

VIETNAM

Support the Students with Special Needs to Enjoy the Activities in School

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1. Introduction

Viet Nam was the first country in Asia – and the second in the world – to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Since Viet Nam's ratification of the CRC, children in Viet Nam are also better educated, with around 95 per cent of eligible children enrolled in primary education.

Viet Nam is now on its way to becoming a middle-income country. At the same time, Viet Nam faces many challenges in ensuring the rights of every girl and boy. It is a fact that while most children in Viet Nam are much better off today than children 20 years ago, there are still far too many children who are not.

Guided by the CRC, UNICEF has been actively advocating with the government to ensure that children's rights are at the center of its development agenda. Viet Nam has paid greater attention to the participation of children and adolescents on issues that affect their daily lives. They also noted that in 2009, despite challenges posed by the global financial crisis, spending on social welfare received the necessary attention in Viet Nam – including spending on child protection, care and education.

In Viet Nam, there are now 15 very active Change agents in the CRC in Ho Chi Minh City, 13 in Ha Noi and 3 in Buon Ma Thuot.

Although Viet Nam ratified the convention many years ago, the knowledge on the CRC among the public in general, and among teachers and children in particular, is still limited. Therefore, understanding and respect for child rights is problematic. Some people have not been interested in children with special needs (SWSN). The knowledge and experience initiated by the training program encouraged course participants, in their respective positions, to initiate a dialogue and discussion with relevant stakeholders. This was effectively utilized as an effort to increase their understanding of child rights and create opportunities for children to exercise their rights related to such issues, which would be of priority in the time ahead.

2. Frame of Reference

Ho Chi Minh City is in the south of Viet Nam and highlights the culture, economy and education of the country. It is currently divided into 24 districts; with a population of over 8 million. It also has close to 500 primary schools. CRC has been implemented in all of the primary schools in Ho Chi Minh City.

Besides the common schools, Viet Nam has special schools for students with special needs. In Ho Chi Minh City, there are special schools; such as, Nguyen Dinh Chieu school (for blind students); Tuong Lai school (for hearing impaired students), Hi Vong school (for children with autism), and Hoa Binh school (for students with disabilities). Students with special needs can attend the appropriate school, but, parents (of these children) do not want to send them to these special schools. They hope and believe their children could take part in the activities in schools with the normal students. These parents think that if their children go to common schools, they will develop in a better way than in a special school.

In recent years, Viet Nam has some common schools which accommodate and allow students with special needs. Although this is a benefit for those children with special needs, it can create a problem for principals and teachers; therefore, having them spend valuable time to solve many of these issues. For instance, some of the students with special needs are hyperactive. They want to do what they like, do not sit still and don't like to make friends. Sometimes they often hit their friends as well. This causes problems and parents of the normal students ask the principals to move the hyperactive students to other schools.

As principals, we always have to think in the best interests of our students. It is our responsibility to protect them and we believe that we will help our students improve more and more. On the other hand, every child has the right to study and play. We have to help them obtain these rights. So, in our two schools, the students with special needs are included in common classes and there they are educated and well cared for.

Nguyen Binh Khiem and *To Vinh Dien* are primary schools in Ho Chi Minh City.

Nguyen Binh Khiem primary has 37 classes, 1691 students, 54 teachers and staff (68 officers of which 37 are assistant teachers). This primary school belongs to the Department of Education and Training in District 1. The breakdown of the parents are as follows: 50 % work in public offices, 22 % businessmen, and 28 % labour. The students study a full day and have lunch in school.

To Vinh Dien primary has 46 classes, 2080 pupils, and 53 teachers and staff (27 officers). This primary school belongs to the Department of Education and Training in Tan Phu district. The breakdown of the parents are as follows: 26% work in public offices, 25 % businessmen, and 49% labour.

This change project was applied in 16 classes with 600 students, 25 teachers and 30 parents in To Vinh Dien primary school, and in 4 classes with 200 students, 15 teachers and 20 parents in Nguyen Binh Khiem primary school. We are collecting 20 classes from grade 1 to grade 5 and also establishing a volunteers group which includes teachers, staff, parents, and delegates from the local government.

3. Purpose

Both schools are committed to the purpose of this project, which focuses on the rights for the protection and participation for *students with special needs*. We hope parents and students change their recognition of the SWSN. Teachers, parents and students need to help and support the SWSN to be able to take part in activities in school, therefore creating and building a safe and friendly learning environment. Besides school; family and society cooperates to organize activities in sharing the positive methods in education of SWSN.

4. Methodology and activities

4.1. Phase III

4.1.1. Present CRC and the change project to school managers, teachers, staff and local government.

On November 15th 2013, we had a meeting with the school managers, teachers, staff and local government. We presented CRC and our change project. The participants discussed about a time to organize the activities in both schools (Nguyen Binh Khiem and To Vinh Dien).

4.1.2. Organize workshop

On November 24th 2013, in Nguyen Binh Khiem primary school, we organized a workshop with 70 participants, including 40 teachers and 30 parents from To Vinh Dien and Nguyen Binh Khiem School.

There were three activities in the workshop:

First, the participants played a game called *“make friends”* and split up into seven groups. They chose their group name and introduced their members.

Second, the groups discussed and presented what they understood about CRC.

“What do you want?” was the name of the last activity. The participants role-played and talked about what they would want if they were a child, a teacher or a parent.

4.1.3. Training for students

Team Vietnam and 10 teachers spent two days for the training course in two schools. On December 6th 2013, we organized the training course for students in To Vinh Dien school. After that, we went to Nguyen Binh Khiem on December 12th 2013.

800 students participated in the training course. We worked on the contents of CRC with four rights groups: Rights to Survival, Rights to Protection, Rights to Development, and Rights to Participation.

Through the training course, students know what the CRC and became educated on the CRC. They have learned about provision, protection and participation. In that time, the students changed a few their recognition of the students with special needs. They were happy with the new knowledge about the CRC and shared ideas with their friends naturally and with innocence.

4.1.4. "Funny day" Festival

On December 23rd 2013, parents supported the teachers as they organized a "Funny day" Festival for students in Nguyen Binh Khiem and To Vinh Dien school.

On that day, students enjoyed with interesting activities. They played the games such as *fishing; ring to neck duck; bingo; cross words; drawing; dancing*, (we will attach the pictures when we present the report in Zambia). After that, SWSN went to the Zoo and had a happy time there.

4.1.5. Meeting and sharing

After the above activities, we organized a meeting for teachers, students and parents, in which they received SWSN's feelings.

The meeting was held at each class in both schools. There were 16 classes in To Vinh Dien school and 4 classes in Nguyen Binh Khiem school.

The first session of the meeting focused on developing participants' understanding on the concept of a child friendly school. A school which provides children with an environment that is physically safe, emotionally secure and psychologically enabling. A child friendly school recognizes, encourages, and supports children's growing capacities as learners by providing a school culture, teaching behavior and curriculum content that are focused on learning and the learner.

In the second session of the meeting, with the game "Who am I?" - The students introduce themselves. Students with special needs expressed their feelings about their life, friends, dreams and learning. They strongly talked about what they want to do and how they wanted people to see themselves as normal students. They did not want special favours (without fear or favour).

The participants were happy and surprised at the thought and the desires of SWSN. They promised that they will take interest in SWSN's aspirations, support them and help them enjoy the activities in school. That was a matter of great interest in the meeting.

In the last session, the students played the roles that they composed with the main topic "We are in a family." SWSN was more confident to enjoy the activities. That was a happy time for all of participants.

4.1.6. Make "The happy mail boxes"

Teachers showed the students how to make "The happy mail boxes" to express their feelings to one another in class. Each child has their own mailbox. Every week, stu-

dents send a letter to someone who they want to exchange ideas or comments with. The students comment on the illustration activities in order to know about provision, protection and participation.

4.2. Phase V

Thanks to participating in the training course at Lund and the good experiences from change agents in order to facilitate the implementation of programs on child rights in our country, we continued our project with the activities in Outcome 3 after arriving back from Zambia.

4.2.1. Build a safe and friendly learning environment in the classroom and at school.

We are aware of the importance of taking care of children with special needs: “A mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child’s active participation in the community.” (Implementation handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 23 Rights of children with disabilities, page 321)

With the aim of helping students interested in learning and that like to go to school, the administrators and teachers have taken many measures to develop a friendly school environment for them.

We organized the game “Friend circle”, attracting the attention of many students in both schools. The students made small groups (from 2 to 5 students) and played the game following the topic. They helped, shared and worked together when they performed the skits: As a father, students expressed specific interesting gestures, caressing children. As a mother, they guided children to do homework every day at home. As a teacher, they encouraged students to participate in fun activities. If their friends were in trouble, as a friend, students were concerned and helped with sincere affection.

Through the play, students practiced their self-service skills. They did simple things: neatly arranged school supplies, cleaned tables and chairs, swept, etc.

4.2.2. Organize the periods with the relevant activities and design the special lesson plans for developing good life skills of the SWSN.

In the last year, we organized 4 training workshops on innovative teaching methods and classroom management in a positive direction for the teachers. Presenters are experts in educational psychology, both domestically and foreign.

After the training workshops, day by day and step by step, teachers applied positive methods to teach and take care of the students with special needs. They encouraged students to learn through different activities in the classroom.

Sometimes, teachers took students to the zoo, the museums or somewhere to organize the lesson. There are many lessons to be held outside the classroom. That was

interesting for children. They participated in a lively session, were extremely focused and quickly gained new knowledge.

4.2.3. Visit 20 classes: meet, talk, and listen to the teachers and students.

During project implementation, team Viet Nam has advantages because 2 of us are principals of two schools which are currently working on this change project. We observed the learning environment in classrooms in both schools. At the same time, we had a short conversation with teachers and students in the classrooms.

Students with special needs are confident when they were talking about learning, hope and their classmates. They introduced themselves and sang many funny songs with their friends. We felt the pleasure and saw the sparkle in their eyes.

Nguyen Binh Khiem primary school has counsellors who are volunteer parents. With the topic “We talk together”, the counsellors talked to the SWSN about what they wanted to say. Through the conversation, the counsellors helped the students to express their thoughts and make appropriate suggestions to help them feel more confident in the choices and decisions they wanted to do.

5. Results

As decided, our objectives were to implement the elements of child rights in the selected school in order to empower all the children, especially SWSN to participate in all learning activities irrespective of their socio-economic and cultural variance. Our project was implemented in both schools during 3 semesters (school year 2013-2014 and the first semester of school year 2014-2015). The results of the initiatives based on the indicators are given below (see also the questionnaire in Appendix 1, 2 and 3 below):

Teachers, parents and students taking part in the CRC workshop expressed their interest and understood more about the CRC. After the training courses and workshops, the participants were excited as their CRC knowledge improved significantly. 92% of participants understood the importance of CRC and 8% of the remaining participants needed more time to understand clearly about the rights of the child groups.

Students in Nguyen Binh Khiem school (37/37 classes) know basics of the CRC.

Most of the parents and students have changed their awareness of the SWSN. They know what the SWSN wants to do and they also know what they must do for SWSN.

Through the activities in school, teachers and students have a closer relationship, which makes the learning environment more effective and friendly. The teaching has improved because students are more active during their learning process.

The students feel more confident, active and responsible for their own education. They are developing important communication skills.

The students with special needs are more confident to enjoy their classmates. They have learnt how to listen and respect one another. They have made progress in communication and behavior. A very important thing is that the SWSN understands their rights and duties, so they are very happy to share their feelings with one another.

6. Discussion and Reflection

In the project implementation process, we are always interested in comments of the participants on how to adjust the content of training courses and organize relevant activities. After the activities in a period, our team summed up and talked about what we learned from the experience.

There is need for our team to continue working together with the schools in monitoring the operation of the students where the schools can own the project.

We expect that every initiative and corresponding result are on the right track and hope our change project will be successful.

We will continue to disseminate and provide skills related to the implementation of the CRC as well as building, developing and promoting the capacity of those who work with the children.

7. Way forward

With the results obtained from this change project we will:

- Continue to organize the relevant activities to encourage students to like to go to school.
- Create favorable conditions for students with special needs to integrate into the community.
- Continue to organize the workshops about the rights of the child groups for all of teachers, students and parents in Nguyen Binh Khiem and To Vinh Dien schools (at least once in every new school year).
- Continue to organize the workshops about the relevant teaching methods regarding SWSN for teachers and parents in both schools.
- Share the results of this change project with other schools for students with special needs so they have many opportunities to learn and play with their friends.

8. List of References

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Talking Child Rights Seriously (Reflection on five years of an International Training Programme), Per Wickenberg, Agneta W Flinck, Ulf Leo, Bodil Rasmusson, Richard Stenelo and Bereket Yebio (eds.).

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire for the students

1. Do you like to go to school? Why?

Yes No

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2. Do you understand the contents of CRC?

Yes No Not clear

3. Are you aware of your rights?

Yes No

4. Do you think that children must be respected? Why?

Yes No

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5. If you have a difficult problem, who will you talk to?

Mother Father Teacher Friend No one

Other

6. Do you like the activities in school? Why?

Yes No

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7. What are your favorite activities at school?

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8. Are the students allowed to take part in the workshop at school?

Yes No

9. Are the teachers interested in your ideas?

Yes No

10. What do you want to be?

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Appendix 2: Questionnaire for parents

1. Do you understand the contents of CRC?

Yes No Not clear

2. In your opinion, which right of CRC is the most important? Why?

Provision Protection Participation All of them

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3. Do you usually talk to your child about his/her rights and duties?

Always Usually Sometimes Seldom Never

4. If your child has a difficult problem, who will he/she talk to?

Parents Teacher Friend No one I do not know.

5. Do you encourage your child to make his/her own decisions?

Yes No Sometimes

6. Do you encourage your child to join the activities in school?

Yes No Sometimes

7. Do you think changes of family living conditions will affect the child's learning?

Yes No

8. Do you participate with your child in the activities at school?

Always Usually Sometimes Seldom Never

9. What do you do if your child does not like going to school?

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10. What can you say about the activities which you have attended in this workshop?

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Appendix 3: Questionnaire for the teachers

1. Do you understand the contents of CRC?

Yes No Not clear

2. Do you think that children must be respected? Why?

Yes No

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3. Do you help the students to solve their problems anytime?

Yes No Sometimes Seldom

4. Are the students talking to you about their friends or family?

Yes No

5. Do you often contact with parents to help the students get better?

Yes No Sometimes Seldom

6. Were you satisfied with the results of students in your class? Why?

Yes No

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7. What do you do when the students complain of their friends?

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8. What do you do when the students talk to you about their difficulties in their families?

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9. What do you do to encourage students with special needs to like going to school?

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10. What did you learn from the training course about CRC?

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