

SINZA SPECIAL SCHOOL

Seven gates to understanding

Tekst og foto:
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From the University College at Nordnes in Bergen to Sinza special school in Dar es Salaam it is about 9000 kilometers. It is a long distance. Sinza is a school in sub-Sahara, in Tanzania. This tropical country is the opposite of Norway. It is everything Norway is not; It is huge, it is hot, it is colourful, there is little money around, it is complex, busy, dusty and noisy. Sinza is in Dar es Salaam, in Kijitonyama district near Mabatini police station

This report is lengthy. As it must be. When you read it, think «African time». Please lean back and spend some time without worrying that time flies! Just like you learn when you visit Tanzania: Do not worry! If you visit, and want to understand, you might need to start with observations and write them down. And descriptions of this kind must be thick. They need space and lots of words. So here are some thick descriptions for you. Perhaps you can call them gates, gates through which you can, slowly, enter an understanding of Sinza. Karibu! Welcome!



Reiser du nordover, til Moshi, kan du skue mektige Kilimanjaro, Afrikas høyeste fjell.

The first gate to understanding

The first gate, the first lesson to learn about Sinza, is how to get there. I mean quite physically. Wednesday, February 15th 2012, in spite of the thorough description I gave him, my Jajal driver took some time to find the school. And if you don't know, a Jajal, is a 3-wheel, 3-passenger, 3rd world open taxi with lots of air and no airbags. And there you sit, in the back seat of this scooter-like vehicle, staring into the driver's neck. If the traffic is dense and cars are stuck in a jam the driver might leave the street and head for the ditches to pass the cars. Then you will want to hold on tight.

There are many nameless small streets

surrounding Mabatini police station. The big paved roads have all been given names. But what about all the small dusty, dumpy roads and alleys where people live, with the shops and workshops and bars and the many desolated plots containing nothing but scattered rusty spare parts and plastic and other waste not so well hidden in the long yellow dry grass? With the Jajal driver I had negotiated a price of 5000 shillings to take me to Sinza from my accommodation at Passionist Fathers apartments out on Old Bagamoyo Road. This was a good price and he knew it. He worked hard and several times he asked people along the road for directions. And of course, they all pointed in different directions. Asking for



Barna i Tanzania er sosiale fra ung alder.

directions is a gamble in Tanzania. Locals all give advice, whether they know the way or not. Let's say your driver asks another driver for direction, and then he again asks another driver and so 3-4 more drivers and a couple of by-passers join in and they have a loud Swahili conversation for quite some time about your mysterious destination. And you really don't know if the conversation will ever turn back to you. So you can find a tree giving shadow and wait, or you can just leave. They will wave at you and not really remember what started the hustle. But there is a strong desire to be friendly and concerned. And even if advice is not absolutely correct, it is advice, and at

least intentions are good. And that counts. In Tanzania good intentions seems to count a lot.

I caught sight of Sinza first, recognizing the huge blue TIGO sponsored school bus that just then drove up outside the gate, so I directed the Jajal driver. The children, in their white and blue school uniforms, swarmed out of the bus and in through the gate. Very many parents of disabled children want their child to attend Sinza, the teacher Madina Mallya told me later. One reason for this, I knew already, is the low number of primary schools for disabled children in Tanzania. But Madina gave me another reason for the

high number of applicants to Sinza and so led me through another gate to understand about Sinza; namely the school bus.

The second gate to understanding

The school bus transporting the children between the school and the homes is a great advantage for parents who can just put the children on the bus and run off to work – and not have to drive them to school themselves. And it is easy to understand the parents. I have also, several times, been stuck for 30 minutes without a seat to sit on, in a mini Toyota bus, a so called Daladala, when the traffic is stuck in a junction with two crowded files in all directions and buses and trucks are roaring at full throttle even when the traffic is stuck and 35 degrees and the air kind of blue and almost sticky.. In the bus there is a low ceiling and 55 other passengers and things are...tight. Yes, I understand the

parents. And, let me add; I don't know how many hours the little disabled passenger who is the last one to come home in the afternoon, spends in the heat in that school bus every day. I am not sure if I even want to know. Being only a visitor is nice. You have a certain influence what you want to do and on what kinds of information you care to collect, from all you are offered. But, imagine, just for one minute, to be a poor and disabled child and trapped for life in Dar es Salaam!

The third gate to understanding

Another gate of understanding is to learn something about who is admitted to the school or not. You must realize, first of all, that the sheer number of disabled children is too high to fit the number of schools. But, also, to be admitted the child must be toilet trained, able to eat by itself and able to sit in a bus without individual adult

«Jeg trenger mye mer enn fine ord.»





Bruskorker og glasskår brukes som leketøy.

attention. The human rights paragraph on education says nothing about having to be toilet trained to earn the right to education. But, then again, the Human Rights charter was not written in Dar es Salaam - obviously.

The fourth gate to understanding

As we entered the physical gate to Sinza another possibility of understanding, or getting totally confused, unfolds: Inside the gate, among the grass and the walking-paths, another enormous school bus, beautifully painted blue and open for the children to climb into and play, has reached it's final destination, to put it that way. The Headteacher at Sinza, Mr Maerere meets me at the bus and

reaches out to take my hand and hold it, while he tells me about the bus: «It was a gift. Michael Jackson visited the school in 1989. He donated the bus. He visited because at the time Sinza was the only special school in Dar». And, when I ask «THE Michael Jackson?» he nods, one time only and very slowly, as if to stress the uniqueness of this piece of information. And, after an appropriate time of reflective silence, perhaps when he believes the enormity of this has settled in my mind, he seems to think it safe to let go of my hand. «Karibu» he says, leading me in the direction of the Headteacher's office.

We enter the semi-dark room with curtains drawn and 3 big sofas in front of the Headteachers desk. From similar

En landsby, tegnet av en lærerstudent.





En elev på Sinza, som gjerne ville bli fotografert.

events a few years back I now expect to be asked if I would like a Pepsi or a Fanta? But, no question or soda appears. Times are a'changing. Perhaps the global financial crises has hit Sinza? On the walls there are big colourful posters with the names of all the children and staff, and many posters with photos exposing special events in the Sinza history. «It was the Norwegian organization of parents of disabled who erected the first two buildings of this school» the Headteacher tells me. »So, are they still relating to the school?» I respond. «No», he answers. After pointing out this gate to understanding Sinza history, a short embarrassed silence follows, in which I did not know quite what to say.

«The children can attend the school for eight years» he continues, «and there are 3 different levels according to IQ». How they track the IQ of the students I have never found out. The Headteacher tells me there are 68 children and approximately 9 or 10 teachers at Sinza, if all are present, which is seldom the case. «If the students do not develop properly they do the same class over again» Madina later tells me.

“I see» I say. But, really I do not.

What would I do without my students? The best part of this morning meeting is this: On my part I am now deep in one of the headteacher's sofas, very absorbed in being polite and understanding the somewhat low voice and peculiar English

of the Headteacher. I admit I had forgotten all about my students. But, after about 10 minutes one of my students knocks on the door, opens it and asks: «Shall we come in, or ...?». This saves the day. The students enter, and the conversation expands in the best manner possible. This is just what we have been talking about at home before coming: «Be offensive, take initiative, put questions, let yourself be heard». So later when I tell the student that took the initiative that it was a superb move, the student responds: «Yes, I think so too». Modestly, and without blaming me for my neglect.

The fifth gate to understanding

We go to class and there we find several other gates to understanding Sinza. Classrooms are simple square concrete

buildings with no glass or anything in the windowframes. Walls are partly painted and also covered with cuttings from magazines and with commercial posters. «Come fly with us. Singapore airlines». The contrast from this airline commercial picture of a male business executive resting in a reclining chair 30000 feet above the earth's surface, with a beautiful Singapore steward lady offering a drink on a tray, – to the reality of children in this classroom is close to total. ...

And here we meet Welu, Anu, Pendo, Amina, Salomo, Said and Farida. The childrens' tables are set in a horseshoe pattern. It is very difficult to move between the chairs and the wall. Why the tables are not moved closer together using this free space in the middle, I do not

Fire gode venner.



think to ask. There are many things you forget to ask, and even to notice, in a small, crowded 30 degree, noisy classroom.

We stay with teacher Gabriel Mselemwa. He is a most friendly and inspiring teacher who provides us with English explanations as he goes along. He is going to teach the two subjects «numbers» and «addition». First he practices the numbers 4 and 3 separately, by showing 4 and 3 fingers correspondingly, asking the children to also show the correct number of fingers. Then he writes $4+3=7$ on the blackboard, drawing 4 circles under the number 4 and 3 circles under the number 3 for illustration. Then he counts the circles while pointing and produces both the number 7 and 7 circles. Following this, each child, one at a time, counts the circles on the blackboard out loud and produce a result, while Gabriel points at the figures. Some do it correctly and some do not. There are large individual differences, but the children all patiently await their turn. Afterwards, with the use of 7 pencils, Gabriel shows how 3 pencils in one hand and 4 pencils in another hand becomes 7 pencils in one hand. Then each child is expected to do the explanation, with Gabriel showing the pencils. Each right answer from a child is followed by all the children clapping their hands at a steady beat - three times, and then a fourth clap, after a small delay in the rhythm - as if to stress the point.

In the final phase of the lesson Gabriel hands out 7 pencils to one child, 7 small stones to a second child, seven well worn Lego pieces to a third, and so forth, and everybody does the addition with the help

of the items. Gabriel recommends using the fingers to do the adding. Moja, mbili, tato, nnee, tano, sita, SABA. And now in this individual phase, comes the opportunity for the social educator students, who have been observing until now, to walk around the classroom and give individual help. Each child is handed their writing book, and with assistance they write $3+4=7$ in their book. This writing finishes the lesson. Before their fieldwork is through, the social educator students will have taught this whole lesson to the class, with Gabriel watching and giving feedback.

Now it is ten–o'clock and tea time.

But Gabriel and the social educator students and I, their visiting contact teacher, remain in the classroom to discuss the lesson. «How do you modify behaviour?» Gabriel asks. All the Norwegians look at each other. Big question. «There should be individual lessons in a separate room, and eye contact and close supervision and focusing on really small learning objectives at a time» the Norwegians say. «Well, I think all children have to stay in the classroom, as there is only one teacher» Gabriel says. »Also, individual children should not learn different things or have different opportunities“ he adds. We realize that there is much to talk about.

But, before that, there is tea – also for us.

The sixth gate to understanding

After tea we enter a class on Level one with teacher Donata Shayo. She is teaching the children different sounds. She walks

around the classroom to every child and asks them to beat a drum with a stick and say «ngoma» (drum). Then she uses the same stick to drum on a drinking glass to produce a contrasting sound. I wait for her to ask the children to drum both on the drum and the drinking glass so that they also can make the discrimination, but she doesn't.

This is why I talk about gates of understanding. Sometimes, we just look in through them, though the gates, not understanding very much, – yet.

And before I can ask her about this, we are on to the next lesson. Now the children are handed a sheet of paper with two empty circles. Donata draws two circles on the blackboard and demonstrates how to colour the space inside the circles. Then the children are handed one pencil each and they start colouring. But they have very little idea about the assignment. And I wonder why Donata gives the children a task they do not handle at all? Is it because of us, because of the Mzungus (white) visitors that are present? Again, I am left in the gate, not understanding so much.

But a small girl called Faiza turns the paper around to where there are no circles and makes her own drawing. A drawing with both head and body and feet. Unfortunately no arms. But, there are genitalia.

A seventh and final gate to understanding

So, there are many gates to enter in order to try to understand Sinza. From Michael Jackson to The Norwegian parents of

disabled organization, to the lessons of learning numbers and addition, learning the colour of the Tanzanian flag, and how to sing, to make drawings, to discriminate the sound of a drum from other sounds, to wash your body and your classroom, and many, many other subjects. And further, to Faiza's drawing, to tea-time, and offensive and clever Social educator students visiting from the other side of the world. These are just a few of the many gates to the challenging task of understanding the remarkable Sinza Special School.

And here is a conclusive gate to understanding, taken from the individual training plan of a Social educator student; *“It happens very often that there is no bread and tea for the children, only for the staff. Since the children are tired and not able to learn anything, I think it is important they get drink and food. In the time to come, I will try to figure out more about the system. I don't think I can do much about the economy, but I will try to find out more about why things don't seem to work, especially the food service.....”*

Since the breaks are so long, and many of the children are idle, I would like to make breaks more organized. I have observed what the children like to do. So we might give the school some equipment since there are not a lot of things to play with. Lately we have bought some coloured chalk and have been drawing with chalk on the paved ground and the children like it. We have been teaching them games and will teach them more the following weeks..... I will try to observe more, as well as talk more with the teachers.....»



Elever i uniform svermer hjemover fra skolen.

Om Sinza special school

**Vernepleierstudentene Kjersti Skeie Sunde
og Nathalie Regin Berge Vika**

Sinza spesialscole er en skole for barn med ulike grader av utviklingshemning. Barna er veldig imøtekommende. Elevene ved skolen er i alderen 7 til 20 år, med noen unntak. Skolen har på det meste 78 elever. Her er 10 lærere, de fleste er utdannet lærere og noe har spesialisering innen barn med spesielle behov. Siden Sinza ble startet i 1989, har 10 tidligere elever fått tilbudt yrkesrettet arbeid innen gartnerarbeid og håndverk og fem andre er overført til vanlig barneskole etter noen år ved Sinza.

På skolen blir det jobbet med skrive- og leseferdigheter, hagearbeid, husvask og sosiale ferdigheter. I løpet av skoleåret blir det gjort to individuelle evalueringer per elev. Det blir gjort for å se fremgang i elevens ferdigheter og gjør det mulig å se hva man må jobbe videre med og hvordan. Disse rapportene får foreldrene tilbud om å se.

Skolen har fem klasserom, spisesal og fint uteareal.

Vi ble fortalt at skolen har tre nivåer. Hvordan disse fungerer har vi ikke helt fått oversikt over. Men slik vi forsto det;

jobbet barna ser oppover i nivåene. Nivå 1 er de med lavest IQ og nivå 3 er de med høyest. Sinza Spesialscole jobber med utgangspunkt i at elevene lærer mer ved bruk av sansene; som å høre, se, ta på og smake. Utenom skoletiden blir det årlig gjort forsøk på å arrangere utflukter til blant annet nasjonalparker, noe som har vært veldig populært blant elevene. Noen av elevene har ikke vært utenfor sitt eget nabolag, noe som gjør disse utfluktene veldig spennende og lærerike.

En dag var vi sammen med elevene på nivå 2. I forkant av timen fikk vi beskjed fra læreren om at hun var ny i denne klassen. Hun brukte dagen til å danne seg et overblikk over elevenes forståelse og nivå. Hjemme i Norge ville dette blitt gjort individuelt for hver elev, mens her ble vurderingen gjort klassevis. Den første timen hadde læreren gjennomgang av tall. Elevene fikk komme opp på tavlen og se på forskjellige lapper med forskjellige tall, deretter skulle de si hvilket tall det var. Noen klarte dette uten problemer. Læreren

var flink til å oppmuntre og rose elevene og du kunne se at barna satte pris på dette. Læreren brukte også mye sang i timen.

De elevene som ikke hadde språk, var veldig flinke til å kommunisere med tegn. Det var ikke tegn til tale eller tegnspråk, men heller peking og fysisk ledelse. Vårt inntrykk var at det var et godt forhold mellom personalet og barna. Men skolen har disiplin på barna. Lærerne går gjerne rundt med en pinne som blir brukt til å vise hvem som er sjefen. Vi kan for lite swahilie til å forstå alt lærerne sier. Men en Tanzanianer som jobber frivillig, oversetter for oss. Hun er selv overrasket over hvordan enkelte av lærerne forholder seg til barna. Vi ble fortalt at alle som jobber på skolen er lærere, men at de mangler spesialpedagogikk. Noen ganger i året er lærerne på kurs, og vi går ut fra at kursingen er rettet mot utviklingshemning. Så langt vi ser er det lite eller ingen individuell tilrettelegging eller tilpasning. Det meste av undervisningen foregår kollektivt. Det er veldig tydelig at barna har respekt for lærerne på skolen, men det er også rom for tull og tøys. Lærerne går rundt, og er bortom hos barna og leker med dem.

Som ved alle utdanningsinstitusjoner er det forventet at foreldrene bidrar med et månedlig beløp for å støtte barnas utdanning. Sinza er ikke et unntak, men elevene ved skolen kommer ofte fra familier med dårlig råd, alene foreldre (alenemødre) som ikke har mulighet til å bidra med store beløp, og noen har gjerne ikke mulighet til å bidra med noe som helst. Skolen har likevel retningslinjer på at man skal ikke snu ryggen til disse barna,

selv om foreldrene ikke kan betale for skolegangen deres.

Skolepengene som blir betalt inn av de foreldrene som kan, går til hverdagslige, nødvendige oppgaver som bensin til skolebussen som henter barna, lunsj og te. Dessverre er det til tider så lite penger i skolekassen at de ikke har mulighet til å hente barna. Disse dagene er det kun elever som bor i nærområdet som kommer seg på skolen, og undervisningen blir noe amputert. Penger til bensin blir prioritert fremfor lunsj og te. Noen av barna kommer fra så fattige familier at de gjerne ikke får mat, utenom det de får på skolen. Myndighetens bidrag er så lite at noen av lærerne til tider har sett seg nødt til å ta penger fra egen lomme for at barna skal få lunsj på skolen.

Andre ting som man ser tydelig mangel på ved Sinza, er skolemateriale. Alt fra skrivebøker, leker, bildebøker, skrivesaker, vannkanner, symaskiner som blir brukt for å lære praktisk håndarbeid, og materiale som lærerne hadde hatt bruk for. Ettersom det er lite eller ingen samarbeid med myndighetene, når det kommer til økonomisk bistand, er Sinza stadig på leting etter private- og individuelle donorer som kan hjelpe til og gi disse barna en mer verdig utdanning.

Som utvekslingsstudenter i Tanzania har vi tilegnet oss mange nye erfaringer og mange inntrykk i løp av oppholdet her nede. Man får et innsyn i hvor forskjellige systemene er mellom Norge og Tanzania og hvilke ulike utfordringer man står ovenfor. Ved Sinza Special School bruker de det lille de har av resurser til å gi elevene en best mulig skoledag.