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Pedagogical Approach Toward Economically and Socially Disadvantaged Children

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

72 million children around the world still do not have access to education. This number does not even include the children with access, but unable to attend due to informal costs. Many countries that profess to provide free education neglect to include the cost of uniforms and school supplies. Even when these costs are covered, the most impoverished children continue to drop out. This worldwide phenomenon suggests that the price of going to school is not the only factor affecting student attendance.

The purpose of this paper is to present a preliminary survey of the educational situations in Peru, Romania, Tanzania, Mongolia, and India, while focusing on the most disadvantaged populations of children within each country. Since government schools in all five countries largely promote rote learning, it seemed that attempts to revolutionize educational practices must come from the private sector. Thus, one non-governmental organization was observed in each country. Initially the survey focused on pedagogical approaches that attracted and retained these children, but it soon became obvious that a combination of organizational practices and community involvement also had significant impact on student engagement.

Universally, students were most receptive to engaging activities, such as singing, craft-making, and games, but not every organization encouraged interactive teaching approaches. In countries where traditional pedagogy emphasizes memorization and repetition, it is imperative to train teachers in “new” methodologies. The organization that best fulfilled this role, *Asociatia Ovidiu Rom*, did so with the financial and political support of local and national government. This introduces another important factor in educating disadvantaged children: political support. Some organizations underestimated the importance of securing and maintaining government support and as a result suffered financially and structurally. However, it is crucial to remember that government inefficiencies and underdevelopment may also attribute to the aforementioned cases.

Possibly an even greater influence than government, country-wide prejudices seem to be the most common barrier to educational progress. In the countries visited, poverty is associated

with mental retardation, troubling behavior, and low social value. *Asociatia Ovidiu Rom* combats this situation by educating the general public and soliciting prestigious support; Achlal-Children's Development Center combats this situation by operating almost solely within the poor community, empowering the people. Both of these organizations emphasize community engagement, teacher development, and political support, the combination of which makes both organizations sustainable. They serve as model organizations for burgeoning educational programs.

There is one more important factor, which this paper does not address in depth: social and political climate. In Romania, economic and political pressures to meet European Union standards resulted in increased support, allowing *Asociatia Ovidiu Rom* to change focus towards sustainable initiatives such as policy making and country-wide teacher training. The serendipitous occasion catapulted the organization's progress. Within about two years after Romania joined the European Union, *Asociatia Ovidiu Rom* not only developed a curriculum for mainstreaming children into the public school system, but the curriculum received the official support of the Ministry of Education. Summer schools, once held in pockets throughout Romania are now rapidly spreading throughout the country. This is ultimately the kind of progress desired throughout the world to make childhood education freely available to all.