What is a
Good School?

Imagining beyond the limits of today to create a better tomorrow

Dipak Naker

Raising Voices

WHAT IS A GOOD SCHOOL?

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By Dipak Naker

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Acknowledgements

Through universal access to education policy, we are creating an opportunity for many children to develop skills that will enhance their lives. This is a major step forward for the possibilities of children who, for far too long, have sat on the margins of our society. However, as we open our schools to more children, the quality of education within these schools comes into question. Unless we ensure that the experience of school is meaningful and fulfilling for students, our efforts will become empty gestures.

We need to extend our focus beyond creating access to education to also include the quality of that education. In doing so, we will unleash a new set of questions and challenges, worthy of our attention and dialogue. To promote this dialogue, this publication contributes ideas and perspectives on what characterises a good school and how we can collectively create good schools for our children.
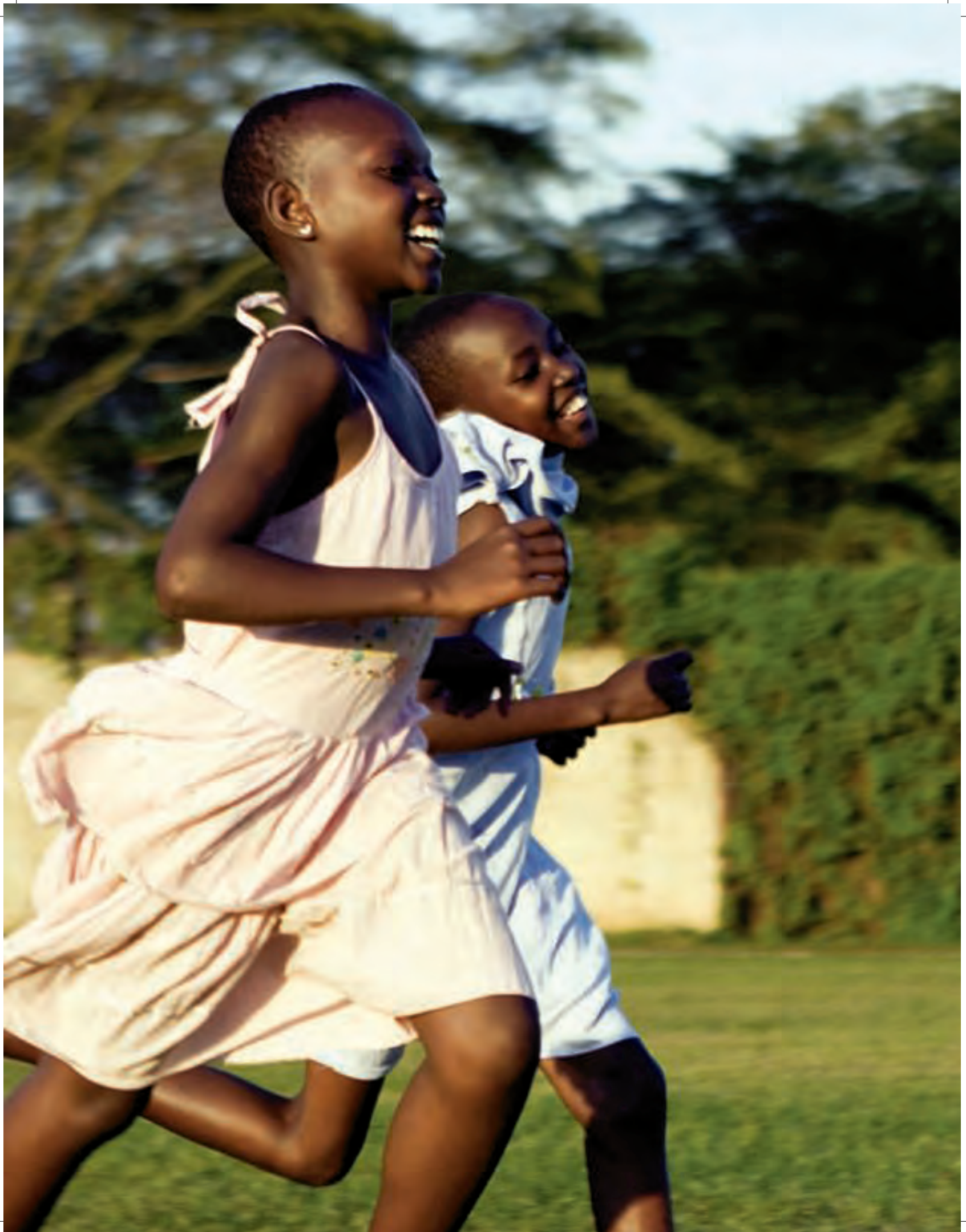
Every great advancement has issued from a new audacity of imagination.

John Dewey

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Who is this publication for?

This publication is for anyone who influences how children experience education in our schools. It reaches out to school administrators, teachers, policymakers and activists who recognise the need to improve how we deliver education. It aims to inform and inspire those individuals who recognise schools as our places of hope, our investment in the future and our commitment to children today. In short, this publication speaks to everyone who has a stake in creating better schools.

This publication is a discussion of ideas and not a how-to manual. It presents issues and interventions requiring urgent attention as we design the way forward. As an interested and influential stakeholder, your decisions could affect how our schools evolve in the coming years. Therefore, this publication presents perspectives and information that may inform your thoughts and choices.

Our hope is that, as you read this publication, you will ask deeper questions about how we deliver education and how it could be different. By investing your influence, resources and imagination in realising some of the following ideas, you could profoundly impact the lives of numerous children—as well as the lives touched by the decisions these children will make when they become our future leaders.

This publication speaks to everyone who has a stake in creating better schools.

If we betray their aspirations they will simply leave the system with crushed dreams and abandoned hope. We will be worse off than when we started; lost hope is an expensive state of mind.

Introduction

Many African countries have invested unprecedented amounts of funding in creating universal access to primary education. Many countries, such as Uganda and Tanzania, declare themselves ahead of the agreed timetable, and some are even pressing on with universal access to secondary education.

However, as we assess the experience of the universal access policy, we are realising that many students who are eagerly taking advantage of this new opportunity are soon becoming disillusioned with what they find when they get to school: violence, lack of infrastructure, constraints on creative thinking and limits on opportunities for self-expression, among others. Rapidly, we are realising that access to a school is just the first step in making education possible for millions of children. What they find once they get to school will determine whether our children emerge from the education system with the capabilities they need.

Investing precious years of an individual's life in education is an extraordinary commitment for both child and family; labour is a precious commodity in a resource poor environment. To forego that immediate gain for a perceived benefit is an act of hope—a deep desire on the part of parents to break the cycle that keeps them burdened. If we betray the aspirations of students and their parents, they will vote with their feet, as they already have in many places. They will simply leave the system with crushed dreams and abandoned hope. We will be worse off than when we started; lost hope is an expensive state of mind.

If we do not supplement our investments in access to education by also ensuring quality of education, we will profoundly undermine our efforts. If we do not examine the question, what is a good school? and respond imaginatively, our students will fail to thrive. They will remain locked in a position of disadvantage, unable to compete and subservient within the global economy and culture. In the global dialogue of ideas and influence, they will be condemned to silence, to following the lead of others, feeling overwhelmed by their powerlessness and irrelevance. If we persist in dulling their minds and numbing them into compliance and obedience, instead of equipping them with the skills and support they need to become imaginative and creative thinkers, they will remain as we are today: disadvantaged, unfulfilled, uncompetitive and, as a group, economically poor.

But it doesn't have to be that way. The decisions we make today could help students become protagonists for their own ideas, perspectives and causes. Students need to have knowledge and skills that can be applied in ever-changing situations. They need versatility and the confidence to trust their instincts. They need the discipline to reach their full potential. If we choose to create schools that develop these capabilities, we will produce individuals who become engines of our culture and economy, who stretch their possibilities and bring the energy and verve of their priorities to global attention.

We need to ask ourselves, in today's world what is a good education? And what kind of school will deliver it? What kind of school will prepare our students to thrive in this new environment? We need to make these questions urgent priorities, committing to them the full attention of our imaginations.

Our biggest hurdle to creating a good school is not lack of desire but lack of imagination.

Chapter 1 | Imagining a Good School

Imagination is the ability to see what does not yet exist. It is the ability to create in our minds new ways of responding to old problems. Our biggest hurdle to creating a good school is not lack of desire but lack of imagination. We have succumbed to a lethargy of thought, a failure to step beyond the limits defined by our experiences. It is time to think beyond the borders of our experiences and to imagine a school that meets children's immediate needs.

Our schools today

Why are a large number of children who yearned for an opportunity to learn now abandoning that dream?[1]

Our schools are based on ideas that were appropriate for a different time. Most of us are used to thinking of schools as places where children learn to pass exams by memorising what the teacher writes on the blackboard. We expect children to obey their teachers and remain quiet unless spoken to. We aim to instil a fear of breaking rules and of the consequences. Our schools operate by intimidating and shaming children into complying with what is required of them.

We measure schools based on narrow indicators, such as students' exam scores. As long as a school compels its students to pass their exams, then we accept that this school has fulfilled its role. We have accepted this diminished vision of what a good school should be, because until fairly recently, in most developing countries, just having access to a school was seen as a privilege.

Many teachers who have graduated from similar schools will ask, what is wrong with schools instilling the discipline of obedience and compliance in children? Are these not valuable character traits that we all want our children to have? Do we not want our children to learn the established traditions of respecting their elders and obeying their superiors? Aren't fear and shame useful tools for teaching children how to behave?

The reality is that this system of teaching is not working.[1] Everyone agrees that adults have an important role to play in guiding children's development. However, our current approaches for achieving that aim are losing credibility. Many of our children are emerging from our schools with very few of the capabilities they need to thrive in the modern economy. Furthermore, we are discovering that intimidating, shaming and humiliating children does not help them learn new skills. It merely limits their possibilities.

A global consensus is emerging (see World Report on Violence against Children) that our current approach to educating children is ineffective for the following reasons:

- It enforces compliance over the short-term and fosters resentment and rebellion over the long-term.

- Many children are unable to withstand the psychological stress of fear and shame and, therefore, often become passive. This experience leads them to withdraw and to cease contributing their unique perspectives to their communities.

- Obedient and fearful children learn to conform to an established way of being and thinking and, therefore, do not develop the skills necessary to generate original solutions to new problems.

- Preventing children from discovering who they are denies them their fundamental right to freedom and dignity, guaranteed in the Constitution of most African countries and ratified by most African governments in international treaties.

For these and other reasons, it is important that we imagine a new way of educating our children.

If you ask children about this state of affairs, they will tell you in large numbers that schools are often not pleasant places for them. Schools as we conceptualise them today are not child-centric. They lack the activities, methods and environment that stimulate the creative and independent thinking abilities that children today require. They tolerate dehumanising conditions for children and allow violence against children to occur with impunity.

Despite declared national policies and commitments to protect children, students routinely experience ad hoc beatings, degrading punishments, sexual harassment, bullying and humiliation. In a recent survey commissioned by UNICEF in eleven sub-Saharan African countries, seven out of the eleven country offices listed violence in schools as one of the top three priorities to be addressed.[2] In a study conducted in Uganda,[3] more than sixty percent of the students surveyed said they experienced violence regularly in schools, and from the available evidence, the situation is not particularly different in most other African countries.

Are we not then failing despite succeeding, as far as educating our children is concerned? Given our urgent need for creative and thoughtful individuals, is this brain drain sustainable?

Everyone agrees that adults have an important role to play in guiding children's development. However, our current approaches for achieving that aim are losing credibility.

Educating the whole child

A good school aims to help the child learn by addressing the developmental needs of the whole child. It nurtures the cognitive, social and ethical development of children.

Cognitive development. Through learner-centred teaching methodology and skill building, a good school develops children's ability to analyse and process information efficiently. It focuses on teaching children how to learn rather than how to merely memorise information.

Social development. Through respectful relationships, mentoring and careful guidance, a good school develops children's self-confidence and ability to trust their own judgments. It provides children an opportunity to discover their potential and define their priorities. A good school promotes an environment in which children feel accepted and valued and learn to relate with others responsibly.

Ethical development. Through democratic and accountable structures, deliberate role-modelling and progressive policies, a good school develops children's ability to share in upholding a set of policies and to demonstrate a sense of civic responsibility. A good school cultivates clear ethical standards that it then helps students internalise as a lifelong value system.

A good school recognises that children's cognitive development is dependent on an enabling social and ethical environment at the school. Efficient learning can only occur when the child is taught a wide range of cognitive skills needed to navigate the various stages of the learning process, including grasping information, analysing its implication, exploring its value and applying it. Development of these skills requires the child to feel accepted, protected, and respected as well as feel a sense of belonging within the learning environment. This social environment can be fostered by nurturing children's ethical development through creating compassionate relationships, mentoring children, providing a structured environment and demonstrating clear standards by which everyone operates within that environment (see diagram on opposite page). It is the collaborative influence of all these factors that produces creative thinkers and imaginative problem-solvers. The following chapters discuss these ideas in more detail.

Compassionate
Relationships

Clear
Standards

Role Modelling
and Mentoring

Structured
Environment

Acceptance

Respect

Belonging

Protection

Imagination

4. APPLY

Confidence

Good Jugdment

EXPERIENCE

Listening

Instincts

Attention

SHORT-TERM MEMORY

3. EXPLORE

2. ANALYSE

1. GRASP INFORMATION

Concentration

Comparison

LONG-TERM MEMORY

Patience

Logic
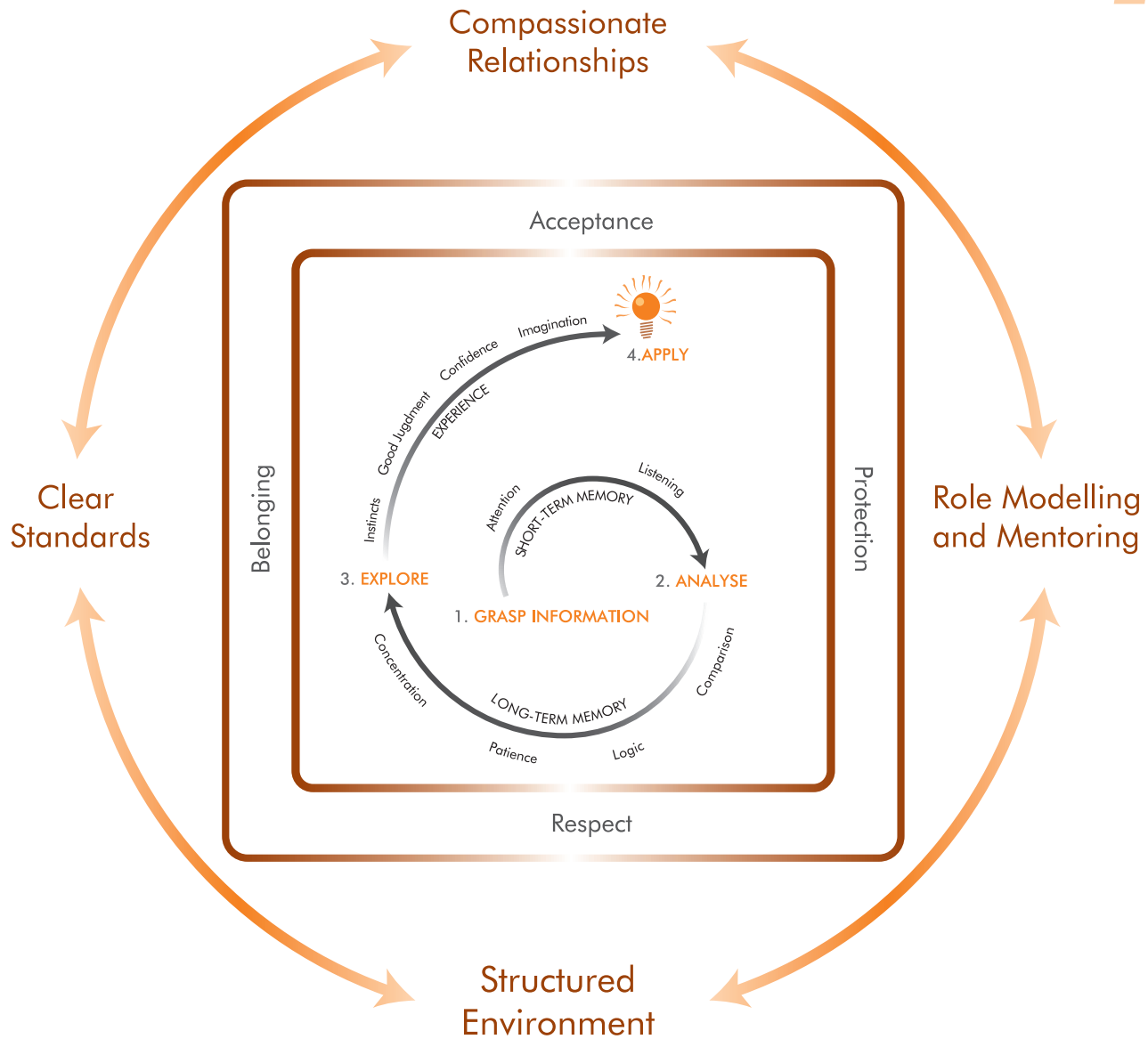
Learning is a result of a complex interaction between the information
processing skills of a learner and the social and the ethical environment of a
school.

Characteristics of a good school

A good school creates experiences, environments and relationships that enable children to thrive and discover their full potential. It immerses children in a culture that values their humanity, nurtures their individuality and unleashes their intelligence. A good school is a place where children discover their passions. It is a place where children develop self-definition, self-confidence and self-assurance, as well as the belief that they can make a useful contribution to their community and country.

A good school is led by visionary teachers who appreciate that education goes beyond what happens in the classroom. It is led by individuals who have a vision for a better society and understand a school's role in influencing the values permeating their community.

A good school runs according to a shared mission and publicly declared values and standards. It puts forward progressive ideas about social justice, human rights and the larger aspirations of the nation. It sees itself as the community's repository of hope, where community members go to discover and nurture their best selves.

A good school has practical policies and operational mechanisms that are faithful to the school's mission. It creates mechanisms and structures to institutionalise values that it believes in. It is run with efficiency and on sound principles that guide day-to-day decision-making processes. A good school is inclusive and creates opportunities for all stakeholders to participate.

A good school presents learning as a lifelong enterprise. It enables children's growth and helps them discover a value system that can be their compass in the world. A good school is our collective hope for building a compassionate, thoughtful and wiser nation.

What will it take to create good schools?

To create good schools will take financial resources—a larger share of the national budget, spent more strategically. It will take political will to ensure that the universal access policy evolves to reflect a deeper set of education priorities and an expanded understanding of government and educator responsibilities.

However, the most important ingredient for enhancing the quality of our schools will be the energy, commitment and vision of individuals. It will take individual educators who feel passionate about these ideas and who put them into action. It will take teachers, parents, students and community-based decision makers speaking eloquently of their achievements and persuading other educators to take these ideas seriously.

Creating a good school, wherever you may be, will require you to take the first step. Ask yourself, how can I do it? What role can I play in making this happen in my school or in a school in my community?

The most important ingredient for enhancing the quality of our schools will be the energy, commitment and vision of individuals.

The teaching methodology we employ, and the relationship within which we employ it, must intentionally encourage children to acquire and develop the cognitive skills they need.

Chapter 2 | Cognitive Development at a Good School

The main reason why parents send children to school is to ensure they get an education. For most adults "getting an education" means gaining the ability to read and write, as well as gaining the benefits that emerge from literacy. Learning in this context requires children to practice various forms of information processing and to develop the behavioural choices that adults expect educated children to make. These are all broadly referred to as cognitive skills; learning is, in fact, a coming together of several cognitive skills.

Many factors influence a child's ability to acquire and develop cognitive skills, including the school's physical environment and the child's nutritional status. A child immersed in a dilapidated environment will struggle to summon the personal discipline needed to pay attention. A child preoccupied with hunger and suffering from nutritional deficiencies may be physically limited from investing in the learning process. These larger political problems must be addressed, with strategies that may be beyond the immediate control of teachers and administrators.

However, other factors within a school's immediate control can bolster children's learning capacity, namely the ways we teach and how we relate with children. We know that learning is a coming together of several cognitive skills, and skills can be taught and improved with practice. Therefore, the teaching methodology we employ, and the relationship within which we employ it, must intentionally encourage children to acquire and develop the cognitive skills they need: the capacity to grasp, analyse, explore and apply information.

Cognitive skills and the stages of learning

To effectively compare and discuss current and alternative teaching methodologies, we must first establish a basis for our comparison, a framework for understanding the specific relationship between learning and cognitive skills.

Learning is a process that breaks down into four stages.[4] To become efficient learners, children must develop the wide range of cognitive skills required for navigating all four stages of learning.

Stage1 Grasp the information.
This stage requires paying attention and retaining crucial elements of the information in memory. Students who can quickly grasp information have developed the skills to concentrate and focus on what is being communicated. They have also developed reliable and effective skills for memorising information.

Stage 2 Analyse the relevance of the information.
This stage requires the learner to compare the information with other information they already know and to assess whether it is relevant and meaningful. Students who can analyse information efficiently have learned to apply logical thinking skills and have the ability to retain relevant information in their immediate awareness.

Stage 3 Explore the implications of the information.
This stage involves tracing the information to its conclusion and making decisions about its truth or usefulness. Students who can make sound and justifiable decisions have developed the skills and honed the instincts that allow them to make mature judgments.

Stage 4 Apply the information.
This stage involves extracting overall meaning or general principles from the information and applying these to other situations. Students who can apply what they have learned have developed the skills necessary to synthesise information, generalise from a particular case and imagine different manifestations of the overall principle.

Stages of Learning

Imagination

Confidence

EXPERIENCE

Good Jugdment

Instincts

4. **APPLY**

Attention

Listening

SHORT-TERM MEMORY

3. **EXPLORE**

2. **ANALYSE**

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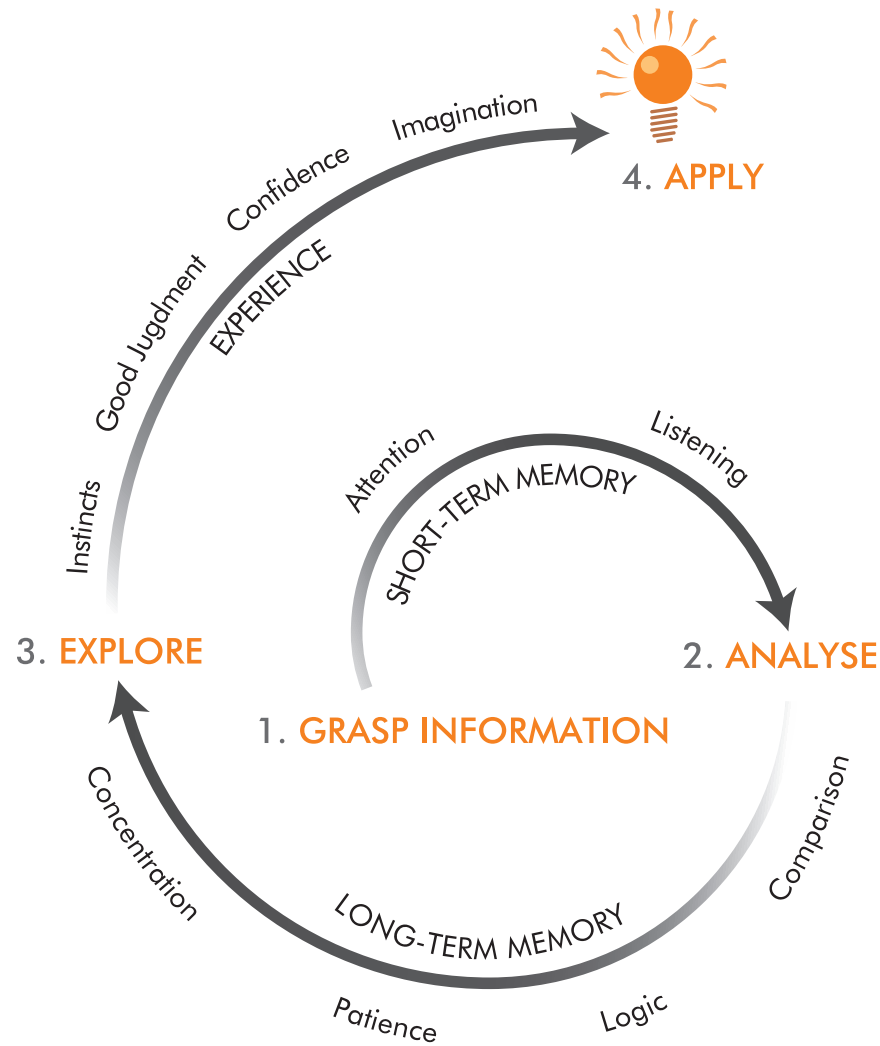
Learning is a process that requires the learner to travel from Stage1 to Stage 4. During this journey, the learner needs cognitive skills and personal discipline to navigate these four stages.

Our current teaching methodology

Our current teaching methodology is based on the following assumptions:

- Students learn by memorising the information presented. The teacher, therefore, relies on copious note taking and accurate recall.

- How the students feel while internalising information is not important. The teacher, therefore, focuses on transmitting the information rather than on how the information is being received.

- Failure to understand the information as presented by the teacher is due to a lack of effort on the part of the student. The teacher, therefore, feels personally affronted when a student does not understand.

- Fear and shame will motivate students to make the required effort and avoid mistakes. The teacher, therefore, uses corporal punishment to impose her or his authority in the classroom.

- Poor exam scores are a failure of the student, not the teacher. The teacher, therefore, punishes students when they fail an exam.

As we become more aware of how people learn, we are realising that many of these assumptions are not useful, or plainly wrong. Our current teaching methodology limits the learning process in two fundamental ways:

1. **Our current teaching methodology primarily focuses on only the first stage of learning, thereby truncating the learning process.** Efficient learning requires more than memory work; it requires repetition, practice and guidance on how to link the information to other information already learned. Efficient learning involves exploring, asking questions and seeing the information and its implications in a variety of new ways—all with modelling from a trusted adult.

2. **Our current teaching methodology uses the threat of a stick or public humiliation to make students study and obey thereby, producing psychological stress within the classroom.** In this type of learning environment, students withdraw into the safety of passivity and as a result limit their cognitive skills. Furthermore, a lack of encouragement and constant criticism—compounded by fear and anxiety—will likely undermine children's confidence in their abilities and could lead them to internalising the belief that they are poor learners. Once internalised, this belief can perpetuate itself over their entire lives.

Our current teaching methodology limits children's ability to navigate the learning process.

The teaching methodology of a good school

The teaching methodology of a good school is based on the following assumptions:

- Students learn by gradually progressing through the four stages of the learning process, each stage working synergistically with the others. This means that learning deepens with each stage that students go through. Therefore, the teacher actively encourages and helps students develop the cognitive skills to move through all stages.

- The stress of the physical environment (dilapidated classrooms, unsanitary latrines) and the psychological environment (fear, anxiety, shame) deeply influence the acquisition of cognitive skills. Therefore, the teacher actively creates a safe space for learning.

- All learners want to learn. Failure to do so reflects the student's inability to see the relevance of the information being presented. It is, therefore, the responsibility of both the teacher and the student to make information meaningful and connect it to a broader meaning in the child's perception.

- Learning will require trial and error, accompanied by encouragement and patience from the teacher.

- Poor exam scores may be a reflection of the teacher-student relationship and the learning environment rather than just the child's abilities.

The teaching methodology of a good school is based on enabling children to navigate the learning process.

The teaching methodology of a good school promotes learning in two fundamental ways:

1. **The teaching methodology of a good school creates opportunities for children to develop all the cognitive skills they need to become efficient learners.** What happens at school, in and outside the classroom, is all seen as contributing to children's cognitive development.

2. **The teaching methodology of a good school involves helping children understand the world around them, weigh the information being presented to them and make judgments about what it means.** It aims to inspire young minds to ask questions and not be afraid of making mistakes. It is about building children's confidence to learn new skills and caring about how children feel throughout the learning process.

It is through our social relationships and how we feel within them that we develop our social selves.

Chapter 3 | Social Development at a Good School

Each one of us discovers who we are based on the social interactions we have with others. We learn to experiment with different ways of behaving, expressing our ideas, exploring feelings and practicing skills in our relationships with each other. It is through this experimentation that we slowly develop our personalities and how we express them in our communities. This is referred to as our social development.

Children's social development is a delicate process that is dependent on how their environment responds to some of their basic social needs.[5]

- Children need to be accepted by those who matter most to them.
- Children need to feel emotionally and physically protected.
- Children need to feel respected by their peers.
- Children need to feel like they belong to the groups they find themselves a part of.

When children's social needs are met, they blossom into healthy and positive individuals who are committed to their schools and communities. They become better learners and invest their talents and energies for the betterment of all.

If their social needs are not met, children feel at a disadvantage and expend a considerable amount of energy compensating for this deficit. Thus, we find bright students making poor choices, or succumbing to peer pressure when they know it is not in their best interests. Girls may be particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation. As they explore their social selves and as their bodies change visibly, they may be targeted for bullying or sexual harassment.

A good school endeavours to protect children from such vulnerability by creating a social environment that responds to children's social needs. Responding to children's social needs, to enable their social development, requires the following:

- nurturing children's dignity
- fostering children's unique voices
- supporting children's development of personal discipline

Acceptance

Belonging

DIGNITY

VOICE

DISCIPLINE

Protection

Respect
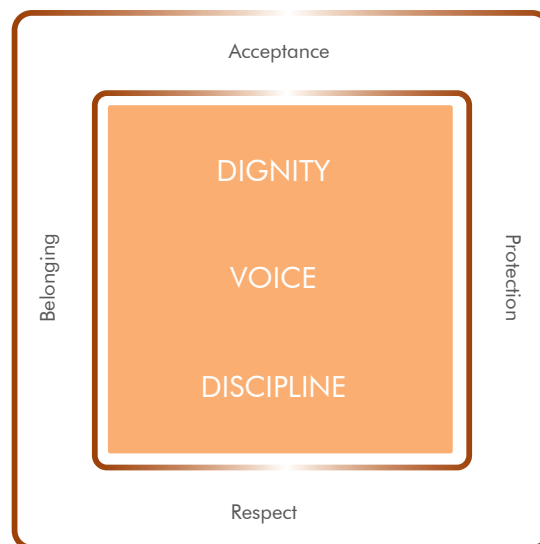
When children's social needs are met, they blossom into healthy and positive individuals. They discover their voice, become aware of their dignity as individuals and develop personal discipline in their learning process.

Dignity

Children have a fragile sense of their own dignity. They look toward key adults in their lives for the reassurance that they deserve to be respected and honoured as individuals. They search for this confirmation in their relationships, in the rules and the arrangements of their surroundings and in the responses their contributions elicit from their environment.

An individual's dignity is the base belief that their value as an individual is irreducible and that their self-worth is unconditional. Individuals with a healthy sense of dignity take pride in who they are and how they relate with their peers and surroundings.

Children's belief in their own dignity does not emerge on its own, but rather is cultivated over a period of time through a variety of means. As adults, we can foster children's sense of dignity by engaging them in a nurturing relationship; by mentoring and role modelling values and behaviours; by supporting them in accepting responsibility for their thoughts and actions; by creating a stable and respectful environment in which they can explore their identity.

When children regularly experience this type of educational environment, they will learn that their school and community value their contributions and see them as worthy of respect.

Children look toward key adults in their lives to confirm that they deserve to be respected and honoured as individuals.

Schools that respect children's dignity include:

Vibrant and maintained schools

A school can maintain and decorate its classrooms and compound to stimulate children's imaginations. By emphasising such things as cleanliness, painting classrooms and displaying students' artwork, the school signals to students that they are special and important.

Sanitary schools

A school can provide clean and sex-segregated latrines with adequate sanitary facilities, so that children are not reduced to improvising. This would include provisions or a contingency plan for girls who may be menstruating. A sanitary school helps children retain self-respect.

Violence-free schools

A school can develop policies and mechanisms that protect children from abusive behaviours, such as bullying or sexual violence, particularly against girls. These measures send a clear signal to students that the school values them and will not tolerate victimisation of its members.

Proud schools

A school can emphasise a positive image of itself, making students feel proud of belonging to it. Various initiatives, such as collectively coming up with the school motto or painting a wall that declares positive values, can foster a sense of pride in the school's identity and create a shared sense of responsibility for how the school is perceived externally and internally.

These measures send a clear signal to students that the school values them and will not tolerate victimisation of its members.

Voice

Voice is a fundamental tool for participation in processes that affect us as individuals. A school has a responsibility to cultivate every child's voice, so that children's ideas contribute to the collective vision of how our society ought to be. If children's voices are not valued or given due consideration, children learn passivity, and they surrender their stake in their community. They become resigned to the view that

A child's voice is her or his unique expression of perspectives, priorities and experiences. When given the opportunity to develop and use their voices, children communicate to others how they understand the world and what is important to them. In developing their voice they discover an expression of themselves.

nothing they think, say or do matters. This belief fosters apathy and a withdrawal from public processes, which can have long-term consequences for children, their schools and their country.

A good school fosters vibrant and original voices in its students. It encourages children to explore their perspectives; it creates opportunities for them to discover and express what they feel and think about the issues that affect them. It is only in such a climate that original ideas emerge. A lack of unique voices indicates stagnation and decay in any system and reliably predicts a school's decline. If a school aspires to thrive and excel, it must create healthy spaces for the expression of diverse views and the exploration of new ideas. A good school recognises that an investment in fostering mature voices to express a diversity of opinions is a critical stepping-stone toward generating strong democracies and healthy governance systems.

Schools that nurture children's voices include:

Schools that involve students in decision making
A school can create opportunities for children to express their views in meaningful ways by including students in the school's decision-making processes. The school could create practical mechanisms, such as a Student's Council or other committees, through which students could discover their voices and exercise real influence.

Schools that encourage self-expression

A school can invest in opportunities such as a school magazine, annual essay writing competition, student-directed play or drama, dance class or sports events to enable students to explore various facets of themselves.

Schools that take students' opinions seriously

A school can offer students the experience of their views being taken seriously and effecting positive change. This experience could involve fostering a climate that tolerates a range of opinions, perhaps using notice boards or suggestion boxes; then acting on some of the recommendations from students; and ultimately entering into a dialogue with students about why certain decisions were made.

Schools that teach students constructive participation skills

A school can help students develop their voices by building students' abilities to respectfully critique a dissenting perspective and persuade effectively using cogent arguments.

Positive discipline

A good school uses a positive discipline approach, providing students with a system that helps them succeed and grow as they learn healthy and acceptable social behaviours. This system is informed by compassion and derives its vision from the belief that children need guidance, not retribution. In this system, mistakes are an opportunity to teach rather than humiliate.

A good school does not resort to humiliating children with corporal punishment. Instead it helps children develop discipline through mentoring, providing clear guidelines and offering ongoing support. A good school helps children develop clear goals for themselves and helps them build the skills and character to achieve those goals. It inspires children to be persistent and recognises that achieving worthy goals takes hard work.

A positive discipline approach guides children's behaviour by focussing on the overall development of the child. Through role modelling, mentoring and providing clear guidelines for acceptable behaviour, it aims to build in children the skills and value system that will motivate them to develop positive behaviour, self-respect and strength of character.

A positive discipline approach is child-centric, placing at the heart of every interaction the best interests of the child. It is a long-term investment in a child's development, rather than grasping for immediate compliance and short-term gains.

The central tool of this approach is the relationship between the teacher and the child—its tone, its nature and the compassion and respect within it. Teachers create these relationships based on the basic knowledge of children's developmental needs and frame their responses to children with the aim of helping them learn and develop. This approach embraces the teacher's role as mentor and guide. A good school knows this relationship is crucial for children's development and, therefore, invests in discharging this responsibility with diligence and wisdom.

A good school does not resort to humiliating children with corporal punishment.

Schools that succeed in adopting a positive discipline approach include:

Schools that redefine discipline through reflection and dialogue

A school can begin a collective reflection on its current approach to discipline, exploring the reasons this approach is used and its shortcomings. At the same time, learning can begin about the positive discipline approach, its advantages and how it could be introduced into the school. Once internal reflection and dialogue have taken place, the school can present stakeholders with an alternative vision of how to relate with children. Relaying their knowledge and examples with confidence, school members can persuade stakeholders that corporal punishment has no place in a good school.

Schools that effectively manage the transition to positive discipline

Schools must recognise that the transition to positive discipline takes time and involves a process of learning for teachers and students. To maintain an unwavering commitment during this transition, a school can adopt a zero tolerance policy on the use of corporal punishment and develop a clear written disciplinary policy (see page 37).

Schools that build the capacity of their teachers to use positive discipline techniques

Schools must provide ongoing opportunities for teachers to learn and practice alternative ways of disciplining children. A positive discipline approach uses techniques such as sharing the disciplinarian role with children.

Sharing the disciplinarian role with children includes the following:

- the creation of classroom committees that share the role of creating discipline
- the collective establishment of class rules and objectives
- opportunities for children to reflect on and articulate how particular behaviours are problematic
- opportunities for children to consider and share alternative choices of behaviour

For additional practical suggestions, please see the companion publication that focuses on promoting positive discipline in schools,[6] available from Raising Voices at www.raisingvoices.org.

Ethical development is nourished and nurtured through a clear indication of what is an acceptable behaviour, what is not and why it is so.

Chapter 4 | Ethical Development at a Good School

As we accumulate experiences, each one of us attempts to develop a value system that will be our ethical compass. As we interact with the world, we experiment with what we believe, what works for us and how we will decide right from wrong. Ultimately, the set of beliefs we settle on, how rigidly we hold onto them and with what fidelity we actualise them in our lives will determine what we become in the world.

Schools have a profound influence on children's ethical development. What children witness, imbibe and partake in becomes the raw material for their ethical identities. They observe what schools proclaim regarding an individual's worth; they witness how justice is administered; they notice what standards schools declare and uphold; they learn deep lessons about how reality works in the world they are just beginning to discover.

For most children, school is the first external environment they encounter beyond their families. Thus, children look to school to fill in gaps left by the home environment, to resolve conflicts they are experiencing in their ethical perspectives. If a parent is violent or absent, a child looks to the school to understand what that means. If there is a lack of communication at home, or absence of any discernable system for assessing what is appropriate behaviour, a child will fumble to find those missing pieces at school.
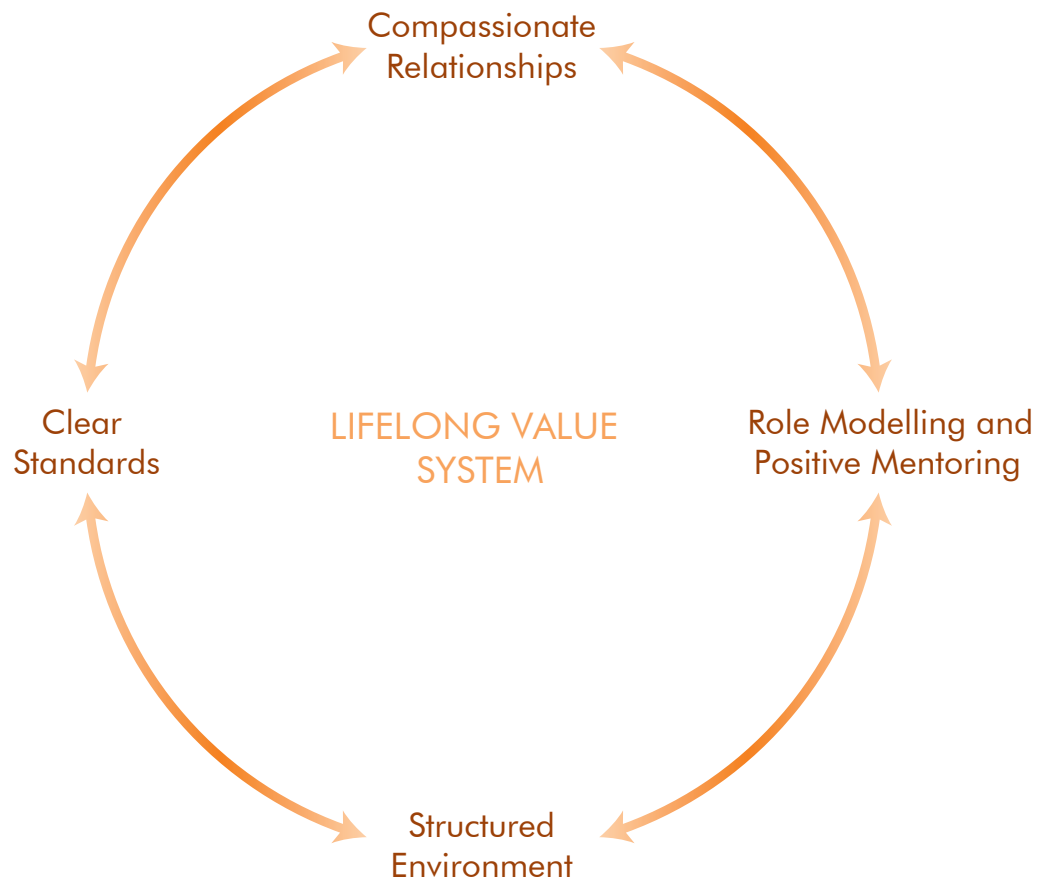
If schools fail to provide those pieces, then children will improvise with haphazard responses, often to the detriment of themselves and their communities. Aggressive behaviour, crime and corruption do not suddenly fall from the sky, but result from gaps left unfilled in an individual's ethical development. Consequently, it is crucial that schools invest in children's ethical development.

Ethical development is nourished and nurtured through a clear indication of what is an acceptable behaviour, what is not and why it is so. A good school cultivates ethical development through role modelling, mentoring, demonstrating ethics in action and creating appreciation of human rights. For a value system to take root within an individual, the individual must encounter a clear statement of it, see it at work in the structures and policies of the immediate environment and experience it consistently over a sustained period of time.

Ethical development is the highest aspiration we have as humans, and yet it is the part of our lives for which we receive the least guidance and support. It is a fundamental part of how we behave in the world, what we deem as wrong and what we judge as just. Our ethical perspective is our map for navigating the moral dilemmas we will encounter as individuals.

The most powerful desire our schools can instil in children is a lifelong quest to enrich their ethical selves. In practice, a good school can support children's ethical development by creating and maintaining ethical relationships, shared standards, credible written policy, responsible governance and a broad involvement of the community in its ethical practices.

A good school cultivates ethical development through compassionate relationships, role modelling, mentoring and demonstrating ethics in action.

Compassionate
Relationships

Clear
Standards

LIFELONG VALUE
SYSTEM

Role Modelling and
Positive Mentoring

Structured
Environment

When children experience compassionate relationships through
positive role models and thoughtful mentors, and when their
school provides a structured environment and clear standards, they
will develop a life-long value system that will help them to become
ethical individuals and vibrant community members.

Ethical relationships

First and foremost, a school must establish a clear commitment from all its adult members that they will strive to create compassionate, enabling and healthy relationships with children based on an appreciation of children's rights. This means that through its public identity, as well as through internal processes, the school must acculturate adults to respect children's dignity, promote children's development and always act in children's best interests. The adults must demonstrate personal integrity and sincerity of intentions. They must model a shared value system through their behaviours and mentor children to develop positive identities. The adults must aim to inspire children to imagine bigger possibilities and develop the discipline to reach their aspirations.

The school must particularly ensure that teachers do not exploit the sexuality of young girls and that teachers are aware of their responsibility to demonstrate exemplary behaviour in fostering healthy sexuality in all children.

A school must establish a clear commitment from all its adult members that they will strive to create compassionate, enabling and healthy relationships with children.

Standards

Integrated with the aim of creating ethical relationships, schools must establish clear standards that every member of the school makes a commitment to promote. Standards are a basic set of values that a school declares and aims to live by. They describe the collective aspirations of a school and are stated in a way that inspires school members to create related personal ambitions and stretch themselves to live by them.

A good school explicitly states its standards, such as:

• We strive for positive discipline in our school.
• We strive to respect the dignity of each member of our school.
• We celebrate the achievements of every individual at our school.
• We take pride in our school and show it through our person, behaviour and environment.

A good school has a well-defined internal culture that promotes these standards. Students are exposed to and immersed in these standards in a variety of ways on a day-to-day basis. Throughout the school, there is a concerted effort to sustain these standards—from a declaration in the school motto and regular emphasis during the morning assembly to strategically placed messages throughout the school and the behaviour and actions of every school member.

Standards are not the same as school rules. Rules are practical guidelines on how to maintain standards. For example, the rule "Vandalising of school property will not be tolerated" is upholding the standard "We will take pride in our environment." The rule prohibiting corporal punishment upholds the standard, "We respect the dignity of each member of the school." Rules without clearly stated underlying standards become arbitrary and provoke apathy. Standards provide the basis for the rules and behaviours at a school. They demonstrate to every member of the school that rules are not there to control them, but to help everyone fulfil their aspirations.

*Standards are a set of values that a
school declares and aims to live by.*

Credible written policy

Standards without credible, written and demonstrably enforced policy become empty words, in which people soon lose faith. A good school enshrines in a written form its vision, values, standards and rules, as well as the corresponding consequences for contravening them. Examples of such policy documents include the following:

School Constitution
A school constitution describes the overall vision, mission and values of a school and states in detail how they will be actualised. It explains who will be vested with the authority to ensure the school remains faithful to the document's contents and how that body will discharge its duty.

Teacher's Code of Conduct
A teacher's code of conduct describes the values and standards that a school expects its teachers to uphold and how the school will support teachers in discharging this duty. This document also describes consequences for failure to uphold these responsibilities.

Student's Code of Conduct

A student's code of conduct describes what a school expects from its students and how the school will help students abide by these standards. This document also explicitly states the consequences for students failing to fulfil these expectations.

Disciplinary Policy

A disciplinary policy describes the aims of the policy and specific actions the school will take when an offence is committed. This policy should be guided by the standards agreed upon as a school and comply with the law of the land and any policy directive that may have been issued by the appropriate government authorities. (For example, in many countries where corporal punishment has been prohibited in schools, a school policy could not legitimise it.)

A disciplinary policy must be developed through a participatory process, allowing all school members to feel they had a voice in creating the culture they will be expected to promote and uphold. This process may need to be broken into several stages, such as (1) consultation with all school members, (2) a smaller group delegated to draft the policy, (3) a broader feedback process on the presented draft and (4) final approval by the school's governing body.

Standards without written policy become empty words in which people soon lose faith.

Responsible governance

Once a school officially adopts its written policies, the school members must take it upon themselves to equitably share the provisions and the responsibility for enforcing them with all key stakeholders, including children. Through such experiences children learn that they too have a stake in what happens at their school and a responsibility to maintain discipline at their school.

Flagrant policy violations that go unchallenged diminish everyone's faith in the policies developed, reducing the trust individuals will vest in them to protect their priorities. These policies will then lose the power to inspire individuals and will become counterproductive, demonstrating that the school does not practice what it publicly declares.

Flagrant policy violations that go unchallenged diminish everyone's faith in the policies developed.

Community involvement

A school is not an island. It is embedded in a broader community and is, therefore, influenced by and accountable to the community it serves. A school must represent the community's highest aspirations and seek to ensure that community members feel pride and investment in their school. Members of the community, particularly parents, must be brought on board so that the values children encounter at school are also fostered at home. Also, local institutions must be involved and engaged in promoting the vision of the school.

Schools can create opportunities for exposing community members to the school values and culture. This may take the form of a parent's day, an invitation to join school governing bodies or periodic engagements, such as a letter or a meeting that updates the community members on key achievements and developments at the school. In some communities, the school may lead community members in seeing the value of having a more imaginative understanding of education and schooling.

Members of the community, particularly parents, must be brought on board so that the values children encounter at school are also fostered at home.

For far too long we have remained locked in a cycle of disadvantage and poverty of imagination.

Final Word

A good school is a repository of our best ambitions and aspirations. It is our hope for expanding our possibilities and stretching beyond the borders of frozen thinking. A good school helps not only the children within it but also the entire community to grow, dream bigger dreams and imagine bigger possibilities for our collective future.

For far too long we have remained locked in a cycle of disadvantage and poverty of imagination. We have remained trapped on the periphery of the global economy as well as the drive for new ideas and new directions. For far too long we have remained recipients of other people's priorities and supplicants in the global dialogue. We now hold the key to unlock ourselves from that chain. The question is, will we use it?

Notes

1) Take for example the case of Uganda. In 1997, when UPE (Universal Primary Education) was introduced, 2,159,850 students enrolled in Primary 1 class. Of these students, only 485,703 completed Primary 7 class in 2003. While retention numbers are difficult to ascertain accurately, these numbers suggest the retention rate of approximately 23%. The majority of the students who had dropped out stated "lack of interest" as their primary reason (46%), family reasons (15%) and sickness (12%). See further discussion of this in Overseas Development Institute: Universal Primary Education, Uganda (2006). Available at: http://www.odi.org.uk/interregional_inequality/papers/Policy Brief 10 -Uganda. pdf. Accessed on March 27, 2007.

2) Assessment of Violence Against Children in the Eastern and Southern Africa Region. F. Zuberi, UNICEF ESARO (2005). Available from www.crin.org/docs/ ESA_Regional_Assessment_final.doc. Accessed on March 27, 2007.

3) Violence Against Children: The Voices of Ugandan Children and Adults. D. Naker, Raising Voices (2005). Available from www.raisingvoices.org. Accessed on March 27, 2007.

4) Derived and adapted from the "Cognitive Learning Stages" in The Architecture of Cognition. Cambridge, Anderson J.R. (1983), MA: Harvard University Press. Also derived and adapted from the four stages of cognitive development proposed by Jean Piaget.

5) Simplified and adapted from Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, which holds that each individual must navigate eight stages of social development to reach psychosocial maturity and that effective navigation depends on a supportive social environment. These ideas are also supported by the work of Heinz Kohut, who held that an individual develops capabilities through empathic social relationships.

6) Alternatives to Corporal Punishment: Promoting Positive Discipline in Our Schools. D. Naker, Raising Voices (2007). Available from www.raisingvoices.org.

Recommended Reading

1) World Report on Violence against Children. Paulo Sergio Pinheiro. United Nation's study of violence against children (2006). Available from www.violencestudy.org Accessed on March 27, 2007. Chapter 4: Violence against Children in Schools and Educational Setting may be of particular interest.

2) Millennium Development Goals (2000-2006). Available from http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/. Accessed on March 27, 2007.

3) Education for All. A framework for Action in Sub-Saharan Africa: Education for African Renaissance in the Twenty-first Century. Available from http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001211/121147e.pdf. Accessed on March 27, 2007.

4) EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005: The Quality Imperative. UNESCO (2004). Available from www.efareport.unesco.org. Accessed on March 27, 2007.

Ideas

Ideas

What the best and wisest parent
wants for his own child; that must the
community want for all its children.

John Dewey