

“Right Based Approach on Education and Management to Reduce Dropout Rate of Students”

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Summary of the project

Being out of school is a critical problem, which results not only in an uneducated future generation, but also contributes to the development of a situation where antisocial practices flourish in the country. Most of the children who are out of school work as labourers for the survival of their families. Children who live in remote and plantation areas are sent by their parents to work as domestic help in order to earn money for the family. Street children are the most vulnerable group facing the worst forms of abuse and exploitation at all levels, from their family, work place and the antisocial elements in and around their environment. The ongoing war in the country is another critical reason not only for the increasing numbers of dropouts in schools but also for gross violations of child rights. Growing up displaced and in a heavily militarised environment leads to psychological stress, family break-up, despair, alcoholism, violence and suicides (UNICEF, 2001). According to the above facts the out-of-school children's group is the most vulnerable group to have their rights violated in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the above children must be protected, provided with opportunities of survival and opportunities to fully develop as good citizens. In this sense, how can the school system contribute to promote child rights and reduce school dropouts? This Project was focused to answer the above question.

The project is implemented in one primary school in a disadvantaged area in the centre of Colombo, in one teacher centre and in the Open School. With the aim of introducing a child based approach to education and management in order to protect child rights and to reduce the dropout rate of disadvantaged children, the project team has been working with different target groups such as disadvantaged school children, teachers, teacher educators and some community members to achieve the following objectives.

- Identifying child rights, which are violated at home.
- Identifying activities connected with school, curriculum and the teaching learning process, which deny children of their rights.
- Introducing right based strategies in order to create a child friendly school and classroom environment, which promotes child rights.

Impact on the personal and professional levels

The initial training programme conducted in Sweden was successful in changing our mindset and it has reflected upon our professional and personal lives. As a result, we became active partners of child rights' implementation by discussing, arguing and analyzing these issues with our friends, colleagues and others who work with disadvantaged children in organizations such as social welfare centres, the police, and prisons. In the beginning, working with the teachers from the selected schools was tiring due to their negative attitudes, lack of understanding of child rights and their expectations for benefits in exchange for their contribution. The team had problems finding ways to encourage these teachers to study child rights and in getting their cooperative support for the child rights project. With the support of case-study games, drama, activities, art, and cartoons we were able to gradually empower the teachers. At the same time we realized that the above strategies are very appropriate to address uneducated and poor parents as well. They do not show an interest to speak or to listen to their children's rights because their major problem is the survival of their children. Therefore, the team realized that the above methodology was successful to address child rights in the target group.

Impact on the organizational level

The following actions could be taken in the organization level:

- Include child rights in all teacher-training programmes for teacher trainees conducted at Teacher Centres.
- Create an environment in the teacher centres that relates to CRC concepts.
- An article is included in the annual magazine of the Teacher Centres.

Impact on the country level

- Create awareness of child rights in curriculum developers (School and Teacher Education level).
- Preparation of a brochure for teachers and parents to inform them of child rights.
- Preparation of an audiocassette for the public to inform them of the importance of child rights.