



School for Life



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[COMPONANTS AND VALUES]

This document describes the rationale and the values of the major pedagogic and planning components of School for Life.

SCHOOL FOR LIFE'S COMPONENTS & VALUES

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2) INTRODUCTION

School for Life has a holistic approach to education in particular and to development as a whole. By holistic, we mean looking at the whole human being (psychologically, intellectually, physically and morally). This is important when pursuing a relevant and meaningful learning situation in life. In empowering people to improve on their everyday life situation, we look at all aspects of life and design the curriculum correspondingly. We aim to develop in the children a sense of critical thinking and activeness, which will reflect in the society at large and promote active participation in democratic processes.

From a societal perspective, we therefore aim at creating synergy and relevance between the learner, the classroom, the home and the rest of the community. This is to generate a harmonic and balanced society with mutual respect and understanding between sexes, ethnic groups, generations and social groups.

This document describes the rationale and the values of the major pedagogic and planning components of School for Life. It is important to note that each component is essential as part of the holistic concept and a combination of all factors that contribute to the outstanding result that can be noted from the School for Life classes.

2.1) Objectives of the Components and Values

- Create transparency in the values and elements contained in the School for Life approach.
- Guide management of School for Life in discussions with organizations interested in replication.
- Guide interested organizations in the process of adopting the School for Life approach.
- Guide the School for Life Technical Committee in Ghana and the School for Life Committee in Denmark in decision-making regarding replication and collaboration.
- Commit interested organizations to the indispensable basic values of the approach in order to strengthen it and eliminate unwanted presidencies.
- Ensure the quality of replicated SfL literacy classes.

3) THE HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL FOR LIFE APPROACH

In 1993 the founding fathers of Ghanaian Danish Communities Association (GDCA) thought of the yawning gap in the field of education between Northern and Southern Ghana. The matter was discussed with members of the Ghana Friendship Groups in Denmark (GV), as it coincided with the fact that the proceeds of Danida's "Christmas Calendar Fund" was to go to Africa.

When the idea of a functional literacy programme for children aged between 8 and 12 years was evolved by the two partners, Dagbon Traditional Council on the advice of the two partners made a request to DANIDA to fund the conceived functional literacy programme for districts in Dagbon. Gushegu/Karaga and Yendi Districts were piloted.

The SfL approach developed based on experiences from the Ghanaian founders and the long history of the Danish school system, formal as well as non-formal. The final concept was approved at a seminar at the Adult Training Centre (Dagban Ninesim Karinzong - DNK) in 1995 in Dalun, with the participation of outstanding Ghanaian

educationists and representatives from different educational organizations and departments, such as the Ghana Education Service (GES), the Non-Formal Education Division (NFED) and NGOs.

The School for Life (SfL) approach has been created and developed through a joint partnership between the Board and Management of SfL and members of the Ghana Friendship Groups in Denmark (GV).

As at the beginning of 2004 ten Districts in the Northern Region were involved in the School for Life Programme.

Over the years, the School for Life concept of creating an innovative route to education has proved successful in bridging the gap between rural/underserved communities and the endowed ones. Though advocacy, the government of Ghana has come to recognize that in order for education to reach all children, there is a need for alternative routes to education. The Ghana Complementary Basic Education Programme, implementation of which will start in October 2013, is a joint effort among Partners like MoE/GES, Development Partners and NGOs to provide education to out-of-school children

4) COMPONENTS & VALUES

School for Life is providing the needed guidance and technical support in the process. At stake is the waste of the potentials of another generation. The approach has been documented and summarized in three comprehensive questions:

- What is the School for Life approach?
- What are the integrated components?
- And what are the basic values of these components?

4.1) Use and Teaching of Mother Tongue & syllabic/phonetic methodology

The textbook to pupil ratio is 1:1. Instruction is sequential with emphasis on the phonetic approach to language learning. A comprehensive and detailed teaching manual in the language of the community guides the facilitator through the sequences of literacy and numeracy teaching. Facilitators therefore learn the methodology of mother tongue teaching by being trained in the language they teach. All teaching is done in the mother tongue including numeracy. Teaching and learning, and other literacy materials are developed in the languages spoken within the programme area (including written languages that have no national approval as a formal school language). The communities choose the language of instruction most suitable for the class. English, however, is not an option. The mother tongue literacy is further sustained and developed by SfL providing the communities with a mini-library of extra readers in the local language after exiting from the community.

4.1.1) RATIONALE OF THE COMPONENT:

- Mother tongue literacy has proved to be the most functional and efficient method to acquire the skill to read and write, being the 'tool of thought'
- Mother tongue teaching promotes fast literacy skills and understanding of all topics, including numeracy

- Experience shows that not only is the acquisition of the concept of a visual (read/write) form of language faster and more efficient when the mother tongue is used, but the second language (English) is more easily and better learnt by matured children.
- The phonetic reading approach acquired by children through the SFL instruction is used in pronouncing English words when integrated into formal schools and this creates better second language literacy skills (i.e. English)
- Using the language of the people eases the understanding among parents for the need for education. This reduces the general reservations about education.
- Learners' understanding and ability to relate to the language of the facilitator, develop their curiosity and thirst for knowledge
- Using the language of the children promotes self-consciousness and self-esteem in children and appreciation of their own cultural background
- Mother tongue literacy helps to upgrade the use of Ghanaian Languages and helps to develop them
- Mini-libraries help sustain literacy levels in the communities

4.1.2) BASIC VALUES OF THE COMPONENT:

- Access to education
- Quality in education
- Meeting people where they are
- Community participation
- Complementary Education
- Functional literacy
- Respect for cultural differences and language diversity
- Inter-cultural understanding
- Respect for child-parent relations
- Promotion of Ghanaian Languages
- Gender sensitiveness

4.2) A Functional Curriculum

The curriculum is based on the needs in the community. This is done through developing adequate teaching and learning materials with focus on life-skills and functional literacy in the local language of the people. Life skills deal with recognizable aspects of everyday life of the children, e.g. children learn about basic hygiene, sanitation and prevention of diseases, protection of the environment (natural resource management, agro forestry, etc.). Children learn from the known to the unknown. Teaching and learning aids available in the immediate surroundings are used (e.g. crop seeds or pebbles as counters in doing numeracy, farming tools, basket weaving, etc.). The knowledge base available in the community is used actively (e.g. story-telling, traditional games, plays and songs). Audiocassettes are also used in the classroom work. Functional literacy refers to the application of acquired knowledge. The active participation of children, focus on daily activities at community level and learning by doing, form major components of the pedagogic approach.

4.2.1) RATIONALE BEHIND THE COMPONENT:

- Skills have more value for the children involved if they are immediately applicable for improvement on everyday life of the children and their families
- The functionality of the curriculum makes school and home complementary in acquiring learning and makes learning relevant and motivating
- Learning is acquired through practice ('I hear - I forget', 'I see – I understand', 'I do – I know') focusing on concrete issues rather than abstract
- The children develop capacity to use what they learn, independently in new connections
- Building on the knowledge-base in the community helps in bridging the generational gap and minimizes the general reservation towards education
- Enlightenment on relevant issues discourages harmful social and cultural practices (e.g. bush burning, child betrothal, fosterage)
- The children develop social responsibility and respect for elders
- Addressing improvement of the immediate surroundings of the children discourages migration to urban centres with its attendant negative effects (e.g. 'kayaye' activities)

4.2.2) BASIC VALUES OF THE COMPONENT:

- Relevance in education
- Knowledge and skills are to be used in life
- Everybody's knowledge is recognized and valuable
- Humility towards and appreciation of rural life
- Creating will to improve on rural life conditions
- Respect for poor people's time
- Experiencing that learning is fun
- Experiencing participatory learning

4.3) Child-centered and non-authoritarian pedagogy

The instructional approach is very participatory, interactive and child-centred in the sense that facilitators use question and answer techniques consistently. Emphasis is placed on creating a reassuring atmosphere between the children and the facilitator by involving the children in dialogues and discussions of the text. In order to ensure a manageable size of the class, 25 learners make up a class. The classes are therefore not more than 25 learners to one facilitator. Learning is acquired through motivation by encouragement from the facilitator as well as other learners and without use of the cane, threats and punishment or demands for extensive homework. There is no examination or formal testing or ranking of the children and everybody who completes the nine months literacy cycle is given a certificate of participation.

The blackboard is for everybody and the 1:1 pupil-textbook ratio makes the children practice reading, writing and standing in front of others consistently. Rote learning is discouraged and facilitators do not waste time in writing long sentences on the black board since every learner has books of his/her own. Different teaching methods are encouraged such as different classroom arrangements, group work, songs, plays and games. A radio component has been developed whereby literacy cassettes are played for the class to listen and learn. This diversifies the classroom practice.

4.3.1) RATIONALE BEHIND THE COMPONENT:

- Basing the topics on the interest of the learners encourages questions, discussion and dialogue
- Diversified classroom practice makes learning motivating and interesting
- Interactive teaching promotes critical thinking and sense of democracy in children
- Learning through motivation encourages curiosity and eagerness to learn and brings out the best in the children
- A supportive environment teaches children that they learn by their mistakes and promotes their self-esteem and self-worth
- Small class sizes enable the facilitator to focus on each learner's competences and needs
- Strengthening and encouraging the weak learners instead of punishing them, i.e. you will not be punished for wrong answers
- Absence of physical punishment means that the children are never afraid to go to school
- Absence of mandatory home assignments means that children will always go to school with a clear conscience
- Sufficient supply of teaching and learning material results in efficient use of time and gives room for more attention on each learner

4.3.2) BASIC VALUES OF THE COMPONENT:

- Conducive learning environment
- Everybody is appreciated, no matter his/her academic skills
- The process is as important as the end result
- Promoting equality and social responsibility among children
- Critical thinking is crucial for a vibrant democracy
- Interactive learning is appreciated

4.4) Participatory/interactive supervision and monitoring

A major component of the School for Life approach is the efficient and frequent supervision and monitoring of classes that focuses on supporting the facilitators at the class-level to deliver quality instruction. Classes are visited at least once a month and facilitators are given on-the-spot support by the supervisor. The regular in-service training reinforces new skills and serves to improve the quality of instruction. It rekindles the facilitators' commitment. Field staff are based in the district. District Supervisors supervise about 25 classes each and a District Coordinator carries out frequent monitoring of classes and coaches the supervisors. Management carries out random monitoring of the classes as well as hold discussions with the field staff and communities.

4.4.1) RATIONALE BEHIND THE COMPONENT:

- Supervision is crucial for quality education, since it rekindles the commitment of learners, facilitators and community members in general
- People without formal education can be supported and trained to teach
- Frequent supervision almost eliminates absenteeism among facilitators

- By frequent supervision, coaching and on-the-spot support, facilitators and classes do not feel isolated in spite of their 'hard to reach' surroundings
- Problems and challenges among learners, families and the community are taken up while they are still manageable
- Prompt address of challenges and early identification of shortages in teaching and learning materials means time is not wasted
- The continuous sensitization by field staff minimizes drop-out rates and learner absenteeism
- Frequent sensitization involves communities in the educational development and they are updated on new policy developments, etc.
- The supervision and on-the-spot support helps in upgrading the facilitators' methodological skills
- The supervisors and monitors share knowledge and get inspiration at field staff meeting

4.4.2) BASIC VALUES OF THE COMPONENT:

- Quality in Education
- Motivation rather than control
- Attachment to locality
- Solidarity among key players (learners, facilitators, supervisors)
- Continuous individual and collective teaching and learning processes
- Addressing training needs
- Efficiency and economic use of resources
- Assurance of a sense of direction in learners and facilitators

4.5) THE COMMUNITY: Self-governance

In order to select target communities, animation is done in sample communities when entering a new district. Recently smaller communities in very deprived areas are also included in the animation. This is done in close cooperation with Department of Community Development (DCD). Communities are animated on all the aspects of School for Life and the importance of education to their own development. They are invited to identify their facilitator and to form a local SfL committee as part of the criteria for applying for a class. The local committee makes the formal application to have a literacy class and, if a class is approved, the committee has the responsibility for monitoring of the day-to-day teaching and learning activities, taking decisions about the class and organizing the community's support to the facilitator. The committee consists of three women and two men, usually with representation of the chief, the women's leader, the assembly member, etc. In that way, the successful running of the class is the joint responsibility of the community and SfL.

4.5.1) RATIONALE BEHIND THE COMPONENT:

- The self-governing of the class creates ownership and sustainability
- It promotes attitudinal and behavioural change since the criticism of certain practices of the community comes from within and not from outsiders

- The high representation of women promotes girls' education in particular and commitment to regular attendance since it has shown that women are more conscious of and committed to the welfare of the children
- Building the confidence of local committee members' leadership skills encourages other developmental initiatives in the community.
- Self-governance ensures close monitoring of classes, facilitators' presence and commitment
- Empower communities to demand their rights because of regular sensitization and awareness creation among community members on development issues in Ghana

4.5.2) BASIC VALUES OF THE COMPONENT:

- Self-help philosophy (Don't do for people what they can do by themselves)
- Ownership and sustainability
- Education as a communal interest
- Empowerment of communities
- Equal access to education for girls and boys
- Attitudinal and behavioral change starts with oneself

4.6) Flexible school calendar

During animation it is explained to parents/communities that classes will be organized at a time suitable to the communities in order that pupils can be available to help their parents on the farms and in carrying out household chores. The literacy cycle therefore runs from October to June (9 months), which is the dry season and avoids interfering with the major farming season where children are needed to offer labour in the farms. Moreover the community, most often depending on religious praying days and market days, chooses the two off-days in a week, which can also rotate, i.e. in case of rotating market days. The communities also choose the 3 daily class-hours to fit their situation. It is, however, not advisable to hold classes in the night due to tiredness of learners and absence of light.

4.6.1) RATIONALE BEHIND THE COMPONENT:

- Adapting to the context of the communities creates receptiveness of education
- The poorest parents can now send their children to school without losing their help in sustaining the family
- The flexible school calendar promotes girl child education e.g. foster children can also be sent to school after their daily chores.
- Changes parents' attitudes on the importance of letting children attend school.
- Ensures community ownership for the educational process

4.6.2) BASIC VALUES OF THE COMPONENT:

- Education should be adapted to the people it is meant to serve
- Appreciation of the life-conditions of communities

- Community ownership of classes
- Gender-sensitive

4.7) Voluntary and community-based facilitators

Facilitators are recruited directly from the communities in which they are to facilitate. Instead of depending on formally trained teachers, who are often very difficult to attract to the rural areas, committed local facilitators are recruited as teachers. Facilitators are nominated and recruited by the communities themselves. The facilitators should be literate in the mother tongue of the community. SfL staff encourages the communities to nominate female facilitators to act as role models for girls. The facilitator works as a volunteer, with only an annual incentive (equivalent to the price of half a bicycle) and monthly 'soap-money'. The monthly support is only symbolic to add to the assistance (in the form of foodstuffs, labour or cash) that the community is expected to provide.

A comprehensive training programme is followed. Three weeks in-house training is done initially and every three months facilitators are given refresher courses at the various district centres. A core team of resource persons from within GES runs the courses. They have been trained in the special SfL approach and teach in the language of the facilitators. Guest resource persons are called in from various areas for topical issues. After some years of service, facilitators are given various opportunities to further their own education, e.g. by supporting potential teachers to gain the formal qualifications required by the Colleagues of Education.

4.7.1) RATIONALE BEHIND THE COMPONENT:

- Using a person from within the community contributes to a safe learning environment
- When the facilitator resides in the community, absenteeism hardly occurs
- Ensures facilitators' commitment
- The change in status of the facilitator promotes voluntarism and social responsibility towards development in the community
- Increases adult literacy levels in local languages and develops a rich resource base at the community level
- Frequent and regular in-service training ensures a uniform pedagogical approach
- Using female facilitators as role models stimulates girl child education
- Increases interest in the teaching profession
- By supporting facilitators to gain access to Colleagues of Education, the number of trained teachers willing to teach in the rural areas increases
- Ensures low cost in running of classes

4.7.2) BASIC VALUES OF THE COMPONENT:

- Empowerment of youth and communities
- Informal teacher training
- Continuity in teacher performance
- Ownership to education
- Sustainability of education
- Safe learning environment
- Confidence building among learners

4.8) Non-exclusive

In order not to exclude any child from gaining access to education, the costs involved for the parents are kept at an absolute minimum. There are no dress requirements in terms of uniforms and all teaching and learning materials are provided free of charge. These materials are produced in a very simple and low cost form to enable the programme to reach as many communities as possible and to enable the government to eventually take over (i.e. District Assemblies and GES). The costs involved (e.g. supporting the facilitator, contributing to infrastructural development) are made the joint responsibility of SfL and the whole community and not only the parents of the children in the class.

4.8.1) RATIONALE BEHIND THE COMPONENT:

- Education is affordable and does not exclude anybody
- Increasing literacy levels in the community will benefit the whole community and not just the families involved
- When the interest in education is created, the priorities of parents have most often changed and they are more willing to direct resources into the formal education of their children

4.8.2) BASIC VALUES OF THE COMPONENT:

- Education for All
- Education as a communal interest
- All-inclusive and pro-poor equitable education
- Appreciation for and adaptation to rural life conditions

5) THE WIDER GHANAIAN SOCIETY: ADVOCACY FOCUS AREAS

School for Life engages in active advocacy on a number of crucial issues with the overall aim of using its practical experience aimed at improving equal access to quality basic education in Ghana. The advocacy targets are therefore based on the success of the various components spelt out in this paper. School for Life advocacy focus areas are:

- Promotion of mother tongue teaching in the formal schools
- Promotion of School for Life methodology in formal schools
- Promotion of literacy/school materials in local languages
- Promotion of DAs/GES establishing of wing schools in very remote, sparsely populated areas where Sfl has created awareness and yet there are no schools
- Promotion of alternative/flexible approaches to education for hard-to-reach children and communities (e.g. flexible calendars, no dressing requirements, etc.)
- Advocate for GES and DAs to support identified volunteers to upgrade themselves so that they can serve in the most deprived areas ('dark spots' without access to education).
- Promotion of girls' education and gender equity in general

- Promotion of free education in formal schools
- Awareness creation for the DAs to sustain Sfl impact.

6) CONCLUSION

As a functional literacy programme for children, the School for Life approach has succeeded in giving out-of-school children a chance to enter the formal school system and changing attitudes towards education in the communities. Sfl would therefore be happy if other organizations are interested in replicating and/or developing the approach. It would then be mandatory to make use of:

- Mother tongue teaching & syllabic/phonetic methodology
- A functional curriculum adapted to skills needed in the community
- Child-centred and non-authoritarian pedagogy
- Interactive supervision and monitoring
- Flexible and suitable school calendar
- Voluntary and community-based facilitators
- Self-governance
- A non-exclusive approach

After a thorough introduction to the approach and a period of Sfl consultancy, an agreement would be made between the organization and Sfl.