

The ups and the downs in a year in EducAid.....

2007–2008 was the year that saw EducAid hit the 1,000 mark: going from 20 students on the back veranda of a rented house in September 2000 to over 1,000 students across three secondary schools and one primary school in 2008. It was also the year in which we saw two more EducAidians entering the medical school, one joining the Arts faculty of Fourah Bay College, two more starting accountancy and many more joining other faculties across various tertiary institutions in Freetown and Bo.

Tragically it was also the year when we lost a 15-year-old student. In March, Mohamed died of what was almost certainly a fairly treatable seizure, but was diagnosed as 'demon possession' by the government hospital workers. He died on the way to the witch doctor that they sent him to. Once again, we see the case for education made eloquently.

Barely a month later, we were hit by tragedy again. Two cousins, both EducAid students, the best of friends who did everything together, including the normal brotherly falling out and making up, had a more than usually serious argument. The younger one (14) stabbed the older one (Ezekiel, 17) with a pair of scissors and killed him. That day, two youngsters lost their lives. The case is made not just for education in terms of literacy but also in terms of thinking, in terms of attitudes and in terms of democratic and peaceful solutions to problems.

To the non-Sierra Leonean staff, there was a double shock: not just the ease with which a simple argument over who would or would not throw away the rubbish could end so tragically, but maybe even more at the low-key response of all our other students. The youngsters with whom EducAid is working are far too used to death. They see death around them on a daily basis because of poor health care and poverty, but also because so many of them were exposed to such extraordinary sights of death during the civil war. Sierra Leone is a country at peace today. But, we forget at our peril how long the effects of the war can be on everyone exposed to it.

As a result of Ezekiel's death, our up-coming citizenship education week became the 'Ezekiel Williams Memorial Week'. The peer mediation, 'What future am I working towards?' and citizenship challenge projects all focused on peaceful solutions to problems. Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Romero and Martin Luther King Junior were identified as potential role models and the youngsters were excited by the possibility of a new way of showing courage.

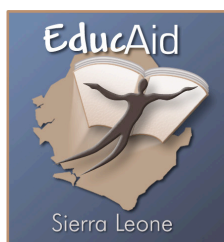
Over 60 students have joined a Human Rights Amnesty International Group. The waiting list for peer mediation training has had to be closed for the moment and our students are proud to be learning what it is to be positive and peaceful citizens alongside achieving high academic standards.

Website renovation.....

The EducAid team in the UK is made up exclusively of volunteers. As a result, we don't always do everything as quickly as we might. The website has been one of the things that has had to wait some time for our attention. Keep an eye out over the next few months though, as we will be adding many new pages ranging from possible collaborative curriculum projects for donor schools, to media references to EducAid and photos and info about how our donors raise their money.



Learning to play Scrabble in a Life Skills Class



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And when they leave school?

There are thousands of Sierra Leoneans in need but EducAid has limited resources. How can we make most effective use of these? We have come to realise that those who don't get into the habit of 'putting back' are unlikely to learn it later. We are very proud of the willingness of many of our ex-students to come back to the schools and work to assist their juniors to access what they themselves have received.

The Women's Project in Rolal was started by ex-EducAidian volunteers; the Women's Project in Magbeni has now been opened by ex-EducAidian volunteers and we have many male volunteers serving in all the schools. Their commitment and professionalism is exemplary and a source of great inspiration to the administration and all the other teaching staff.

This voluntary service has also now become a platform for sponsorship by friends of EducAid of some of our most committed ex-students into university and other tertiary studies.

Education and Democracy

"Put yourself down, if you want to learn"

If it is not heard spelt out explicitly, and it often is, it is implicit in every aspect of how nearly all schools are run in Sierra Leone and indeed in much of Africa. Not only is rote learning seen as the only really effective methodology both by staff and students), one's dignity and self value seem also to be regarded as more likely to get in the way of learning than to be a vital foundation on which to build up skills and knowledge. Democracy is possible with a population where people hold opinions based on freely accessed information, can challenge, hold to account and critically evaluate the leaders. It is not ever going to be strong where having a different opinion is regarded as insubordinate and disrespectful and where it may well earn you a good hiding or even, as you get older, a fine from the local chief or headman.

This year, in addition to the invitation to reflect and develop opinions that is implicit in all EducAid teaching materials, specific 'thinking skills' have been explicitly introduced to as many classes, assemblies and tutor group sessions as possible across the programme. We hope this will contribute our drop to the ocean that we feel is swelling towards a stronger and stronger thinking and conscious democracy in Sierra Leone.



The sign painted above the Magbeni School Entrance

One Day's Wages

Alongside continuing growth in student numbers, we are seeing food and fuel rising in price, just as they are in Britain. This means that each year we have to raise a substantial amount of extra money [the food bill has increased by over £10,000 for the year].

To help us achieve this, we are launching an appeal for **One Day's Wages**. Could you, your family, your team at work or even your whole office, give one day's wages to EducAid? For more information, including what different things cost in Sierra Leone, visit our website.

Please pray for:

- Sierra Leone and its people in their pursuit of peace, democracy and justice.
- Young people, and particularly girls, seeking their education.
- EducAid to be faithful to its mission to bring Christian education of the highest quality possible to as many disadvantaged Sierra Leonean youngsters as it can.

Christmas Gift Certificates are available from james@educaid.org.uk or through the EducAid website.