

Commonwealth Education Good Practice Awards



In 2005, the Commonwealth Secretariat launched the first round of the Education Good Practice Awards, which Ministers had recommended in 2003 to recognise and acknowledge good practices in education throughout the Commonwealth. Nine finalists of the first round attended the adjudication at the 16th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (16CCEM) in South Africa in December 2006, and good practices from South Africa, Cyprus and India were selected as winners. Education Ministers at 16CCEM endorsed the programme as an effective means of disseminating information on promising problem-solving initiatives across the Commonwealth.

FIRST PRIZE: GOLD Peer Education Development Agency

'GOLD Peer Education works in mysterious ways, I have seen students change their behaviours, and become responsible. Not only have they become peer educators, but they are young responsible people with the ability to change our nation.'

Mr Magano, GOLD contact teacher, Francistown, Botswana

'Yes, before I was a peer educator, I was a bully. I was in a gang. People used to hate me and now they love me. I am now chairperson of the local TAC branch. I'm very involved in lots of organisations.'

16 year-old male peer educator, RSA

We see a generation of young African leaders confronting the root issues of the AIDS and HIV pandemics, through uplifting their communities and imparting vision and purpose to present and future generations.

Information alone has not been effective in changing behaviour with regards to HIV transmission. Massive condom promotion and awareness drives have failed to stem the tide of the epidemic. An intervention strategy that hopes to be effective must address root causes, meet young people within their communities, get to grips with the challenges they face, and offer practical and relevant support to enable them to confront these challenges and to make life-affirming choices.

The Gold Peer Education model

The GOLD Peer Education Development Agency (GOLD) is a dynamic non-profit organisation that believes that youth are a nation's greatest resource. GOLD's vision is to see a generation of young African leaders confronting the root causes of the HIV and AIDS pandemic through uplifting their communities and imparting vision and purpose to present and future generations.

GOLD aims to succeed in this by supporting viable community organisations across Sub-Saharan Africa in the sustainable roll-out of quality youth peer education programmes, in alignment with the GOLD Peer Education model. This model uses the methodology of peer education, which harnesses the influence that young people have over their peers to encourage youth to make informed choices and develop health-enhancing social norms (Sloane, B.C. and Zimmer, C.G.; The National Hemophilia Foundation; DiClemente, R.J.).

The model was originally designed to be applied within a secondary school context and be involved in building the capacity of community-based organisations ('implementing organisations') to train and support school-going peer educators. By 2009, the GOLD model will also have a field-tested, community-based programme able to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable adolescents throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, many of whom are no longer in the secondary school system by the time they reach their teens.

The GOLD model targets young people by addressing the behaviours and beliefs that are at the root of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The model is implemented within a developmental framework by skilled peer education facilitators who, through skills-training and mentorship, equip adolescent leaders with the skills to influence their peers and younger children.



The model strategically targets high school-level opinion leaders, who can act as catalysts to bring about personal, group and community transformations to combat the devastating effects of HIV and AIDS.

At the heart of the model is the belief that it is the message giver who delivers the strongest message. Adolescent peer educators are equipped and supported to fulfil the following four roles, in varying levels of responsibility, for both their peers and younger children.

1. Role modelling: to role model health-enhancing behaviour.
2. Education: to educate their peers in a structured manner.
3. Recognition and referral: to recognise those in need of additional help and refer them for assistance.
4. Community upliftment: to recommend additional resources and services for themselves and their peers, and to raise awareness of the important issues affecting youth.

The model is cross-cultural, values and rights based, and enhances and strengthens the life-orientation curriculum within the classroom. Establishing relationships with all community stakeholders, for example, schools, clinics, churches and police, is central to the success of the programme.

The core components of the GOLD Peer Education Model

1. It is applied within a structured framework whereby adolescent peer educators are equipped to fulfil four specific roles over three years (with an optional fourth year).

Monitoring and evaluating training



2. It responds to identified youth needs.
3. It is implemented within a cluster of two to six secondary schools or community sites within a geographical area.
4. It is implemented within a community-development framework and promotes community involvement.
5. It is put into practice by a viable community-based implementing organisation.
6. It supports skilled facilitators to train and mentor peer educators (providing information and support, and teaching role model health-enhancing behaviour).
7. It is youth focused and targets adolescents from either participating secondary schools or community sites selected according to peer educator criteria.

Table 1 Expected outcomes from tackling the root causes of HIV/AIDS

Expected outcomes from tackling the root causes of the HIV/AIDS pandemic among youth

- 1 Increased levels of knowledge about HIV/Aids
- 2 Increase in knowledge of life skills
- 3 Improved access to community services that support health-enhancing behaviour among youth
- 4 Increase in health-enhancing relationships among youth
- 5 Increase in youth-driven community upliftment activities
- 6 Increased delay in engaging in sexual activity among youth
- 7 Increased reports of condom use among sexually active youth
- 8 Increased reports of care-seeking for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among youth
- 9 Increased perceived efficacy in contraception use
- 10 Increase in youth participation in VCT services
- 11 Decrease in sexual coercion among youth
- 12 Decrease in gender violence among youth
- 13 Decrease in substance abuse among youth
- 14 Decrease in school drop-outs
- 15 Decreased reports of teenage pregnancies
- 16 Decrease in average number of sexual partners among youth
- 17 Improved attendance in schools
- 18 Improved academic performance
- 19 Improved behaviour in school as documented by school counsellors or educators
- 20 Increased youth participation in community upliftment activities
- 21 Increase in numbers of youth assuming leadership positions
- 22 Decrease in behavioural or discipline problems at affected schools



Staff members from GOLD implementing organisation, YFC Mpumalanga, during an advocacy event

8. It can be adapted to different contexts, uses a values- and rights-based curriculum to strengthen the school life-orientation/skills curriculum, and supports peer educator training and activities.
9. It has a comprehensive and standardised monitoring and evaluation system, with associated easy-to-use tools based on common indicators.
10. It is quality assured by the GOLD Peer Education Development Agency (including accreditation of peer education implementation in accordance with the GOLD Peer Education Model, standards and brand).

The Gold Footprint

GOLD is currently working in South Africa, Botswana and Zambia, where GOLD Peer Education is being implemented within 104 secondary schools. These schools are located in the Western Cape, Kwa-zulu Natal and Mpumalanga provinces of South Africa, in Gaborone and Francistown in Botswana, and with preliminary work being done in Zambia. Approximately 208 facilitators are being trained to develop over 6,710 adolescent peer educators to positively influence their peers and communities. By October 2008, across all the three countries, including Zambia, there will be 16 new implementing organisations, 100 new sites, 200 new facilitators and 3,000 new peer educators.

Stakeholders

GOLD collaborates with key strategic and regional stakeholders to enhance and strengthen GOLD's support of implementing organisations on the ground. Regional stakeholders include selected government departments, donors, tertiary institutions, church and NGO networks and sustainability partners. GOLD works in support of the relevant national HIV and AIDS strategic plans of the countries within which GOLD is being implemented.

Developmental objective and expected outcomes

The GOLD developmental objective is that, by December 2012, GOLD Peer Education will have contributed to an African society where youth are better equipped to challenge the root causes of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, thereby decreasing their vulnerability to HIV; where they show resilience in the face of the socio-environmental factors that cause this vulnerability; and where they confront these factors and in so doing, move towards new, health-enhancing behaviour. By addressing the root issues of the HIV and AIDS pandemic among youth, specific developmental outcomes can be expected.

Services

GOLD's work focuses on six core service delivery areas to ensure quality peer education roll-out.

1. **Stakeholder management:** where GOLD engages, identifies, assesses and selects viable community-based organisations as implementing partners on the ground, as well as collaborating with strategic and regional GOLD programme stakeholders.
2. **Research and development:** involves the research, documentation and development of peer education good practice implementation methods and customisable GOLD peer education resources and curricula.
3. **Interactive and technical training and support:** available to community organisations and other programme stakeholders in order to help them implement quality and effective GOLD peer education programmes.
4. **Quality assurance:** achieved by providing customisable programme implementation logical frameworks in alignment with the GOLD model, and by monitoring and evaluating their implementation on the ground to ensure quality.



Peer educators from GOLD implementing organisation, Sethani in KZM, during an outdoor skills-training session



5. **Resource mobilisation:** sees GOLD identifying, gathering and co-ordinating a wide range of local, national and international resources that enables community organisations in each community of practice to implement sustainable GOLD peer education programmes.
6. **Advocacy and programme visibility:** involves facilitating activities and campaigns that (a) raise awareness of regional GOLD peer education programmes and (b) support implementing organisations to enhance the visibility and credibility of their peer education programmes within their own communities.

Success stories

Behaviour change isn't easy. GOLD peer educators know that behaviour change among peers starts with implementing change in their own lives. Below are two of the many stories of youth educators who have turned their lives around and who are role modelling positive behaviour change to their peers. These young people are living out the belief that personal transformation leads to group transformation and, ultimately, to community transformation. (Names of peer educators have been changed for the sake of privacy.)

Thandi is a peer educator from a community where many of her peers are orphans. Orphans are exempt from paying school fees, but they have to prove their orphan status by providing a lot of documentation. Many of the orphans leave school, as it is so difficult to obtain all the necessary documentation. Thandi went around to all her orphaned peers to help them gather the documentation they needed to become exempt from paying school fees. Some of these children had already dropped out of school. As a result of her efforts to help her peers, these orphaned children are now back at school.

Nana is a 15 year-old senior peer educator who was suffering from low self-esteem and was struggling to interact with other learners when she first joined the programme. After a lot of input from her facilitator, and after undergoing the skills-training sessions, Nana is now one of the most outspoken members of the group. She has been spearheading talk groups where peer educators discuss problems and share information around HIV/AIDS and other youth issues with other learners in her school. She now plans to become a psychologist and wants to host her own talk show one day.

References

- DiClemente, R.J. (1993). Confronting the Challenge of AIDS Among Adolescents: Directions for Future Research. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 8:156–166.
- National Hemophilia Foundation (1994). *Peer-to-Peer Health Education Programs for Youth: Their Impact on Comprehensive Health Education*. New York: The Foundation.
- Sloane, B.C. and Zimmer, C.G. (1993). The Power of Peer Health Education. *Journal of American College Health*, 41:241–245.



SECOND PRIZE: Agiou Antonios Primary School

Educational innovations implemented in a Cypriot primary school – Agiou Antonios – reformed an atypical infamous school into a national multicultural institution.

The background

Agiou Antonios Primary School is situated in a deprived and underdeveloped area of Lemesos old town that is full of social, cultural, religious, and ethnic diversities. In the past few years, the homogeneity of this area's population has changed rapidly into a multicultural and multi-ethnic divergence pool and has directly affected the population of our school, as children in Cyprus can only register in their neighborhood primary school.

Our school's population is made up of Greek Cypriot internally displaced persons, Turkish Cypriots, Roma children and children of economic emigrants, and most of them are from low educational and socio-economic backgrounds. Because of its diverse population, the school was suddenly faced with several challenges that were new and unrivalled for our teachers and the public education system alike.

Ten years ago, the population of most public schools in Cyprus comprised mainly Greek-speaking Christian Orthodox children; most foreign families on the island with school age children registered their children in international private schools. However, gradually, our school's population started losing its consistency and new challenges started appearing, along with a growing dissatisfaction among the teachers and parents, which manifested itself in increased numbers of pupils and teachers transferring to other schools.

Among the main challenges that the school faced was that of how to deal with foreign speaking students and how to create an environment of co-operation, mutual understanding and respect between students and parents of different ethnic backgrounds.¹ Integrating Turkish Cypriot and other students at risk of exclusion into the school's society was also equally important, as was persuading Roma families to register their children at the school and finding ways of ensuring they attended regularly. Improving



Students perform Aristophanes' Peace at the school's end of year event

the school's infrastructure and facilities was considered essential in order to make the school an attractive place to be throughout the day for all of its students. As a result, the school drew up a list of basic targets that included:

- Improving quality in education offered.
- Promoting equality.
- Promoting schooling.
- Fighting exclusion.
- Fighting racism.

To manage its challenges and reach its targets, the school was accepted in the Zone of Educational Priority (ZEP) by the Ministry of Culture and Education of the Republic of Cyprus. A plan was drawn up between the school's management and the ministry, with the assistance of the local District Educational Office and Educational Psychology Service.

Consequently, the school's management developed its own 'Educational Vision' and identified weaknesses and problem areas in the running of the school in order to offer more support where it was most needed. To make this vision a reality, a long-term programme comprising the following targets was formulated.

- To offer a multicultural education.
- To adjust the school's aims to suit the needs of children in the area.
- To recruit experienced staff on a more permanent basis.
- To develop acceptance and mutual respect between students of different cultural, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.
- To efficiently integrate the Turkish Cypriot, Roma and other foreign students into the school.
- To open up the school to the community.
- To provide additional support to teaching staff by hiring educational psychologists and other specialist teachers.
- To improve the school's infrastructure.
- To offer in-service training to the staff.
- To co-operate with other public services.

The school developed an Action Network, incorporating several governmental and other non-profit bodies and organisations, to obtain the assistance needed to fulfil the school's needs and realise its targets. Through this network, the school was able to hire additional staff and upgrade and maintain its buildings and infrastructure, as well as obtain other material help to attain its goals and introduce educational innovations.

Staff recruitment

The school's management, in co-operation with the local district educational office and the Ministry of Education and Culture of the



Republic, concerned themselves first with recruiting sufficient, as well as efficient, staff members. As a result:

- Experienced teachers were hired who would remain in the school for a number of years to help carry out its long-term programme.
- A Turkish literature graduate was allocated full time in the school to assist in the communication of Turkish-speaking students and parents, to teach Turkish to Turkish Cypriot students, and to teach Greek to Turkish Cypriot parents.
- Two full-time Turkish Cypriot teachers were employed to teach the Turkish language and culture to Turkish Cypriot students.
- A full-time Turkish Cypriot teacher was employed for the school's afternoon classes.
- An educational psychologist was allocated full time in the school.
- A logotherapist was taken on for two days per week.

In addition, the school, in co-operation with the Educational Psychology Service and the Cyprus Youth Organisation, organised seminars for teachers, parents and students. Staff members also attended special seminars on peer mediation and educating Roma children.

Class size and pupil support

Apart from the efficiency of the personnel, another crucial factor affecting educational outcome in a school environment like ours is how much time a teacher can afford each student for personal contact and mentoring. To increase this one-on-one time, the number of students in each class was reduced; now the school has 11 classes over six grades (see Table 1). In addition, 49 teaching periods in the school's timetable were allocated to support weak and foreign-language students.

Table 1 Number of students per class

Class	Number of students in our school per class	Max. number of students in ZEP per class	Max. number of students in Cyprus per class
1a / 1b	12 / 13	20	25
2a / 2b	13 / 12	20	25
3a / 3b	13 / 13	24	30
4a / 4b	13 / 13	24	30
5	17	24	30
6a / 6b	18 / 20	24	30
Total	157	Academic year 2006–2007	

Achieving the highest possible educational outcomes

To maintain a continuous upgrade of education offered, the school's management carried out a number of procedures to improve schooling and combat the regular and long-term absenteeism of some of the students. As result, students who were often absent were visited at home and were assisted in solving

family disputes and problems by being offered financial and, if needed, psychological support and guidance.

To realise our educational goals, apart from the actions taken above, the following changes were implemented.

- Afternoon classes were introduced in all classes in our school (other schools that have afternoon classes, have introduced the scheme only for Grades 4, 5 and 6).
- A free volunteer reading programme was introduced in all classes.
- Libraries in classrooms were given new and attractive books.
- The school unit entered the European Network of Health Promoting Schools. Personal and environmental health and hygiene issues in students' school life was regarded to be of a great importance to the school, especially because of the schools' uniqueness.²

Creating an attractive and tolerant learning environment

In order to make the school more attractive to the students and a place where they would want to spend their day, the school management put in place the following measures:³

- Free breakfast was given to all students of the school (second year running) and free lunch provided for all students attending afternoon classes (70% of the school's population).⁴
- Educational day trips were subsidised.
- Low-income and Roma students received financial support (school uniform, stationery, registration fees and insurance cover).
- All students received presents for Christmas, New Year and Easter.
- A pilot summer school was organised and offered free to the students.⁵
- A new infrastructure was built in the school.

To promote acceptance and fight racism and religious discrimination, students made a trip to the Orthodox Church and the Muslim Mosque, while religious representatives visited the school. Children were encouraged to play and work together, which was crucial to improving relations, promoting acceptance and fighting discriminations. A students' newspaper was published with articles in both Greek and Turkish, and a bilingual calendar was produced and offered free to all students. Student artworks on health and safety issues were also exhibited.

Developing relations with the local community

We decided to open the school to the community so that we could achieve better co-operation with our students' parents and be accepted as a positive centre of contribution to the society in general. Our two main goals were to bring parents into school⁶ and to take the school out into the community.

To bring parents into school, the management, in association with the Ministry of Education and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs), organised the following events:



Agiou Antonios Church in Lemesos

- Seminars were offered to Turkish Cypriot mothers,⁷ which were given by a gynaecologist, a paediatrician, a dentist, a social services' official and a beautician. Greek language classes and dance were also organised.
- Educational activities and other events were made available to all parents⁸ – Greek Cypriot, Turkish Cypriot and other ethnic minorities. Christmas and New Year festivities were laid on, as well as those for Mothers' Day and Child's Day. We organised a multicultural festival, a carnival party and an end-of-year show. We also had a photographic exhibition of various school activities and a book exhibition. We gave several speeches to the parents and organised a diploma awards ceremony for the Turkish Cypriot mothers who had attended the school's programmes.
- A 'Cultural Month' with various events for children and parents was organised.
- Turkish Cypriot parents were invited to participate in the School's Parents' Council.

To take the school out into the community, the school arranged the following activities:

- A campaign to clean and improve the school's neighborhood, in association with the local municipality of Lemesos.
- A 'Road Safety and Safe Cycling' campaign, in association with the local police, which ended with a cycle ride through the

neighbourhood, in which students, teachers, parents and policemen all took part.

- The forming of a theatrical group made up of teachers and parents, who performed their own play.
- The launch of the school website.

Positive results

The operation of our school within the ZEP was accepted from the parents and the community, while the results of the work done so far is summarised below.

- The co-existence of Greek and Turkish Cypriot students was accepted by both parents and children. Racism, fights and exclusion decreased, while levels of acceptance and tolerance increased.
- An opinion poll carried out among the Turkish Cypriot parents found that they preferred their children to study in a regular school rather than have them go to a Turkish-speaking one that could be built in the area.
- The percentage of students' school success increased.
- Absences decreased.
- Students that had left the school to register elsewhere returned.



- More school age Roma children were willing to register and study in the school.
- The percentage of consistent studying increased.
- New technologies were implemented in the school. These included developing the ICT laboratory, connecting all classes to the school's network, providing all classrooms with an internet connection, offering new interactive computer-based multimedia lessons (on CD-ROM), and purchasing a digital camera and additional computers and printers for the students.
- The operation of afternoon classes in the school advanced: the number of students studying increased and a wider variety of subjects was offered to include, drama, dancing, ICT, art and sports.
- A summer school that attracted 45% of the schools' population was successfully planned, organised and run.
- Hygiene issues were embraced by children and their hygiene levels improved both in school and at home.
- Co-operation between students of different ethnic and socio-economic origin in the school improved.

Building on our success

All actions mentioned above were implemented in our school between the academic years 2004–2005 and 2005–2006. The school was awarded second prize for these educational innovations from the 2006 Commonwealth Good Practice in Education Awards. Following on from this success, our school received positive publicity both in the Greek and Turkish Cypriot press, while our Minister of Education held a press conference to announce our school's achievements and highlight our current projects.

This positive publicity not only helped us gain even more respect and co-operation from our student's parents, but also gave the personnel and management staff the incentive to keep working. We took advantage of this momentum and, since we proved through an independent panel of jurors that all money our ministry and other NGOs invested in our projects was money well spent, managed to maintain the funding to keep our programmes active throughout the subsequent academic years, even receiving additional funds to plan new projects.

Since working towards achieving equal opportunities and quality in education, fostering inclusion and fighting racism, we have moved our goals higher. Our aim now is to implement a multicultural curriculum through specific projects planned to run throughout the academic year.

In the 2006–2007 academic year, promoting co-existence was our main aim. The result of this aim was the production of a musical CD, titled *Co-existence*, produced by Beraber Varolu. Our students worked throughout the year, during their music, art and language classes, to write lyrics in Greek and Turkish, and to compose the music for the 11 songs on the CD. Their final work was recorded in a studio and digitally produced, before being distributed to all primary schools in Cyprus.

Throughout the 2007–2008 academic year, co-existence has continued as our central theme and has brought about an understanding and acceptance of the different. At the start of the year, based on work towards co-existence, students came together to design their own 2008 calendar. We also produced an international cookery book, titled *18+1 Recipes from the 18th Lemesos Primary School – Agiou Antonios*, for which parents supplied recipes that reflected their national cuisine. Many of the parents visited the school to cook their national dish in their child's class.

To conclude, we would like to point out that the Commonwealth Good Practice Award we received in 2006 has immensely helped our school and advanced our targets.

Endnotes

- 1 The two largest groups of our students, as far as their religion and language are concerned, were Greek and Turkish Cypriots. This task was of equal importance and difficulty, especially since these people had been living apart since the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974 and the consequent occupation of the northern part of the Republic of Cyprus. A large number of its people, Greek and Turkish Cypriot alike, had been forced to suffer losses in human lives and properties and had become refugees in their own country. Initially, these recently reunited people were facing each other with doubt, to say the least, and their children's common socialisation was of great concern to them. These feelings of mistrust have substantially changed since the implementation of our programmes.
- 2 The hygiene (vaccination, lice etc.) and general appearance (clothes and personal cleanliness) of Roma students was raised as an issue by several Greek Cypriot parents.
- 3 We considered that all these measures promoted equality in education and so they were offered to all students, regardless of their financial background; in so doing we avoided 'favouring' the poorer students and discriminating against the small minority who had no particular economic problems. In order to carry out these measures, the school's management put these suggestions to the Ministry of Education to accept and fund.
- 4 As the population of our school generally comes from the lower classes of our society, food on its own is enough of a reason to attract many of our students to school, especially considering that some students would sometimes miss classes to help their parents at work.
- 5 Its programme was based on trips to the beach and the mountains, as well as school-based activities such as ICT, dance and art lessons, and sport.
- 6 Bringing all parents to school was crucial to getting them acquainted with us and making them understand that regardless of their socio-economic, cultural or ethnic background, they were all parents of our students and they all shared the same dream of seeing their children achieving a better life for themselves than they had. By understanding their similarities rather than their differences, we were able to build bridges of communication between them – vital for the smooth running of our school.
- 7 As Turkish Cypriot and Roma students were those most regularly absent, we considered that bringing their uneducated parents into school to take seminars on subjects of real interest to them would make them better understand the value of education, while at the same time would help to make their children more attentive as they would see their own parents sitting at the very same desks they used.
- 8 These frequent events were used as another way of bringing parents together in school.