, guiding students in a more active, indirect and project-based mode of learning.

After a brief, initial visit, the African teachers were sent back to Tanzania with three crates of educational materials and supplies before coming back for a longer stay.

Students at South Arbor raised a portion of the cost of the teachers' airline tickets by holding jeans days.

Students who wanted to wear jeans had to pay a dollar. The money was later matched by The Andrah Foundation, a charitable group.

An exchange of pen-pal letters helped teach the South Arbor pupils about student life in Tanzania.

"Here, we take a lot of things for granted," said 10-year-old Maria Contreras, a fourth-grader. "I've learned something about how their culture is."