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## Learning at Taonga Market

F. Edward Williams  
*University of Lynchburg*

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## Ta, Ta, Ta Taonga Market''

### F. Edward Williams

Almost everyone views education as a path to an easier and more satisfying future. Many places in Zambia are far from local Basic Schools and maybe on the other side of a river hosting crocodiles. Countless children, malnourished and undeveloped, lack sufficient strength or energy for long walks of ten or more kilometers to school. OR, the Basic School, with limited resources and insufficient assigned teachers bound for the "Education for All" mandate by the government, is crowded by pupils.

Interactive Radio Instruction uses precisely planned instruction broadcast over radio waves each day and gives pupils without access to stable Basic School instruction a lesson comparable to that in Basic School.

"Grab your books and grab your pencils." "Let's get ready to learn!" So sing the teachers for Learning At Taonga Market, the Interactive Radio Instruction broadcast. All of the pupils follow these instructions they have learned through rote memory after some days of the program. Because children do not have a grasp of the English language of the broadcast, Mentors, who are not trained teachers but are adults with proven success in school, translate the program into local language and lead pupils through the lesson using a guidebook.

45 minutes before broadcast, at the same time everyday, pupils gather at the Learning At Taonga Market School location, which may be a physical structure or only at a convenient location such as a tree. Pupils here, too, learn one "can not learn in a dirty class", wherever it may be, and cleaning of the Learning AT Taonga Market School grounds inside and outside are a daily practice.

Pupils line up short to tall, boys in one line and girls in another. There are no uniforms for Learning AT Taonga Market schools. Pupils wear everyday clothes, often torn, misshapen, or dirty, and many families do not have enough money for shoes so children go to school barefoot. The mentor examines each child and pronounces cleanliness or not, of teeth, hair, skin, and clothes. The mentor takes attendance 30 minutes before broadcast. A quick review of yesterday's lesson reviews strengths and weaknesses to help pupils stay on target for learning progress. The Mentor and pupils use this 30-minute pre-broadcast time getting ready for concentration during the upcoming broadcast. As in any school, there is some talking and playing between children, but not a great deal because this is an important opportunity for them. Without Learning AT Taonga Market they would have NO school.

A few minutes before scheduled broadcast time, the Mentor turns on the radio and calls the pupils to attention. Everyone settles into their seats, with exercise books and pencils, whispering to one another, and attending to the radio. Suddenly, "Ta, Ta, Ta, Taonga Market," and today's lesson begins, as the pupils sing along with the radio.

The broadcast lesson is only 30-minutes long, so attention of the pupils and Mentor needs to be one hundred percent. From the radio, directions translated by the Mentor for pupils to stand, and then a song:

"One and one, what is that?"

"One and one what is that?"

"One and one is two."

Interactive activities and songs create interest and help focus attention by the pupils. Sometimes the teacher in the radio broadcast talks directly to the pupils and always gives direction to the Mentor.

Pupils rarely cause a distraction. If one does, s/he is sent from the class to parents and community leaders who are charged with the responsibility of ensuring befitting behavior of the pupil, from "this day on." Misbehavior by one child is not permitted as a detriment to others in the class.

Learning AT Taonga Market lessons are deliberately structured. Today's lesson is built on yesterday's lesson. Attendance to every lesson is essential, so pupils make every effort to be at school. A child, who misses a day will ask friends and try to get the lesson as s/he can.

After conclusion of the daily broadcast, pupils talk and sing and play while getting ready for a 30-minute post-broadcast session. This time is not quite so tense with attention, but is equally important. Now, information from the broadcast is re-explained or clarified, with additional practice and individual attention provided, as needed.

Government Basic Schools are using the structured lessons of Learning At Taonga Market to help with the shortage of trained teachers in the Basic Schools. Nearly all pupils in Zambia can sing many of the songs from Learning At Taonga Market Interactive Radio broadcasts. People listen to the broadcasts throughout Zambia, as entertainment and self-enrichment.