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IMPRINT

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Programme Development
Hermann-Gmeiner-Strasse 51
A-6010 Innsbruck
Austria
Tel.: +43/512/3310-0; Fax: +43/512/3310-5087
e-mail: forum@sos-kd.org - www.sos-childrensvillages.org

Responsible for the contents:
Christian Posch
Editor-in-chief
Karin Demuth
Associate editor:
Sirje Raagmets, Barbara Schratz, Gisela van Bommel
Guest author:
Zaida Albino Loroño, Heger Akrout, Fábio José García Paes, Manuela Hinteregger, Daniel Ihansekhien, Ashot Kocharyan, Tajudeen Oyeleye, Virginia Paterson, Barbara Prashnig, Sirje Raagmets, Divakar Ratnadurai, Tsering Thondup, Gisela van Bommel
Translators:
Language Services team of the General Secretariat, Lucy Percival and Ann Drummond
Graphic design, typeset:
Johanna Romillo
Cover photo:
Joris Lugtigheid
Printing:
smart letter & Services, Innsbruck
Dear reader,

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) focus heavily on school education. Indeed, the second MDG calls for all the children of the world - both girls and boys - to be able to complete a full course of primary education by 2015. According to the 2010 UN report on achieving the Millennium Development Goals: “Enrolment in primary education has continued to rise, reaching 89 per cent in the developing world. But the pace of progress is insufficient to ensure that, by 2015, all girls and boys complete a full course of primary schooling” (cf. UN MDG report 2010, p. 16).

The third MDG runs “Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015”. The UN report of 2010 adds: “In 2008, there were 96 girls for every 100 boys enrolled in primary school, and 95 girls for every 100 boys enrolled in secondary school. In 1999, the ratios were 91:100 and 88:100 for the two levels of education, respectively. Despite this progress, gender parity in primary and secondary education - a target that was to be met by 2005 - is still out of reach for many developing regions” (cf. UN MDG report 2010, p.20).

SOS Children’s Villages’ contribution

So how is SOS Children’s Villages contributing to the realisation of these goals? The 2010 statistics show that 95 per cent of the children on SOS programmes received either primary or secondary school education, or vocational education. The results of the Tracking Footprints Global Report show a similar picture: 98 per cent of the adults who lived in SOS Children’s Villages as children have a formal school diploma. Gender quality has been achieved here since this goes for both girls and boys (cf. Tracking Footprints, Global Report 2010, p. 16).

As part of the Formal Education Policy, the groups of children that SOS Children’s Villages targets (those without parental care and children at risk of losing parental care) will be expanded to include children in the community who do not have access to formal education. The biggest challenge according to this policy is developing good opportunities for education for the target groups together with the state, the community and other parties. This can be accomplished, for example, by providing training and further training for teachers, through quality-improving measures for existing schools, or through the creation of new opportunities for learning.

The primary objective of the policy therefore is to further develop the quality of the existing education opportunities in the community, in partnership with the relevant parties. In doing so, SOS Children’s Villages will place more importance on working together with partners to design and create than having sole responsibility. In this way, more children can be reached, and greater
sustainability will be achieved. Should it be necessary for SOS Children’s Villages to build schools or kindergartens due to a lack of plausible school-building opportunities, then this should be done under the premise that these facilities can, in time, be successfully taken over by the state, the community or by other parties.

**This edition of FORUM**

This is what the Formal Education Policy says, and you can find a summary of the policy in the centre of this magazine. What the policy also calls for is “effective” and “relevant” education. But what exactly does “relevant” mean here? In her article “What type of education?”, Barbara Schratz attempts to answer this question and colleagues from different parts of the world also offer their views on the matter.

One thing is for sure: a solid vocational education is relevant. “Competence and practical skills” deals further with this topic. In this edition of FORUM, you can also get to know some of the vocational training centres run by SOS Children’s Villages. Despite their diversity, they all have one thing in common: they tailor the education they provide to the demands of the local market, and are very successful in their work.

In order for the policy to be implemented, an integration process is needed in many of the SOS Children’s Villages-run education facilities, which is described by Virginia Paterson and Barbara Schratz in the article “Schools as spaces for learning and living”. What the policy means when a new SOS Hermann Gmeiner school comes into being is explored in “Your school, my school, our school”.

Also at the heart of the guidelines - as already described - is the cooperation with state-funded schools. Sirje Raagmets and Ashot Kocharyan explain further in “Paradigm shift” how this cooperation can be successful.

An interview with Siddhartha Kaul allows us a glimpse into the education work being carried out in Asia, while Heger Akrout’s article, “Towards a child-centered school” describes how the Formal Education Policy is being implemented in Africa and the Middle East.

As well as all this, this FORUM deals with the question of how children learn, and what they need to learn well. Barbara Prashnig, an expert in this area has her say - as do some children and young people. In a further interview, Stella Mendonça describes the “Meeting Cultures” initiative, which sees music and art used as tools of education and development.

At the very end of this magazine, we present a book which, with the help of two construction projects, reveals the dreams children have for their living and learning spaces, and how their perspective can influence the design and evaluation of children’s living spaces.

I wish you an inspired and exciting time reading this edition of SOS Children’s Villages’ FORUM!

Christian Posch
Our view of education depends on our cultural and social heritage as well as on our own personal experience of it. Our image of education, however, also depends on whether we are policy makers, practitioners, parents or students; our lifestyle and financial situation are further determining factors. Nevertheless “education” is often understood mainly as the formal aspect of schooling, and thus the concept of “a good education” is reduced to whether a child attends a good school and achieves academic success. Later in life, being “educated” is seen as the ability to quote relevant literature, historical dates and formulas. This confers a superficially better social status when compared to those who are considered to have a lower level of education or none at all.

EDUCATION – A HUMAN RIGHT OR THOUGHT CONTROL?

In the late 70s Pink Floyd voiced their concern about rigid norms of teaching and “thought control” in their catchy song “The Wall”, with its line “we don’t need no education”. Michel Foucault, the French philosopher and critical thinker, deconstructed education systems...
as monocultures forming future generations into obedient citizens and consumers in mass production units of conformist thought – schools. Supporters of the UNESCO programme “Education for All” or the Global Campaign for Education advocate the human right to learning and development which every child in the world should be granted without any form of discrimination or exclusion.

According to Katharina Tomasevski, the late United Nations Special Rapporteur on Education, governments around the world in the last decade spent an average of 12% of their total expenditure on defence, while a mere 6% was allocated to education. This means there is a global average of at least 150 soldiers for every 100 teachers. According to the latest estimates by UNESCO, there are still over 70 million children worldwide who cannot exercise their right to education.

In most cases, certificates from colleges, universities or other higher education institutions open doors to well-paid white collar jobs. Vocational training or life and work experience alone, on the other hand, only allow for lower paid jobs or cannot provide a route out of unemployment. Degrees are required to get jobs, but life experience, values, attitudes and skills are mostly developed from informal and non-formal education processes stimulated by families and communities. The formal education sector often fails to address these areas at all, or only in the context of “extra-curricular activities”.

So what do we mean when we, as a global organisation focusing on child development and advocating children’s rights, state in our ONE Child Strategy that we “assure access to relevant education”? Do we mean the certified formal aspects of education, such as grades, scholarly discipline, and academic success? Or do we mean education as a unique, tailor-made, and holistic process which supports a child’s attempt to increase her/his innate abilities and skills? Do we see education as a process through which children learn to think beyond textbooks and blackboards, beyond teacher-led instruction and repetition? Do we mean those processes that stimulate an individual’s ability to ask questions, to address issues of inequality, to make informed decisions, and to participate actively and unreservedly in social and economic life?
What type of education?

From Teaching to Learning

Our understanding of education is also influenced by how we understand children. If we see a child as a unique individual, who brings along a range of skills and capabilities, then education can be a stimulating and multilayered process which supports the further growth of existing skills and abilities, beliefs and ethics. It enables children to strengthen their capacities, to enrich knowledge, and to develop a set of ethics and values. Education then means guiding curiosity, creating individual learning options, and allowing children to research and experiment. If education is conceived in this way, teachers are there to support and facilitate learning. They have a creative role. Parents with this kind of mindset do not discipline, but explain and thus help a child to understand right from wrong. At

+ + + Views on the Subject + + +

Heger Akrou, Director of Programme Development, Africa, Middle East;
Tajudeen Oyeleye, Regional Office Central and West Africa;
Daniel Ihankhien, Regional Office North West Africa

Education provides the wings for human progress. It helps the individual to advance intellectually, physically, spiritually and emotionally. In some ways, education helps the individual to lead a happier life, especially in the modern world where specific skills are often needed to understand how the world around us functions. Education dignifies a person, and can either be of a formal, informal or non-formal nature.

What is meant by relevant education? Education is said to be relevant when it addresses the specific and individual needs of individuals so that they can contribute to the growth and development of the environment in which they live. This can take place in three main domains of learning: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. If these three areas are covered, the individual can develop holistically. Relevant education helps to promote the ethics, norms and culture of the people.

A relevant education system is a complex entity which cannot be reduced merely to economic terms. Relevant education addresses the real issues that plague society. In fact, education lies at the heart of every society and must be understood in a wider context than just formal schooling. Relevant education is primarily about the effectiveness of educational interventions, which can be measured in different areas of the educational system.

Analysing how relevance and relevance criteria are defined in terms of their applicability to the Formal Education Policy of SOS Children’s Villages, you can immediately see the potential relevance of the policy which advocates relevant high quality education for all the children of our target group, and which is free, inclusive, compulsory and sustainable. The goals were clearly defined in relation to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the UNESCO actions for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and the aims of UNESCO’s Education for All (EFA).

With the help of these goals, we shall be able to firmly establish our Hermann Gmeiner schools, with their school profile and curriculum, as “schools for development”.

FROM TEACHING TO LEARNING

Our understanding of education is also influenced by how we understand children. If we see a child as a unique individual, who brings along a range of skills and capabilities, then education can be a stimulating and multilayered process which supports the further growth of existing skills and abilities, beliefs and ethics. It enables children to strengthen their capacities, to enrich knowledge, and to develop a set of ethics and values. Education then means guiding curiosity, creating individual learning options, and allowing children to research and experiment. If education is conceived in this way, teachers are there to support and facilitate learning. They have a creative role. Parents with this kind of mindset do not discipline, but explain and thus help a child to understand right from wrong. At
WHAT MAKES EDUCATION RELEVANT?

Relevant education does not mean the same everywhere. It is determined by the factors of context, economy and culture; but also to a great extent by education systems and the experiences today’s teachers and policy makers had when they were children themselves. And it is influenced by curricula and textbooks which are often a far cry from children’s everyday realities. Textbooks published somewhere in Europe, often outdated, are constantly being found in classrooms of the south, where children barely know where their next meal is coming from. No wonder they cannot relate to topics like holidays, going shopping or trips to the seaside.

One of the most efficient ways of acquiring literacy is to start by reading and writing in your own language (mother tongue). Yet many school systems specify English or French as an entry requirement, as they are often the languages of instruction, although neither the children nor their parents speak them well.

Relevant education is also determined by our concepts of teaching and learning. For decades, for example, intelligence was measured by intelligence tests, discriminating against children with a different form of traditional knowledge. Young people find that having inadequate command of a language presents a particular hurdle. For those over 15 years of age, there are no suitable educational provisions, special language courses or advisory programmes for training and jobs, which act as a bridge to general and professional education. The regulation banning young refugees from working and the scarce opportunities for obtaining a work permit represent the greatest barrier to education, as these are the factors which most seriously restrict their prospects in life.

Young people coming from a migration background are equipped with valuable resources, such as multilingual skills and intercultural expertise. Participating in educational programmes and opening up future prospects can ensure that young people play an active part in social life and are able to make their own living. In this sense the following demand is valid: the right to education for all unaccompanied refugee minors, irrespective of age, their status in the asylum process, and their prospects for staying in Austria.

For further information, see www.sos-kinderdorf.at/biwalk

+ + + VIEWS ON THE SUBJECT + + +

Manuela Hinteregger, SOS Children’s Village BIWAK (flat-sharing community for unaccompanied refugee minors), Austria

Education is at the core of the integration process: it provides direction in a foreign country, offers stability through its daily structure, and helps with the acquisition of linguistic skills, as well as opening the door to future prospects.

This fundamental basis for integration is only marginally possible for young refugees in Austria, and has many associated obstacles. School attendance in a foreign school system represents a special challenge in itself, and in addition, the young refugees have to cope with past and present burdens (traumatic losses, experiences of violence and persecution etc). The young people’s existing qualifications vary. Often young people barely had a chance, or had none at all, to attend school in their country of origin, perhaps because they had to work or simply because they were female.

It is especially difficult to find the motivation to start an education when the outlook is uncertain and there is little chance of getting further qualifications. If residence is pretty much guaranteed, educational options offer a route for a person to become self-sufficient and integrated. But even for young people who do not remain in Austria, education and acquiring a language can mean they have greater chances of finding a job in their country of origin.
Neuroscience and authors writing about multiple intelligences (such as emotional, social, spatial, intra- and interpersonal intelligence) have provided a fresh perspective, but education systems still need to catch up. From research we know that heterogeneous groups represent the best learning environment, but most education systems still organise children according to age groups in standardised classrooms. No consideration is made for children undergoing different phases of development, which need to be supported. There are still only a few schools built in such a way that the teaching space can be adapted to learning processes and content. Mostly schools are strictly structured into classrooms dominated by blackboards, where real life is overruled by tables and charts, and teachers occupy a dominant position at the front, using chalk as their teaching tool. At the Kenya Youth Business Trust, a non-profit organisation in Nairobi, young people with secondary education or university degrees, who cannot find employment, receive a special form of education. They have to unlearn their experience of mainstream information accumulation and are challenged to create a new understanding of their life: how to develop the capacity to take informed decisions and actively participate in society, take on responsibility for themselves, be flexible, understand reality and think on their own. Learning and the future are the components of their new curriculum. “They come with a qualification, but they have no idea what they want to do with their life, and how to achieve anything. They are expecting somebody to give them a job, but there is nobody there to do so”, says the project manager, summing up the reality of the young people. In a tough eight month training-work project they learn to learn, to develop their creative potential, to generate individual ideas and business plans, to be pro-active, and they succeed.
So – what does it mean if we want to assure access to relevant education? First of all it means that we focus our work on making education available to all children in SOS Children’s Village programmes. It also means ensuring that all children in SOS families and families of origin can access high quality services in the area of early childhood development, for example in crèches, kindergartens, pre-schools, as well as in primary and secondary education. Guaranteeing access to relevant education also means working together with community-based or government education programmes to enhance the capacities and competencies of the state-funded schools and kindergartens involved. It also means advocating the right to free education, including those with special needs or disabilities, children from minorities, child labourers, trafficked children, refugee children, and street children among others. Whatever we do, then, must introduce a dialogue with key stakeholders, in order to exchange information about adequate educational content and forms of delivery.

“Relevant” will always be what key stakeholders, including children and young people, parents, policy makers and practitioners define together as being relevant to their given context. Relevant is whatever enables the development of the individual child in relation to her/his potential and life situation, beyond all boundaries and odds. What also counts as relevant is everything that is not limited by gender, faith, ethnicity or economic situation. Relevant is what expands thinking and learning beyond today’s knowledge, beyond taboos, and beyond limiting regulations for an unknown tomorrow. Relevant education enables children to have the chance to live their life with the skills they need, so that they can exercise their rights and call on all forms of social and economic services. Relevant education allows children to live dignified and secure lives, enabling them to develop all the skills they need to make free and informed choices, and pursue their goals that one values and has reason to value.

According to the Composite Learning Index 2010 (the
What Type of Education?

Canadian compositional indicator for lifelong learning) learning means to know, to do, to be, and to live together. Hence, relevant education will always be a combination of cognitive, social, emotional, physical and vocational stimulation. In this way a person can develop holistically as a unique human being within her/his specific context and as a member of the wider community. A standard solution can never be relevant, as education can only be relevant in relation to the real-life situation of the particular child. Education is relevant if it gives the child the opportunity to learn and unlearn, to apply what has been learnt, and to adapt to changing environments and challenges. It is all about developing today’s skills for an uncertain tomorrow with new and different challenges, even if these challenges affect the teachers as well as the students.

Barbara Schratz

SOS Children’s Villages International, Programme Development

+ + + VIEWS ON THE SUBJECT + + +

Tsering Thondup,
Principal, SOS Hermann Gmeiner School Pokhara, Nepal

I have been working with children and learning communities since 1977 and continue to learn from people of all ages as I go about my daily responsibilities. Children and young people continue to amaze and educate me in their unique ways. They give me my share of stress and also moments of great joy. I know that the best form of classroom discipline comes from the students themselves. Students who have a hand in creating the classroom rules find it easier to remember them and also observe them better. This is a very simple illustration of what relevant education means.

All over the world the family is the cornerstone of society. Countries with a proper system of social security know that there has to be ‘give and take’ in any society. Relevant education, in any local setting, is basically what the community should receive from society for all its children. It is what the best and wisest parents would wish and ‘expect’ for their own child’s growth, for the development of his/her body, mind and soul, for a fulfilled human life, and for the preservation of one’s cultural heritage.

Education should be locally relevant and culturally appropriate, as it combines both conservative and progressive functions. Education is a powerful tool for removing inequality, discrimination and inability in any society. It should therefore be delivered in the best interest of the child or other target groups by word and deed.

Relevant education should be competently managed and supported politically and financially. The expectations of all the relevant stakeholders should be met in an honest, straightforward manner, and there should be a clear understanding that respect and cooperation are needs that stay with us throughout our lives. In my opinion, relevant education should be based on a sound curriculum for the target groups involved. Evaluation measures should also help individuals to develop their values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and competencies to the best of their abilities, and thus contribute to sustainable development.
“Through the course on entrepreneurship I realised that I could set up and run a successful business. Now I feel confident that one day I will open my own garage”. Wareksa, Ethiopia.

Vocational education and training is concerned with the acquisition of knowledge and skills for the world of work. This includes formal and non-formal education, short courses, apprenticeship training, soft skills, entrepreneurship skills and much more. It supports people, not only in expanding their skills, but also in developing their individual potential in all spheres of life. Vocational training also prepares them for more active participation in society.

Globalisation, the shift towards knowledge-based economies and the use of new technologies have major implications for skills demand, as well as for human resource development and training. The labour market is becoming more specialised and the economy is demanding higher qualifications. People everywhere need to develop their knowledge and skills on a continuous
basis, so that they can live and work meaningfully in a changing society, generating their own income\textsuperscript{2}. Investing in vocational programmes is therefore synonymous with an investment in the future; knowledge and skills are the engine of economic growth and social development.

High levels of youth unemployment in many parts of the world demonstrate the importance of skills development for employability or self-employment. Many young people can only dream of formal employment since they do not even have access to the training required for it. In the informal education sector too, many a person’s productive and social potential remains untapped. There is a lack of opportunity for young people to develop their own skills to suit the specific working and living environment.

Vocational programmes should focus on the development of an individual’s potential and capabilities and not on academic performance. Aspects of life skills training and work-life balance should be just as much a part of any vocational programme as pro-active attitudes and positive action. Lessons learnt and expertise built up in existing SOS vocational training centres and family strengthening programmes can be used to develop relevant vocational programmes in partnership with community members. This can include tailor-made vocational training for adults and young people, with an emphasis on soft skills such as entrepreneurial competence, motivation and self-reliance. Programmes can also be supplemented by advisory services and start-up support for income-generating activities in order to increase participants’ economic independence.

Gisela van Bommel
Programme Officer International Co-operation,
SOS Children’s Villages Netherlands

\textsuperscript{1} UNEVOC (2010), http://www.unevoc.unesco.org/2.0.html?tx_drwiki_pi1\[keyword\]=What\%20is\%20TVET, last accessed on 22 June 2010

\textsuperscript{2} UNESCO (2002), Technical and Vocational Education and Training for the Twenty-first Century

\textbf{A DREAM, AN IDEA, A BUSINESS}

\textbf{THE ENTREPRENEURIAL TRAINING PROGRAMME OF SOS CHILDREN’S VILLAGES BOLIVIA}

The capacity to dream is an essential part of what it is to be human. How can we help children and young people to dream and turn their dreams into reality? How do we tell them that the world is full of opportunities that we have to grasp, and that they should approach life with a positive and engaged attitude? SOS Children’s Villages Bolivia took on the task of conveying these ideas with its entrepreneurial training programme “Programa de Educación Emprendedora de Aldeas Infantiles SOS” in three schools and two vocational training centres. Our aim is to stimulate a spirit of enterprise and encourage the development of young dreamers in their childhood and adolescence.

Betty Carrión is following the Cookery and Events Management course of the entrepreneurial vocational
training programme. Twenty years old and the mother of two small children, she explains a bit about herself: “I only completed three years of secondary school. I found out about the vocational training centre with my sister, who encouraged me to apply for cookery courses. The course appealed to me as I would really like to learn how to cook and also because I want to run my own business. The training centre gives me lots of support, for it isn’t easy being a mother and studying at the same time. Everything I learn gives me more confidence and reinforces my dream of having my own business some day.”

The families and communities are a key factor in the work of entrepreneurial vocational training. They should eliminate expressions like “That’s very hard”, “Maybe later”, or “No way” from their vocabulary. The role of families and the community should consist of teaching children not to give up at the first hurdle. If children and young people know how to take calculated risks, if the goal is clearly established, and if they can count on a support network, then it is possible to realise their dreams and implement projects.

A business man or woman combines a range of qualities: the passion needed to realise a personal dream, the energy for the steps they need to take, and knowledge of the environment. In this context, education represents the unifying link. We arrange the children’s dreams on the so-called “Dream Map”, according to the “size of their dream”. This map helps to answer such questions as: What is my goal? What resources are available to me, and what do I still need? Who can help me? In the early school years the dream map is used as a tool for elaborating projects. In the later years of schooling,
project development is primarily targeted at methods of setting logical parameters and at business plans.

Entrepreneurial vocational training can be seen as a process for driving forward social and economic projects, preferably a combination of both. It is premised on community members sharing responsibility. We establish the scope of vocational training in joint working groups, based on the community vision of a productive economic development. At this point community organisations are involved, such as neighbourhood associations, authorities, parent’s representatives, and students.

As soon as the scope of the vocational training has been established, we work out the curricula, taking account of the reality of the community and the dynamics of the associated training area in question. The entrepreneurial vocational training is underpinned by four pillars: the modules for specific vocational training, entrepreneurship, citizenship, and the environment.

The students, who are selected on the basis of a social survey undertaken by the community, follow these practical and theoretical modules for six months. They learn to analyse opportunities, and from this to develop entrepreneurial ideas. Their idea is then elaborated in a second stage, known as the enterprise seminar. As part of this stage the students complete a three-month work experience in local companies.

They conclude by spending a further three months producing the business plan for their entrepreneurial idea. They present this plan to the community so that the necessary support network can be put in place to set up the business. And with the help of this network, they get down to work.

Zaida Albino Loroño
SOS Children’s Villages Bolivia, Director of Programme Development

THE ROUTE TO SUCCESS

SOS VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE AT MONARAGALA, SRI LANKA

The SOS Vocational Training Centre (SOS VTC) at Monaragala was established in 2006 in response to youth unemployment. The Monaragala district is situated about 245 km from the capital, Colombo, and has been identified as the second most underdeveloped district in Sri Lanka. Most families live in poverty in a context of social instability.

The young people in the SOS VTC are provided with training to help them improve their skills and thus share in the development of their communities. The training is given to young people from families in need and to those from SOS Youth Facilities in Sri Lanka.

We offer six different types of training with a capacity to train up to 100 young people at a time: our aim is to
train 136 each year. The courses currently on offer are: Car Mechanics, Welding, Carpentry, Industrial Electrician, Computer Applications and Ecotourism/Hotel Industry. The successful trainees receive National Vocational Qualification Certificates which provide easy access to employment in Sri Lanka and abroad.

Besides skill training, the young people in the SOS VTC are given free food, accommodation, uniforms, course materials, stationery, and bus fares. Students are insured, their TVEC\(^1\) examination fees are paid, and on successful completion of their training, they are awarded a certified certificate through the TVEC. We have made arrangements with some organisations and companies for the young people to get work experience before they sit the exam. Most of these companies offer them jobs after their exam as they are skilled workers who have a recognised qualification. To date we have managed to find employment for all young people who successfully completed our training.

The SOS VTC is a registered training centre, its courses accredited by the TVEC in Sri Lanka in accordance with Clause 14 of the Tertiary and Vocational Education Act of 1990.

Alongside vocational training, the SOS VTC tries to introduce other subjects to these underprivileged young people: there are courses on career guidance, personal productivity, first aid, fire fighting and evacuation procedures, and sexual health. Through these courses we aim to provide the young people who complete their training at the SOS VTC with a smooth and guaranteed route to a prosperous future. The training involves a constant combination of theory and practice. All these factors make the SOS VTC one of the most famous and respected vocational training centres in Monaragala district.

The SOS VTC has introduced a Quality Management System based on ISO 9001: 2008 and IWA 2:2007 which are valid for the TVEC, and provides the option of a National Vocational Qualification up to level 3 and 4 for successful trainees. The career guidance department set up in the SOS VTC, combined with the quality management system, has been a driving force in paving the way to success for the young people who qualify from the SOS VTC.

A Management Review Meeting is held once every three months to ensure the smooth functioning of the

### Statistics of the SOS Vocational Training Centre at 30th April 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of the Course</th>
<th>Course Accredited Level at TVEC</th>
<th>Duration of the Course (Including in-house &amp; Industrial Training)</th>
<th>No of Passed Out Batches</th>
<th>Pass Rate of the Examinations</th>
<th>Number of Passed Out Trainees</th>
<th>Present Number of Trainees at the SOS VTC</th>
<th>Class Capacity</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1 CAR MECHANICS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18 MONTHS</td>
<td>03</td>
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<td>2 WELDING</td>
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SOS VTC. The Management Review Meeting Committee is attended by the National Director or his Deputy, the Principal of the SOS VTC, student and staff representatives, the QMS officer and QMS Internal Audit Coordinator.

The SOS Vocational Training Centre does everything conceivable to make the underprivileged young people into privileged ones, and we can assure any young person who decides to join our training programme that it will be a smart decision.

Divakar Ratnadurai
Deputy National Director/Director Programmes
SOS Children’s Villages Sri Lanka

THE PRINCIPLE OF SUSTAINABILITY

The Farming Livelihood and Improvement Programme

In April 2009 SOS Children’s Villages Ghana joined together with partners to set up the Farming Livelihood and Improvement Programme (FLIP). This programme has a preventative function on the one hand in matters relating to youth unemployment and rural-to-urban migration, or when children are being neglected or abandoned. On the other hand it secures food and development in rural areas. FLIP began its work in four communities in the Asiakwa region of east Ghana. In the course of 2009, 450 orphans and vulnerable children and 120 carers/parents received support from the programme in various ways.
The project targets young people in rural areas at three stages of their development: in their family environment, during their time at school and after leaving it.

- Children need a supportive family environment as a basis for life, wherever the foundation for learning is laid. The project works with families so that they are better equipped to meet the development needs of their children, and can send their children to school.
- Children are not only encouraged to complete their basic education, they can also take part in extracurricular courses. This way they can acquire the skills needed for organic farming as well as life skills. The aim is to equip them with the motivation, knowledge and skills required for working in the rural sector and especially with the knowledge on organic farming.
- On leaving school, young people are provided with start-up support to help them cope with the transition to work, and create sustainable livelihoods in the agricultural sector, thereby in turn contributing to local food production.

A supportive environment, combined with relevant agricultural training and support for entering the labour market are important steps for giving young people in the countryside the opportunity to create a sustainable livelihood in the agricultural sector. In doing so, there will be an increase in the more skilled and productive youth labour force who will contribute to the local rural economy, promote local agricultural development, and improve food security for the entire community.

The project is based on a participatory approach. Families and communities are empowered to take charge of their own development and that of their children, and are provided with access to the necessary knowledge and skills. Existing community structures are strengthened, so that the benefits of the project are maintained after its completion. Investing in the local partnering NGOs boosts their ability to manage not only this project, but future ones as well. The dissemination of best practices helps to expand or even repeat projects. All partners are also eager to apply the lessons learnt to future projects in Ghana and other African countries.

The programme’s integrated approach, incorporating the expertise of socio-economic community development and organic agricultural development has created a positive synergy: it allows us to address the problems faced by children and young people within their communities while at the same time encouraging their potential.

The greatest achievement has been the overwhelming enthusiasm of the communities in implementing the programme. The programme has received massive support from community leaders, opinion makers, children and young people, especially with regard to the organic agricultural elements. The positive response and willingness to cooperate stems from the inclusion of community members in the planning and management of the project, as well as the fact that the programme responds to the needs they identified and enhances the opportunities available to them within their own communities.

Attendance levels in the programme’s activities are high, and the active and supportive role of community-based organisations in implementing the programme clearly illustrates the high degree of community participation. The use of community volunteers has proved useful in the implementation of FLIP, as they provide free services to the project and ensure that our resources are actually used for the benefit of the families and young people.

Karin Demuth
SOS Children’s Villages International, Programme Development
Why is it that schools around the world all look the same? According to conventional theory schools are institutions using efficient instructional means to help children reach the desired educational outcome within a given timeframe. The publication of pass marks, league tables and school rankings all contribute to public perceptions of what is deemed to be a “good” school, and a good school’s reputation is enhanced by exceptional achievement in the “serious” subjects of maths and the sciences.

Schools which consider themselves to be “hothouses” of the future have come, however, to understand that a school is not only a place for academic teaching, but for learning, and the most valuable space, besides the family, for influencing our society’s future. Learning is based on individual development, understanding, the ability to apply things, convey what you have learnt, and in this way to create knowledge. Where learning is prioritised, schools have come to understand and appreciate the child as a unique person, to believe in each
child as being of equal worth and to see the child within her/his network of relationships. These schools work on setting up processes between students and students, teachers and teachers, and teachers and students, as well as within the wider community, that enable everyone to continue to learn and develop. The young people attending these schools do not want to miss a day – for such schools are not only a place for learning, but also for living, for students and teachers alike.

ALIGNING SCHOOLS – TO WHAT?

SOS Children’s Villages’ Formal Education Policy is based on this child-centred educational approach. The planning of learning goals, facilitation of learning experiences, methods of assessment and recording of achievements are all derived from the child’s needs and wishes. The abilities, challenges, pace and style of learning of each child are the driving force behind this process. Teachers have to respond to their students’ diversity and vary the curriculum accordingly - the content, the delivery method and the way in which performance is assessed and recorded. The ultimate goal is to provide equal experiences of education that address the needs of all children.

Recognising the challenges presented by a child-centred approach, SOS Children’s Villages offers support to teachers in the form of continuing professional development. As part of this training, teachers should develop an understanding of the social context of our work and build the capacity to take on board external professional support services. Teachers who have to concentrate on the needs of disadvantaged children can work more effectively when their skills are enhanced so that they can deal with learning difficulties and behavioural challenges. If our organisation fails to invest in the appropriate measures, our teachers’ capacity to meet the educational needs of our children will suffer.

The second key aspect of the Formal Education Policy is the focus on the target group. SOS Children’s Villages has set itself the aim of alleviating the lives of children who are at risk of losing parental care or who have already lost it. This also applies to the SOS Children’s Villages educational programmes. As we invest in educational interventions, we ensure the resources are used for our target group as well as for children whose rights to education are being violated. This mainly applies to the most vulnerable members of society.

Especially where the state education systems are weak and low in quality, our schools, kindergartens and vocational training centres (VTCs) have proven to be high-quality educational establishments. Better schools attract parents who can readily pay for their children’s education. Much as we welcome children from diverse backgrounds who contribute to the profile and educational standard in our schools, we do have to account to our donors. We must ensure that we use our resources primarily to benefit the children we want to support.

The third relevant aspect in the policy is the issue of ownership and funding of schools, along with the responsibility of education authorities. Education is the responsibility of those with legal obligations, including first and foremost the child’s main carers and the State. SOS Children’s Villages participates in educational processes on behalf of the children in our programmes.
It is neither justifiable nor sustainable to take the ownership of schools away from the communities they serve. New forms of collaboration – as well as funding sources – are needed to make programmes more relevant and sustainable.

SOS mothers, parents, guardians, primary carers, teachers, community members, civic groups, local businesses and education authorities, and not least the children themselves, all need a platform from which they can influence the processes of SOS Hermann Gmeiner Schools. This will ensure a flexible and multi-agency response to the educational needs of the children, family and community.

Building and maintaining schools is not the core business of SOS Children’s Villages. Wherever there are local options for partnership funding for existing schools and kindergartens, such opportunities should be exploited; and where these possibilities do not yet exist, they should be explored.

Where governments have established free and compulsory primary education, it is our job to pursue it on behalf of our target group children and other families in the community. We also have to approach governments and education authorities to become partners in funding our programmes, thus allowing us to ensure access for all children in the programme to quality education.

Where the provision of free education for all is not achievable, parents who are able to afford high-quality education can contribute by paying realistic school fees. Moreover the alignment process should also be transparent, to show that education subsidies are only used as donors intended. Then National Associations and support groups will be able to collaborate more effectively to increase subsidies as the number of target group children in our schools grows. Reaching the target group with our education programmes also makes it easier to obtain public support.

Each continent is responsible for setting up its own framework for school development – a framework which is genuinely adapted to suit local circumstances, but one which at the same time includes clear criteria for the target group, quality standards and realistic funding partnerships.
ARE WE THERE YET?

Some will ask why we have to discuss quality issues at all, given that our schools are among the best in the countries in which they operate. Others will worry about the standard of educational performance if more children from disadvantaged backgrounds are enrolled in our schools. If schools are to be “beacons of excellence” in serving orphans and vulnerable children, rather than just pursuing academic achievement, teachers will have to reconsider their role. Some of them may prefer to work in more reputable schools.

Another problematic factor is that SOS schools, kindergartens and VTCs are often located far away from family strengthening programmes. We then have to think about how we can increase the number of target group children.

We might also ask what to do about schools charging high fees that do not reach our target group. SOS Children’s Village is a brand; and the brand needs to come alive wherever the name and logo are involved.

Sometimes we hear that teachers are reluctant to teach in schools with a diverse or “difficult” student population. Being a teacher is certainly a constant challenge: stimulating learning in a fast changing environment against all odds needs creative and imaginative personalities who love what they do, who are inspired by the minds of young people, and who want to make a difference in their lives. Good teachers are inspired by the concept of creating a framework in which every child can learn at his or her own pace. Such teachers reflect on their practice with their peers on an ongoing basis, eager to support the growing process of each child.

Research shows that the “best” schools are the ones that work within an environment characterised by diversity; which are involved in continual professional development; which reach marginalised children; which are part of their local communities; and which become learning and living spaces. These schools have realised that learning and development are holistic processes: that students need their intellect, a good diet; a holistic curriculum and the support of their family and community; and they need a shared vision that the school can make a difference. Research also shows that schools can only achieve all this if they have committed school leadership, and the whole school is learning together.
WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

In order to align our schools to the Formal Education Policy we have to introduce processes that help us evaluate the extent to which we have reached the target group as well as assessing quality, ownership and funding structures. Within the quality management system of each National Association, the school, kindergarten or VTC will look at issues like quality standards and guidelines, stakeholder participation, resources and infrastructure, human resources management, and partnerships and communication. School heads and stakeholders will discuss whether existing quality standards meet or even exceed the formal education policy requirements. The question will also be raised whether there needs to be specific training for child-centred methods or working with parents.

Schools must draw up development plans which can do justice to student diversity and at the same time establish them firmly within the community. We also have to find creative ways of reaching our target group in affluent areas.

Quality development is a continuous process which takes stock of existing practice and the particular context, adapting them to internal and external parameters, research findings, and professional development.

DOING THE RIGHT THINGS RIGHT

What is quite certain is that our schools, kindergartens and VTCs work within the spirit of the SOS Children’s Villages mission, and want to be a positive influence on the future of the most vulnerable children. They believe in the human capacity for action and in children’s rights. They believe that it is important for both students and teachers to learn, and that there should be learning spaces for the whole community. They believe in the achievement potential of students and teachers, ensuring that the young people have the space and time they need for learning. They understand that one size does not fit all, and that teachers in our schools can adapt national curricula for individualised learning. Our schools are partnering with other schools, constantly exchanging information to make student learning more meaningful and to understand how to assess an individual student’s performance, not against a standard benchmark, but on the basis of personal progress.

Our teachers feel honoured by the challenge of working with the most vulnerable children. At the same time they are given the support they need to tackle this challenge and the opportunity to engage in continuous professional development.

Our schools are linked to learning networks as well as being learning centres for other schools. They are proud of what they are.

So what has to be aligned? In quality management it is a matter of checking whether the right things are being done properly. Policies provide a framework for content and the alignment to policy is nothing other than a quality test. It is what every professional organisation needs to do, as proof of both accountability and professionalism – no more, no less.

Barbara Schratz,
Programme Development
SOS Children’s Villages,
Virginia Paterson,
Regional Educational Coordinator,
South Africa
“We want to inspire an education approach which puts the child at the centre.”
This is how the project charter formulated for the continent expresses the goal of developing SOS Hermann Gmeiner schools in Africa and the Middle East. An important part of this process is to make adequate resources available to ensure the quality of education facilities on a long-term basis, thus working for social justice in the environment of the most disadvantaged children.

This can only succeed if we also boost the parents’ role as the main people responsible for their children’s development, and if the resources required are made available to improve teaching quality and support teaching staff in their professional development.

The following provides some important points for this school development process in Africa and the Middle East.
THE CHOICE OF PILOT COUNTRIES

The seven pilot countries were proposed by the General Secretariat on the basis of location and feasibility. We considered Central and West Africa in particular because we could start implementation there immediately.

A CONTINENTAL STEERING GROUP FOR THE PILOT PROJECT

The steering group ensures that all regions are represented, which gives a voice to the countries and schools involved. The steering group works out short and long term goals, thus producing the effective framework conditions required.

The short-term goals are to:
- Specify a school development process which takes into account factors in the cultural, social and economic circumstances in each pilot country.
- Develop guidelines, criteria indicators, resources, concepts and methods on the basis of the Formal Education Policy and Child Protection Policy, acting as alignment for the countries.

PILOT COUNTRIES

- **RO*- SOUTH AFRICA II**
  - Virginia Paterson

- **RO*- NORTH WEST AFRICA**
  - Juliket Mendes

- **RO*- EAST AFRICA**
  - Thomas Odera

- **ZIMBABWE**
  - Ayanda Mboneli

- **ETHIOPIA**
  - Sahlemariam Abebe

- **SENEGAL**
  - Oumar Dial

- ** SENEGAL**
  - Oumar Dial

- **ZIMBABWE**
  - Ayanda Mboneli

In the long term, we want to achieve the following:
- Improved education quality in Hermann Gmeiner schools, which includes strengthening children’s rights to education and inclusive, non-discriminatory education.
- Teaching quality is improved, and teachers are provided with the skills to design appropriate interdisciplinary learning processes.
- A secure learning environment which actively promotes children’s participation in education processes.
- School development initiated through the Formal Education Policy becomes a continuous process of quality development through strategic education planning. We work together to develop education values and continuous professional development.

The criteria for developing schools on the basis of the Formal Education Policy focus moreover on the following areas:
- Strengthening competencies for child-centred schools, e.g. developing competencies in teachers and head teachers in relation to leadership, developing the child development skills of all participants, recruitment of well-trained teachers, etc:
  - curricular, teaching and learning materials appropriate for the target group
  - the level of school fees and the proportion of children from the target group in each school
  - establishing the percentage of students eligible for a grant
  - establishing the percentage of children in a school who come from families on a family strengthening programme
  - establishing the percentage and profile of children whose right to education is not guaranteed and who do not have access to high-quality education, but do not fall into our target group.
- specification of school requirements for students with special needs (as far as possible and considering the school infrastructure and the resources available)
THE ALIGNMENT PROCESS

- CONTINENTAL PROJECT CHARTER
- DESCRIPTION OF IDEAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS
- FRAME OF REFERENCE
- SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS: EVALUATION OF CURRENT POSITION
- PLAN FOR DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL(S)
- SUPPORT DURING DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Aims, advantages, interests
Continental strategy
Development of benchmarks
National Plan
Development of indicators
Feedback and evaluation: statistics and quality

Regulation of competencies, style, and qualities of school development moderators
Establishment of sphere of activity and level of discretion

- TRAINING SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT MODERATORS
  - Priorities for schools development plan and priorities for development
  - Indicators for the quality of the teaching and learning process
  - Developing school performance according to quality assurance system
  - Supporting pilot countries with documentation, feedback, and evaluation using standard methods
• support and exchange between the different SOS Children’s Village projects and the community (parents and those with parental authority)
• creating synergies between education authorities, youth welfare and NGOs
• exchanging experience and documentation in the context of the development process

WHAT WE SUPPORT

We analyse the situation in relation to children’s rights on the continent. The children’s development opportunities are central. This analysis serves as a frame of reference for elaborating an education strategy. In it, we focus on services that are cost-effective and easy to administer, and which address the needs of the children in our target group.

We also try to promote community development. Different initiatives have already been implemented, including the child development “Educational Outreach Programme” in Ethiopia since 2000, which involves over 1,000 children living in difficult conditions. These children have free access to the education facilities in the neighbouring villages.

The Hermann Gmeiner schools in Addis Ababa and Bahir Dar in north-west Ethiopia have set up school scholarships for children in need from families that face financial and social problems. Until then, these children were not able to attend state schools because their parents could not afford the registration fees, school uniforms, and food. In 2007 the SOS Children’s Village Ethiopia also extended the support programme with refurbishment work and further development of the teaching staff’s skills. This was achieved through a partnership (Memorandum of Understanding) with the government and local authorities, who acted as representatives of the partner schools.

DEVELOPING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES IN SCHOOLS

The main aim of the socio-educational neighbourhood programme is to improve the teaching quality in the partner schools through a range of help and support. This also involves developing a training programme for teachers to further develop their skills and improve school facilities (offices, desks, photocopiers, text books, audio materials, and computers). Classrooms and toilet facilities were also upgraded.

During the preliminary stages a number of meetings took place between SOS representatives, the school administration, teachers’ associations and parents in order to identify needs. In some cases the two SOS social centres were also brought on board. Participants also considered how schools could generate income, thus allowing them to finance the development programme themselves.

In Bahir Dar, for instance, the parents’ group of Shimbit primary school took on the job of fattening up animals. The profit generated from the activity allowed the parents to pay for their children’s tuition. This initiative also made it possible to set up a small canteen where the children can receive a milk-based snack.

For both above-mentioned state schools, the funding for this project amounts to 328,000 birr, or 28,000 USD – less than 1/10 of the total cost of building a school without equipment or running costs!

Heger Akrout
Continental Director for Programme Development, Africa and the Middle East

We would like to convey our special thanks to all members of the continent’s pilot committee for their inspiring ideas.
WHAT WE WANT

Access to quality education for all children in SOS Children’s Villages Programmes regardless of gender, ethnicity, faith, abilities, health or any other attribute.

WHAT WE DO

- We advocate free compulsory primary education for all children in our target group
- We advocate the principle of child-centred, inclusive, relevant quality education
- Together with partners and other stakeholders, we enhance the capacity of public kindergartens and schools attended by children within our programmes
- We continually improve the quality of Hermann Gmeiner schools, kindergartens and vocational training programmes

TARGET GROUP

- Children at risk of losing parental care
- Children who have lost parental care
- Children from communities whose rights to education are violated, meaning the most vulnerable children within a community who, without our support, would not be able to go to school at all

DEFINITIONS

Formal education is the structured, systematic, monitored and evaluated teaching and learning process provided by public and private kindergartens and schools.

Learning for life aims to develop the full human potential for a meaningful and dignified life in a given context and through all stages of a child’s development. It enables children to develop the capacity to take informed decisions and participate actively in society and strengthens capabilities and is an ongoing process of learning and living.
PRINCIPLES

1. Promotion of child-centred education
Child-centred education respects the individual child as a resourceful, capable, unique human being who actively participates in her/his own development process and respects diverse learning styles and learning needs.

2. Support for parents in their role as primary carers and educators of their children
Parents and parental carers are actively involved and can take responsibility for the education of their children. They are able to claim their own and their children’s educational rights.

3. Investments in the quality of teachers
Teachers and principals are the key to child-centred quality education. They are actively encouraged to further their professional skills in child-centred education.

4. Support for the effectiveness and improvement of kindergartens and schools
Kindergartens and schools attended by children from the SOS Children’s Village Programme are adequately supported and resourced, inclusive, accessible for all and safe.

5. Working in partnerships to achieve sustainability
Partnership with governments, local communities, donors, civil society, the UN and other international organisations in the field of education ensure sustainability and strengthen effectiveness and quality in educational programmes.

6. Efforts to enhance social justice
Children and families are empowered to claim their educational rights, communities and duty bearers are supported in providing quality education, and the right to free, relevant, non-discriminatory and inclusive quality education is advocated.
YOUR SCHOOL, MY SCHOOL, OUR SCHOOL

Almost forty years later, I can still recall the words of the school prayer with absolute clarity. But as much as we recited the words daily, did we ever stop to consider the meaning? Indeed, I was fortunate to attend a school where love did abide, where peace did dwell, where contentment was a part of my schooling experience. But could any of us from this era truly say that this was “our school”? How many “hearts”, including our own as children and those of our parents and community members, really shaped the vision of our school, how we learnt, or our daily experiences in pursuit of learn-
ing? Now that the international development community has adopted a more participatory approach, this is precisely the question we have to address.

Who “owns” the school? Ownership also includes control over decision-making processes, safeguarding educational philosophies, upholding the educational values and beliefs of the community, the protection of civil liberties and constitutional rights, as well as the guardianship of children’s futures.

**NEW BUILDINGS OR SUPPORT FOR EXISTING ONES?**

The work of SOS Children’s Villages focuses on children who have lost or are at risk of losing parental care. In the sphere of education our resources must be directed to this same target group, as well as to children whose rights to education are being violated. So if it’s a question of whether or not we should build a school, we also have to ask where the best place to build the school would be, so as to ensure as many children as possible from our target group can benefit from it. And as our target group continues to grow and include mostly children who live in their families of origin, we need to bear in mind that the school need not necessarily be built next to the SOS Children’s Village.

We should also remember that family strengthening interventions are short-term programmes with a fixed time limit, because they are meant to result in responses and sustainability at community level. Family strengthening programmes always have an exit strategy to allow us to move on and support new communities. As such, our educational responses may fit better with the concept of family strengthening if they also focus on building the capacity and sustainability of existing educational programmes.

The issue of how we contribute to educational goals and the extent to which we can plug gaps in existing educational programmes should be seen at a local level, and is inextricably linked to our research-driven programme plans. What does the Child Rights Situation Analysis tell us about children’s rights to education in the given environment? Are educational rights being violated and which children are affected? Who bears the responsibility and what is the capacity? At a local level, a stakeholder analysis will tell us who is responsible in terms of rights and obligations, what their existing resources and competences are, and whether they can meet their obligations. In addition, this analysis can help us to identify who has a vested interest in education, including governments, citizens’ groups, private sector organisations and businesses, the community itself and families and children. All of this information allows us to make informed decisions about whether SOS Children’s Villages should set up a new school, or whether we need to look for more creative responses like training, improved access to resources and materials, or building additional classrooms.

**THE VALUE OF PARTNERSHIPS**

In any case, much value can be added to the process by prioritising the involvement of stakeholders and partners in the process of building or improving a school. Partnerships help us to build on and strengthen our own capacities.

A growing body of literature acknowledges the value of coordinated and co-operative community-based services linking education with other social sectors.
Community strategies that place a special emphasis on the child within the family and the community, and which link education with other services, result in higher quality and more relevant programmes – as well as programmes which have a track record in overcoming educational and social disadvantage. Synergies are created, and more versatile projects can develop that bring together multi-professional teams. Educational services delivered alone, without the inter-departmental boundary-crossing between social services and education, will result in disjointed and insensitive responses to the needs of our children which perpetuate the existing inequalities in the system.

Families, communities, teachers, educational leaders, citizens’ groups, industry and private sector businesses, and local education authorities are all crucial partners in developing a comprehensive strategy for education. Such a strategy should provide wraparound services to the family and community and not only directly to children.

DIFFICULT ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXTS

The communities in which SOS Children’s Villages wants to target its resources are ravaged by poverty, deprivation, and disadvantage. It is hard for teachers to adapt their lessons to this social context. They are forced to face challenges such as the educational poverty of children, social problems, emotional difficulties, behavioural challenges and mixed ability groups. They have to adapt their role, attitude and teaching method, as well as develop new skills. Teachers and child development specialists need to speak out, so that the sup-
port they need to achieve better educational results can be clearly identified.

Children should not just be seen as passive recipients of education. They need to be actively involved in the process of building a school. How can we create a friendlier atmosphere in school, what should the school look like, what should be taught, how should the school timetable be arranged, what additional services should be provided, and how can the school help to fulfil their dreams and ambitions?

Partnerships also allow community and government resources to be put at the school’s disposal, so more resources and interventions can be provided. Extended school-based services, such as health and nutrition programmes, recreation and leisure activities, psychosocial and interpersonal support, are ways to offer a more holistic response.

Partnerships with training organisations and education institutions can provide more sustainable solutions by boosting teachers’ competencies and supporting their professional development. In the areas of teaching resources – from books and computers to vocational training equipment – providers are also looking for partners who are trustworthy and accountable.

This community contribution towards ensuring access to education for all, the promotion of quality standards and the development of relevant curricular content as well as appropriate learning objectives will encourage active citizenship and social justice.

**SHARED DUTIES, SHARED RIGHTS**

Ownership is, however, a double-sided coin. As governments bear the greatest responsibilities, they would seem to be the most lucrative and sustainable sources of funding. We can benefit from educational and social development subsidies in many locations, and state-appointed teachers are another option. Local knowledge and assessment of the political environment and education agenda can guide us in determining the implications of nurturing such funding opportunities.

In the past, SOS Children’s Villages has entered the educational arena with a very clear and transparent goal: to provide access and continuity of schooling to their own SOS children and to widen participation in schooling for the neighbouring community. With no underlying ‘hidden’ agenda SOS Children’s Villages has been well-positioned to garner government support for their educational programmes and to develop harmonious, well-defined relationships with governments. And we have been able to “keep our promises”. Care should be taken to ensure continued transparency with governments and to ensure that local responses to education are still shaped to fit within government standards and contexts.

Education is currently a global priority. Local and international donor funding has never been so easy to obtain, given the right proposal. In common with socially responsible companies, international aid agencies, trusts and foundations have budgets for educational purposes at their disposal: whether or not SOS Children’s Villages calls on these funds will always depend on synergies arising that relate to the aims of the organisation.
Partnerships and involving stakeholders for ideological and funding reasons have implications. How much input is SOS Children’s Villages prepared to hand over to communities in terms of developing and implementing education policies? How can we package all the services together? How will we agree on areas of accountability within this shared responsibility?

The move towards increased participation is not without risks and potential pitfalls. The decentralisation of planning and decision-making processes allows local services to be more responsive and flexible to local needs. At the same time, their work needs to be developed within the context of international SOS policy. There also needs to be safeguards about international SOS Children’s Villages’ education standards and National Association agreements with the stakeholders and partners in question. As much as international policies can provide a framework for what goes on in schools, the increased autonomy of stakeholders and partners in the management of schools should always be negotiated properly and agreed upon. Critical areas should remain part of our sphere of responsibility, in particular spaces and funding for children from our target group, representation of SOS Children’s Villages on governing boards, staffing ratios and maintenance of facilities, as well as other areas relating to quality assurance.

**FINDING INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS**

As the development community moves to a more participatory and rights-based approach, building the capacity and developing the self-reliance of communities, so too can SOS Children’s Villages contribute to the dual goals of improving education and strengthening civil society. In doing so, SOS Children’s Villages has far more scope for experimentation and innovation in its education programmes than governments and may be well-positioned to find fresh responses to the challenges faced by governments in the education arena.

Essentially then, the fundamental issue for programme planning is not the name on the school gates, but the availability of quality education. The question of whether or not a new school should be built will be answered when we involve all stakeholders and partners in the aim of developing tailor-made, sustainable solutions for quality education. These solutions should recognise and contribute to the wider developing education strategies for the community or country in question. They should also benefit not only our direct target group, the children, but the wider community as well.

Virginia Paterson  
*Regional Educational Co-ordinator, Southern Africa II*
Education is a human right, empowering people to take an active part in society. When they attend kindergarten or school, however, children from our target group often face stigmatisation and discrimination, especially if their development is slower as a result of abuse, malnutrition or neglect. State-funded kindergartens and schools are often not able to provide a supportive and stimulating environment in which children can overcome these challenges.

For this reason, we started an initiative within Central & Eastern Europe/CIS/Baltics in 2006 to improve the state-funded schools and kindergartens attended by the children in our SOS Children’s Village programmes. At present there are 21 such education projects in 12 countries, working with 25 schools and 9 kindergartens in total. The number of children this allows us to reach is 15,838, including 889 from SOS families, 844 from SOS family strengthening programmes, and the rest from the wider community. The programme also involves 1,224 teachers.
The focus of the initiative is on child-centred education, which should be reflected in the teaching methods, curricula and content.

All of the activities in each educational programme are based on a feasibility study which highlighted the educational needs within the given location. On the basis of the study findings, the main areas to be addressed include:

- Training of teachers and school heads
- Developing specific learning support services
- Improving the learning environment including computer literacy
- Strengthening cooperation with stakeholders and the community
- Increasing child and parent participation in decision-making processes and in demanding their right to education.

Close cooperation with partners guarantees the success of the projects as well as their sustainability. Partners include schools and kindergartens (which may also act as resource centres or good practice models) as well as local education authorities and ministries of education. Other project partners are teacher training colleges and similar institutions, international organisations, or local NGOs and companies.

The following is an example of an education programme in Armenia. It clearly describes the paradigm shift within SOS Children's Villages in terms of addressing the educational needs of target group children, and the impact this shift has had on the education of both the target group children and the children of the wider community.

THE ARMENIAN MODEL

The SOS Children’s Village in question is in the vicinity of two state-funded schools, which have much in common in spite of their separate locations. Before we began the project, they were run down and desperately in need of renovation. The quality of teaching was also poor, they had little or no knowledge about child-centred methodologies, there were insufficient modern teaching materials, and they had no proper libraries. The structure was not based on democratic processes, so working with parents or the community was not an option.

The greatest impact on the SOS children attending these schools, however, was the lack of motivation in teachers. This resulted in low student performance, which in turn meant that for many years, teachers persisted in the belief that the intellectual level of the children from SOS families and the family strengthening programme was low. When the teachers offered their services to SOS Children’s Villages to help with the children’s learning, SOS Children’s Villages hired them to give after-school tuition. For years, these teachers came after school to help the children with their homework. This eventually reached a point where nearly all the school-age children in the SOS Children’s Village were recommended for after-school tutoring by the teachers.

When the SOS Children’s Village spotted this pattern, they felt the situation was being manipulated. We were extremely frustrated when we discovered the extent to which it had become a negative practice. Moreover, when we tried to evaluate the results at the end of the academic year, it was obvious that the children had not learnt anything, and the teachers were simply helping them with their homework. It
was time for radical change: and in October 2005 the idea of the programme to raise educational standards evolved.

**INVESTING IN PEOPLE**

After a detailed analysis we realised that we had to invest in people as a first step – in teachers, administrative staff, children and parents. Great efforts were put into achieving a breakthrough in teaching quality in the targeted schools. As key factors in adult education, a shift in attitudes and increased motivation levels were high priority areas for us. Firing enthusiasm in teachers is a key indicator of changed attitudes and higher motivation, which is directly linked to the inspiration of the students as well as being a stimulus for parents. Success in this respect was achieved by organising not only training and seminars with teachers, administrative staff, the children and their parents, but also by offering psychological support to promote and strengthen the triangle of “child-parent-teacher”.

To begin with, we announced that it was no longer acceptable to finance after-school tutoring. Now extra tutoring is only given to children who have gaps in their schooling and are lagging behind their age-group as a result.

As a next step we began to work with the “International Step by Step Association” NGO, who trained our kindergarten staff in their methods, and they in turn started to apply child-centred learning. We then held a meeting with school heads, against the background of the positive results in educational quality and student performance in these kindergartens. They were very open to the idea of receiving support from SOS Children’s Villages, and allowed us to carry out a detailed analysis of their needs. I still clearly remember the statement of one head teacher: “It is impossible to change anything in our school. The school is in very bad shape and we need a lot of money to renovate and upgrade it”. Needless to say, his reaction was pessimistic when we stated our intention of investing in teaching quality.

Our next step was to invite a group of experts to help us find new ways of improving the quality of education
in our schools. Our goal was not to replace the teachers or school management but to help them to learn and practise new methods and, as professionals, to enjoy the process and the results. The analysis findings showed us that nearly all the teachers were experts in their fields, but they did not know enough about child-centred methods to replace traditional teaching with learning design.

To demonstrate and “teach” child-centred methods we invited teachers from Yerevan who were qualified and experienced in this approach. They joined the “best teachers” of the targeted school in workshops. We deliberately asked the teachers in our schools to choose the topics for the workshops. A teacher from the school in Kotayk kicked off with an Armenian lesson: he began with a traditional 25-minute lecture and finished up by asking questions to see how much of the content had been understood by the children. Although the children tried their best, they did not show any progress. The next lesson was given by one of the teachers trained in child-centred methods, which she applied. She focused on the children’s interests and actively involved them in the lesson. It was patently obvious that all the children had learnt more in this lesson than the previous one.

The same process was then repeated for English and mathematics. Again the “traditional” teachers failed to convey their knowledge and ended up expressing their willingness to learn about child-centred methodologies. They said they would like to get more enjoyment from the teaching process, and that they didn’t want to keep working the same way for years on end, blaming the children, their alleged inability, lack of talent or bad genes for poor performance.

In 2009 we introduced our education programme to the state-funded school beside the newly-built SOS Children’s Village in Idjevan, and likewise in Yerevan in 2010.

PRIDE IN THE PROFESSION

In the four years since we began, nearly every teacher has received training in child-centred methodologies and many of them are now successfully practising this approach in their teaching. The level of self-esteem in teachers as professionals has increased considerably and they enjoy the time they spend with the children.

The programme also is a success in terms of costs. The money previously paid for after-school tutoring is now invested in training which allows just about every teacher in every subject to apply child-centred methods. The number of children, parents and teachers benefiting from the same amount of money is far higher as a result. In addition, the schools’ infrastructure has been improved thanks to the support of stakeholders and partners.

When we planned the programme we were hoping for positive results. Its success has proved us right. We believe the problem for most teachers lies not in their inadequate knowledge of the subject, indifference to the children, or lack of professional motivation, but rather in their lack of knowledge about child-centred methodologies.

Our education projects mobilise and motivate those with legal obligations, parents and most importantly, schools and kindergartens to improve the quality of education. They also improve the image of SOS Children’s Villages in the community and advocate the right to education of the children in our countries.

New education projects are planned for six countries in 2011, and by 2012 we hope to introduce projects for educational quality in all countries within our continent.

Sirje Raagmets
Head of Education,
Central & Eastern Europe/CIS/Baltics
Ashot Kocharyan
National Director SOS Children’s Villages Armenia
The title of this article is from the book “Educação como prática para liberdade” (Education as practice for freedom), written by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Freire’s unique style of philosophical, educational and socio-political thought underpins our strategies for working with children, young people and families in communities.

Some 60 years ago a revolutionary movement emerged in Brazil and other Latin American countries, in an environment marked by colonisation and historical oppression on the part of the “discoverers”. Characterised by an innovative vision of education, it is known as “libertarian education”, “emancipating education”, and especially as “popular education”.

According to this way of thinking, education is fundamentally linked to the reality of people without options, who have no way of expressing their human rights as a consequence. Freire refers to this state as “illiteracy”, relating to people’s inability to read or write down their own reality.
This idea differs from educational concepts which are based solely on a collection of abstract, theoretical knowledge. Such approaches enslave the person, turning him into nothing more than a knowledge repository, instead of enabling a free and conscious process that takes account of everyday reality.

**EDUCATION AS THE ROUTE TO EMANCIPATION AND CHANGE**

According to Freire, knowledge is connected to cultural history and the social, historical and political environment of the individual. Education is a means of developing self-awareness, as well as consciousness in relationships with other individuals. Knowledge is revealed in daily life and in relationships between people. The world can become part of learning and continuous development; curiosity can prove to be a constructive feature.

“There would be no creativity without the curiosity that moves us, and places us facing a world for which we make no contribution” [1]

In summary, one might say, knowledge emerges from the “contents” perceived by individuals and from their capacity to transform the reality they know. In this sense, education is seen here not as “limited space” or “formal environment” (classroom and instructor) or as a specific time for the acquisition and accumulation of knowledge; instead education is understood as an ethical factor which develops in and through everyday life.

As Paulo Freire writes, “From the point of view of those in power, there is no doubt that education should be an inflexible practice that hides the truth.” [2] Seen from the perspective of the empowerment and emancipation of the individual, education means freedom and the possibility of change. This concept deliberately transcends what we experience and define as formal education in different countries.

**MOBILISING PRACTICES – INTEGRAL FOCUS METHODOLOGY**

“There would be no creativity without the curiosity that moves us, and places us facing a world for which we make no contribution” [1]

Against the backdrop of Paulo Freire’s thinking, SOS Children’s Villages Brazil has been providing space for discussions, experiences and collective projects based on this mobilising education approach for the last four years. In 2008, with the help of a team of pedagogical assistants from all the SOS Children’s Village programmes, it was possible to establish a national goal for
pedagogical practices entitled Metodologia do Enfoque Integral (Integral Focus Methodology).

"An innovative practice must be developed, so that you can provide meanings and intentions to the people involved. All of what’s been said is essential for those who are committed to a new way of being and doing."

The integral focus method is related to the experiences of educators like Tião Rocha. He created a social project that involved developing the culture of a region that had been forgotten. As part of the project, educators were introduced into many contexts and spaces in the city of Curvelo.

Cidade Aprendiz (Apprentice City), the brainchild of the writer Gilberto Dimenstein, provided another inspiring experience for the development of our method. He advocates setting up additional educational spaces and the effective use of these spaces in the community (schools, public squares, churches, and health centres). Successfully realised, this project is helping to provide solutions in the areas of education and security as well as healthcare.

A MULTIDIMENSIONAL NETWORK

The method developed by SOS Children’s Villages Brazil is based on three fundamental concepts:

Preserving multidimensionality – knowing who you are and your personal relationships, and being capable of interacting with the world and other people.

Promoting the demographic participation of the population – effectively ensuring that everyone participates.

Ensuring an integral vision – recognising the different dimensions that make up a human being: body, feelings, thoughts and spirit.

These basic ideas should be used to create a local network with an emphasis on integral education.
The Integral Focus Method uses a range of pedagogical tools:

- Local reality analysis – mapping the potential steps that might be taken jointly in the community. Building on this analysis, a core theme can then be found for all programme actions.

- Discussions – creating a space for dialogues, talks and planning to give people the opportunity to participate actively and democratically.

- Environment – the conscious attempt to preserve the buildings in which people live and work, in order to promote people’s development.

With the help of this new methodological focus and SOS policies, SOS Children’s Villages Brazil has developed strategies to promote and secure the interests of children, teenagers, and young people. The main goal of this new education perspective and fresh understanding of education is to develop a network of opportunities that clearly indicates the role of the State, the local community and everyone involved. This should bring greater clarity of responsibilities within an educational landscape that promotes freedom as synonymous with effective and transformative participation. As Paulo Freire often said: “Education does not change the world, it changes the people. And people eventually change the world”

Fábio José Garcia Paes  
National Assistant, Programme Development,  
SOS Children’s Villages Brazil

5 Cf. www.cpcd.org.br
6 http://aprendiz.uol.com.br/homepage.mmp
Schooling is a means of combating social injustice, an essential prerequisite for young people to lead an independent and self-sufficient life, as Siddhartha Kaul puts it. In the following interview the Deputy General Secretary and Continent Director for Programme Development tells us more about the starting point for SOS Children’s Villages’ educational programmes in Asia.

**FORUM**: *What is your main focus in implementing the Education Policy?*

**Siddhartha Kaul**: In Asia we see education as the primary tool which allows young people to become self-supporting – both in the families of origin and in SOS families. The children in SOS families in Asia do not have a family or support system outside the SOS Children’s Village to fall back on. Their sole support system is SOS Children’s Villages. It is crucial for them to get an education so that they can find a job and become self-supporting. That’s the main focus in our SOS families.

In our family strengthening programmes in Asia we work with families who live below the poverty line. These families have little opportunity of earning their own income and for the most part, they have not had any form of education. So the best way we can help these families is to give one family member the support he or she needs to secure the family’s financial future. It is an attempt to break this cycle of poverty. So they have to get some sort of education to achieve this goal. The family strengthening programmes help them by offering targeted provision. But that doesn’t mean it’s just
a matter of completing primary school or getting a high school diploma.

The children and young people can acquire the education they need anywhere, in public schools or in the Hermann Gmeiner Schools of SOS Children’s Villages. The idea behind starting our own schools was to enable children to have school-based education in areas where the government did not have enough schools or the quality of schools left a lot to be desired. At present we also run schools in partnership with the government, and provide the necessary support. But family strengthening programmes are sometimes based in areas where there is no school within a 20 to 30 mile radius. So we have to set up educational programmes there, which need not be a formal school as such.

**FORUM:** Can you give us an example of a particularly successful education programme in Asia?

**Siddhartha Kaul:** I’d like to tell you about two programmes. The Northern India province of Bihar is one of the poorest provinces in India. In one of the poorest districts, Begusarai, we run a family strengthening programme for about 1,200 children and their families. No one has attended school there for generations. So the children in our programme are seeing a school for the first time. Instead of sending them to a formal school, our co-workers offer them an educational programme within their village. The lessons are held in little thatch-roof sheds very similar to the houses in which they live. All the children go to school, and are always properly dressed - they take pride in dressing nicely and going to school. The parents bring other children along and they stand outside the school grounds, watching what is going on there, as their children are singing and so on…it’s fascinating. Our aim is to raise the educational level of these children so that at least 25% of them can attend state schools. To me, this programme makes a lot of sense.

The second programme runs in several countries: Cambodia, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, and now India as well. We started it on a very small scale in Sri Lanka. The programme is aimed at young people who have completed
secondary school but not senior high school. They cannot pursue their studies because they come from poor families and cannot afford further education. They become landless labourers without any prospects. So we started a vocational training programme, linking up with a number of businesses. It may be a very small-scale programme, but we run it in various locations. We select young people, talk to their families, and pay for them to attend the programme. What it means is that we meet the costs of the school bus, something to eat, and the overalls they need for work.

These training programmes last between six and eighteen months and have been certified by the government. The diploma and certificate they obtain provide the qualifications for entry into the job market. But rather than just running the programme itself, we also sort out apprenticeships. We talk to big companies and ask them what kind of people they need, and then tailor the training accordingly. We also say to these companies: “We will do this, but you have to give us a guarantee that you will take these young people into your company and offer them an apprenticeship.” And they agree to it. A large number of young people have now completed their apprenticeships there. Today we are in a position to create work for 90 to 95% of these young people thanks to this scheme. This means that these poor families living below the poverty line now have a family member earning a steady income. That’s the basic idea.

FORUM: What makes them so successful?
Siddhartha Kaul: First and foremost it is the high employment rate among our young people, but the personal commitment of our co-workers is another significant factor in the success. This is not some soulless programme. Co-workers take great effort to tailor the programme to the young people’s needs. It’s not as if the young people just run through the programme, get a certificate and are then free to go. We know what we want to achieve.

FORUM: Would you say that both these programmes fit the Education Policy?
Siddhartha Kaul: They certainly fit into the Education Policy, as well as the SOS Programme Policy and our Mission Statement “Who we are”. There is one main aim underpinning the policy: social justice. And I believe these programmes are an essential step towards social justice. As a child development organisation, we are addressing these social inequalities by such programmes. These programmes can never be self-financing but we try to find local sponsors, like the companies who offer the young people an apprenticeship. This lets them make their contribution. We also have companies contributing towards uniforms or travel costs for the youngsters. But ultimately the main priority is social justice which is a crucial factor for emerging and developing countries.
The question as to how children and young people learn is particularly appropriate during times of change in society or when education systems no longer function as they should or did in the past and don’t deliver the expected intelligent ‘output’ of the next generation. Declining standards of education and growing illiteracy in developed countries make headlines in the news and are of great concern to educators and parents alike. Education is one of the main topics discussed during election campaigns everywhere but the underlying issue is not education, it is learning. The reality is that our children go to school, are taught there, and take part in the curriculum. But they are not learning properly, says Barbara Prashnig, author of this article.

One phenomenon seems to puzzle teachers and parents alike: why do some children begin to fail as soon as they enter primary school? Why do many make it into middle school but then sharply lose the motivation to learn? And why are there even more grammar school students who are frustrated and utterly bored, who find it extremely difficult to achieve good marks in several subject areas and as a result eventually give up, convinced that school and academic learning is not for them? Such inability to succeed in school is often accompanied by behavioural problems in class and at home, which in the worst cases leads to truancy, delinquency, or alcohol and drug abuse.

**OUR INDIVIDUAL LEARNING STYLE**

The starting point is very simple, and therefore often overlooked as the underlying reason for school failure: it is the phenomenon of our individual learning style,
HOW DO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE LEARN?

The way we concentrate on, process, and later remember new or difficult information. Every human being has a personal learning style, which evolves from interconnected learning preferences and learning needs, as symbolised in the LSA (Learning Style Analysis) Pyramid.

LSA profiles reveal which type of instruction students need to help them to learn or successfully absorb difficult information. The options range from listening, talking, discussing, reading, watching, thinking, imagining, and being involved in hands-on activities to experiencing or feeling. For many students, however, the traditional delivery of learning content through handouts and lecturing with little interaction is simply not an appropriate learning style. Through our work with the LSA tool we have discovered that many people, whether young or old, learn best by getting involved and moving their bodies.

Once teachers understand the importance of matching true learning needs with appropriate teaching strate-

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"I've learnt many things in my SOS family. My SOS mother has taught me to be nice and friendly to people. I have seen how she interacts with my brothers and sisters and with others, and how she expresses her feelings and her needs. I have also learnt to work as a team."

Berania, 13,
SOS Children’s Village Léon, Nicaragua
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Finding My Own Way

“My ambition is to become a teacher,” says twenty-year-old Diva from Namibia. “I’d like to teach practical subjects like agriculture and emphasise the importance of sustainable development.” Being a slow learner academically, Diva says she has chosen this direction because she believes it gives hope to others like her.

“During my primary and early secondary education, I struggled to learn the content in textbooks. I had to develop my own ways and means of understanding the lesson during my examination preparations. My enrolment in the Eros Girls School then provided me with an opportunity to excel in practical subjects, because I could observe the ‘product’ from the beginning to the end.

I decided to adopt this learning method. Whenever a lesson was covered by the teacher, I would try to copy the experiment at home and record the results in my mother tongue. I’ve learnt that through practical experience, I could relate far better to the lesson at hand and could speak more freely about the subject in class.”

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gies, they can use their students’ LSA profiles to make personalised lessons possible for all students. To be able to integrate different learning styles into the classroom teachers need to watch out for anomalous results in the group profiles analysis, and divide students with similar needs into sub-groups, implementing every conceivable strategy to accommodate different learning styles. Teachers don’t necessarily have to cater for the individual needs of every single student, but can divide them into small groups with similar learning styles, particularly when they have to teach something new or difficult!

The eight most important needs of underachievers and at-risk students are:

1. Moving around at frequent intervals;
2. A variety of instructional resources (to match students’ low auditory and low visual learning abilities and their strong preferences for tactile/kinesthetic learning - i.e. practical activities – as well as their strong need for variety rather than routines and teaching by rote);
3. Learning difficult content outside early morning classes;

To study magic, you also have to be resourceful. “After we learnt several simple tricks from a book, we began searching for new ones online,” explains Artan. “The magician from the TV show pointed us to a website with lots of tricks which we check every day for new material. We describe every trick we learn in detail in our notebook.”

To be a good magician, you have to be charismatic and bold on stage. If you’re scared and insecure, the audience will see through every trick,” claims twelve-year-old Martin. The boy knows what he’s talking about. For the past year he’s been working hard at learning and practising magic tricks.

Together with Artan, his best friend from the SOS Children’s Village Skopje in Macedonia, Martin formed the magicians’ duo that performs at every celebration in the village and in schools.

“We found out about magic when we were guests on a TV show,” explains Martin. “Another guest was a magician. Artan and I were really impressed and wanted to learn his tricks. He agreed to teach us and that’s how it started.”

As Martin explains “We make our props from cloth, string, cards, boxes, etc. I don’t think you should just buy your props in a shop. Then the seller would know how it works and if he knows, the audience will know too. And a good magician never reveals his secret,” agrees Artan.

“I definitely would like to continue with magic,” Martin goes on. “It would be great if we could travel the world, meet people and learn new magic tricks. But Artan would have to come too. He’s my best friend and he’d be my interpreter.”

The two friends love to perform as a duo in the village. “We can help each other on stage,” says Artan. “Also, we can change the act quicker if one of us wobbles a bit,” adds Martin, making Artan giggle.
4. Recognising their high motivation despite their inability to learn through conventional methods; positive feedback instead of put-downs;
5. Collegial rather than authoritarian teachers;
6. Resources which introduce new and difficult information through multi-sensory methods (kinesthetic, tactile, visual, auditory) to make learning easier and more appealing;
7. Informal seating arrangements in classrooms to respond to many students’ inability to sit still for more than 10-12 minutes and provide the space they need to move around;
8. Soft lighting, which means avoiding fluorescent lights in classrooms.

COMPENSATING FOR NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES

The students in question should be encouraged to learn in different ways. The trouble is, they often don’t think it’s possible themselves. They have experienced failure for so long that they are used to their negative labels and have lost all confidence in their learning abilities. Trust-building is of the essence here. All that’s needed here is a lot of patience on the part of the teachers who understand their students’ true learning needs and approach them with gentle authority. My message to teachers is “Please, please keep up your valuable work. You have to save the learning life of these students!”

Readers who are interested in helping underachieving students to be more successful will find a wealth of information combined with practical examples and case studies in my book “Learning Styles in Action” published in the UK by Continuum Press. It is a sequel to my second book, “The Power of Diversity”.

“I always learn when I am with my friends, brothers and sisters, when I am influenced by their attitudes. I can then get to know how they feel, and find out about life experiences.”

*Pamela, a teenager from SOS Children’s Village Iloilo, Philippines*

“In my SOS primary school, learning meant memorising what the teacher had taught you. Things you learnt outside the classroom were not seen as relevant to a young person’s development. At SOS Hermann Gmeiner International College, I learnt a lot of facts about the world, but it was my experience of various social groups that made me who I am today. Being curious is one of many ways I have learnt; wanting to understand things gave me a lot of experience, including what works and does not work in different communities. It’s easier to learn and gain experience if you are prepared to make mistakes. After all, what kind of people are we if we are always right? They say Albert Einstein made 999 mistakes before solving his famous equation.”

*Jamad, 24, grew up in SOS Children’s Village Mogadishu, Somalia, and went to Hermann Gmeiner International College in Ghana*
accommodated. It’s a practical handbook for implementing personalised learning and integrating students’ different learning styles. The book also explains how the idea of learning styles can be linked to other pedagogical concepts in order to improve the delivery of curriculum content.

DOING JUSTICE TO DIVERSITY

If we start from the position that every individual has his or her unique style of learning, then we also recognise that a teachers’ personal learning style also influences the way he or she teaches. However, every teacher must be aware of the different learning styles that are represented in their classrooms, and they have to do justice to this diversity. It’s a lot to ask and what it really means is this: as an educator you must teach the way you teach best, but at the same time you must teach in multi-sensory ways to meet the differing needs of ALL students.

Therefore teachers need to know their own teaching style as well as assessing the learning styles of their students. Fortunately, we have developed sophisticated software which does both. It can recommend areas where improvements in teaching techniques could help in appealing to a wider student group.

In my international work with educators I have seen what the matching of learning and teaching styles can do to improve academic grades, discipline and learning motivation. Particularly in underachievers we were able to see changes in as little as six to eight weeks. And all that is only possible through a profound understanding of our teaching style and our students’ learning style.

Barbara Prashnig
Emeritus Professor from New Zealand, author of several books.

Readers who are interested in identifying their own LSA-Adult profile are invited to use this direct link to the online questionnaire: http://clc.co.nz/profile/A391922

2 Both books and the LSA software available from: www.creativelearningcentre.com

LEARNING OUTSIDE SCHOOL

A group of young people – between the ages of 10 and 13 - from SOS Children’s Village Waterfalls in Zimbabwe, tell us what sort of things they have learnt outside school:

Chegetai comes up with a mixture of the practical and the moral. “To cook and to forgive,” he said thoughtfully. “I learnt to share by seeing others sharing and by dividing my toys with my brothers and sisters like my mum taught me.”

Daddin and Kudzanai were proud to explain all the things that they had learnt about living independently. “I think it’s great to learn about new things. I want to find out how to look after myself and earn money,” said Daddin. He also mentions that the most difficult thing he has learnt to do is cleaning windows. “It’s hard to make them sparkle - you have to scrub hard. My sister Precious taught me. She was very patient with me.”

Kudzanai says that he has learnt all about housekeeping from his mother and brothers and sisters. “We all take turns to help in the house. You can learn a lot when you all work together.”
The basic idea of the MeetingCultures initiative (www.MeetingCultures.org) is to use music and art as a tool for education and development. Stella Mendonça, co-founder of MeetingCultures, tells us in an interview about the idea and about the first steps that are being taken to prepare for the joint project with SOS Children’s Villages in southern Africa.

**FORUM:** What is the basic idea and the concept of MeetingCultures?

**Stella Mendonça:** Our aim is to develop sustainable, long-term education programmes for music and art in the south – hence creating a complementary tool to existing basic education. We plan to work on the development of education programmes for singing, acting, dance and learning to play instruments. Students engaged in music education projects are often more positive, more motivated and more disciplined. Together with SOS Children’s Villages, we can have a profound positive influence and inspirational impact on society. We also strive to create a valuable tool of cultural exchange and cultural innovations.

Instead of building facilities from scratch, we plan to work closely with SOS Children’s Villages as the organisation is already operating locally and running social and educational programmes for children and families.
Our concept offers the opportunity for a fast implementation and in a second step, a cost-efficient replication in many other locations around the world. We are now looking into fundraising to secure the long-term funding of MeetingCultures.

In our collaboration with SOS Children’s Villages and ambassadorships of renowned artists and personalities, we strive for both quality and credibility.

**FORUM: How was MeetingCultures set up?**

**Stella Mendonça:** Being a native Mozambican myself who received the wonderful opportunity to study voice and music in France already at an early age, followed by performances of classical music in many countries, I always wanted to also use my talent for Africa, trying to bridge north and south.

Teaching young talents for many years in my own opera studio here in Berne and staging different classic productions in Africa - e.g. Bizet’s Carmen in 2002 -, confirmed my understanding of the African sense of musicality and its huge potential.

After a long process of reflection and research, along with discussions with Maria João Pires and my partner Andreas, we gradually developed the concept of MeetingCultures over the past few years.

In 1999 the pianist Maria João Pires created Casa Belgais - a centre for the study of music and the arts, and Andreas worked as a consultant and fundraiser for different NGOs.

One of the important questions underlying the concept of MeetingCultures: “How can we offer this complementary education AND reach as many children as possible?” For this reason, we mainly decided to cooperate with already established not-for-profit partners or with existing schools in the south, strengthening their existing basic education programmes. This opens not only the door to culture for a larger group of non-privileged children, but will also reduce implementation costs.

**FORUM: What is your understanding of “learning”?**

**Stella Mendonça:** In my understanding learning is an active and integrated cognitive process of gaining knowledge or skills in a structured way. Studied methodologies and techniques of learning are important and
should, in an integrated environment, help us to maximise a person’s potential. The social-cultural context is as important as the subject itself.
I also believe in the importance of learning about music and the arts, because it develops literacy and language skills, helps to acquire reasoning and the basics of maths, and increases self-confidence and discipline.
Overall, it has been proven that music has a deep and lasting impact on children’s general educational development, as well as encouraging teambuilding and getting the children to do their best. The Meeting Cultures team believes passionately in empowering students to take responsibility for their own lives.
We are very aware of the many challenges still facing the majority of civil societies in the south, but we see culture also as a tool for development, representing an additional need for material progress.

FORUM: What are your plans for the near future?
Stella Mendonça: With regards to the two pilot projects proposed by SOS Children’s Villages for Mozambique and South Africa, we are planning a first field trip in order to establish detailed plans and budgets, followed by a fundraising campaign.
In parallel, we are working on the commissioning of the African opera project “TERRA SONÂMBULA”, based on a novel by Mia Couto, and in collaboration with Henning Mankell who is writing the libretto (www.TerraSonambula.com).
In-between those two major projects, I would like to find the time to prepare a recital programme in collaboration with Maria João Pires, honouring Liszt’s 200th anniversary in 2011.

For additional information, please go to: www.SONCAinternational.org

How can young children play an active role in developing the design of learning environments? And what methods can be used to bring together children’s and practitioners’ views about their environment? These questions are explored in Transforming Children’s Spaces, the culmination of ten years’ work by the author, Alison Clark.

Based on two actual building projects, this book demonstrates how young children see their environment, the aspirations they have for their spaces, and how their views can influence the design and review of children’s spaces. Transforming Children’s Spaces also introduces the ‘Mosaic approach’, in which the author has taken a leading role.

Combining different methods, the Mosaic approach concentrates on the strengths of the participants. The foreword describes the approach as participatory, reflexive, and adaptable, and focused on the children’s experiences. A common language on which to base this model of dialogue had to be found in order to elucidate the views of children. So photography was one way of accessing the children’s knowledge about their environment. It became a key tool in extending communication between the different players involved.

Emphasising the importance of visual and verbal methods of communication, this book shows how participatory methods can support new relationships between children, practitioners and architects. As well as addressing the issue of involving children in the research projects, it also considers the environment in which the children live and learn, the relationship between adults and children, and how the interviews with young children should be conducted. In the case of the school survey, the children were between three and five years old. While Part I introduces the theoretical and methodological tools, Part II deals with gathering children’s narratives about existing, possible and new spaces, giving examples of applied methods. This generates a discussion on the major themes which emerged from the young children’s views about their environment.

Part III explores facilitating exchange between young children and adults within the design process. One chapter examines how making young children’s perspectives visible can open up debate within learning communities and among practitioners and parents about shared environments; another illustrates the interaction between young children, practitioners and architects at different stages of the design process, from initial discussion to post-occupancy reviews.

Part IV discusses the potential implications of adopting the model of dialogue described in this book. It also explores how these ways of communicating can help more schools and early childhood institutions to become living spaces for children and adults that are attuned to a person’s capabilities and needs.

Karin Demuth
SOS Children’s Villages International, Programme Development
Various care systems are available for children living in alternative care which ensure and improve their chances of development. However, inadequate care can hinder this development and result in children’s fundamental rights being violated.

Against this background, SOS Children’s Villages will organise the International Conference “Quality in Alternative Care” in the Clarion Congress Hotel in Prague from 4 – 6 April 2011.

The aims of the conference are to:

- Identify ways of empowering children and young people to take an active part in improving the care system.
- Promote the implementation of quality care standards by giving an account of their impact.
- Provide a platform and networking opportunities.
- Highlight the changes needed in policy and practice and align them with international frameworks.

The International Conference “Quality in Alternative Care” is aimed at decision makers, NGOs, care facilities, and young people with experience of care, among others. In order to set up a level-playing field, we will work with the young people over a three-day period in a preparatory meeting prior to the conference.

We want to give as many young people as possible the chance to attend the conference, so we are looking for sponsors!

Contact: www.quality-care-conference.com, quality-care-conference@sos-kd.org