



CHILD FRIENDLY SCHOOLS

CHAPTER 6 Learners, teachers and school managers

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CHAPTER 6

LEARNERS, TEACHERS AND SCHOOL MANAGERS

Can China create schools that foster openness, flexibility and innovation? And what happens to China if it does?

Even as American educators seek to emulate Asian pedagogy – a test-centered ethos and a rigorous focus on math, science and engineering – Chinese educators are trying to blend a Western emphasis on critical thinking, versatility and leadership into their own traditions. To put it another way, in the ... style typical of official Chinese directives (as well as of educationese the world over), the nation's schools must strive "to build citizens' character in an all-round way, gear their efforts to each and every student, give full scope to students' ideological, moral, cultural and scientific potentials and raise their labor skills and physical and psychological aptitudes, achieve vibrant student development and run themselves with distinction."

Source: Hulbert, Ann, 'Re-education', *The New York Times Magazine*, 1 April 2007.

6.1 SCHOOL REFORM AND LEARNING ACHIEVEMENT

During their early and formative years, children spend half their waking hours in school. It is therefore reasonable to expect that schools and teachers will help forge students' development and destinies. Countries invest heavily in schools as the key institution for shaping the lives of the young and preparing them for future roles in homes, communities and society at large. Much is expected of schools, especially in terms of enabling children to achieve their potential through mastery of the learning prescribed in the curriculum.

The school is not the only determinant of how children develop, what they learn, how much they

learn and what becomes their ultimate destiny. Innate abilities, socio-economic factors relating to home and community background, and information and knowledge in the popular culture play a key role in children's lives. Links between schools and communities are critical for optimizing the school's influence on the child's development and achievements.

The school's main contribution rests on the total learning experience it provides for children. A wide range of planned and unplanned activities is involved, usually defined as the formal curriculum and the 'hidden' curriculum. The specific ways in

which schools are expected to make a contribution will be established by the teaching and learning process that takes place in the classroom as well as 'outdoor' activities organized as part of the curriculum. In fact, the interactive classroom process has the greatest influence in determining learning outcomes because education is most of all about engaging young minds.

Over time, schools and education systems develop distinctive teaching and learning styles, which may be based on learning theories, philosophies of learning rooted in the culture or simply practices that have evolved through eclectic teaching and learning methods. The predominant pedagogy usually influences education from primary school to university, and determines the kind of successful learner produced by the education system. In every system, good schools tend to excel in the predominant style of teaching and learning, while taking into account the requirements of different subject areas. For instance, teaching mathematics will be different from teaching literature; teaching science will be different from teaching religious studies.

In general, the predominant style of teaching and learning defines what constitutes success. At one extreme, successful learners may be those who excel at formulating arguments, assembling evidence, exercising judgement, expressing opinions, exploring creativity, showing tolerance, making innovative decisions and developing a balanced approach to life. At the other extreme, successful learners may be those who are good at following rules, conforming to conventions,

applying formulas, memorizing facts, correcting mistakes and managing time. All of these can count as successful learning, as long as learners master much of what is prescribed in the curriculum.

The predominant means of measuring learning achievement helps determine teaching and learning styles as well as the culture of schools and education systems. In some systems, there is a predominance of multiple-choice testing, frequent tests and continuous assessment, while others focus on major examinations at the end of a grade or cycle and use test formats that involve technical problem-solving, essays and comprehension exercises. Learning assessment systems may also emphasize and reward individual efforts or teamwork through different categories of projects and assignments. Most schools and education systems will use a combination of these means of testing learning achievement, but there will be a predominant testing mode that learners must master if they are to be successful.

At an early stage of their education, children quickly learn the importance of the predominant style and the significance of the main testing modes that are used to determine learning achievement. Initiation into this culture can take place, for instance, when children begin to understand that self-expression is discouraged in favour of rote memorization; when answers are known only to the teacher; when there is only one right way of doing things; when conformity is rewarded and creativity is punished; and when labels of 'stupid' or 'clever' are applied to young children.

In a child-friendly school, the style of teaching and learning will be centred on what is best for the learner. It will be geared towards bringing out the best in each learner as he or she strives to master the prescribed knowledge, skills and attitudes in the curriculum. Child-friendly schools will encourage the use of different teaching and learning methods appropriate for the children and the subject matter. This promotes multiple paths to knowledge and skills acquisition.

To facilitate multiple learning pathways, teachers will need to be reflective practitioners who:

- Strive to understand why some children do not do as well as others;
- Use different techniques and strategies to get children to learn and succeed;
- Operate on the basis that children can follow different learning paths to achieve success.

Teachers need training and support to accomplish this. Teachers as reflective practitioners are troubled when only half the class gets test questions right after a lesson, so they explore alternative teaching methods to help the failing half of the class raise their scores. As such, pedagogy in a child-friendly school will be based on such facts as:

- Children learn by exploring and expressing opinions just as much as they do by memorizing facts and following set rules;
- Children need to challenge other opinions in the process of learning just as much as they need to take certain facts on trust from those who know better;
- Children need the freedom to use their inner resources to solve problems just as much as they need guidance in making the best use of their natural talents as learners.



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Such principles will guide the range of teaching and learning styles employed by the teacher as a reflective practitioner operating in a child-friendly classroom. The broad focus is on the best interest of the child and how to bring out the best in every child.

Learning is an individual process dependent as much on what a child brings to it as on what a teacher does to facilitate it. The nature of this process will vary with the age and developmental stage of the child, among other factors. For instance, in the early years of school young children do not have the same 'readiness' in terms of skills, knowledge and ability to learn complex concepts as older children or adults. Children learn differently at this stage, and research indicates that, for the most part, learning occurs through structured play. Learning is also affected by language and culture, especially if the curriculum is based on a language and culture alien to the learner. Research makes clear that children learn best in the early years when taught in their own language; so schools often must adopt multilingual policies for children from different ethnic or language backgrounds.

The research literature also shows that children learn better when they are motivated and encouraged to participate in classroom activities. Therefore, class size needs to be manageable for a teacher to give adequate attention to motivating each child. Motivation can come from the physical environment in which learning takes place, the facilitating efforts of the teacher and the activities and processes among the learners in the classroom. The interest shown in

children's education and well-being by parents, local communities and the nation at large also can inspire students' motivation to learn. A child-friendly school in itself attracts and motivates children, brightening up their lives and inspiring them with the desire to learn (UNICEF, 1999).

A child-friendly classroom or learning space is many things. It is not only friendly and welcoming for the child, but also conducive to learning, safe for all, gender-responsive and fully inclusive. It provides opportunities for girls and boys alike, regardless of their background, enabling all to participate equitably in the learning process. In such schools, as far as possible and appropriate, the focus is on allowing learners to experiment with ideas and discover answers to promote the 'joy of learning' that comes from self-discovery. In much the same way, these schools encourage and facilitate the 'joy of teaching' that comes from applying professional skills and reflective methods to help all children achieve in the learning process.

Experiences in different countries show that child-friendly schools provide motivation for teachers, who, through the schools, are introduced to appropriate pedagogy for the first time. As they operate in stimulating classrooms and use new techniques to improve learning achievement for their students, these teachers become infused with a new sense of pride in their own professional competence. And as the schoolchildren display a new confidence and an increased interest in learning, their teachers are better able to win the respect and trust of parents and local communities. Such professional rewards and recognition can be just

as important to teachers as issues of salary and conditions of service. It has also been observed in several countries that teachers who have been introduced to child-friendly pedagogy often serve as ambassadors for the model. They motivate other teachers to become more reflective in their work and more concerned with the general welfare and improved learning achievements of all their students.

The teacher's role is the key to achieving results in child-friendly schools and learning spaces. Therefore, the required training and support to prepare teachers for this important role must be a priority. Attention also should be given to teachers' rights and responsibilities as well as their accountability and general conditions of professional service. For teachers to play the critical role expected of them, the classroom design and layout should be right for them and should provide and organize teaching and learning materials and activities appropriately. These elements contribute significantly to the overall classroom management necessary for quality teaching and learning.

Whatever teachers do in a child-friendly school, they need to focus on child participation and consciously strive for children's empowerment as an outcome of the learning process. Combining the right classroom conditions and processes with the expertise of trained teachers and a supply of pedagogic materials constitutes the critical child-friendly school package.

The challenge that countries face is not only to plan for new child-friendly schools, but also to make existing schools more child-friendly

in order to boost education quality throughout the system. The range of problems encountered in refurbishing an existing school may include unattractive classrooms, inappropriate teaching-learning methods, inadequate teaching-learning materials, unsafe school grounds, absence of effective and sustainable teacher support systems and poor teacher motivation. These factors erode education quality and contribute to high drop-out rates and low levels of learning achievement. School reform to improve quality therefore requires effective strategies for the investment of resources and support of key stakeholders.

Education reform based on the child-friendly school model makes it possible to:

- Implement innovative classroom practices that greatly improve learning outcomes;
- Encourage the involvement, cooperation and participation of children, teachers, school heads and parents in the reform process;
- Cultivate incentives for improving the quality of education based on favourable working conditions that serve to motivate teachers, students and the community.

These working assumptions of the child-friendly school model are conditions for success in the sense that they need to be factored into education reform plans as 'risks'. In other words, if the assumptions do not hold in practice, results from investing in child-friendly schools will be less than expected. The child-friendly reform process needs to avoid generating false expectations like those that have occurred in earlier education

investments. For instance, it was assumed previously that if countries simply invested in constructing schools and providing teachers and materials, quality education for all would blossom. But it takes more than supply-side provisions to achieve such results, and more attention needs to be given to the demand-side barriers that keep children out of school, even when schools and teachers are available.

The key assumptions about success in child-friendly schools are fairly cautious and based on widely accepted norms about human behaviour. They include expectations about how children and their parents are likely to behave, such as:

- Based on their innate abilities and instincts, all children wish to learn and will do so if their natural curiosity is encouraged and strengthened;
- Parents who can afford the costs will send their children to school regularly if they trust the school to teach and care for them;
- Children will willingly attend school on a regular basis if they find the teaching-learning process enjoyable, stimulating, inspiring and attractive;
- Children and their parents will develop confidence in schools if the children are making progress with learning;
- Communities will generally support teachers and identify with schools (local ownership) if children are learning, teachers are committed to facilitating learning and the school is responsive to the concerns of the local community.

6.2 PREPARING TEACHERS

Teachers are central to school reform. Thus, the success of implementing child-friendly models in the context of reform will depend on the calibre of teachers within the system. In many developing countries, a high percentage of teachers lack the requisite level of education and training needed to rise to the challenge of school reform. Moreover, for many reasons, the morale and motivation of teachers in these countries may be low. If school reform is to succeed, it will be critical to establish well-designed training and mentoring programmes that build competencies, strengthen capacity and improve the morale of teachers. This will include high-quality preservice and in-service training for teachers enabling them

to operate effectively within the challenging rights-based, child-centred and interactive pedagogy that is at the heart of the child-friendly school model.

Investing in this type of training must be a two-pronged approach: focusing on in-service training for existing teachers, preferably at the school level; and building new capacity through preservice training for those wishing to join the teaching profession. In addition, strong teacher mentoring by school heads will be essential for success. For many countries, this would require a revitalization and restructuring of teacher training. Such restructuring would not only improve professional competencies, but also encourage



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changes in career structures, accreditation policy and promotion criteria in recognition of competencies gained through in-service training. Both preservice and in-service training should be designed to integrate child-centred pedagogy with content area knowledge and subject specialization.

To date, systems reform efforts have been limited, making in-service training the main mode for preparing teachers and school heads for child-friendly schools. The lessons learned from this experience indicate that in-service training needs to be continuous and localized to produce results. It also must tap into the resources that teachers bring to the training process. Teachers have enormous reserves of knowledge and experience that often remain untapped in conventional training programmes. In-service training should build confidence, skills and new strategies and help identify problems that teachers face in embracing change. Every child-friendly school initiative to date has involved developing and implementing in-service teacher training programmes with a variety of delivery models. These initiatives have produced a wealth of training guides, modules, checklists and other support materials.

So far, successful in-service training has taken the form of short workshops,

combined with increased opportunities for teachers to regularly share good practices and deal with professional problems. This approach enables teachers to assist, train and support each other on a regular basis and benefit from the professional and personal support available from formal training centres, especially vital for teachers in remote locations. Teachers who participate in these mutual support schemes take ownership of the process and understand the issues and constraints they need to address. Eventually they are able to monitor, evaluate and implement the measures needed to improve their own classroom practice. Based on experiences in several countries, it is critical for this reciprocal approach to be understood, valued and supported by head teachers and education administrators. The reform process requires budgeting of the necessary funds and an allocation of time for these types of exercises.

For many countries, such an intensive, comprehensive approach to training and support implies major reform in teacher education policies and practice. Current policy and practice often fail to transform classroom processes. And if changes are not made in training patterns, school-level investments may not yield the best results for child-friendly schools. To

contribute effectively to changes in classroom practices, teacher education pedagogy should not only stress the theory that underpins child-centred learning, but also be grounded in practical methodologies that have been successfully classroom-tested. In-service training for teachers and school

heads is also important for bolstering their capacities for school development and planning, as the child-friendly school is likely to be different from most other existing schools.

Reform that seeks to make schools child-friendly system-wide will

IN-SERVICE TRAINING: TEACHER-CENTRED TRAINING FOR CHILD-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS

In Ethiopia and Kenya, a five-day in-service teacher training programme was developed with unique organizational, methodological and content features. Additionally, the programme set out to improve quality by varying the customary training hierarchy with questions of 'who trains?' and 'how will the training be conducted?' This innovative training was based on the following principles:

- The training programme must be stimulating, inspiring, motivating and exciting for teachers and trainers;
- For maximum impact, the training programme preferably should be residential, with minimum distractions;
- The training should bring about a change in teachers' perceptions and orientation in a way that enables them to put what they have learned into immediate practice;
- Teachers should be given 'take-away' resource packs that they can use in their classrooms;
- Teachers should be given suggested, rather than prescriptive, guidelines that can subsequently be adapted to their classroom and school situations and supported through continuous training at the cluster level;
- The training programme should be activity-based and highly participatory, as well as helpful and friendly (non-threatening), so that teachers feel confident enough to share experiences, learn from mistakes, express doubts and voice shortcomings without fear of ridicule;
- The training process should involve some behavioural objectives, including self-discipline, role modelling, respecting each others' views, punctuality, cooperation, equitable treatment and gender sensitivity;
- The training programme should use enthusiasm as 'shock therapy' to help teachers rapidly replace any inertia, cynicism or 'non-action syndrome' that might defeat promising innovations;
- Teachers should finish the course feeling confident and satisfied not only that they have learned a great deal, but that it is feasible to put what they have learned into practice in their classrooms;
- Trainers should include experienced, practicing teachers who are familiar with a variety of teacher training techniques and are able to articulate how these techniques can be made effective in schools;
- Trainers should be enthusiastic about child-friendly school models and capable of generating excitement and interest in the teacher trainees, who need to observe and hear inspiring trainers to be motivated.

succeed only to the extent that it is possible to build a critical mass of trained, committed teachers, education managers and teacher educators. Universities and teacher training institutions must take the lead in school reform processes. For child-friendly school models to be sustained at the education-system level, they have to be an integral part of preservice teacher education programmes, and several countries have started this process. However, the main challenge is not with preservice training, but in designing appropriate in-service programmes that prepare current teachers for the demands and challenges of the highly innovative, child-friendly school models.

Experiences with these models in countries that have begun to integrate them in preservice teacher education, such as Ethiopia, Kenya and Vanuatu, have underscored that teachers' behaviour change must be 'institutionalized' at both the classroom and the school level for successful reform. Only when such changes are routinely part of everyday practice in the classroom and throughout the school will there be a positive impact on the education system in terms of access, quality and learning achievement. In short, this type of reform requires sustained, long-term support to transform classroom practice.

Support measures that have proved to be effective include:

- Building capacity and strengthening the role of field-level education supervisors as resource persons who follow up

with teachers in their schools or at the school cluster level;

- Enhancing the capacities of head teachers as mentors and 'catalysts for change' at the school and community levels;
- Helping teachers develop self-confidence in their professional competence and become increasingly autonomous as capable child-friendly school practitioners.

Experience to date suggests that school-based, on-the-job training and support are most appropriate for building teacher competencies and maintaining momentum around the change process in classrooms and schools. In providing such training, it is essential for teachers and head teachers to be treated as professionals with a stake in developing their school and their own practice. Purely technical

INDIA: TEACHER EMPOWERMENT PROJECTS

Experience from India has shown that timely involvement of teachers can enhance the process of education reform. The Teacher Empowerment Projects in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh in the 1990s included high teacher participation at early stages. As a result, the Primary Teachers' Association assumed a leadership role and helped motivate teachers to fully support child-friendly school innovations introduced by the Education Department with UNICEF support. This type of partnership between teachers' unions and associations, which goes beyond issues of salary and conditions of service, has helped to successfully implement innovations such as child-friendly schools.

training programmes tend to treat teachers and head teachers simply as practitioners who lack the knowledge and skills necessary to implement the innovations that have been designed by others. Major changes are required in the mindset of those who plan the new type of in-service teacher training programmes. If these new programmes are to work and improve education quality, there must be a close relationship and understanding between the teachers and teacher educators. In such

countries as Ethiopia and Kenya, the core trainers providing in-service training include both teachers and teacher educators. They work closely together, demonstrate mutual respect as professionals and understand the need to communicate and cooperate with each other. (See Box, page 8.)

Teachers' motivation and commitment are as much a part of the reform process as their knowledge and technical competencies. Salaries and

ETHIOPIA: VOLUNTARY SERVICE OVERSEAS AND NEWLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS PROGRAMME

The Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) programme was introduced throughout Ethiopia in 2004–2005. A VSO mentor in the school welcomes the new teacher, orients him or her and works with the newly qualified teacher and other school staff involved in planning, subject knowledge and other programme activities. They form a small team to work on simple, practical classroom-based assignments and share good practices with others in the school community. This is graded and monitored by the head teacher and the local administrators, and at the end of the period, the newly qualified teacher is given a certificate of competence. The programme design allows this managed professional development programme to extend throughout the school.

“It is very interesting that I have learned so much from this programme for a new teacher,” said Mulatu Waktole, a teacher in Assosa Primary School for 13 years.

NIGERIA: VSO AND SCIENCE EDUCATION

A VSO science teacher in Nigeria had been running a series of practical regional workshops for science teachers. By the end of the programme, more than 40 science lessons had been developed, along with descriptions of how to turn discarded objects into simple science materials and equipment. The volunteer approached the area's Regional Education Officer, who was impressed with the quality of the initiative and ultimately requested UNICEF support. UNICEF agreed to have the lesson plans published as a book, *Junior Science 1*. The book was then distributed to schools throughout the region, where it was welcomed by teachers and children – some of whom had never had an opportunity to engage in practical science before. This initiative continues to develop, and *Junior Science 4* will be published soon.

conditions of service are major factors in teacher motivation and commitment, and these need to be carefully addressed. However, other important factors besides pay and conditions affect teachers' morale and motivation. Many of these are critical for the child-friendly model to succeed.

How much are teachers included in planning reform as opposed to simply being asked to implement it? Research suggests that practitioners will implement innovations if they believe in them and are committed to the promised outcomes. Involving practitioners during the planning process is one of the most effective ways of getting them to believe in and commit to reform. Without this, teachers tend to perceive innovations such as child-friendly schools as just added work, often with little or no additional compensation or reduction in their existing workload. On the other hand, when teachers feel that they have taken part in planning a reform and that their views have been taken into account, they will have a stake in its successful implementation.

External support to education under the Monterrey Consensus requires credible plans arrived at through a participatory process. In reality, most plans are purely technical exercises involving little or no participation by key stakeholders. Analysis of education sector plans developed in many countries as part of the sector-wide approach process shows negligible teacher involvement. The exceptions tend to be in matters of salary and conditions of service, rather than in the technical and professional aspects of the

proposed changes in these plans. In order to win teacher support for implementing child-friendly school models, countries need to mount major advocacy campaigns and consultation processes around the reform.

Another key factor that affects teachers' commitment to change is the extent to which their professionalism is recognized and utilized in the process of building capacity for reform. Most teachers have knowledge and skills that will help others adapt to change when they are shared. Usually, a simple appraisal will identify teachers' knowledge and skills and, at the same time, pinpoint their areas of weakness. Teachers can agree to a systematic plan to correct these weaknesses and develop practical programmes to improve what they do well in order to support change in the classroom. These simple programmes can address many of the day-to-day difficulties that teachers encounter in their work, while creating a sense of professional pride in the collaborative efforts used to support child-friendly achievements in the classroom. There are many talented practicing teachers who can be role models for other teachers and, if they are good communicators, also effective trainers. Although this in-service approach may appear intensive and burdensome for teachers, it reaps significant gains. (See Boxes below.)

One of the most effective ways of promoting intensive, localized and continuous teacher training is through school clusters, small networks of allied schools that encourage professional development

among teachers and allow for sharing resources, facilities and experiences. Typically, four to six schools in the same area form a cluster, enabling teachers to arrange in-service training programmes. In many developing countries, most teachers live and work in isolated locations and require regular, timely support to improve their classroom and school practices. Establishing a support system such as school clusters or a resource centre that serves several schools enables teachers to build on what they have learned in more formal training programmes. Without this ongoing support, the initial enthusiasm for change can drop rapidly.

The main objective of school clusters is to improve the quality of the learning-teaching process in the classroom. This involves the cooperation, active involvement and full participation of all facilitators and teachers in the cluster so that teachers receive the ongoing support needed to upgrade their pedagogic skills and professional competencies. Clusters also can help increase the enrolment, attendance and learning achievements of student in the cluster schools and mobilize local community participation in planning and managing primary education. By establishing and strengthening linkages among district education offices, divisional education offices, teacher training colleges and primary and secondary schools, they can also improve the quality of learning-teaching practices. School clusters in Kenya go further by assuming a holistic approach that integrates early childhood education with formal primary and non-formal education.

In practice, the most important advantages of school clusters include

GUYANA: TEACHER LEARNING CIRCLES

In Guyana, teacher absenteeism is high, classes are large, and volunteers are essential. The country's strategy of 'learning circles' (or 'school clusters', as they are called in Ethiopia and Kenya) is a simple method of in-service training whereby teachers in a school or cluster of schools periodically discuss emerging issues and processes related to children's learning. They come together to share information, experiences and successes in their quest to become efficient, effective and confident teachers, and to develop common goals and vision.

providing opportunities for teachers to participate in continuous in-service training without travelling long distances and facilitating the use of needs-based, demand-driven teacher training based on the 'teacher teach teacher' school-based in-service training model. Clusters also improve school management practices through school collaborations.

In Ethiopia and Kenya, school clusters were shown to be sustainable by modifying the roles of education department supervisors and teacher training institutes and colleges. The education departments provided encouragement and support, while teacher training institutes and colleges gave ongoing technical guidance through cluster-learning resource centres, using schools' feedback on the implementation of this innovative approach. Further, in Ethiopia, Kenya and many Asian countries, periodic training sessions organized at cluster-

learning resource centres led to progressive improvement of overall classroom practice.

In western Ethiopia, UNICEF and Voluntary Service Overseas developed school clusters that delivered training programmes and workshops simultaneously to school cluster coordinators, head teachers and local administrators. All involved received clear guidance on how the development of each stage would progress and at the same time were able to understand and develop their different but complementary roles and functions within the system. While attitude change can be slow, continuous interactive on-the-job education, especially at the school or cluster level, can be an inexpensive, culturally appropriate and effective way of introducing new teaching

styles to both trained and untrained, inexperienced teachers. With minimal variation, this interactive teacher training can be extended to community groups and to volunteers in emergency situations.

School clusters or learning resource centres work well if schools are located close enough to each other or to the resource centre. Realistically, teachers have many other responsibilities outside the school and cannot be expected to travel hours or even days to the next school. In those situations, school-based training and development may be the only realistic option, unless there are investments in modern information-communication technologies so teachers can have regular exchanges with their peers through the Internet.

MEXICO: CHILD PARTICIPATION IN THE ESCUELA AMIGA PROJECT

The Escuela Amiga project in Mexico promotes quality education for indigenous girls and boys through child-friendly learning environments. Children's participation is emphasized as part of citizenship and democracy education, based on the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

The project developed a guide for teachers and education managers that includes checklists on constructing a school work plan and monitoring and evaluating progress towards child-friendliness.

Project indicators for child participation include:

- School has informational material on the CRC;

- Child rights are taught at every class level;
- There is concrete evidence that unequal classroom participation between girls and boys is diminished;
- School 'societies' with established after-school activities exist, with equitable participation of girls and boys;
- Children's opinions are heard and taken into account;
- A positive climate for the resolution of conflicts has been created.

Source: United Nations Children's Fund, *Proyecto Escuela Amiga: Guía para maestros y autoridades escolares*, UNICEF, Mexico, 2002.

School heads play an important role in raising their schools' teaching and learning standards to ensure high achievement for all pupils. Yet in developing countries, most school heads have heavy workloads linked to increasingly complex, varied tasks for which they are responsible but poorly trained to handle. These school heads often are drowning in bureaucratic procedures and directives from national and district education authorities. Often there is a lack of clarity regarding which policies and tasks are mandatory and which are optional.

Child-friendly innovations provide an opportunity to tackle school leadership challenges. If education ministries support school heads by overhauling outdated school regulations and providing better guidance on whether policies are compulsory or advisory, school heads are in a better position to limit their involvement with bureaucracy and focus instead on facilitating change in classroom practice, school management and links with the community. Further, school heads need to be empowered, supported and trained to serve as managers and mentors for school reform.

In child-friendly schools, the heads are custodians of change and managers of innovation. They lead the school planning process, secure necessary resources, facilitate essential training for teachers and build constructive links with the local community. In managing the process of change, the school head must lead, guide and inspire

teachers – who are the main thrust behind classroom change in child-friendly schools.

The school head must have adequate qualifications, training and experience to cope with challenges and win the respect and support of teachers, pupils and the local community. The school head needs to use these credentials to exercise authority in a positive manner, not simply rule by bureaucratic force. While ultimate responsibility for crucial decisions rests with school heads, they must consult with and involve teachers, pupils and the local community in decision-making. Similarly, they must manage school resources transparently, in order to inspire confidence and persuade teachers, pupils and local communities to use limited resources judiciously.

The school head's management style helps determine teachers' motivation and commitment to child-friendly standards. Securing appropriate salary levels and conditions of service, for instance, allows teachers to feel that their welfare matters in the school. Additionally, the head should provide training opportunities for all teachers and help organize ongoing training and support at the school or cluster level. Most of all, the school head should be a mentor to teachers, leading by example in the use of child-friendly pedagogy, being accessible as a confidant and adviser to all teachers and helping to solve problems that arise in classrooms or in the local community.

In addition to these aspects of school management, the school head serves as the school's main public relations officer. The image of the school, its traditions and ethos, must be carefully cultivated in line with child-friendly standards. The school head needs to maintain rituals and activities that help project the correct image. These could be school celebrations, sporting events, cultural performances or charitable events, or establishing school clubs that support the local community. In the same way, the school head needs to nurture links with the local community. A child-friendly school will not only seek to win community support, but will also reciprocate

that support where appropriate and show sensitivity to the communities' aspirations and challenges. In some of the most disadvantaged communities, child-friendly schools take on even greater roles in the lives of children and their communities. (See Box, page 15.)

School reform that seeks to raise quality through child-friendly principles requires national standards that will guide schools and school heads as they implement the change process. Each country will develop its own standards in this regard, but there are some broad guidelines for school heads. (See Box, page 15.)

LEARNING PLUS: CHILD-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS PROVIDE MORE THAN LEARNING

My school is in a poor region of the country. The poverty is made worse by the growing number of adults dying from AIDS. In my school, I have many children who are orphans. These children either live with their grandmothers, other relatives or by themselves. They live in poverty and come to school hungry and psychologically traumatized. That is why the school is collaborating with the Ministry of Education, other government ministries, the university and the community to address these challenges.

The Ministry of Education officials and the university are developing my capacities and those of the senior staff to provide psychosocial support for the most vulnerable children. As a result, the deputy school head

keeps a notebook to record all the orphans in the school and all cases of our schoolchildren's being victims of sexual harassment, rape and abuse in and around the schools. She and other senior teachers work with the Department of Social Welfare to ensure that orphans have birth registration forms. For those who do not, the Department comes to the school to register them. The community works with us to raise funds and provide children with school feeding. Some mothers run a café once a week, and community members come to the school to buy lunch. We also work with the Ministry of Health to deworm children and work with the Ministry of Water Affairs to ensure that the school has clean water.

Extracts from interview with a school head.

LEADERSHIP GUIDELINES FOR CHILD-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS

School leadership should focus on the rights of children, the best interest of teachers and the expectations of parents and the community.

The key objective of school leadership is to raise the learning achievement level of each child and the collective achievement of the student body.

The head should be a qualified teacher, a professional with relevant knowledge, skills, vision and versatility to inspire, lead and adapt to change.

Leadership functions can be distributed among senior staff to engender a sense of participation and motivate staff to commit to the process of change.

Wider skill sets should be developed, such as expertise in finance, human resources, children's rights and programme management.

School heads need to adopt a democratic style of authority to win the support and commitment of teachers, pupils and the local community.

School heads must lead by example, as problem solvers, trusted confidants to teachers and the main public relations officer who projects the school's image.

School heads need to be able to identify areas of practice requiring improvement and those where positive trends can be capitalized on.

6.4 ORGANIZING CLASSROOMS AND LEARNING SPACES

School heads and teachers need to create a favourable environment in order to make schools more child-friendly. This environment begins with a well-designed and well-constructed school that is safe for children and teachers, with secure classrooms, functional spaces and open areas. Just as important, however, are child-friendly equipment and supplies that promote learning. The goal is to create stimulating classrooms where children are inspired to learn and teachers have a range of skills and tools to successfully engage them in the learning process. These classrooms often have learning corners, and teachers typically produce and use a wide range of high-quality, low-cost teaching aids.

In many countries, a stimulating classroom is prepared by a trained

teacher with the help of other teachers and the pupils. Classrooms can be made stimulating in a variety of ways depending on the context. It is possible to have stimulating classrooms even where resources are limited or the education system is impoverished. However, this requires teachers' commitment and enthusiasm and strong support from the school head and the local community.

In many developing countries, the challenge of making classrooms stimulating is compounded by the problem of overcrowded space, especially as policies to boost enrolment begin to gain success. Kenya, Malawi, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania experienced huge increases in enrolment when school fees were



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MAGDA'S FIRST DAY IN A STIMULATING CLASSROOM AT A CHILD-FRIENDLY SCHOOL

What will Magda see when she gets to her school? Before she and Leila, her 'big sister', come around the last bend, Magda hears children shouting and laughing as they kick a ball around the swept area in front of the school. Leila takes Magda into a classroom where many first graders are sitting on floor mats. While fairly crowded, they are sitting comfortably and writing in their exercise books. Some are looking up at the colourful posters, charts, alphabets, numerals and story outlines on the walls. Magda is fascinated that some children her age are drawing pictures on the little chalkboards all around the classroom. The whole classroom is vibrant with wall blackboards, pocket boards, learning corners and a host of teaching aids.

Magda is a little nervous, this being her first day in school and first time in a classroom. She is relieved when the teacher, Mrs. Haba, smiles at her, says her name and introduces her to the class. The whole class claps their hands and Mpho, the girl standing next to Magda, offers her a space next to her on the mat to sit. When Leila comes to get Magda at the end of the school day, she finds her with a group of classmates, busy drawing on their little chalkboards and having a lot of fun.

When she returns home, Magda tells her mother about her exciting first day in school. Magda is delighted and says to her mother, "I love my school. I would like to go to school every day."

abolished and education was declared free; about 1.3 million additional children enrolled in Kenya in 2003, stretching the already limited infrastructure and resources. Even in these conditions, teachers can use innovative ways to maximize classroom or school space – for instance, by using walls and floors creatively to make teaching-learning processes in the early grades interesting and exciting.

So much is possible with simple resources and a great deal of imagination. In Ethiopia, India and Kenya, for instance, ordinary classrooms have blossomed into stimulating classrooms through the use of pocket boards with word cards, picture cards and numerical cards; wall boards painted with indigenous ink; alphabets, numerals and mat signs; cut-outs and story outlines on walls; and low-cost or no-cost

teaching aids in learning corners. Optimal use of locally available resources is encouraged as a way to make classrooms stimulating. The basic cost of converting an average Kenyan Standard One classroom into a stimulating classroom is only US\$25, a modest amount that most schools and communities can afford.

Child-friendly schools involve the principle of progressive realization. For example, purpose-designed desks and chairs and other customized furniture and equipment should be part of the stimulating classroom. However, if this is not feasible, the environment can still be true to child-friendly principles, philosophy and standards. In many developing countries, children in primary schools have to sit on dirty floors or under trees due to

shortages of furniture or classroom space. Pupils and their parents can work with teachers and school heads to transform drab classrooms into stimulating environments.

Child-friendly schools in Ethiopia and Kenya adopted the progressive realization principle to change existing schools. Floors were made smooth and clean with layers of plaster and floor paint, and because customized desks and chairs were not affordable, children were given clean, brightly coloured floor mats that they could sit on after removing their shoes. This not only provided a pleasant and clean classroom environment, but also gave the children, teachers and parents an understanding of the importance of hygiene and cleanliness, even in an environment with little or no

IRAN: BUILDING BACK BETTER IN BAM

In December 2003, an earthquake levelled 67 schools in the city of Bam, and most of those remaining were damaged beyond repair. A month later, schools were officially reopened in an effort to return to normalcy for children. First, classes were held in the open air, then in tents and containers. 'Mobile' education and recreation were provided, a tracking system for out-of-school children was established, tools for data collection, management and analysis were created, and learning spaces were linked to early childhood development centres and non-formal education and recreation centres. Advocacy and technical support were generated for a national school design review with the goal of promoting healthy and safe girl-friendly environments incorporating water and sanitation facilities, playgrounds and

sports areas, and involving children and the community in school design and construction. Interventions to improve learning quality included advocacy for girl-friendly schools as a package at the policy and school level; teacher support including psychosocial services, extra-curricular courses (psychosocial education, life skills, hygiene education); educational and recreational materials review; participatory, child-centred and gender-sensitive teaching methods; children's participation in schools (clubs, school governance); enhanced community involvement in planning, management, and monitoring and evaluating educational activities (school management); implementation of catch-up classes; and school environments and learning materials to meet the needs of disabled children.

resources for customized furniture. Sitting on the floor enables young children, especially those in the early grades, to feel at home and engage comfortably in such activities as playing games, cutting, pasting, drawing and creating art.

The principle of progressive realization can be an essential innovation of school reform when re-establishing schools and education systems after a disaster or crisis. In the aftermath of the earthquake in Bam (Iran), there was an opportunity to 'build back better' with improved schools and learning spaces based on child-friendly standards. The recovery and reconstruction process involved the progressive introduction of child-friendly features and standards over time, resulting in a successful reform process. The reconstruction allowed interventions to be initiated for children both in and out of school and also demonstrated the importance of learning materials for classroom and learning space.

Whatever furniture, equipment and teaching aids are available, promoting learning depends on how the teacher organizes and manages the teaching-learning process. A child-friendly classroom is a learning community, and teachers are the primary organizers of the atmosphere. Much will depend on how teachers interpret child-centred pedagogy in their classrooms. Learning is not just about individual comprehension and skills acquisition; it is also about constructing knowledge with others. Group activities and the sense of a learning community are important for child-friendly schools. A child-friendly classroom includes individualized, gender-sensitive instruction together with active, cooperative, democratic group learning activities that are respectful of the rights of each child.

When this approach works, it provides structured content and makes use of quality materials and resources. It enhances a teacher's capacity, morale, commitment and professional status.

ETHIOPIA: CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

Our Classroom Golden Rules:

- We want our classroom to be clean and tidy.
- We want everybody to look after our books, cards and other materials.
- We want everybody to talk quietly, including our teachers.
- We want everybody to try to do their best work.
- We want everybody to be kind and friendly to each other.
- We want everybody to help each other and share.
- We want everybody to keep their hands to themselves.
- We want everybody to be safe in the school and playground.
- Every so often children need to sit and discuss these again.

Source: Gambella Primary School, Ethiopia.

It promotes quality learning outcomes not only by helping children learn what is prescribed in the curriculum, but also by defining what they need to learn in order to become independent learners (learning how to learn). In this regard, child-friendly

schools encourage children's active participation in numerous activities related to quality education, such as having children set their own code of conduct for the classroom and the school. (See Box Ethiopia: Children's participation.)

6.5 PEDAGOGIC MATERIALS

The success of child-friendly schools depends on the quality of pedagogic materials. Many primary schools in developing countries suffer from acute shortages of teaching and learning materials. Progress in this area is mainly interpreted as improving the ratio of textbooks to pupils, as research has linked textbook availability to gains in learning achievement. The child-friendly school model, however, is not dependent on textbooks alone, especially in the early years of schooling. The ability of teachers to create appropriate teaching-learning aids, often from low-cost, locally available materials, bolsters success. The approach also assumes that teachers will involve children in helping to produce learning materials, and that students' schoolwork will be posted on school walls for instructional purposes and to instil a sense of pride.

In Ethiopia, India and Kenya, teachers consider pocket boards and wall blackboards to be innovative, low-cost and useful tools. The blackboards mounted around the room and used by children help teachers monitor learners' progress and identify students who may require personalized attention and assistance. These boards also help teachers recognize pupils

who grasp concepts faster and can be encouraged to assist their slower peers. Using small blackboards allows learners to make mistakes and correct them without having a permanent record of failure, unlike errors made in their exercise books. Children can therefore go through a process of confidence-building while learning that failure is not permanent but simply part and parcel of the learning process.

LOW-COST LEARNING MATERIALS

Making teaching-learning materials from low-cost materials was not new to many teachers, who apparently learned this in their teacher training institutes. However, they never had considered it useful practice in the real classroom. They did not realize the potential applications until they were introduced to the requirements of child-friendly school models.

Source: Child and Learning-Friendly Environment in Primary Schools: A documentation of the process, UNICEF Ethiopia, 2002.



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“Many of us who were trained years ago find it hard to imagine how the chalkboard concept can be effectively modified and used by pupils as a learning aid. I am referring to the new methodology, where every child has a wall board to work on. We would find it hard to believe that one can spend less than 100 Kenya shillings (US\$1.25) to paint the inside of an entire classroom and thus create enough writing spaces (wall boards) for as many as 50 Class One pupils and their teacher.”

– Professor Karega Mutahi, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, Kenya

The pocket board is made of an inexpensive cotton fabric 3 metres long and 1.5 metres wide. It has about 235 pockets measuring 12 centimetres by 14 centimetres. The board can be used to teach various concepts in all subject areas by using picture or word flash cards. The pocket board is convenient because it is portable, easy to make and promotes teacher-

“At first the preparation of teaching aids looked very tough. But once they have been developed, teaching became very easy and enjoyable.”

– Leah Asego,
Teacher at Ayani Primary School,
Nairobi, Kenya

learner interaction in class. The pocket board can be used to teach some 200 concepts of primary-level mathematics, science and language, and it is an effective testing tool. It can be made from paper, cardboard, sacks, mats or any large sheet of strong material.

Every teacher needs adequate amounts of good quality teaching aids, in addition to textbooks, as a precondition for promoting quality education in child-friendly schools. These teaching aids should be relevant to the syllabus and properly used. Teachers can produce high-quality teaching aids, but they may need time and space to prepare them. Teachers must be willing to put in the additional time to make the teaching aids and

must be committed to using locally available materials.

In Ethiopia, Kenya and many East and South Asian countries, teachers use polystyrene packing material, packing boxes, tin cans, bottle tops, pebbles, flowers, leaves and inexpensive, easily obtained materials to make pocket boards, flash cards, big books, charts and models illustrating textbook lessons. By calling on their ingenuity, teachers' latent talents are revealed and they develop new confidence and pride in their professional competencies. Moreover, production of innovative, low-cost teaching aids from locally available resources requires wider, more regular consultation among teachers within the school and clusters. This builds team spirit and forges closer working relationships in support of child-friendly school models.

As we move up the education system, the need for more formal teaching-learning aids becomes more important. To ensure that children receive quality education at higher levels of the primary school and into secondary education, basic instructional materials and supplies need to be available for all children and teachers. Too often, there is a lack of basic teaching aids and learning materials, yet without them, teachers are hard-pressed to transform their classrooms into stimulating environments or to maximize their students' participation in the learning process. Education systems need to ensure that schools, teachers and children have access to these materials in a reliable and sustained manner.

The nature and cost of materials depend on curriculum requirements – not only on prescribed curriculum content, but also on the curriculum's

appropriateness, on whether teachers can implement such a curriculum and its feasibility in terms of available resources. Teachers seeking to utilize child-friendly principles need to interpret and adapt the curriculum to reflect these principles.

The curriculum may inadvertently project prejudice and discrimination towards girls, children affected by HIV and AIDS or children with diverse backgrounds and abilities. Existing textbook material may portray children living on the streets as pickpockets, or working children may be depicted as uneducated even though they may have strengths such as excellent survival skills. Likewise, children with disabilities may be considered 'slow' even though many have impeccable social skills. In a child-friendly school, these prejudices must be challenged through supplementary pedagogic materials purchased or developed by teachers and other experts engaged in promoting child-friendly models.

Inclusiveness is a major child-friendly school principle and must be reflected in the nature and quality of learning-teaching materials. The school must embrace diversity and nurture children with different backgrounds and abilities. The pedagogic materials need to be relevant to all children's learning needs and abilities; they must be culturally appropriate and value social diversity. Only then will they benefit all children.

Pedagogic materials are only part of what is required for child-friendly schools to work. Another necessary component is participatory learning-teaching methods, which give teachers various techniques to help different learners and allow them to explore alternative forms of discipline.

In many countries, classrooms are dominated by teachers engaged in 'rote learning' education methods and 'teacher-centred' approaches, which are antithetical to child-friendly principles. Part of the challenge of training teachers is to win them over to child-centred approaches characterized by inquiry, discovery, mastery and the application of such concepts as students' acquisition of knowledge. Reform should move schools away from strongly 'didactic' teaching methods to methods that are more interactive and 'learner-friendly'.

Child-centered, interactive methodologies make learning enjoyable and exciting to students and improve their retention, participation and performance. These approaches create open learning environments characterized by group cooperation and positive competition among learners. This new methodology changes the role of the teacher from the 'fountain of all knowledge' and a feared authority figure to a 'facilitator of learning'

and one who listens to students. Teachers encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning so the motivation to learn comes from within rather than being imposed from outside.

Teachers are expected to work jointly with learners to create a scholarly environment beneficial to both. Activity-based learning makes classroom control easier and improves discipline. Teachers can be trained to prepare learner-friendly lessons with thematic approaches for more holistic learning. Teachers who utilize learner-friendly approaches increasingly report a new sense of job satisfaction and talk about the 'joy of teaching'. These approaches have also boosted teacher attendance and punctuality, encouraged greater attentiveness, interest and responsiveness, and inspired greater participation of children, especially girls, in learning activities. This in turn has increased children's motivation, resulting in behaviour change and the 'joy of learning'.



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School reforms based on child-friendly principles still have room for improvement, although there is little doubt that classroom interaction by all children, especially girls, has greatly improved. Children are acknowledged by name and given personal value in this interactive process. In some schools, children wear name tags and girls are classroom monitors. Where schools have adopted such innovations and their benefits have been noted, communities have felt more involved in their children's education. In some areas in Ethiopia, parents came to observe and saw their children's names written on the blackboards, and this improved teaching-learning processes. With increased practical support for the schools, the communities built cluster resource centres to ensure a sustainable teacher support system. Parents also became active in school management, with more women involved in school activities.

If child-friendly schools are to succeed as part of general school reform, they must embrace other innovations that are critical for success. One of these is multigrade teaching to make small schools (especially in rural, remote areas) viable for extending quality education to all children. Research has shown that full participation in small rural or isolated communities occurs when schools are located close to the community in both geographical and cultural terms. In practice, however, the population of children may be too small to sustain the number of teachers required to serve each grade over the full primary cycle. If schools cannot afford a teacher for each grade, they need multigrade teaching in which one teacher can facilitate learning for children at different grade levels within the same classroom or school space.

6.6.1 Lessons learned from multigrade teaching

Multigrade teaching means teaching children of different ages, grades and abilities in the same group. It is the most appropriate way of reaching students from grades one to four when remoteness and low population undermine the viability of normal school practices.

Multigrade schools can be found in hard-to-reach locations in Sri Lanka, and they are common in parts of Malaysia, serving people who are disadvantaged, such as the Malay and Chinese schools in small villages and settlements. The same is true in Mongolia. In countries such as Colombia and Zambia, multigrade teaching is recognized by governments as an effective initiative for teacher educators and teacher trainees at the national level. (See Box below.)

MONGOLIA: MULTIGRADE TEACHING

In hard-to-reach areas in remote rural communities, children attend boarding schools. However, parents are reluctant to send young children away from home, so they enrol them in multigrade schools. The teachers who run these schools are trained in methodologies and class organization developed to work with children of different ages and different abilities in one class. After Grade 4, some children enrol in formal primary school in district boarding schools, while others join non-formal education in the community to later be allowed to return to formal school or obtain certification of primary education.

Lessons have been learned from experiences with multigrade schools in Lesotho, Mexico, Peru, Sri Lanka, Western Samoa and Zambia. First, multigrade teaching is more common than previously realized. Schools with more primary grades than teachers must organize learning along multigrade lines some of the time. Too few ministries of education, curriculum developers and teacher education institutions factor this reality into their plans and programming. Textbooks on curricula and teaching methods, teacher guides and education pedagogy in colleges and universities do not incorporate enough of the knowledge, skills and values required for teachers to apply multigrade teaching methodologies successfully (Little, 1995).

There are several elements in the multigrade strategy that are also found in child-friendly school models. These include teacher training in the design, reproduction and distribution of large numbers of pedagogic materials (teacher-made and self-study materials), peer and small group learning, procedures for evaluating learning improvement and achievement, and forms of internal school and classroom organization establishing routines centred on students rather than teachers.

6.6.2 Classroom discipline and management practices

Like any other model of quality education, child-friendly schools include systems for discipline and order. These schools encourage rules and regulations, but also emphasize that they must be in the best interest of children and applied in a fair, transparent manner. Classrooms and learning spaces should be safe

places for children to learn. In child-friendly schools, teachers need to have the skills to apply alternative forms of discipline instead of falling back on corporal punishment and other forms of physical and verbal abuse. Teachers should be made aware of the emotional and psychological damage these practices can do to children. For example, threats or promises of rewards to girls in exchange for sexual favours are intolerable. Teachers also need to understand why violent forms of discipline such as corporal punishment are harmful to children. (See Chapter 5.)

Teachers require training in constructive discipline practices to promote orderly and fair conditions for learning in classrooms and learning spaces. School managers, teachers and other school personnel also need training and support in human rights education that fully recognizes the importance of tolerance and peaceful conflict resolution and the significance of child participation. Ensuring that teachers' rights are respected is the first step towards ensuring respect for children's rights. This mutual respect requires teachers to reach out to children in an affable manner while maintaining dignity and respect as authority figures in the classroom.

Child-friendly schools encourage a pedagogic approach that emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge, development of abilities and understanding of concepts in a holistic manner. The approach offers teachers latitude to plan interactive sessions in varied settings and to continuously assess the quality and effects of their interventions in the classroom. In a child-friendly classroom or learning space, the

teacher is the mentor, the facilitator of learning and the coordinator of all learning activities. Creativity, openness, flexibility, tolerance, good leadership and organizational skills become the avenues through which effective learning-teaching is

maintained. Classroom management that enhances learning is child-centred and promotes active learning. The teacher's role must be to observe, discuss, probe, extend ideas and engage children in meaningful, positive learning experiences.

6.7 CURRICULUM

Many developing countries have a national curriculum that serves as the blueprint for consistent learning and teaching standards in schools throughout the system. There is usually some flexibility for schools to implement the national curriculum to fit with their particular strengths and challenges and for schools to introduce other activities that extend the learning experience for the pupils.

Generally, the national curriculum:

- Delineates the most important knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that every child has a right to learn;
- Provides a flexible government framework to teachers to ensure that all schoolchildren learn in a balanced, manageable way, while

stretching to challenge students and meet their diverse needs;

- Sets standards that measure children's progress in each subject to help teachers monitor achievement and plan to help students do even better.

The national curriculum shown below defines a child's progress in broad key stages. Schools and learning spaces are usually given some leeway to organize teaching within this framework in a manner that best suits the reality of the children in their care. The schools create their own plans, term by term and year by year. At the end of key stages 1, 2, 3 and 4, a child may take a national test. At the end of key stage 4, the national final examinations determine eligibility for the next stage of education.

KEY STAGES AND NATIONAL CURRICULUM LEVELS

AGE	STAGE	YEARS	TESTS
4–5	Foundation (Early Childhood Education)		
6–9	Key stage 1 (Lower Primary School)	1–4	Year 4 national tests
10–13	Key stage 2 (Upper Primary)	5–7	Year 7 national tests
14–16	Key stage 3 (Junior Secondary School)	8–10	Years 9 or 10 national tests
17–18	Key stage 4 (Senior Secondary School)	11–12	Year 12 national tests

At the classroom level, it is the teachers' responsibility, with support from the school head, government authorities and parents, to ensure that children learn at or above the educational standards for all primary schoolchildren in literacy, numeracy and life skills. There is flexibility in how this may be achieved. Most successful literacy teaching is interactive, with children encouraged and expected to contribute. Several developing countries are implementing effective methods for teaching literacy in the mother tongue. A case in point is the Breakthrough to Literacy (BTL)

programme in Uganda. (See Box below.)

The BTL approach is also used in Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi and the Limpopo Province in South Africa and has yielded good results. The United Kingdom Department for International Development (DIFD) is funding BTL in both Lesotho and Malawi. In Botswana, BTL is funded by the Government and has been expanded nationwide. The major drawback of the approach is that it ends at the lower primary school level. When the children reach the upper

UGANDA: BREAKTHROUGH TO LITERACY

In May 2001, Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports and its partners, UNICEF, the Institute of Teacher Education, Kyambogo, and the National Curriculum Development Centre, began a pilot project to teach local languages, using the Breakthrough to Literacy (BTL) methodology. Originally developed to teach functional literacy skills to learners in their first language, BTL brings the language used in the home into the classroom. The approach helps children recognize words they are accustomed to hearing and speaking when they see them translated into a written code; it then helps them read and write the language themselves.

The learning environment in a BTL classroom is organized into social and ability groups, which perform interactive tasks in a relaxed and stimulating atmosphere. BTL Uganda aims to develop functional literacy skills in young learners, so that 85 per cent of both girls and boys are able to read and write in local languages by the end of Primary 3 (P3). It promotes other important features of the

education landscape in Uganda, such as establishing child-friendly learning in all lower primary schools and learning centres, and ensuring that learners demonstrate proficiency in at least three selected life skills by the end of P3.

The BTL methodology has been a resounding success, in terms both of increasing reading proficiency in the pilot schools and promoting several aspects of child-friendly learning environments. The mean score for all BTL learners, including those who failed to attain the required reading proficiency, was 50.7 per cent compared to 26.0 per cent for the non-BTL group. Compared to their grade cohort, the BTL learners have outperformed the non-BTL Primary 2 (P2s) by more than 40 percentage points (50.7 per cent BTL compared to 10.2 per cent non-BTL). The non-BTL learners are most deficient in reading comprehension, the most important skill for future learning. The BTL methodology was found to work equally well with boys and girls (mean of 50.9 per cent and 50.6 per cent, respectively) (Letshabo, 2002).

primary level, they are confronted for the first time by the harsh realities of didactic and teacher-centred learning-teaching methods. The governments in these six countries need to organize a subregional seminar on BTL to discuss the challenges, especially those concerning costs and the scaling up of the initiative, lessons learned and good practices.

Child-centred curriculum planning and development combined with interactive and participatory teaching-learning approaches increase opportunities for children to work together and share their knowledge

SOUTH AFRICA: ONE TEACHER'S EXPERIENCE

I teach Grade 1 in a rural school in South Africa. I have a class of 40 six- and seven-year-olds – 25 girls and 15 boys. In the life skills education class today, I was teaching them about personal hygiene and reading a story about the hospital. The short story had lovely pictures, but several worrying gender stereotypes. The pictures of doctors were men and those of teachers were men. The people queuing to see the doctor were women; and all parents holding babies were women.

After reading them the story, I organized the children to perform a simple, short role play, showing parents with a sick child in the doctor's room and the doctor with a nurse examining the child and giving an injection. One group of pupils were directed to select a boy as a nurse and a girl as a doctor and the other group selected a girl as a nurse and a boy as a doctor. The pupils had great fun doing the role play. At first, the girls were too shy to play doctors and the boys were reluctant to play nurses. But with encouragement, they did. I often use role play to break stereotypes and stigma – and it works.

and educational experiences. Curriculum content in the areas of numeracy, literacy and life skills education must be gender-sensitive and participatory. (See Box, this page.)

The increased attention that child-friendly schools give to the development of curricular activities, such as lesson planning and preparation, and use of teaching aids and classroom management, has contributed to an increasing confidence, motivation and ownership of the teaching process.

Child-friendly schools and learning spaces encourage the development and application of principles of curriculum and pedagogy that promote peace, human rights and non-violence. Curriculum content should include children's rights, human rights and peace education within the framework of communication strategies that are developed by and for young people. Teachers should be given relevant preservice and in-service education in ways that are participatory and democratic.

The transition to constructive and positive pedagogic methods may be extremely difficult for teachers who themselves were taught with authoritarian and didactic approaches. Ways must be found to overcome those autocratic barriers to more progressive, democratic pedagogic practices, which may also play a role in reducing and ultimately eliminating school violence. Student and community participation is also vital to child-friendly curriculum development. The preparation of class activities can demand more time than 'chalk and talk' methods, but the benefits outweigh the workload.

