

PROMOTING EDUCATION IN AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION... Education in Africa has been a long journey of evolution through the history of the continent and continues to grow today but why has it been so difficult? Why are literacy numbers so low? What challenges is Africa facing that could be causing all this? And what can modern design do to reverse these problems? Through researching the history behind the African people and their cultures some of the mysteries of the education systems can be revealed and understood. Some issues have been resolved but many remain untouched. From a design standpoint, there are many ways to improve ones learning just with the impact of a clean, well-designed environment. Color, lighting, and materials all impact the interior while external features like on-site electricity and athletic tracks revolutionize the schools that kids learn in. However, before all of these things can be implemented in a new-build project, we must first understand how we got to where we are now.

BACKGROUND... Africa's history with its education systems began in the pre-colonial period. At this time the many different tribes in Africa had very hands-on approaches to learning and teaching their children. Education was on a very isolated level with each tribe practicing their own education systems. They usually involved telling stories that taught important values and learning skills such as dancing, farming, wine making, cooking (mostly the women), and in some cases certain members of the tribes learned how to practice herbal medicine, how to carve stools, and how to create masks and other furniture.

This period ended once Europeans began to colonize the continent. The colonists changed the education by twisting it to their will. They only taught what they found useful to them. The natives began learning practices in intensive labor that required little skill because this benefited the colonists greatly at that time. Slowly, the colonists erased African culture and tongue with strict curriculum and adjusted education to fit their agenda. With less community awareness, efficiency in learning skills, and understanding of the past, African communities began to suffer in education and prosperity.

Between the 1950's to 1990's African countries finally regained their independence. With this freedom they began to reform education into a hybrid of colonial teachings and native values. However, policymakers prioritized secondary and tertiary education without setting sights for universal primary education and the continent is still trying to mend the affects of this today.

EDUCATION TODAY... Due to Africa's history, the impacts have stunted its education system today. Many programs are set up to reform and repair it such as the UIS and UNESCO with the first step being to educate those that can make a difference. They provide the following facts.

- Sub-Saharan Africa currently has the highest rates of education exclusion within the continent with over one fifth of children between the ages of 6 and 11 out of school followed by about one third of children between 12 and 14.
- Without urgent action the region will experience even worse statistics due to a rise in the population of children at ages where schooling is necessary.
- Some major issues within education in Africa are a lack of proper teaching, school access to potable water and electricity, and textbooks needed for learning material.
- The exclusion rate for girls is higher than boys with about 9 million between the ages of 6 and 11 never going to school at all compared to about 6 million for boys. To fix the issue, policymakers are issuing specific indicators related to access to separate toilets for girls and boys and the presence of female teachers, who can serve as role models and encourage girls to continue their education.

COLEMERE PRIMARY SCHOOL... Due to the lack of focus on primary education by policymakers this building was designed to optimize learning and maintain higher enrollment numbers with fewer dropouts. To do this, the building has several additional features in place aside from the requirements set by the Republic of South Africa.



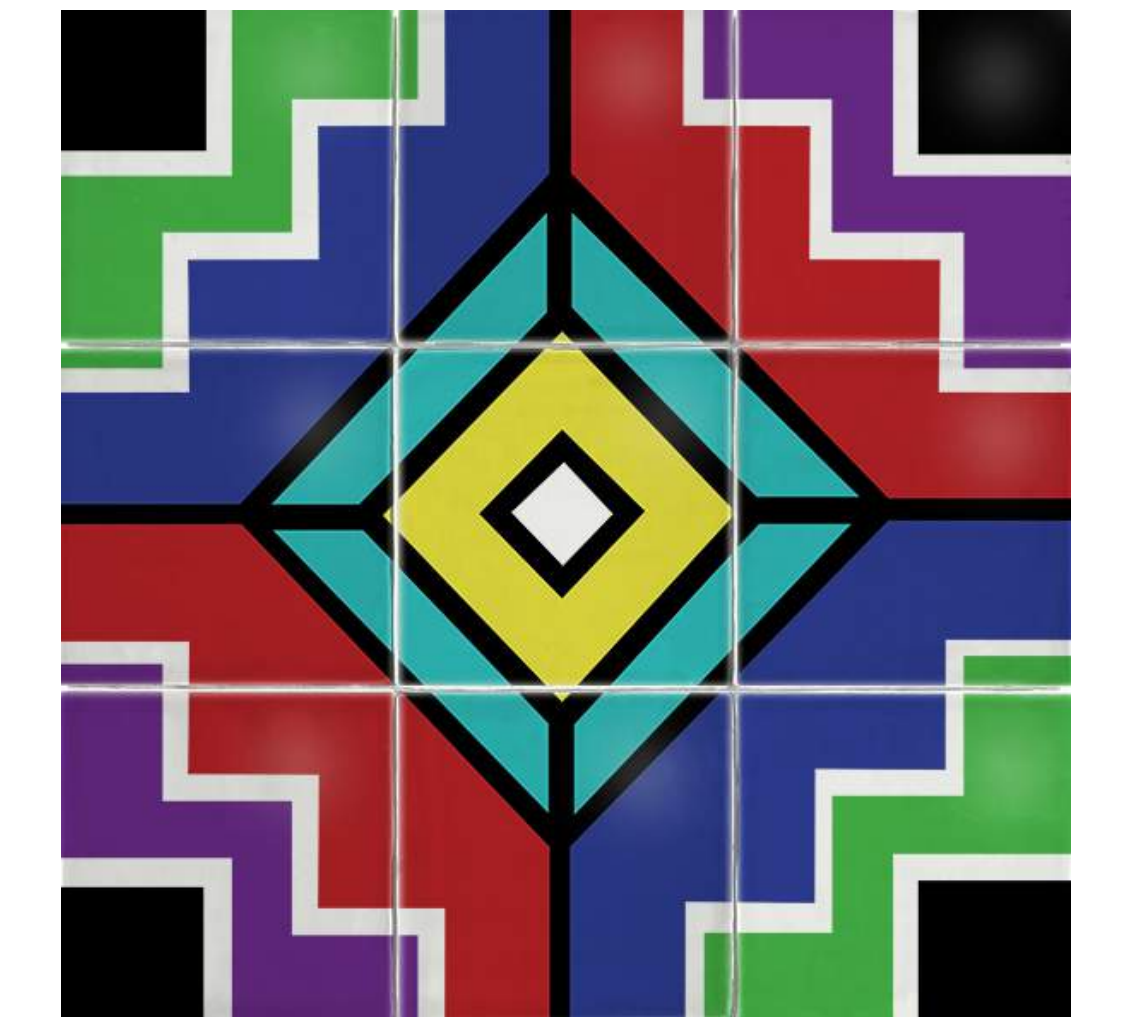
EXTERIOR... The exterior of the school is designed to blend in with the land around it but also bring clean lines and angled roofs to portray a modern look.

The various colors relate to the cultural emphasis of the building because South Africa is known as the "Rainbow Nation." This is due to them having a wide range of different cultures.

The materials of the building were chosen with the local economy in mind. Each of the materials are native to South Africa and will engage the builders nearby instead of shipping them from across the world. This will also provide jobs to the locals while the school is under construction.



FLOOR PLAN... The floor plan for this school was designed with strict intention. The colors at each of the main exits are for way finding and means of egress in the case of an emergency. They achieve this safety goal while also providing fun shapes and pops of color to bring energy into the space. The carpet tiles were chosen in a deep red color to stimulate learning and productivity while also serving as a durable, low-cost material. At the main entrance there is another safety measure taken. The second pair of double doors is to remain locked at all times going into the building but unlocked coming out. This ensures that all visitors entering the building will pass through the main office before going any further.



CULTURAL EMPHASIS... There are multiple factors that connect this building to the diverse culture in South Africa and this logo was created to show how the different cultures become one. The sun with the South African flag in the middle is meant to show that each culture finds harmony in the place they call home and it is what connects them all.

In the logo each ray of sunlight has its own symbol and each symbol represents one of the most common cultures in South Africa.

KHOIKHOI and SAN are the leaf because they were known as "bushmen." They were skilled hunters and gatherers. Their tracking skills are still necessary for the fight against poachers.

ZULUS are the spiritual bird because their beliefs are based on ancestral spirits which appear mainly in dreams and a supreme being who is rarely involved in the activities of the mortal. Tragedy and illness are blamed on the evil spirit.

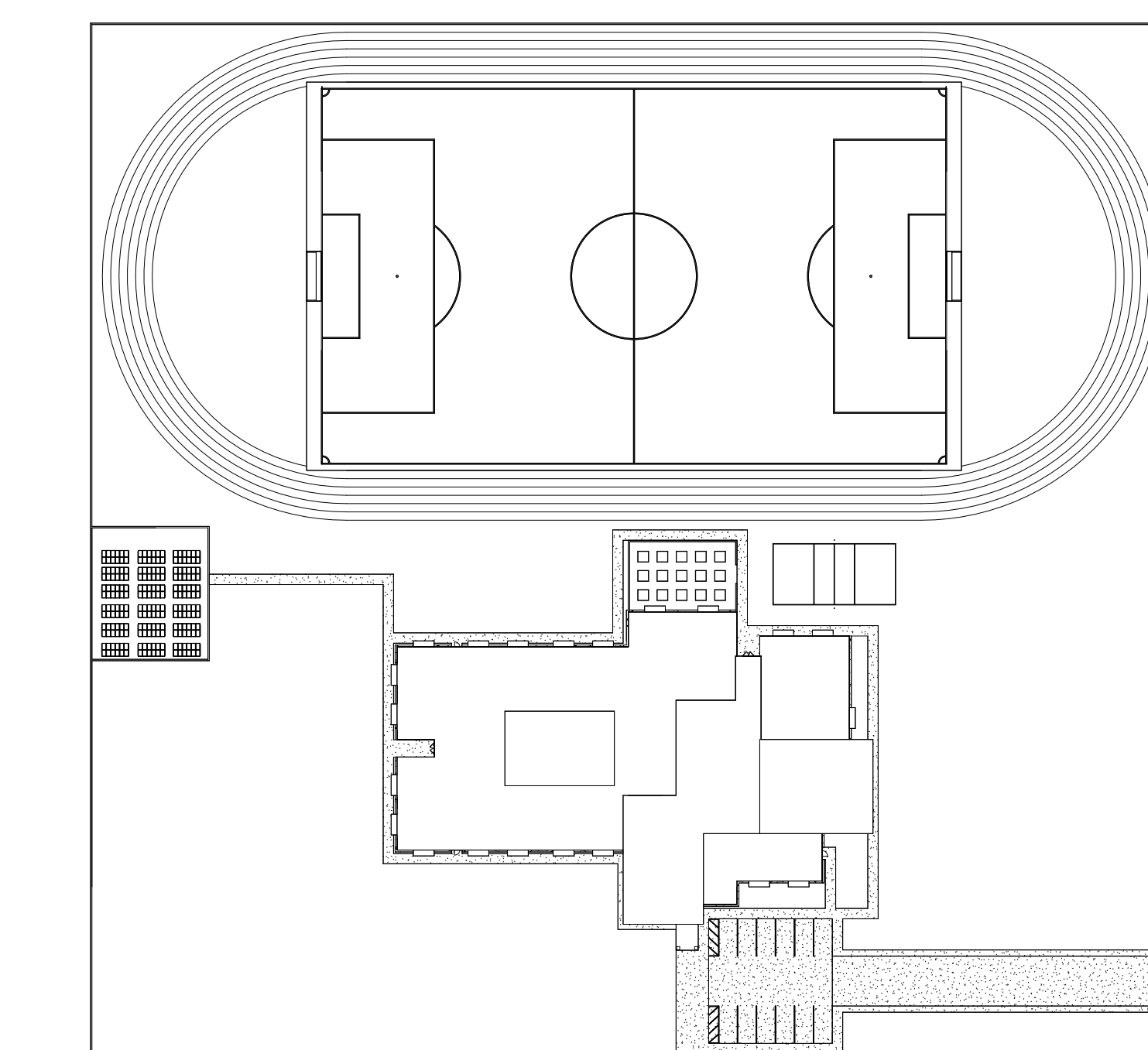
XHOSA are the book because they have a strong oral tradition with stories of ancestral heroes. Ancestral worship is common practice and young men undergo a rite of passage. Stick fighting is a common sport among young men looking after cattle. Women mainly tend crops and look after the home.

NDEBELE are the geometric shape because they are known for the skilled women who decorate their houses in beautiful geometric designs. The skills are hereditary, and women are tasked with the responsibility of teaching their daughters. The shapes used in the decoration are inspired by their fashioned bead work. They also have neck rings and striking traditional blankets.

SOTHO are the growing people because they organize their villages into age sets. Each one is given specific responsibilities and they graduate from one age set to another. Their traditional folk art includes pottery, bead work, decoration of house, and weaving.

VENDA are the water because their traditions and culture are built on mythical beliefs and water. They believe that lakes and rivers are sacred and that rains are controlled by Python God. Lake Fundudzi is one of the sacred places among the Venda and hosts the annual rites.

NDEBELE TILE... This custom designed tile is based on the geometric designs created by the Ndebele people and is also incorporated as part of the cultural emphasis. Each restroom contains a beautiful accent wall with this tile applied to give them a pop of color and attribute to the culture in South Africa.



SITE PLAN... The site for the building was carefully planned to fit the needs of the school. There is a large concrete wall surrounding the perimeter for safety precautions and many features inside as well.

There is a fenced off area for photovoltaics that provide the school with on-site electricity as well as a full length soccer field, a six lane running track, and a volleyball court.

Behind the school is another fenced off area that serves as a community garden. The students will learn how to grow and take care of their own plants while also providing a source of fresh food for the class.

CONCLUSION... In conclusion, Africa's education system still struggles with many different challenges today but through good design strategies and modern innovation, we can give Africa the opportunity for great education and the ability to thrive. All it takes is for people to care a little more about equal opportunities for education worldwide. We can reverse the percentage of illiteracy, enrollment, and dropouts if we consider their needs and find ways to work with the many cultural barriers that make learning difficult.

Through designing for everyone we can bring the luxuries of modern design to all. Let all new spaces be designed to help kids grow and fuel their passions.