

International Education - Professional Development Programs for Counselors in Cameroon

<https://www.open-dreams.org/post/international-education-professional-development-programs-in-bamenda-and-douala-cameroon>

Bamenda: On Saturday, February 2nd, 2019, at the DHS Hall, Baptist Center, Nkwen Bamenda, despite the security odds, we ran a seminar with High School Counselors and teachers from Secondary Schools to Higher Institutions of learning in Bamenda and some from community-based access organizations, totaling 51 in all. When Open Dreams started operations in Cameroon in 2013, one of the biggest challenges was getting teachers/counselors to advise students on the choice of universities to apply to (internationally), write comprehensive letters of recommendation which reflect the students abilities beyond academics, appropriately follow up students in schools, respond to email regarding students' applications to universities, manage students' documents and e-files, have a comparative understanding of the North American and European systems of education and reporting students scores to their standards, guiding students on standardized tests and helping them prepare, mentor ambitious candidates and provide a range of best-fit options to help advance their academic goal etc.



Moments before the program take-off

At 8 a.m. when all participants were settled after the preambles and sharing of resources, the program kicked off with a selected number of counselors and teachers, sharing the successes and challenges they have working with students who are applying for studies abroad. This part was coordinated by Claudette Fumeh, the Open Dreams Secretary, who noted down the most important points, that were added to the objectives of the seminar. She went further to make a presentation on the benefits of international education and global citizenship, and the role of the International ACAC in international education.



Volunteers from Open Dreams assisting in the program

By 9 am, James Akaba, 2018 International ACAC Scholar queued in with presentations beginning from a comparison of the college application processes in Cameroon and in North America (and other countries), letters of recommendation, managing students' documents, the CommonApp and other similar platforms, student mentorship etc. The different interactive presentations, which were interspersed with video projections ran for four hours, with a 40-minute lunch break in the middle.

At 2 pm, there was a presentation by Peter Acham from the University of Bamenda on student leadership, the specific needs of students who want to study graduate programs abroad, the challenges they face and how to work closely with faculty to meet up the needs of foreign universities. Among the issues tackled were personal statements, research proposals, publishing in international journals, getting student records and letters of recommendation on time, leadership etc.

Given that it was the International Education Week, we joined the world to celebrate the merits of international education, while calling for more rationale from actors in the anglophone conflict in parts of Cameroon (20%), which had crippled the functioning of educational establishments for months. The musical celebration, which started at 4pm, was led by an

Open Dreams Scholar, Sumfor Loic, who had composed a special song, "We don tire" (*We are tired*). Find the video below, which resonated with the theme, "Education First" and thus raising the global awareness of the importance of education in citizenship development, peace-building, enhancing understanding among people and raising the human development index.

Douala: This is the economic capital of Cameroon, which also hosts thousands of English-speaking students who are internally displaced, thus making it an important focus for academic guidance. On October 3rd, 2019, in collaboration with school authorities and local organizers, we ran very interactive and enriching sessions on international education, college admission counselling and increasing needs to nurture the potential in Cameroonian students.



With over 60 teachers, we had workshops with teachers on using online tools to support students in their college journey. We discussed letters of recommendation, college choices, managing students files, academic mentorship and leadership. We were very fortunate to have in our midst Lucien Giordano and David Ingram, international education experts who had flown into Cameroon for a 5 day working visit.

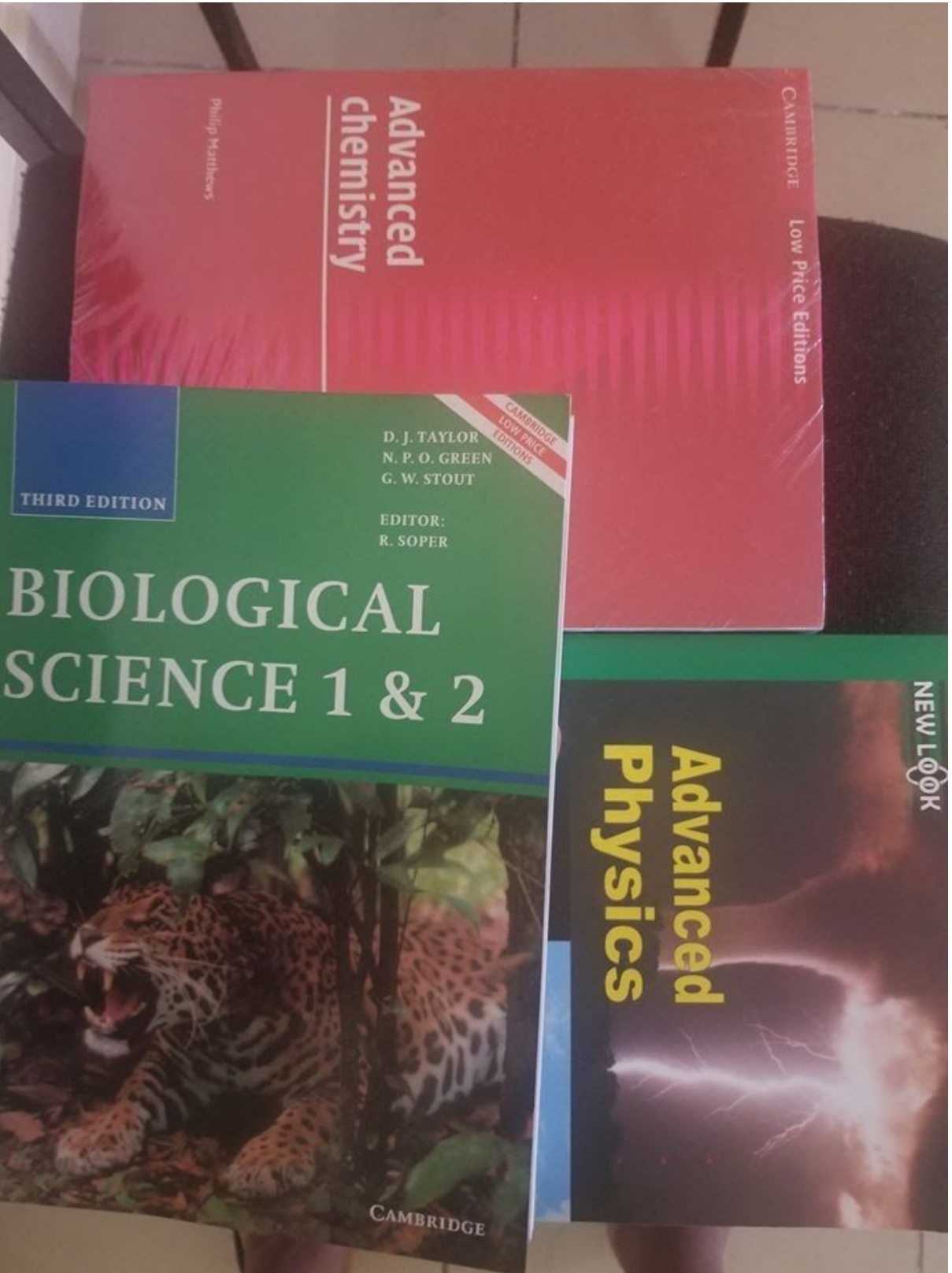


The presence of the international august guests at the workshop and their very inspirational presentations on their career journey, their experiences working and supporting international students and counselors over the years and their strong passion for supporting students through every step of the way re-ignited zeal in the teachers, students and the administrators we had sessions with. David (*speaking in the first picture below the video*), who had left his previous job as a law-enforcement officer to switch over to education because it is a profession that seeks to build than to punish, made a very insightful and fulfilling case on the importance of building the next generation through education and opening up the world to them.



Lucien spoke about the incredible opportunities in international education and the nurturing of a collaborative platform that students in Cameroon can benefit from to achieve their dreams. He encourage students and teachers to dream really big. His presentation is captured in these words by Nelson Mandela, “Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mine worker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one

person from another.” Lucien and David ended up making a donation of expensive books to the School in Douala (picture below)



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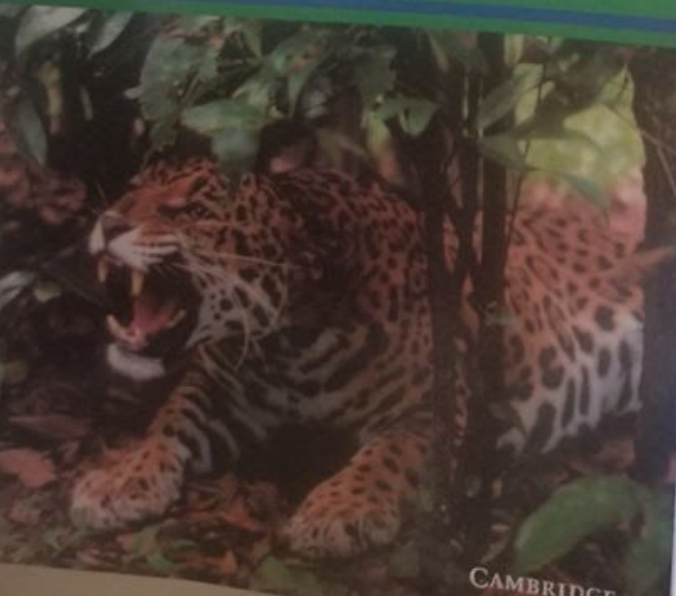
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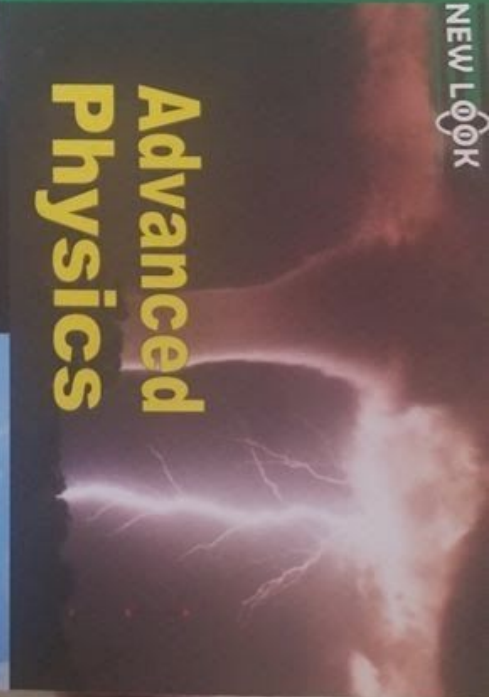


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The program ended with souvenir photos as we set the foundation for counselors and teachers to work confidently with their students as they prepare them for college.

These were made possible, thanks to the Opportunity Grant from the International ACAC (*NB. The International Guests took care of their own expenses in full*). You may follow [this link for another part](#) of this series of programs.