Argy Nestor and Lindsay Pinchbeck travelled with Go! Malawi, a non-profit organization working to improve education and reduce poverty in the Ntchisi District of Malawi. They provided a 10-day workshop with teachers from Mpamila Primary School and neighboring schools.

**Overview** During the workshop ideas were explored in Drama, Music, Movement, Poetry, Storytelling, and Visual Arts. Teachers developed individual action plans around a Fiber Arts project. Each day underlying themes such as Hopes and Dreams, Traditions, Making Mistakes were woven through the work. At the end of the ten day workshop the community gathered to celebrate teachers and students from the local community.

**Daily Projects and Goals:**

Each day teachers explored themes relevant to their experiences through the creative arts.

Day 1 - Hopes and Dreams: *Journal making, planting a seed in our journals, names*

Day 2 - Traditions: *Share stories of customs and traditions, paint explorations*

Day 3 - Patterns and Rhythms: *Song, box making and poetry*

Day 4 - Trust: *Cyanotypes, trust walk, introduce individual action plans*

Day 5 - Stories: *Telling, sharing, applying stories to action plans and lessons*

Day 6 - Making Mistakes and Letting Go: *Drawing exercises, printmaking*

Day 7 - Walls: *Accordion books with Malawian sayings, watercolor techniques*

Day 8 - Another Way: *Patterns and colors, kaleidocycles, folding books*

Day 9 - Support and Reflection: *Finishing individual projects, letter writing, paint pendulum*

Day 10 - Celebration and Sharing: *Gallery walk, community celebration*
Classroom Visits:

Each morning we visited the classroom at Mpamila Primary School. Classes were mostly large and the youngest grade had over 100 learners. Teachers had very small pieces of chalk and divided paper into four. Learners shared pens. In the younger classes led by female teachers song and movement was often observed. Classrooms were cold, students wandered in at different times and many children were outside the classrooms playing while lessons occurred. Memorization and repetition were observed as common ways to learn. Clapping was used to engage and celebrate learning.

In Malawi teachers are paid approximately $85 a month. Teachers may be moved by the government to a new school without their consent at any point in their career. The school had no electricity, some classrooms have no tables or chairs. The teachers embody hope, determination and commitment.
Flow of Daily workshops:

**Opening Circle:** Sharing inspiration, checking in and sharing new ideas and questions. Introducing the theme of the day.

**Experiential Learning:** Offering new skills and materials daily. Drawing, Painting, Poetry, Book making, Drama and Storytelling activities, Printmaking, Felting, Photography and more.

**Journaling / Share:** Daily time for reflection to consider how activities can be applied to the classroom. Individual and group work.

**Projects:** Fiber Arts/Quilt focus and individual action plans.

**Closing Circle:** Traditions of song, take aways, 3 happy moments and a question.

Working with the teachers we observed excitement and connections being made among the group while making art together. Our own relationships were quickly established due to the implicit emotions contained in art making.
Experiential Learning - building skills and getting to know materials

Cyanotype Mural: Exploring science and art through experience. Combining science, art and a little magic we observed teachers nervously engage in the mysterious material. Teachers tentatively engaged in the activity but were precise and organized about their design, building on previously introduced ideas of pattern. Participants stood in rows and arranged materials in lines. This activity also engaged Standard (grade) 7 students which shifted the dynamic of camaraderie. The light sensitive material took approximately 10 minutes of exposure. Initially the group was silent, by the end everyone joined in singing to pass the time.

Cultural Connections: We explored sayings from Malawian traditions and shared songs together in both English and Chichewa. This allowed the group to learn and experience together. We were having trouble learning Chichewa and collaborated with the teachers creating songs to learn phrases. This was another relevant example of how the arts helps us learn.

Other examples of experiential learning included drama activities built around the learners’ examination questions, creating group activities around the teachers’ challenges, singing songs from their traditions, discussing customs and modeling team teaching. Trusting the process of the arts allowed us all to move through challenging conversations safely.

One Head cannot hold up the roof

_Mutu Umodzi Susenza Denga_

Malawian Proverb
Journaling / Sharing: Sharing ideas lifted us all up - exploring collaboration and encouraging the sharing of ideas allowed for the deepest noticeable growth. At the end of the workshop we asked teachers to reflect on their experiences and to consider again their Hopes and Dreams.

“To share and continue doing the work we have done in the classroom.”
Mirrium

“I want to improve in my creativity when I go back in September. I have to be the best teacher I can. ”
Kalambo

“To share mainly knowledge and again laugh.”
Gift

“Now flexible to share my views and my voice.”
Olipa

“To expect my learners to have high achievements. I expect good results.”
Bosco

“My Hopes and dreams are being a good teacher with the knowledge you have given. I am more important now, I will be more than I was.”
Cecilia

“My hope is education does not end so I can master what I have learned.”
Virginia

“Caring, friendly, kind. When I understand the content it makes me be kind and caring.”
Jane

“This training is helpful to acquire different skills, artwork, the quilt, it will help my learners to have skills for the future. I appreciate different ways of sharing and appreciating everyone’s work.”
Sekera

“I want to be an expert in Arts so I can be able to teach other subjects without much ado.”
Kagwa
“My Hope is to be a good teacher that I can help my learners pass exams using arts and other concepts in other subjects. If possible I would like to see myself on a higher level in education.”

Thom

“Trust is the best way to achieve.”

Stellah
Quilt Projects - Individual Action plans

Each afternoon we engaged in an ongoing 2 week project. Teachers applied the skills acquired in our experiential learning time to their individualized projects. Teachers were supported to use a variety of arts to develop individual quilts / banners to hang in their classrooms to inspire their learners and remind them of the experiences we shared as a group. Teachers were encouraged to develop individual action plans and share ideas and lesson plans with one another. Projects included, lessons in geometry, parts of speech in English, mathematical operations, literacy skills, storytelling, and environmental awareness.
Reflections:

* We observed teachers digging into the thematic ideas such as Hopes and Dreams.

* When we observed one of the teachers in her classroom we saw deep joy, energy, singing and movement. Other teachers began to recognize her as a strong leader.

* Teachers quickly became open to share ideas and skills with one another.

* Teachers shared their final work eagerly with community members the gallery session.

* Lots of laughter was shared and relationships built.

* Some disconnect between the workshop and the classrooms was observed as teachers began to try ideas out with their learners. With time and support we hope to encourage the teachers to apply their experiences.

* By the end teachers were teaching each other, and we observed learning and sharing amongst one another as they got excited about a new book making activity. Their ability to collaborate and share ideas grew quickly through the activities presented and experiences shared.

Conclusions:

* Making art together built connections and allowed cultural differences to be minimized.

* Singing together had a strong power to connect us all.

* Sharing stories allowed us to be human and find common threads.

* Sharing with the community created excitement locally.

* Teachers were eager to share learning with teachers in neighboring schools.

* Asking questions became easier for teachers with practice over time.

* We left feeling confident teachers would build on their experiences and most importantly support one another as lifelong learners, in a safe and supportive environment.
Support and Celebration

On our final day we turned our classroom space into a gallery to celebrate the work created throughout the workshop and share with the community. Local students and community members came together for a celebration and certificates were given to each teacher at a public presentation. The volunteers of Go!Malawi gave baskets of arts supplies to each school participating in the workshop. The biggest joy was seeing the excitement as the teachers shared their work with the students, elders and chiefs of the community. The buzz in the ‘gallery’ was alive and there were many sparks of inspiration from the visitors. It was a day of celebration.

Hold on to what is good
Even if it is a handful of earth
Hold on to what you believe
Even if it is a tree that stands by itself
Hold on to what you must do
Even if it is a long way from here
Hold on to life
Even if it is easier to let go
Hold on to my hand
Even if I have gone away from you.

Pueblo Blessing

Teachers gather and celebrate with a song - Ndikusangala, Ndili Bwino.
**What’s next?**

* We have set up a Face Book group to continue conversations, share ideas and resources. Most teachers have access to the internet through phones. Communication is spotty but possible.

* Sweetland School in Hope, ME and students of MPamila Primary School will participate in pen pal opportunities. We are reaching out to other educators and schools to participate.

* Create a book group / library send resource books for teachers to inspire and continue arts integration work.

* Recruit and support US teachers to visit and continue the work in Malawi in the future possibly through the Maine Arts Leadership Initiative (MALI) or other interested groups in Maine and beyond.

* Search for support to arrange for a teacher exchange program for Malawian teachers to visit Maine.

* Share presentations and articles through stories and images of the workshop.

* Send requested materials periodically with volunteers heading to Malawi, through Go! Malawi.

* Share lesson plans and ideas between schools in US and Malawi.

**Supporting ideas, readings and inspiration (books we packed in our suitcases):**

Pedagogy of Hope - Paolo Freire

The Pocket Pema Chodran - Pema Chodran

Carlina Rinaldi - Reggio Emilia

The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind - William Kamkwamba & Bryan Mealer

Margy Burns Knight - Welcoming Baby, Talking Walls, Africa is not a Country.

Malawi Folktales 1 - Veronica Maele

**Articles and links:**

https://meartsed.wordpress.com/tag/go-malawi/

Our Self Reflection - Creative opportunities

We were inspired to create throughout our time in Malawi. As artists and educators we found ourselves journaling and stealing creative moments whenever we could. We collaborated and created a quilt together. Argy dug clay and created beads as gifts for the teachers. Lindsay made photographs and sang songs with the local children.

The beauty and magic of the people we met and environment we explored left lasting impressions which we continue to work to understand. The arts again provide a platform for this work to continue. We are so grateful.

Argy Nestor    Lindsay Pinchbeck    July 2016

Argy Nestor is the Director of Arts Education at the Maine Arts Commission. She served as the Visual and Performing Arts Specialist at the Maine Department of Education and spent 30 fun filled years in the classroom teaching visual arts. Argy has been recognized for her accomplishments in teaching and has published many articles and presented on many teaching and learning topics. She is most proud of the Maine Arts Leadership Initiative (formerly the Maine Arts Assessment Initiative) and the work that all arts educators do in classrooms across the state.

Lindsay Pinchbeck is the director of Sweet Tree Arts and founder of Sweetland School, a Reggio-inspired arts integrated program in Hope. She has been teaching in art and alternative education settings for the past 17 years. Art, she says, can be shared by all ages and all abilities on many levels: “We create as active participants, engage as observers and share experiences together that enrich our lives and build empathy when we explore the world through the arts.”

For more information please contact Argy and Lindsay at anestor@maineoutdoors.biz, sweettrecarts@gmail.com.

Go! Malawi  http://go-malawi.org