



SCHOOL, HOME, AND COMMUNITY

Partnerships that Support Learning

STORIES OF THE 2019 PRINCESS MAHA CHAKRI AWARDEES

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Onpawee Koonpornpen

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Princess Maha Chakri Award

The Award for Outstanding Teachers who Change Students' Lives.

The Princess Maha Chakri Award is a prestigious international award given to teachers from 11 countries in Southeast Asia: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam who have devoted themselves to helping students achieve in their lives. The Princess Maha Chakri Award aims to promote excellent practices in teaching and inspire teachers in Southeast Asia.

The Princess Maha Chakri Award was set up in 2015 at Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn's 60th Birthday Anniversary Celebration to recognize HRH's dedication as a teacher and her life-long contribution to education both at the national and international level.

Teachers who receive the award are nominated by their respective Ministries of Education on the main criteria that they are teachers who change students' lives and whose work has contributed to education in their own country. The more specific criteria of selection are based on the context of each Ministry of Education's desire to acknowledge the commitment and dedication of their outstanding teachers. Final approval of the Princess Maha Chakri Award recipients is made by the Princess Maha Chakri Award Committee, chaired by HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn.

The Award is given every two years to one best teacher from each eleven countries in Southeast Asia (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam).

The award recipients will receive US\$10,000 in prize money, a gold medal, an honorary brooch, and a certificate of honor. The award is administered by the Princess Maha Chakri Award Foundation in cooperation with the Teachers' Council of Thailand, the Ministry of Education, and the Equitable Education Fund.

FOREWORD

Teaching is not a job, and it is more than imparting knowledge to the students. It is a process of nurturing, caring, understanding, and inspiring that impacts the students' lives. This book tells the stories of eleven outstanding teachers who committed themselves to walking this path. They are teachers who received the Princess Maha Chakri Award (PMCA) in 2019 from the Princess Maha Chakri Award Foundation. These eleven teachers are from eleven countries in Southeast Asia, namely Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam. They were nominated by the Ministry of Education of their respective countries to be the best teachers for the year 2019 and receive the Princess Maha Chakri Award from Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri of Thailand.

This book reflects not only their teaching techniques and practices but also their inspiration and uniqueness, which make them stand out from other teachers. Their lives are as normal as we all are, but they work hard for their students to make them ready for the real world. They have changed many students' lives for the better. Their work and dedication contribute to the community and win the hearts of many in it. The PMCA Foundation has captured their stories through various educators and writers who also understand how difficult and challenging it is to be excellent teachers.

It is hoped that this book can serve as an example of best practices that ignite the flame of innovative teaching for teachers and instill a love of learning in students in Southeast Asia and beyond.

Dr. Krissanapong Kirtikara
Chairman
Princess Maha Chakri Award Foundation

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BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

DAYANG HAJAH NOORLIAH BINTI HAJI ASPAR

PMCA 2019

Story written by Wandee Kasemsukpipat, Kasetsart University

Leading a Cutting-Edge Inclusive School

**“We are one of the leading inclusive schools
in the country dedicated for special needs
children with various medical diagnoses.”**

The teachers from different backgrounds got together in a classroom to discuss and share their pedagogical strategies for inclusive education. This was in the school of head mistress Mrs. Dayang Noorliah binti Haji Aspar – the Sekolah Rendah Lambak Kanan Jalan 49 School in Bandar Seri Begawan. This was a typical scene for teacher professional development that took place in this school with Mrs. Noorliah playing a variety of roles as administrator and mentor to other teachers working with them to achieve the desired results for effective and significant teaching and learning. “We work in teams,” she said with a smile, “upskilling, inspiring one another, and helping each other overcome difficulties.”



The journey to becoming a school leader

“To be honest,” Mrs. Noorliah admitted, “at first, I was not even planning to become a teacher. But as time went by, I grew up and discovered more about myself. I realized that I needed to support my family and be independent. Having six siblings made me feel like I had a responsibility and commitment to have a stable job to support myself.” Since teaching is regarded as a noble and well-respected profession in Brunei Darussalam, she decided to continue her studies at the Institute of Education of Brunei Darussalam to earn a teaching certification after her high school. “At the time, I thought that being a teacher in Brunei would provide me with a bright career and a salary that would allow me to support my family”, she continued.

Mrs. Noorliah began working as a teacher at a local school for five years after receiving her teaching certificate in 1987. She was given an opportunity to further her education through the in-service training program and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Primary Education majoring in Mathematics in 1995. After receiving her degree, she worked as a teacher (Education Officer) at a primary school. From there, her role as a school leader began. From senior administrative officer to assistant headmistress to headmistress, she has held several leadership positions at the school. She was promoted to Headmistress of a primary school in 2007.

In 2024, she will retire after 36 years of service in the educational field. “One of the most important tasks as a school leader,” she asserts, “is to continuously monitor how well teachers are preparing their students for learning and how to best help them acquire the information and skills, they need to deal with the constantly shifting dynamics of the educational system.”

As she looked back at her career in education, Mrs. Noorliah reminisced on who her role models were. Her first role model was the principal of her first school, Pengiran Haji Aji. He was the first educator to receive the Excellent Teacher Award at the celebration of Teacher’s Day. Another role model was the late Fauziah binti Hassan, the Malaysian principal, who was admired for her wonderful thoughts and values on school leadership that she embedded in herself until today. Lastly, she has a great respect for Malaysian Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, who she recognizes as a superb leader as well as a highly productive person. “They have all had an impact on me,” she said, “because they were committed to shaping the future and were passionate about and

determined to develop and adapt. They exhibited the qualities of a good leader – integrity, honesty, and the willingness to work hard, the eagerness to learn, the awareness of change, and to lead by example.”

Her school context

Sekolah Rendah Lambak Kanan Jalan 49 School is a big primary school of 560 students from preschool through Year 6. The school is located in a housing development area within the city. 10% of its students are with special needs and 98% of the students are Muslim Bruneian Malays who speak Malay as their first language. There are 50 teachers with various qualifications, one school guidance counsellor, and 14 support staff members, including librarians, clerks, cleaners, and school guards.

Looking over her school, Mrs. Noorliah spoke out with pride, “What makes my school unique? We are one of the leading inclusive schools in the country and we have a specific facility dedicated for special needs children with various medical diagnoses.” The school has three special education teachers, two support teachers, and a special education building designed to support students with special needs in their daily undertakings and in their basic academic achievement requirements.

Mrs. Noorliah stated with passion, “everybody is equal here. Everyone deserves our respect and undivided attention. If we want learning to occur, we need to love the students.” The socioeconomic backgrounds of the students range from average to low income. Their parents are from the working class and make relatively little money for the number of kids they have – an average of 4-6 children per family. The number of students from broken homes has increased in the school in recent years. Students are either living with grandparents or with single parents.

One of the biggest challenges students face in this time of pandemic, school shutdowns, and blended learning is having access to technology at home because of their family’s financial situation. Only one or two devices may be available to students at home, which must be shared by parents and children. Some students do not have Wi-Fi at home and therefore, have extremely restricted internet access. These challenges make it difficult for some students to access the blended learning opportunities that the Ministry of Education and the school provides to build SPN 21¹.

¹ SPN 21(Sistem Pendidikan Negara Abad Ke-21) is the National Education System for the 21st Century, approved by the Ministry of Education of Brunei Darussalam.



Secret recipes for school success

When people ask her how her school has been successful, Mrs. Noorliah proudly shared her secret recipe. “Collaboration has been the key to our success in all school areas,” she avers. “We take a whole-school approach. At every grade level, we need teachers to take part in a variety of committees, teams, and collaborations.” She told a story that was the consequence of her secret recipe. Students in Brunei Darussalam complete their primary school education by taking the comprehensive PSR examinations in Year 6. Her school has made consistent growth in all disciplines over the last five years. “In our whole-school strategy, every year from Pre-school through Year 6, we nurture each year as a valuable part of the journey until the ultimate ‘products’ in Year 6 are produced. Our Year 6 students serve as a reflection of what the entire school, each year level, each student, and each teacher, contributes.”

In addition to collaboration, Mrs. Noorliah makes every effort to employ technology to improve teaching and learning in her school. “It is a big dream of mine to lead the school towards a digital transformation,” she said, “and to inspire the teacher in the school who are always busy shaping the future of the school to be a digital school alongside other schools around the world.” Her school’s journey to adopt ICT began in 2013 with the implementation of ICT projects introduced and supported by the Ministry of Education, Brunei Darussalam.



In the past two decades, technology has been carefully integrated into schools. But in order to support teachers and accelerate learning, the intention to use education technology must be accompanied by purposeful preparation, comprehension, and assessment. Currently, Mrs. Noorliah's school is collaborating closely with organizations such as the Edtech Centre of the Ministry of Education, Brunei Darussalam to ensure success in implementing educational technology initiatives. She outlined her school's achievement as a "Microsoft Showcase School" saying, "we are the very first school in Brunei, and one of the very few within Asia, to have achieved this prestigious title." She also argued that integrating technology into classrooms may improve the environment for both students and teachers.

"Technology can make learning far more engaging, rewarding, and equitable," she continued, "equipping students with the skills and knowledge to become confident, happy, contributing participants to our world." The school used other Microsoft tools in teaching and learning with a focus on developing 21st Century Learning Design (21CLD) skills in their students, which includes collaboration, skilled communication, knowledge construction, self-regulation, real-world problem solving, creativity, and the use of ICT for learning, in and out classroom context in order to help students adapt to a new technological era.

21st Century Learning Design (21CLD)

To better prepare students for life and work in the 21st Century, educators across the world are developing new learning models. The goal of 21st century learning design rubrics is to assist educators in recognizing and comprehending the changes that learning activities present for students to develop 21st century skills. For the Innovative Teaching and Learning Research project, these rubrics were created and evaluated globally.

The six rubrics of 21st century learning, each of which represents an important skill for students to develop, comprise:

- **Collaboration:** Are students required to share responsibility and make substantive decisions with other people? Is their work interdependent?

- **Knowledge construction:** Are students required to construct and apply knowledge? Is that knowledge interdisciplinary?
- **Self-regulation:** Is the learning activity long-term? Do students plan and assess their own work, and revise their work based on feedback?
- **Real-world problem-solving and innovation:** Does the learning activity require solving authentic, real-world problems? Are students' solutions implemented in the real world?
- **Use of ICT for learning:** Are students passive consumers of ICT, active users, or designers of an ICT product for an authentic audience?
- **Skilled communication:** Are students required to communicate their own ideas regarding a concept or issue? Must their communication be supported with evidence and designed with a particular audience in mind?

https://www.academia.edu/34212053/21CLD_Learning_Activity_Rubrics

“When physical schools closed in Term 1 of this year due to the pandemic (second quarter, 2020), we were extremely concerned with the implications of this school closure on our pre-school students,” said Mrs. Noorliah. “We know that phonics acquisition is an inherently social practice. Pre-schoolers need extensive exposure to phonics, the building blocks for learning how to read. Pre-school students need someone capable of teaching phonics, to show them how to sound out the letters and carefully plan reading activities in a sequential manner.”

She provided a concrete illustration of how technology was utilized to assist pre-schoolers who were struggling with reading during the COVID-19 Pandemic school shutdown. To help the students at Prasekolah (preschool) strengthen their reading abilities, particularly in the understanding of phonics, they chose ABC Reading Eggs, an online learning platform, to integrate into their blended learning strategies. This platform provides students with an extremely engaging learning experience. It uses both audio and visual prompts to explicitly teach students phonics and phonemic awareness, sight words, vocabulary, and reading comprehension in the form of games. Students learn to read through play. As a consequence, more than 85% of their students met or exceeded the pre-school level criteria for reading proficiency.

Meaningful learning

“Learning is innate, God-given faculty we humans are born with,” believes Mrs. Noorliah. “We learn from the moment we open our eyes at birth, and it only ends when we close our eyes upon death.”

“Learning is a life-long pursuit,” she continued. “Our job as educators is to foster a passion for learning in our students. Learning is a process that requires students to actively apply the skills and information they have acquired to all aspects of their lives. Knowing which specific knowledge and skill to use at any given time to solve problems that students may encounter in their life is what is meant by learning.”



Mrs. Noorliah further clarified the distinction between knowing and learning. “Knowing something” refers to compartmentalized knowledge while “learning” is the ability to make connections in the various knowledge areas and skills gained. “To achieve the purpose of learning,” she continued, “we should place more emphasis on assessment. Assessment of learning should focus on students’ knowledge and skills they will require to succeed in an ever-changing world. Due to the rapid evolving of technology and communities, it is our responsibilities as educators to keep up with these developments, incorporate them into our pedagogy, and then assess how well the knowledge has been applied. We may provide them with problem-based and project-based tasks because students need opportunities to synthesize their learning.” Mrs. Noorliah asserted, “Assessment is an ongoing daily process where teachers collect formative data, to instruct their future teaching. It is a deeply reflective process.”

According to Mrs. Noorliah, “The true measure in learning is to see what kind of human beings we have nurtured when our students have left the school premises. Are our children compassionate and caring human beings, who love for others what

they love for themselves? Are they aware of the pertinent issues in the world and are proactive citizens, doing their part to tackle these issues? Are they kind and courteous, showing a high moral character and conduct? I believe that educating the whole child is the true measure of learning and success.”

Moreover, assessment should focus on acquiring formative data, which informs teachers of how well they organize and deliver lessons. “Doing Teacher Reflections, in my opinion,” she concludes, “is a valuable activity we should do each year since it ensures that teachers are delivering well-planned lessons.”

Despite the challenges, Mrs. Noorliah made her school a well-known inclusive school in Brunei Darussalam and a world-class technologically integrated one at that. Although her students come from deprived backgrounds, the entire school community has embraced them with love. Together, they have pursued the shared goal of empowering students with knowledge and skills needed to face an everchanging future. With broad-minded vision, she integrated technology with subject matter content to strengthen teaching and learning in her school and, by extension, to the country’s education system, turning vision into reality.

Mrs. Dayang Noorliah binti Haji Aspar has been a school leader championing inclusive education with the support of the teachers in her school motivating her students to overcome challenges they may face in a changing world.



SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS (SEN) IN BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

Ministry of Education

What are special educational needs?

Children with special educational needs (SEN) face learning difficulties in the form of disorders and disabilities. Some of the common learning disorders among children are dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dyspraxia. Children who have medical disorders such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism will face learning disruptions as well.

Learning disorders and disabilities are caused by abnormality, injury, and impairments from a disease. Children with SEN will encounter obstacles when it comes to schoolwork and personal organisation. They may also have trouble maintaining friendships and relationships with adults.

Special educational needs centres in Brunei

Special education needs in Brunei are managed by the Special Education Unit (SEU), which is under the Ministry of Education. Founded in 1994, the SEU is responsible for the special education programs and support services that cater to students with special needs across Brunei. There are four branches which are situated in Brunei Muara, Tutong District, Belait District and Temburong District. The SEU provides Allied Professional Services, Specific Support Services along with Learning Support Services. The 1997 Special Education Policy ensures that all students with different abilities are to be given appropriate learning environments that suit their needs.

How to help children with special educational Needs?

There are a few things parents with SEN children can do to create a positive and loving environment at home. Firstly, they can come up with simple tasks for their children to complete which will lead to a sense of achievement and pride. For these tasks, parents should always give clear instructions that are easily

understandable. Next, parents can also give descriptive praise to their children when they do well to boost self-esteem. It is also important for parents to have meaningful conversations with their children and provide a safe avenue for them to express their feelings. Parents need to realise that they cannot rely on the school completely to teach their children. They have to do their part by also teaching their children adaptive skills which can boost their self-esteem and can help them at a later stage in their life.

In addition, there are several ways teachers can help create a more conducive learning environment for children with SEN. Teachers have to ensure that the classroom is organised and has little distractions as possible. It is also important to schedule learning breaks throughout the day. Next, teachers can incorporate music and voice inflection when giving instructions. Students with SEN may respond better to varied voice inflection and tone. Teachers also need to get creative with their lesson plans and include multi-sensory cues such as visual cues, auditory cues and tactile cues when teaching SEN students something new. Finally, teachers must always motivate SEN students and give compliments and reassurance for small accomplishments.

Counselling

A number of schools also have an in-house counsellor who helps students with academic, emotional, and social problems. School counsellors can aid students with SEN with personal development and improvement of social skills if needed.

Reference:

<https://educationdestinationasia.com/essential-guide/brunei/special-education-needs-sen-brunei>

CAMBODIA LOY VIRAK PMCA 2019

Story written by Chatree Faikhanta, Kasetsart University

The Teacher as Change Agent

“A good education brings opportunity for a better-quality life.”

Mr. Loy Virak was born into a low-income family and never thought he would end up in teaching. He was even uncertain that he would ever be able to go to college. “I never would have predicted the road I took to become a teacher,” he said, “nor that I would have this passion for learning and the ambition to change the world through my teaching.”

During his time in high school, Mr. Loy had a teacher who greatly inspired and impressed him with her way of life and her teaching. He had other teachers who had a significant influence on his life as well. They were friendly, understanding, and were always ready to listen. When he needed it most, they gave him advice while also listening to his difficulties. They taught well and did well in all dimensions of their teaching and were caring and sensitive to others. In their personal life, these teachers also had moral faith.



“From them I grew to believe that a good teacher is a person who has respect and faith,” he said. “I was inspired by these role models and endeavored to become a teacher myself.” As he grew as a teacher, he understood that he would like to instruct his students in that same manner. He was willing to uplift, encourage, and support them as they faced life’s trials. But becoming a good teacher was by no means easy.

When Mr. Loy made the decision to become a teacher, he pursued a Certificate in Pedagogy and a Master’s degree in physics from the Royal University of Phnom Penh. Since 2001, he has been a teacher at Kampong Chhnang province’s Hun Sen Roleapha-Ear High School teaching physics to 12th graders. Over the years, Loy compiled a list of outstanding characteristics good teachers should develop. For him, a good teacher:

- Demonstrates a good understanding and concern for local, national, and international events and movements;
- Adopts a principled stance against injustice and inequity;
- Learns about environmental issues and how they affect their community and other communities;
- Believes in democratic methods as the best way to bring about change for the better;
- Takes some kind of social action to promote ideals;
- Possesses the willingness to alter one’s general or specific attitudes, as well as one’s knowledge, beliefs, and values;
- Has a growth mindset, is curious, open-minded, and possesses mastery of subject matter and pedagogy; and,
- Is willing to take chances to see whether a modification might be improved even more.

Well-being, a major goal of teaching

Mr. Loy’s background has informed his approach to teaching. “I grew up in a poor family,” he said, “and think that education is the way to improve the well-being of people. I feel that a major goal of education is to enable children who do not see their future to have bright lives in their community. I would ultimately like to be an agent of change who helps children have a better life.”

Mr. Loy is aware that most Cambodian students are from low-income families. “Poor children do not have access to good resources in science in Cambodia.” In truth,

his school has limited teaching materials to work with, so he has had to spend a whole lot of effort in designing and developing teaching and learning kits for his students from every day, locally available materials. Mr. Loy has tried his best to provide students with quality science resources, particularly for slow learners and those from poor families.

Personalized learning

Mr. Loy's educational perspective as a teacher is based on the concept of individualized learning. "As a teacher," he says, "it is my responsibility to recognize each student's individual learning needs and to tailor my support accordingly so that they can each realize their full potential. Students have diverse ways of learning and different interests. Some are fast learners, others not so fast depending on their interest in the subject (i.e., physics). My teaching should therefore fit a variety of students."

Mr. Loy teaches a mixed-ability class where the students' knowledge and abilities differ. "If I focus on the fast learners, this will cause problems for slow learners. I work hard to establish a secure and encouraging learning atmosphere in my classroom where kids feel free to express themselves and take risks. I think that kids learn most effectively when they are treated with respect and value and given the freedom to go at their own speed."



In this view, the focus is on personalized learning based on the unique requirements and interests of each learner. With this strategy in mind, students take charge of their education and move at their own pace. Additionally, it enables students to investigate their interests and relate what they are learning to their daily lives. Mr. Loy addresses the problems of students' individual differences by being aware of the following.

- *Determining each student's needs and learning style first.* “Poor students frequently have different learning demands, and they may need alternative tactics to succeed. I consider each student's talents and shortcomings while planning my teaching strategy.”

- *Engaging students in their own learning.* “I use a range of instructional techniques which includes interactive simulations, group projects, and hands-on exercises.”

- *Offering students specialized support.* “For instance, I provide private tuition, more materials, personal tutorials, or more practice problems.”

- *Applying real-world examples and connecting the topic to students' everyday experiences.* “I try to make connections that are pertinent to their experiences since underprivileged children may find it difficult to understand how science applies to their life.”

- *Creating a warm and comfortable learning atmosphere.* “Many underprivileged students might not have access to secure or comfortable learning environments since they come from disadvantaged circumstances. I try to make sure kids feel safe and appreciated while fostering a good, friendly, and supportive learning environment in the classroom.”

Mr. Loy strongly believes that there are four factors for student success: (1) Family and teacher support, (2) School environment, (3) Community interest, and (4) Individual student's personal drive.

Working individually with students helps them understand their feelings and conceptual understanding. “From there,” he says with a smile, “I can better guide and encourage my students.” He also uses peer teaching methods in which students work with their peers. In this way, those with high abilities can help slower learners in a learning community.

“To build variety into students' learning experience, I employ several instructional techniques in my classroom,” explained Mr. Loy, “such as hands-on activities, group projects, and personalized instruction, to promote personalized learning. Additionally, I make use of technology to give students access to a variety of resources and to give them chances for collaborative learning.”

Continuing in an excited manner, Mr. Loy went on, “My ultimate objective as a teacher is to assist each student in acquiring the abilities and understanding required to thrive in life. I firmly think that individualized instruction is the key to realizing each student’s full potential, and I am dedicated to giving my pupils the support and direction they require to succeed.”

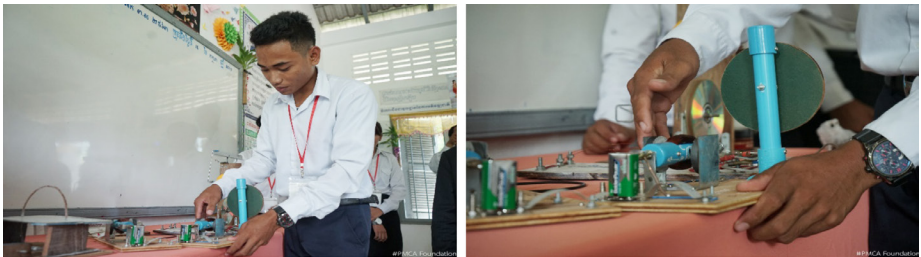
A key strategy Mr. Loy uses is working closely with parents. He feels that teachers do not only teach but also connect with the school community, especially with parents. Communicating about their children’s learning will help parents keep track of and facilitate their children’s education.

With dedication and hard work, Mr. Loy works at the local and national levels to develop education in Cambodia. As a nationally recognized outstanding teacher, he has been invited to train other teachers. At the provincial level, he has spoken about sharing teaching methods and creating simple teaching materials. The Provincial Department of Education actively encourages teachers to attend his workshops. At the Ministry level, Mr. Loy is responsible for recording his online teaching to serve as a model for other teachers and allows students to learn from these videos which have been disseminated throughout the country.

Active learning

In his physics class, Mr. Loy found that students frequently had negative views toward the study of physics. In the eyes of students, physics is a scary and difficult subject. There is a lack of enthusiasm for the topic. “There are several reasons why students have a negative opinion of physics,” he said. “The high level of conceptual comprehension needed for physics is one reason some of my students find the subject challenging. Physics topics are abstract. It is challenging for students to visualize such abstractions which can make it difficult for them to relate to the subject matter. In addition, complicated mathematical equations are frequently used in physics, which can be intimidating for students who struggle with math.” Mr. Loy reflected on this, saying, “My students’ negative attitudes toward the subject are perhaps their way of saying that there are too many formulas to remember.”

To address this, Mr. Loy employed the use of active learning to help remold students' attitudes toward physics. Instead of using lectures and rote memorization as in traditional physics training, Mr. Loy connects his lessons to practical applications which can give his students the impression that the content is important. Students would connect information with an understanding of the importance of studying physics by making the learning material more pertinent, interesting, and accessible. He would have his students do hands-on experiments using real-world analogies to help them comprehend physics concepts.



In his classroom, he fosters a welcoming environment where students are free to take risks and ask questions. This helps students develop confidence and excitement for the subject. “Learning physics is not only about remembering physics-related content,” Mr. Loy explained as he moved about his classroom, “it is also about being able to apply that content to real situations. Students should also remember their physics lessons for the long term, for which experiments and practicing science are key.”

Active learning

Active learning is an instructional approach in which students actively participate in the learning process, as opposed to sitting quietly and listening. Active learning builds on constructivist learning theory, which posits that people learn by connecting new ideas and experiences to what they already know.

<https://teaching.washington.edu>

To make the subject of physics dynamic and exciting, Mr. Loy tries to use simple teaching methods and materials, many of which he developed with his students. In one instance, Mr. Loy, with his students, worked cooperatively to make a simple electrical circuit that was produced, stored, and used in his school's physics laboratory. Mr. Loy has also produced his textbooks to supplement the textbooks developed by the Ministry of Education or by textbook publishers which were too difficult for his students to understand. So, he simplified these to make them easy to read, printing these new materials and sharing them with other physics teachers.

Assessing student work

To assess students' work, Mr. Loy uses formative assessments to help him see how students learn through his teaching. He engages students in activities such as explaining concepts to their peers or giving them assignments. "If students can explain and make others understand physics concepts," he rationalizes, "that means that they have a deep understanding of the topic."

In addition, Mr. Loy might sometimes start the class by introducing formulas or theories, then letting the children do the exercises and experiments as practice. Students are divided into groups for collaborative work. In this way, he can assess students' learning using a variety of methods – oral presentations, individual oral examinations, worksheets, classroom observations. "Students," he explained, "are paired in learning dyads. A good student is paired with a slow student."

In summary, Mr. Loy's tips for actively teaching physics are simple, practical, and straightforward.

- Encourage group work among students.
- Engage students in group discussions and team presentations.
- Incorporate hands-on activities.
- Include real-world examples to assist students understand the practical applications of physics ideas and provide real-world examples.
- Track students' progression in Learning by level of difficulty from simple to moderately difficult to complex.

"Education can improve students' quality of life and encourage their citizenship," Mr. Loy Virak believes. "A good education can bring opportunity for a better-quality life."

EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA

UNICEF Country Programme, 2019–2023 (excerpts)

Situation

Cambodia is known internationally as a success story in educational reconstruction and transformation, following the Khmer Rouge regime of the 1970s when much of the country's education system was destroyed. Significant progress has been made since then, with remarkable expansion in children's access to education. Today, more Cambodian children are entering school than ever before. The number of children enrolled in primary education increased from 82 per cent in 1997 to over 97.8 per cent in school year 2017/18, while enrolment in early childhood education (ECE) has more than doubled since 2007.

...

There are lingering challenges in Cambodia in relation to education quality and school attendance. Many girls and boys are not reaching age-appropriate learning standards: at the primary level, nearly 25 per cent of children in Grade 3 cannot

write a single word in a dictation test. A child who started Grade 1 in school year 2016/17 has a 51 per cent chance of reaching Grade 9, which is the end of lower secondary school.

Key factors behind these challenges include children being unprepared for school, lacking motivation to stay in school, violence against children in schools—with teachers being common perpetrators—financial constraints within households, and the poor quality of teaching and learning. This is compounded by high pupil-teacher ratios.

There are growing disparities between the education attainment of girls and boys, with far fewer boys completing primary and secondary school than girls. At the primary level, 82.6 per cent of girls complete school, compared to only 75.6 per cent of boys. These numbers decline even further at lower secondary level, with 49 per cent of girls completing, compared with only 40 per cent of boys.

While progress is being made in improving education opportunities for children, in Cambodia too many children are struggling to learn and realize their potential, particularly children from poor, rural families, indigenous, ethnic minorities and those with disabilities. Additional efforts are required to ensure that girls and boys have access to inclusive, equitable, relevant, and quality early childhood and basic education that promotes life-long learning in safe, protective environments. This includes during emergency situations.

Improving the quality of teaching and learning

Offering high quality education is critical to attracting and keeping children in school. Together with the government and other partners, UNICEF works to improve the quality of education so that Cambodian children can embark on a life-long learning journey.

UNICEF advocates for financial investment in teacher training, from early childhood to secondary education, and assists Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) in its efforts to revise the national curriculum (including the syllabus,

learning standards, teacher training and textbooks), so that 21st century skills are integrated into the Cambodian education system. A priority is to include health, nutrition, and life skills in the curriculum, so that adolescents can learn how to become healthy, capable, and responsible adults.

Alongside strengthening the capacity of government officials to deliver education results for children, UNICEF also works with its partners to help build effective leadership and management of school leaders and teachers. This is done through the Capacity Development Partnership Fund Phase III, which includes MoEYS, the EU, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Global Partnership for Education (GPE), USAID and UNICEF in partnership with non-governmental organizations. This fund helps school leaders and teachers plan and allocate their resources more effectively and equitably.

Importantly, UNICEF supports the government to provide qualified multilingual teachers for ethnic minority children, particularly in the north-eastern provinces, and skilled teachers to teach children with disabilities. This is to ensure that schools are places where children's talents are nurtured, and all children can learn. Through mobilization campaigns and training, UNICEF promotes positive discipline in the classroom without using corporal punishment and encourages school leaders and teachers to replace violence with positive reinforcement—which protects children and helps them learn. To complement this, UNICEF advocates for positive parenting practices within communities.

Reference:

https://www.unicef.org/cambodia/media/2386/file/CountryProgramme_Education.pdf%20.pdf

INDONESIA

RUDI HARYADI

PMCA 2019

Story written by Onpawee Koonpornpen, Kasetsart University

Learning by Doing

“Students learn from doing activities in real-world settings.”

The State Vocational School known as SMK Negeri 1 Cimahi is located in the city of Cimahi, which is situated in the Industrial area of West Java near the city of Bandung. In terms of their academic pursuits, this indicates that the students will have the advantage of access to industry not only within the school but also with the outside business and industrial sector. Therefore, students in vocational programs will have a solid training foundation and will be ready for work.

In Indonesia, vocational education is a type of formal education at the secondary level in a vocational school (SMK) that offers a range of subjects that are technical in nature such as Mechanical, Automotive, Electrical, and so on (Ministry of National Education, 2003).



SMK Negeri 1 Cimahi, the school of Rudi Haryadi, offers a number of vocational programs including: Industrial Automation Engineering, Process Instrumentation and Automation, Power Electronics and Communication Engineering, Mechatronics Engineering, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Engineering, Industrial Electronics Engineering, Network and Application Information System, Software Engineering, and Film and Television Program Production.

The school has a total enrolment of 2,499 students, of which 308 students are in Rudi's program of Information Networking and Applications. Most of these students are from low-to-middle income families and they expect to enter the workforce immediately upon graduation so that they can earn and contribute financially to their families.

From technical guy to teacher

For over 19 years now, Rudi has been teaching vocational education and been a part of a school administration. Before he entered the teaching profession, however, he worked as a network engineer with an IT company for four years. During that time, when he was not at work, he was helping out a vocational school. The teaching bug soon hit Rudi and he started to feel that teaching was a more fulfilling career to pursue.

Looking back at that period, he said, "one day, my former teacher asked me to join and teach in the school while we were setting up the lab. Prior to that, I had never considered going into teaching. That was the beginning of a new career for me as a teacher."

He continued, "being a teacher is challenging. Even though you are an expert in your industry, that is not enough. For students, in order to keep up with the changing Industry, I need to constantly upgrade my expertise, skills, and teaching methods in order to provide high quality of education and learning in school."

Rudi's education in technical-vocational education began as an undergraduate student in Electrical Engineering at the Jenderal Achmad Yani University. After graduating with a Bachelor's degree, he continued on to earn a Master's degree in VTE (Vocational Technology Education) from Indonesia University of Education. Not wanting to stay at his level of expertise, he is currently pursuing a doctorate in vocational education. In addition

to the higher degree, he attends technical courses to gain additional certification as an IT instructor. “Teachers must continually update their expertise in order to give students the finest instruction possible,” says Rudi. “Teachers must therefore enroll in specific training courses that are designed to update and expand their knowledge.”

The RUDI H goals

“To aim high and achieve your goals, you must be strategic,” Rudi says with conviction. This is reflected in an acronym based on his name, which stands for Resilience, Usefulness, Development, Implement, High Level. Spelled out, RUDI H lays out the goals for himself in preparing his courses.

- **R - Resilience** – “This goal is for students: To have an adaptable and flexible mindset. In spite of the challenges students are confronted with, they are nonetheless able to pull themselves up on their own.”

- **U - Usefulness** – “This goal is for each student to have a clear idea of what they enjoy doing and what they aspire to become. As their instructor, I guide them by assisting them in connecting a wide range of knowledge in class to real-world situations and their benefits. It is possible that in order for students to attain the goal, they will need to overcome a number of obstacles and conditions; therefore, he will be the one to assist them.”

- **D - Development** – “It is always one of my top priorities to improve my teaching abilities in areas such as developing teaching materials, use of materials, techniques, and technology. In addition, I am responsible for the development of the curriculum, ensuring that it is current and relevant to the business world.”

- **I - Implement** – “As a teacher, I provide students with the very finest practice opportunities according to the best plans. Moreover, as a school administrator, I must provide the best standards to help the school develop.”

- **H - High level** – “This goal is to broaden students’ perspectives by making them international (in standard).”

Increasing the appeal of vocational education

Vocational education is the development of practical skills and provides an attractive path to success for many students. Based on the concept, vocational education is aimed at preparing students to be able to handle a particular technical job.

To help prepare students, Rudi teaches students how to work effectively, using his best teaching strategies, including his own experiences. He has a knack of livening up the classroom as a “playground.” His classroom is alive with students working and discussing. Students are inspired to put in more effort in their studies, but they are not alone. “In my classroom, I mingle with students to offer my support for the activities they are participating in,” says Rudi.

“I like to make my lessons fun. When my students are having trouble, I will do whatever it takes to get them back on the right track according to their characteristics,” Rudi said. “Students must continually improve in order to match the skills required for the job they want. Although, there may be obstacles to learning, such as challenging assignments or insufficient information, I will work closely with students to help them overcome these obstacles.”



He continued his thought, “My students are teenagers, so it is quite challenging to get them to pay attention to the subject in class. I try to capture the students’ interest by asking them questions in order to find out what they like. After that, I link the content in the class to the students’ interests as individuals and to their future.”

To illustrate this point, Rudi may begin a class by asking about students’ career goals. Students with a passion for IT will be given contextual learning reinforcement, but for students with a non-IT passion, Rudi will seek to identify the compatibility of the passion with the learning objective, such as looking for role models or looking for forms of implementing IT in the field that is that student’s passion. Students with a passion for musical expression can study IT with the object of musical application.

“I would ask students what their interests were and then help them make the connection between what they learned about IT and their own personal interests. For instance, many students said that football was their favorite sport. I then put them in groups to create a mobile app for playing a football game. They will learn more meaningfully as a result of this.”

Rudi asks students to build a marketplace platform that they can use to conduct business with other students in order to develop independent soft skills like entrepreneurship. This is done so that they can create platforms with experience as both system and application developers and application users. This is so that when they create IT applications in the future, they will create goods that reflect the preferences of the consumer.

To help students achieve their goals, Rudi has built a strong network of support from others. Collaboration has been recognized as an important strategy for meeting the needs of students with learning and attention difficulties.

- **Collaboration among students.** Rudi used hybrid project-based learning where students have to gather and work together step-by-step based on scientific knowledge.

- **Collaboration between teachers.** Teachers from different programs work together to provide a rich learning environment for their students. For instance, Rudi may seek out a teacher who specializes in food preparation if the majority of students desire to carry out a project that combines Information Technology and Culinary.

- **Collaboration between school and industry.** In order to construct a curriculum for vocational education which is linked to and matches industry needs, teachers design work/project-based learning, apprenticeship, job-shadowing, and industry field trips as learning experiences for students. This exposes them to industrial career paths and patterns so that when students graduate, they will have clearer, better defined career plans.

Focusing on learning outcomes

What is the big idea that you hope students will take away from the course? Rudi was asked as he walked around his workshop. “My teaching methods emphasize using activities to put learning outcomes into practice.”

To help students overcome obstacles, Rudi would discuss the objective of the task at hand and collaborate with them to achieve a desired outcome. He claimed that it is also crucial to inform students of what they can accomplish with their skills and knowledge.

From the very start, students are asked to set goals by themselves. “For example, if students wish to be an IT manager, they must learn more about the competencies and skills required of IT managers,” Rudi stated. “Then, in order to become a skillful worker, they must gradually study and gain more training experiences.” In sum, Rudi’s teaching philosophy is learning by doing. Students’ learning is focused on activities set in real-world that address real-world problems and involve actual industry processes and settings that involve the outside world.

“I allow students to venture outside their comfort zones and learn something new,” Rudi explained patiently. “It is more advantageous for them to seek solutions to a task because then they have the chance to obtain more experience while they are in school.”

To help students remember the thought process required of technical experts, Rudi developed a model he calls “PEPPERMINT”. In his earlier training, he had been introduced to the notion of “PEPPER” by the ITE (Institute of Technical Education), Singapore. Now, Rudi added “MINT” to create his own unique teaching method. Since he can still use and grow the knowledge that the expert pedagogy from ITE Singapore gave, Rudi is appreciative of this.

The PEPPERMINT model outlines the important processes in Computer Network teaching and learning. This model stands for Plan, Explore, Practice, Perform, Enquiry, Reflect, Memorize, and Internet.



Students adapting the situation of work as learning goal



Students doing the practicum to grasp the study of knowledge



“The method created has three advantages in order to help students in understanding the culture of the industrial world,” Rudi continued. “The advantages are: (1) to help simulating in learning; (2) to encourage students to master job-related skills; and (3) to integrate the School Literacy Movement.

PEPPERMINT was first used in his classroom but later spread to other teachers in his school. Later still, it was adopted by a teachers’ association in Sumatra. “PEPPERMINT is truly extraordinary,” said fellow teacher Diky Ridwan S.Pd at SMKN 1 Cimahi. “Since the students have been using his model, I can see their progress in their projects.”

Over the years, Rudi shared his knowledge of PEPPERMINT model with other teachers and schools both in person and online in order to assist them on school quality improvement and teacher competency enhancement. Eventually, he broadened his network by setting up a community of teachers. Rudi proudly says, “I initiated *Perkumpulan Pendidik Nasional Berprestasi* (PPNB). PPNB is a community of teachers who learn from one another and share innovation.” There have also been several examples of his methods being employed in many research undertakings by teachers within his professional learning community.

THE PEPPERMINT MODEL

- **P - Plan-** Planning and setting learning goals.
- **E - Explore-** Exploring a variety of learning resources from different sources.
- **P - Practice-** Practicing what students have learned to prove their knowledge and skill.
- **P- Perform-** Showing their performance through scenarios based on the actual circumstances in the industrial field.
- **E - Enquiry-** Summarizing their learning and ensuring that their goals for learning are being met.
- **R - Reflect-** Providing feedback to one another and following up on learning outcomes.
- **M - Memorize-** Memorizing what they have learned.
- **Int - Internet-** Using Information and Communication Technology to optimize their learning.

From actual to virtual

Since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, the Indonesian government has implemented a number of actions to support home-based education as well as the training of teachers in the use of online learning platforms. Schools were among the entities most affected by the pandemic because of the extended school closure to face-to-face instruction.

Rudi moved his students from a real-world playground to a virtual world. His LMS (Learning Management System) was reengineered for this new online reality incorporating new learning activities accordingly.

How did Rudi restructure his LMS?

- Create course content where the teacher could now include text, images, videos, PDFs, tables, hyperlinks, text formatting, interactive assessments, and slideshows.
- Develop accessible and online-submitted automated assessments and assignments for students.
- Exchange of feedback both with teachers and their peers.
- Learn asynchronously (on demand, self-paced) in terms of course content and subject matter.

In addition, Rudi designed the Learning Management System (LMS) for all content files and to-do tasks according to the PEPPERMINT model. Using this LMS learning design, students carried out the practice activity on their own at home and then created short films to demonstrate their understanding of the idea, submitting these to Rudi and other teachers online. “Since they are teenagers,” Rudi smiled, “platforms like YouTube, Facebook, LinkTree, and Instagram were acceptable for presentations.”

Transitioning to online learning has created other challenges and opportunities for teachers and students alike, especially in Rudi’s class, where field work is essential for training and learning.

All of his hard work as a teacher has been worth every minute in his own eyes. Rudi Haryadi has made a significant contribution to the school and society, particularly with students. “I strongly believe that vocational education will become more efficient and effective in meeting the industry’s current and future skills needs,” he proclaimed. “In addition, when well-prepared students graduate, they are in high demand in the labor market. Believe in your students and you will see them grow.”

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UPPER-SECONDARY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN INDONESIA

World Education News + Reviews

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in Indonesia takes place both within the formal school system as well as informally in apprenticeships, other work-based training programs or training programs at governmental vocational and skills training centers (*Balai Latihan Kerja, or BLK*). In the formal system, TVET starts at the upper-secondary level and is offered by both secular vocational schools (SMKs) and religious schools (MAKs). There are more than 10,000 formal vocational secondary schools on the archipelago, mostly clustered on the populous islands of Java and Sumatra, about 70 percent of them private.

As mentioned before, more than 50 percent of upper-secondary students in Indonesia study in the general academic track, but the government is seeking to drastically expand TVET and change enrollment ratios, so that 70 percent of students will study in the vocational track by 2020. TVET is prioritized in order to alleviate severe skilled labor shortages. The government projected in 2016 that Indonesia needs 3.8 million new skilled workers annually until 2030 to bridge a gap of 56 million skilled workers.

SMK programs are typically three years in duration after grade nine, but there are also four-year “SMK plus” options. These straddle secondary and post-secondary education and lead to the award of a one-year post-secondary diploma (D1) in addition to a senior secondary school diploma.

Vocational high schools offer more than 140 different specializations, including fields like agri-business technology, allied health, business and management, information and communication technologies, and engineering technology. However, 60 percent of all students enroll in just 10 popular disciplines, including accounting, computer engineering, marketing, motor vehicle engineering, multimedia, or office administration. The majority of vocational schools specialize in the fields of technology and industry (86 percent) and business and management (76 percent).

SMK programs cover a general education core curriculum (including mathematics, Indonesian, English, natural sciences, social sciences, and so-called normative subjects like religious education and civics), as well as vocationally oriented subjects. Some programs may incorporate internships and other practical training components. After completing the program, students sit for national examinations in both the general education subjects and the vocational subjects. Graduates receive the Ijazah SMK and a certificate of competency in their vocational specialization. It’s currently planned that students will also earn a series of formal vocational training certificates during the course of their studies, so that graduates and school dropouts alike can obtain qualifications of greater value in the labor market.

Reference: World Education News + Reviews

<https://wenr.wes.org/2019/03/education-indonesia-2>

LAO PDR PHAYSANITH PANYASAVATH PMCA 2019

Story written by Chawapan Pettkrai, Kasetsart University

Learning through Culture and History

“Planning lessons by integrating Lao culture and literature with local stories and the local way of life.”

It was over forty years ago when Phaysanith Panyasavath embarked on his journey as a teacher at the early age of 16. At that time, beginning teachers could enter the teaching force with only a high school diploma. It was only in 2011, in his twentieth year of teaching, that he finally graduated with a Bachelor’s Degree in Education majoring in Lao Language and Literature.

“I was directly affected during that difficult time after the regime change,” Phaysanith said. “It was a teacher who helped me through this period by supporting me in my studies and in my living. During that time, I discovered that some teachers were exceptional in terms of knowledge while others were exceptional in terms of life skills. For that reason, I was impressed and appreciated their gracious kindness. All these situations motivated me to become a teacher today to help create opportunity for students from low-income families.”



Phaysanith, a teacher at Santiphab High School in Luang Prabang Province in Lao PDR, conveys an air of spirituality as a teacher. He was put in charge of teaching Lao Literature at his high school. On occasion, he assists at the nearby junior high school. Among his responsibilities are being a homeroom teacher and instructor, as well as being the Head of Lao Language and Literature subjects and Vice Head of Academics. In between, he was temporarily assigned to the Department of Education of the Province.

Reflections on teaching

In his many years as a teacher, Phaysanith reflected on his pathway. Four things came to mind.

First, a teacher must develop themselves through knowledge exchange and educational training. “From the start of my teaching career,” he said, “I looked for training courses every year supported by the Lao Government.” The Ministry of Education and Sports provides in-subject training programs in specific fields of study including Grammar, Phonology,¹ Lao Literature, and other subjects. In addition, other areas of teacher development are in Business Management, Agriculture, Foundation of Professional Development, and Handicraft and Machinery courses with the objective of bringing these fields of knowledge into the classroom.

Second, teaching was not a very popular occupation in the past but today teachers are held in high esteem. “Teaching is one of the most prestigious professions in society today,” Phaysanith says with pride. “Even though the pay is not as much as other occupations, it is a rewarding career.”

Third, one key skill that good education can develop is a mindset for lifelong learning. “A good teacher assists and supports students in their learning and in developing life skills,” he said. “Many students typically continue on to vocational school after finishing senior high school to enhance and improve their chances at getting a job and sustaining their future living. A good teacher will find ways to support a student until they can earn a living in work they pursue.”

¹ Phonology – The system of contrastive relationships among the speech sounds that constitute the fundamental components of a language. The branch of linguistics that deals with systems of sounds including or excluding phonetics.

Four, every child is unique and has different learning needs. “A teacher has to observe each student’s talent and let one join the school’s activities of their choice for them to perform,” he explained. “For example, if a student is talented in singing and playing local instruments, they should be encouraged to pursue this.”

The school and community environment

Santiphab High School in Luang Prabang is a large public school with approximately 2,200 students and 150 teachers. Class sizes range from 30 to 50 students per classroom. “The school’s general environment has developed differently from the time when I was first assigned there,” said Phaysanith. “The most visible change could be student interaction due to generational differences.”

In terms of the working environment, Phaysanith has ten colleagues in the Language and Lao Literature Department. In addition to teaching, he is now the head of school management. At work, he enjoins all the teachers to follow the rules everybody has agreed upon, no matter what the problem. Here the different generations view things differently. “Different teachers – conservative or moderate-generation teachers -- undoubtedly cope with work differently,” was his observation. “An older teacher takes academic principles more seriously and tends to be more hardworking as compared to the younger generation teacher who focuses on quality of work and specializes in technology.”

The community is also diverse. “The school is surrounded by a dense population,” said Mr. Phaysanith. Santiphab High School is a municipal school located in the capital of the province. The Ministry of Education and Sport allocates different educational service areas to the school, so students are from various ethnic groups (Lao, Hmong, and Khmu) who attend the school though they may live one to three kilometers away. Some students travel by motorcycle, others on foot. Some stay in the school dormitory.

The *Lao* are the majority of the population. They live mostly in the nation’s lowlands. Typically, Lao people live along the Mekong River. Many of the ethnic groups that make up Laos are thought to be descended from the Tai people (not to be confused with the Thai from contemporary Thailand) (Scroope, 2018).

The *Hmong*, which include more than 30 tribes in Laos' hilly areas, are the nation's smallest ethnic group. The Hmong (also known as Miao occasionally) and the Yao (also called Lu Mien, Man, or Mien occasionally) are two ethnic groups within the school community. It is thought that the Hmong and Yao are descended from ethnic tribes that were formerly present in southern China (Scroope, 2018).

The second largest ethnic group in Laos is the Khmu, who live in the highlands of the country's center and south. This ethnic category includes people of Austroasiatic ancestry who speak the Mon-Khmer language family. The Khmu live mainly in northern Laos. There are over 20 other ethnic groups besides the Khmu, including the *Makong* and *Katang* (Scroope, 2018).

Luang Prabang is located in northern Laos in the heart of a mountainous region. The town is built on a peninsula formed by the Mekong and the Nam Khan River. Mountain ranges, in particular the PhouThao and PhouNang mountains, encircle the city with lush greenery. The remarkably well-preserved townscape reflects the alliance of these two distinct cultural traditions.

Cultural content integration in the classroom

"I try to apply a student-centered approach in my Language and Lao Literature class," Phaysanith explained. "I begin by observing students' readiness to learn, which allows me to identify each student's problems and strengths, and to use these to address learning needs. I play the role of a supporter to all students equally."

Phaysanith brings together his Language and Lao Literature classes with the larger community to engage both in mutual and common learning. "For example," he explained, "I invite monks from the community to teach students the morals and ethics represented in the literature characters or how to write a Dhamma in handwritten characters."

Phaysanith takes the teaching content in the Laotian textbooks and combines this with related local knowledge. In his Lao Literature class for example, he divides the subject matter content into two categories: Indian-influenced literature and Lao literature. Indian-influenced literature (Hindu originated) is *Phra Lak Phra Ram*, *Phra Suthon-Nang Mamora*, *Panchatantra*, etc. Sin Sai is an example of local Lao literature

which is more Buddhist inspired. “I try to integrate the learning activity with literature narration while having visual education at temples in Luang Prabang where the literature is inscribed on the walls,” he expounded. “The idea is to allow students to connect literature to other forms of art.”



Phaysanith’s learning management style aims to raise awareness and cultivate a deep understanding and appreciation for the rich and vibrant culture of Laos. This he does by applying local knowledge and the ancient wisdom of Luang Prabang with innovative learning techniques.

To promote environmental conservation and social development, students are encouraged to take an active role and engage in socially beneficial activities such as blood donations and participation in meaningful religious and cultural events. “I try to impart knowledge to my students by designing learning activities that spark their imagination and ignite their passion for Lao culture and the magical city of Luang Prabang.” Using music as a learning tool to generate students’ interest in the lessons, he encourages them to compose songs related to the rich heritage and culture of the country using knowledge of musical instruments and local melodies.

Phaysanith says, “The fields of language, literature, culture, and history are closely interrelated and play a vital role in shaping our understanding of Lao national history.” He put more focus on this, saying, “Any discussion on one of these disciplines necessitates an acknowledgment of the others as they each provide unique information that enriches one another.”

“Content in Lao language and culture is complex,” explained Phaysanith. “It relies heavily on memorization.” Regrettably, forcing memorization is the same as giving them a bitter pill to swallow as it may have a detrimental effect on the student’s attitude toward learning. To address this, he uses cultural materials artfully and creatively in his classroom. He uses culture as a mirror to reflect on local history and on students’ sense of themselves. Language is shaped by culture which molds identity. “I encourage my students to embrace their cultural identity,” he says emphatically.

“I normally plan the lesson ahead of time by integrating literature with local stories and the local way of life,” Phaysanith says proudly explaining his instructional approach. “I would search for intriguing literature terms used in the local dialect, then have students analyze the terms. Sometimes I encourage them to draw connections between the main characters and important events to art, painting, music, dancing, and local wisdom in various aspects.”

In arranging extracurricular activities such as excursions, he said, “Learning through cultural landmarks like royal palaces, temples, and history sites helps them effectively pass on Lao history and culture to others and, hopefully, even pass this down to their children one day.”

Good teaching materials are those that change students

“The Ministry of Education and Sport provides a free television station for remote learning called Wisdom Respiratory,” Phaysanith said when describing the learning management system during the COVID-19 pandemic. To reach parents and students more directly, he set up a group chat and other application tools to contact, communicate, and send the attachments to students. Previously, he had tried on-hand learning by sending learning packets of home assignments to households, but the result discouraged him because it only worked with students who paid attention. Later, he changed his class to online instruction and discovered another problem. Some students who lived in very remote areas had no signal and could not be reached. As time went by and schools reopened, the situation improved with students able to study and learn on-site.

Phaysanith’s instructional materials for learning Lao Language and Culture are primarily composed of evidence-based pieces encompassing various media types such

as newspapers, locally sourced materials, electronic media, and model-based formats. Furthermore, different schools actively promote the utilization of ready-to-use teaching aids to enhance the quality of the curriculum. Well-designed learning materials have proven to be instrumental in facilitating comprehension and fostering a lively and interactive classroom environment.

“I use a variety of learning materials and activities for introducing selected classrooms for lessons. My focus is on making the classroom fun and allowing students to share personal, locally relevant experiences,” he said.



Learning assessment based on understanding and opportunity

In a discussion pertaining to classroom assessment, Phaysanith expressed the various ways of assessment he utilizes based on the suitability of the assessment method, such as tests, assignments, attendance, and affective assignments.

As an educator who is intimately familiar with his students, Phaysanith has developed fundamental criteria to distinguish between ‘knowing’ and ‘learning.’ “Knowing is the act of perceiving information through sight or sound,” he expounded, “whereas Learning is the process of acquiring knowledge through active study.”

These two concepts are distinct from one another, as a student may receive information without ever learning it. When a student truly learns something, the teacher can discern this by observing their “thinking movement” manifested as a genuine enthusiasm, interest, and eagerness to gain deeper insight into the subject matter. Thus, Phaysanith continued, “The teacher should be a facilitator and observer at the same time to understand how effectively the student has learned while at the same time identifying those who require additional support or explanation.”

The disciple's success in life is a teacher's happy reward

Being able to devote his time and effort to guide all students to become quality people is what Phaysanith is proudest about as a teacher. He is genuinely happy and proudest of his graduates who get decent employment to succeed in life. “Some of our graduates work in good positions such as at the Bank of the Lao PDR, the country’s central bank,” he says beaming with pride. “Some have become diplomats, and some have even become my colleagues in teaching.”

Since his first days in teaching, Phaysanith has held on to the teacher’s philosophy and spirituality guide intended to develop a student’s love and pride in Language and Lao Literature which are its significant intangible cultural legacy.²

“I constantly encourage my students to use language and culture correctly,” Phaysanith Panyasavath says with a smile. “And I reinforce their efforts to develop life skills for their future careers. I am always willing to lend a hand when my students are going through difficult times. I want to be seen as a candle lighting their way, inspiring them to dream, and use those dreams to lead them to a beautiful future.”



² Laos has three UNESCO world heritage sites (tangible cultural legacy) – the town of Luang Prabang (Phaysanith’s hometown), Vat Phou, and the Plain of Jars.

UNICEF HELPING BASIC EDUCATION IN LAO PDR

With a primary net enrolment in primary education of 98.7% (2017), Lao PDR has met the Millennium Development Goals target of universal access to primary education with gender parity.

Despite this achievement, Lao PDR still has some of the poorest education indicators in Southeast Asia. Approximately 70% of 5-year-old children are not enrolled in Early Childhood Education (ECE) programmes, with those in hard-to-reach areas and from poor families being the most excluded. Many of them do not speak the Lao language, which is the official language of instruction. Pre-primary teachers have limited skills on child-centred pedagogies and supporting materials. The high repetition and dropout rates in primary grades are strongly influenced by the limited access to quality ECE opportunities.

Quality of primary education is another major concern. Only 81.9% (2017) of enrolled children complete primary education. Students' learning outcomes are low, leaving children without essential knowledge and skills. Teachers having limited capacity, a weak pedagogical supporting system, challenges in multi-grade teaching, and a lack teaching-learning materials are some of the key constraints.

Reference: UNICEF

<https://www.unicef.org/laos/education>

LUANG PRABANG

UNESCO world heritage site

Luang Prabang is located in northern Laos at the heart of a mountainous region. The town is built on a peninsula formed by the Mekong and the Nam Khan River. Mountain ranges (in particular the PhouThao and PhouNang mountains) encircle the city in lush greenery.

Many legends are associated with the creation of the city, including one that recounts that Buddha would have smiled when he rested there during his travels, prophesying that it would one day be the site of a rich and powerful city. Known as Muang Sua, then Xieng Thong, from the 14th to the 16th century the town became the capital of the powerful kingdom of Lane Xang (Kingdom of a Million Elephants), whose wealth and influence were related to its strategic location on the Silk Route. The city was also the centre of Buddhism in the region. Luang Prabang takes its name from a statue of Buddha, the Prabang, offered by Cambodia.

After the establishment of the French Protectorate in 1893, following a period of turmoil during which the country was divided into three independent kingdoms, Luang Prabang once again became the royal and religious capital during the reign of King Sisavang Vong. It played this role until Vientiane became the administrative capital in 1946.

Luang Prabang is exceptional for both its rich architectural and artistic heritage that reflects the fusion of Lao traditional urban architecture with that of the colonial era. Its remarkably well-preserved townscape reflects the alliance of these two distinct cultural traditions.

The political and religious centre of Luang Prabang is the peninsula, with its royal and noble residences and religious foundations. The traditional urban fabric of the old villages, each with its temple, was preserved by later constructions. The colonial urban morphology, including the network of streets, overlapped harmoniously with the previous model. Formerly the town limits were defined by defensive walls.

The richness of Luang Prabang architecture reflects the mix of styles and materials. The majority of the buildings are, following tradition, wooden structures. Only the temples are in stone, whereas one- or two-storey brick houses characterize the colonial element of the town. The many pagodas or “Vat” in Luang Prabang, which are among the most sophisticated Buddhist temples in Southeast Asia, are richly decorated (sculptures, engravings, paintings, gilding and furniture pieces). Wat Xieng Thong, which dates from the 16th century, comprises an ensemble of the most complex structures of all the pagodas of the town. It is remarkable both from the archaeological point of view, and from the Lao iconographic and aesthetic viewpoint.

Many traditional Lao houses remain; they are built of wood using traditional techniques and materials introduced in the colonial period, such as plaited bamboo panels coated with wattle and daub. Brick colonial buildings, often with balconies and other decorative features in wood, line the main street and the Mekong.

The built heritage of Luang Prabang is in perfect harmony in the natural environment. The sacred Mount Phousi stands at the heart of the historic town built on a peninsula delimited by the Mekong and the Nam Khan, domain of the mythical Naga. Ceremonies to appease the Nagas and other evil spirits, and Buddhist religious practices (Prabang procession, the monks’ morning quest) perpetuate the sanctity of the place. Natural spaces located in the heart of the city and along the riverbanks, and wetlands (a complex network of ponds used for fish farming and vegetable growing) complement this preserved natural environment.

Criterion (ii): Luang Prabang reflects the exceptional fusion of Lao traditional architecture and 19th and 20th century European colonial style buildings.

Criterion (iv): Luang Prabang is an outstanding example of an architectural ensemble built over the centuries combining sophisticated architecture of religious buildings, vernacular constructions, and colonial buildings.

Criterion (v): The unique townscape of Luang Prabang is remarkably well preserved, illustrating a key stage in the blending of two distinct cultural traditions.

The landscapes and urban fabric retain a high degree of authenticity, and the site is not disturbed by any major construction.

The religious buildings are regularly maintained; monks teach young monks restoration techniques for their heritage. Moreover, the Buddhist cult and the cultural traditions related to it (rites and ceremonies) are still alive and practiced diligently.

However, the degree of the authenticity of materials and construction techniques of many houses is low, since, for a long period, unsuitable modern techniques, and materials (concrete, in particular) have often been used to replace traditional materials.

Reference: UNICEF

https://whc.unesco.org/pg.cfm?cid=31&id_site=479

MALAYSIA

K.A. RAZHIYAH

PMCA 2019

Story written by Juan Miguel Luz

Teaching With Love and Care

**“Teachers may not have the ability to *make life fair*,
but teachers do have the ability to *make life joyous*.”**

The *Teratak Spa* class of 15-to-19-year-old students was a-buzz with activity. This is a special education class of differently abled students organized by Mrs. K.A. Razhiyah in her school in Kota Bharu. The *Teratak Spa* was created to provide a cozy and welcome environment for students with learning disabilities and their customers.

Teratak Spa is an innovative student-driven project recognized by the Ministry of Education. A television program was created in 2018 which featured it as a documentary on Special Education in Malaysia. Teaching Spa therapy for students with learning disabilities was an innovation the Ministry Education recognized and awarded a Malaysian Skills Certificate.



Mrs. Razhiyah established this special class at her school in 2010. *Teratak Spa* translates literally to “Spa Hut” and teaches spa courses to children with special needs. They learn facial, foot and hand spa, besides basic business courses on how to run a spa as a business.

“I trained the special students to create products and learn marketing,” said Mrs. Razhiyah with a broad smile. “They learn to apply different beauty care products – Pandan Oil for hair treatment, Citronella Oil for body massage, Lip Gloss for dry lips, and Cleansing Milk for the face.” This provides students with experience and serves as a steppingstone for these special students to explore the world of entrepreneurship. The products are sold to the public at places like the Kota Bharu Airport by a company named Projek D’Raja Kelantan owned by the Queen of Kelantan.

“This may sound too complicated,” Mrs. Razhiyah said, “but I did this as a creative solution since I believe it would give my students more than just a formal education. It is not an easy subject for them to master in terms of skill, but it has been a big success when they are able to provide spa services to the public. This has gone a long way to erasing the stigma about the capabilities of students with disability. The students have shown success in offering spa services to the public with grace and confidence, even to international tourists. *Teratak Spa* has opened booths everywhere including shopping malls and exhibition centers.”

The spa business has also allowed Mrs. Razhiyah to take her students on learning trips. “I give my special students a chance to meet and socialise with the outside world when we opened spa booths during our holiday trips. The booths in public area are important to our students’ growth because it helps them overcome their anxiety and boosts their self-confidence.”

One of the most memorable moments of the spa class was the booth the students ran at University Science Malaysia. There, doctors, nurses, and medical students visited the booth. “Amazingly, 197 customers attended the treatment in two days,” Mrs. Razhiyah gushed. “And my kids soared internationally, too, when they were able to offer services to tourists at Aseania Resort on Langkawi Island. My special students even gave hand treatment to tourists from Denmark, Holland, Argentina, United Kingdom, Korea, Norway, Russia, Egypt, and India. It was a great experience for them to get involved with all kinds of races, nationalities, cultures, and religions.”

To reward the students' effort, Mrs. Razhiyah gives small gifts and tokens to encourage them to stay in class and do well. At the end of each school year, she organizes a Token Trip for students who showed success in class, good manners, and obeyed rules and regulations. "We bring our kids out and fly them at no cost to them across the country as a token of appreciation. We shower them with new luggage, dresses, and even stay in a nice hotel to thank them for the good rapport they have shown the whole year! In this way, learning becomes enjoyable and exciting while at the same time drawing the attention of students, and motivating them to do more."

Thinking back on the year that had just gone by, Mrs. Razhiyah remarked, "I believe that this approach can help these exceptional children develop the vocational maturity they need, to learn new skills, to be independent, to develop a high level of discipline, and to have a vision for life."

The main goal of her teaching is to make it entertaining and interesting. Moreover, she wants to increase students' self-confidence and focus their training on life skills and a future job. "I take every effort to foster and encourage a love for learning in my class."

Her school

Panji Secondary School in Kota Bharu is an inclusive secondary school that provides education to 700 students of which 99 are special needs children – 66 male and 33 female. They follow a special education curriculum that was created by Ministry Education of Malaysia. To deal with students with special needs, there is an education management system with a classroom program geared to these children with specialized teachers trained in this field.

Kota Bharu is the state capital and the royal seat of Kelantan situated in northeast Peninsular Malaysia near the Thai border. The city is also referred to as "The Cultural City". This seems appropriate given that Mrs. Razhiyah was once involved in the performing arts, a talent she has brought into her classroom. She used to be a stage actor and in 1990, received the best supporting actor award in Malaysia at a National Theater Festival.

Beginnings as a special education teacher

“I was a teacher for 37 years since 1986 before I retired in 2019,” said Mrs. Razhiyah who was raised by a Malay mother and an Indian father. Being under strict parents who always stressed more on discipline and humanity, she developed a culture of being a hardworking spirit with great enthusiasm.

“Teaching is my passion, and I never would like to change my career for anything else in this world,” she says with great aplomb. “I am happy to be born a teacher. In my teacher training college, my major was English and Music.” Mrs. Razhiyah was a teacher in a mainstream school for four years before making the shift to special education.

“I attended an introductory course on special education regarding teaching the hearing and visually impaired,” she said. “It gave me great satisfaction and later, I pursued a Special Education Teaching Certificate, majoring in Hearing Impairment. That was the beginning of a career as a special education teacher. And believe me, I never ever regretted being in this line of work!”

Mastering sign language gives hearing impaired students spirit and encouragement in class and outside. Mrs. Razhiyah became proficient in sign language to a point where she also became an interpreter at seminars and court cases. “The hearing impaired have a hidden talent,” she believes, “and a uniqueness in each one of them. I encourage them to challenge the typical students so that people will realize their talent and specialness apart from their disability.”

She enrolled her hearing-impaired students in a theater competition to get them to stand bravely on stage, sharpen their communication skills, and to overcome the language barrier. Surprisingly, the spirit shown brought them success against 32 mainstream schools. They won First Prize, Best Actress and Best Director at the Schools Theater Competition in Kelantan State in 1992. This success was aired on National Television and published in the local newspapers.



Mrs. Razhiyah moved on to another set of challenges after she pursued her degree in Special Education. She expanded her teaching coverage to Down Syndrome, Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Learning Disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, and Dyslexia. “It is wonderful to see the changes in the special kids’ lives,” she said. “A teacher is a mother, a sister, and a friend to these special kids. When the kids place their trust in you, it is easy to build a good relationship with them. It gives you self-satisfaction when you see them moving on and become a better person than when they first came to my class. Those kids are a gift to this world, and I am happy to be a part of them. Their sparkling eyes show pure love and affection. It makes me feel calm and I appreciate life even more.”

“The most important thing is to make sure students are happy to be in school,” she continued. “Happiness is already part of the success, and it solves all kinds of problems.”

To create a new experience, Mrs. Razhiyah formed and trained a Special Circus Group to act as a rehabilitation program for expression and to contribute towards their psychomotor skills – developing their concentration, balance, and coordination. “The Special Circus Group helps students perform in public,” she explained. “It was a thrilling success when the group was flown to Kuala Lumpur for two performances and got involved with the Down Syndrome Centre Filming by the Lions Club International USA.” Another group – The Special Kid’s Kompang Group, a popular Malay traditional musical instrument – was formed, trained, and widely used for social occasions, parades and official functions, and wedding ceremonies.

“I created another group, an Animal Therapy Project, to equip my special students with a new environment especially for those who show no emotion, have Mutism, are Hyperactive or have Down Syndrome,” she continued. “Animals can teach things that humans cannot because it can make students smile when they hear birds singing or the sounds of chickens. They take care of the animals and have a sense of belonging.” Animal therapy for special kids can bring them peace of mind that can shock visitors. An officer from the Ministry of Education presented this project at a seminar in Yokohama, Japan.

Why special education?

“I believe that every student can improve including special children,” Mrs. Razhiyah said in her animated, dramatic manner. “This is the most challenging aspect of our teaching profession – helping students with special education to create a life force for them. Students with learning disability conditions always have an inferiority complex. So, we need to always be joyful, have fun with them, and always put on a smile. All through my working life, I have never felt tired to teach them. In fact, each day I have enjoyment, high spirits, and a sense of excitement being with them. They are my greatest happiness in life! Each day, there is always something interesting happening in class. That makes life enjoyable and meaningful.”

Special education in Malaysia

In Malaysia, primary level education was made compulsory for every child since 2003. The Education Act of 1996 and the Education (Special Education) Regulations of 2013 provided the legal framework for the education for children with disabilities in the country. Section 40 of the Education Act requires that the Minister of Education provide special education in special schools or designated primary and secondary schools in the country.

The Education (Special Education) Regulation of 2013 is applicable to a government school or government-aided school with special needs education. The 2013 Regulations revoked the earlier 1997 Special Education Regulations which restricted eligibility to the national Special Needs Education system only to children with special needs who were ‘educable’. ‘Physically handicapped children’ who were

excluded in the earlier 1997 Regulations are now included for Special Needs Education in the 2013 Regulations.

Malaysia's Persons with Disabilities (PWD) Act, enacted in 2008, mandates that government-run and private education institutions are responsible for providing infrastructure, equipment and teaching materials, teaching methods, curricula, and other forms of support to enable children with disabilities to pursue education.

The teaching philosophy

The framework for special education in Malaysia encourages collaboration on several levels. There is intended collaboration among teacher, with families, and with the local business sector. "While the state provides financial aid and physical facilities to help students continuously," says Mrs. Razhiyah, "other stakeholders are expected to do their part."

There is a collaboration among teachers in special education programs working together to lead, instruct, and mentor students with the goal of improving students learning and achievement.

There is collaboration between the school, the local business sector, and with local entrepreneurs. Besides providing knowledge in the spa business for children with special needs, she also engaged professional make-up artists and beauticians to help train the students to give a different touch in the lesson.



And there is collaboration with the families of these special needs students. The family and the school are two of the central living environments of students with special needs. “Visiting students’ homes is a normal procedure to ensure good rapport with parents,” Mrs. Razhiyah stressed. “Parents are the first to be informed so that they can track the students’ activities and work on this with teachers. Counselling services are done personally. Besides that, I always ensure my students’ family problems are solved, such as a proper place to stay, a good drainage system, and clean water supply. Positive collaboration and a relationship with parents can create an environment that promotes students’ emotional well-being as well as building a strength-based approach to help students be able to function and live their lives independently.”

Mrs. Razhiyah subscribes to Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligences model. “Some of our students might have bodily-kinesthetic intelligence,” she says. “Others have musical intelligence, linguistic intelligence, or logical-mathematic intelligence. So, I use this criterion to identify students’ special abilities in order that they can learn in their different ways and at different paces. I use different learning strategies with each student.”

“Every child is born with a special skill,” she says emphatically. “A teacher must identify their unique intelligences and enhance and develop these. The skills that they acquire can be beneficial to the community and help them build a career for themselves in the future.”

“Sometimes,” she continued without a pause to take a breath, “it is very difficult for a student to acquire a skill, but you must give them time because each student is unique and has their own pace of learning. Sooner or later, they manage to excel in their tasks. Just give them love, time, trust, and confidence. Students with disabilities who have struggled in school may find their motivation and aspirations change when they participate in a work-based learning environment alongside experts and are treated as adults, enabling them to accomplish more than they ever imagined.”

The program’s impact on the students has had a profoundly positive effect. Mrs. Razhiyah asked teachers to spend more time getting to know their students to assist them flourish. “Teachers may not have the ability to make life fair, but teachers do have the ability to make life joyous,” she says. In addition, positive attitude improvements are being gradually observed, but there is still a great deal that can be done. “These children can perform excellently if given the chance,” she insists, “so this is the best measure of learning.”

Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences (1983)

1. Visual-Spatial Intelligence

- Good at visualizing things.
- Good with directions, as well as maps, charts, videos, pictures.
- Strengths: Visual and spatial judgment

2. Linguistic-Verbal Intelligence

- Able to use words well, both when writing and speaking.
- Good at writing stories, memorizing information, reading.
- Strengths: Words, language, writing

3. Logical-Mathematical Intelligence

- Good at reasoning, recognizing patterns, logically analyzing problems.
- Tend to think conceptually about numbers, relationships, patterns.
- Strengths: Analyzing problems and mathematical operations

4. Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence

- Good at body movement, performing actions, physical control.
- Excellent hand-eye coordination and dexterity.
- Strengths: Physical movement, motor control

5. Musical Intelligence

- Good at thinking in patterns, rhythms, sounds.
- Strong appreciation for music, good at musical composition and performance.
- Strengths: Rhythm and music

6. Interpersonal Intelligence

- Good at understanding and interacting with people.
- Skilled at assessing emotions, motivations, desires, intentions of those around them.
- Strengths: Understanding and relating to other people

7. Intrapersonal Intelligence

- Good at being aware of their own emotional states, feelings, and motivations.
- Enjoy self-reflection and analysis, daydreaming, exploring relationships with others, assessing their personal strengths.
- Strengths: Introspection and self-reflection

8. Naturalistic Intelligence

- More in tune with nature and interested in nurturing, exploring the environment, and learning about other species.
- Highly aware of even subtle changes in their environments.
- Strengths: Finding patterns and relationships in nature

9. Existential Intelligence

- The ability to delve into deeper questions about life and existence.
- Contemplates the “big” questions such as the meaning of life and how actions can serve larger goals.
- Strengths: An ability to see the big picture.

<https://www.verywellmind.com>

“I believe,” she continues, “that this approach can help these exceptional children develop the vocational maturity they need to learn the skills, be independent, and have a vision for life.”

Over a decade since the class was developed, Mrs. Razhiyah put in motion the plan to launch a Special Spa that would be entirely administered by students with special needs. “Students who have finished their secondary education and training ought to be able to work in this spa as a career and to earn well,” she insists. The business did, however, slow down during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many stores, including similar spas, shut down for lack of customers in 2020.



Challenges

The onset of the pandemic and the subsequent school closure in 2020 presented challenges for all schools but especially special education schools. How were things done differently, Mrs. Razhiyah was asked.

“Since students could not go to school and parents had to play a more important role in their education,” she said. “Parents needed to collaborate with teachers from home more closely and be open to teachers visiting students from time to time. Parents had to take charge of both the indoor and outdoor environments that their children would experience. And children had to learn appropriate behaviors as well as social-emotional development and well-being. Parents had to model healthy and loving connections with other family members. Children needed their parents’ constant facilitation without being overly protected or worried that they would not be able to make it.”

Sharing her expertise

Mrs. Razhiyah has spoken at various conferences at the national and international level and authored several papers about the advantages of giving students the practical skills they would need to become contributing members of society. She also wrote novels and short stories as well as four books on Special Education that were used widely by universities, colleges, teachers, and parents. “Sharing knowledge is my passion and part of my life,” she explained. “I was elected as a Special Education Trainer by the Ministry of Education Malaysia and have given more than 100 lectures to teachers and parents at the state and national level to develop a positive attitude towards special education and children with special needs.”

Mrs. Razhiyah was selected as a facilitator by Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) Regional Centre for Special Education. There, she gave 18 hours of training seminars sharing her knowledge and experience with teachers from ASEAN countries on Human Sexuality Education for Children with Special Needs. She was also invited to give lectures in Thailand, Hongkong, Vietnam, Singapore, and the UAE.

“Students with special needs inspired me to be a better person,” she said. “It has taught me to be thankful of life, to empathize with others, to contribute to others who are less competent than we are. When I am with special needs students, they really make me happy.”

As she moved around the room gesturing, she continued, “People generally don’t believe that special children can have the same abilities as that of normal children. Therefore, teachers must pay more attention and try to teach attentively for outsiders to see and trust that they are equally talented.”

As she surveyed her now empty classroom, she said softly, “The challenges in dealing with students with disabilities are two-fold. They are either neglected or overly protected. It is very important to help parents understand how to help their children be able to function in society independently. If one day parents are gone, their children should be able to cope and help themselves according to their individual capacities.”

Writing is therapeutic for her and an outlet for creativity and imagination, which she shared in 17 telemovies and 2 TV series that were aired on national television. Six of her telemovies and a series of 40 episodes are about special kids, where she conveys her views to the public.

In 2010, Mrs. K.A. Razhiyah also served the former King of Kelantan State, His Royal Highness Sultan Ismail Petra ibni Almarhum Sultan Yahya Petra, who suffered a stroke the year before. She went to the palace three days a week to help the Royal Highness with his speech therapy. Her presence developed a special bond in their relationship, which helped him manage his health deficits.

Mrs. Razhiyah has made significant contributions to the Learning Disabilities Teaching and Learning program in Malaysia through the development of the special education curriculum in kindergarten, primary, secondary, and vocational schools. She

was appointed to be an interviewer for the Education Service Commission Panel of the Ministry of Education conducting interviews for teachers job confirmation.

Thinking back on her long career as a Special Education Needs teacher and advocate, Mrs. K.A. Razhinah said with emphasis, “Everyone should play their part in transforming the lives of the special needs children by helping shape their moral values, self-confidence, happiness, knowledge, and skills to be independent, in a way that is unique in the world. It is our responsibility to explore and develop these, to make them special so they can live with equality and dignity. How I wish people around the world would realise the beauty of special kids!”

Endnote

For her many years of service, Mrs. K.A. Razhinah was the recipient of numerous awards at the national level. She was one of the Top 50 Finalists for the Global Teacher Prize 2018 organized by the Varkey Foundation, London. In 2019, she was chosen as the winner of the SENIA award given by the Special Education Network in Asia.

MALAYSIA: EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES FULFILL, RESPECT, PROTECT

When Malaysia ratified the CRC (Convention on the Rights of the Child) in 1995 and the CRPD (Convention on the Rights of Children with Disabilities) in 2010, it undertook to take all necessary measures to ensure that the rights they contain are realised.

- To fulfil the right to education: For example, by ensuring that quality education is available for all children, promoting inclusive education, and introducing positive measures to enable children to benefit from it, such as by making physical adaptations to buildings, providing accessible transport, adapting the curricula to the needs of all children, and providing necessary equipment and resources.
- To respect the right to education: For example, by avoiding any action that would serve to prevent children accessing education, such as legislation that categorises certain groups of children with disabilities as uneducable, or school

entry testing systems that serve to categorise children with disabilities as not ready for school.

- To protect the right to education: For example, by taking the necessary measures to remove the barriers to education posed by individuals or communities, such as resistance by teachers to accepting children with disabilities, or violence, abuse or bullying in the school environment.

DELIVERING EDUCATION SERVICES TO CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

The Ministry of Education (MOE) holds the primary responsibility to provide education for children with disabilities in Malaysia. Responsibilities include:

- Provide and manage special needs education to certain categories of children with disabilities through Special Education Schools, Special Education Integration Programme (SEIP) and inclusive Education programmes.
- Formulate curricula and educational modules for special needs education.
- Manage the training of teachers and teaching resources for special needs education.
- Provide support services and augmentative and assistive devices for students in special needs education.
- Facilitate sports and co-curriculum activities and art programmes for children in special needs education.
- Manage early intervention for children with disabilities at pre-school level and from 0 – 6 years of age at Special Education Service Centres.
- Register and monitor private special education institutions at pre-school, primary and secondary level including teaching curricula and infrastructure.
- Develop and periodically review of education policies, services, and programmes for persons with disabilities.

Reference: UNICEF

<https://www.unicef.org/mayaysia/media/926/file/issue-brief-inclusive-education-malaysia>

MYANMAR MAUNG KYAING PMCA 2019

Story written by Juan Miguel Luz

The Teacher as Community Advocate

“Teachers teach with their heart and should be a role model for their students.”

As per the universal Rights of a Child, to fulfil their potential, all children need a chance to receive quality and inclusive education. In Myanmar, however, many children remain out of school for any number of reasons. Those that do attend school, find that many schools struggle to give students a strong start in life. Only 20 percent of children in Myanmar between ages 3 and 5 attend an organized preschool program. Too many children are not accessing or completing primary school. Three out of ten children who start primary education do not complete it, 2014 census data shows. Fees related to education are one cause for many children to give up on schooling. Economic hardships in families are another.



Adolescence is a period of great opportunities – as well as special needs and potential risks. Mostly, it is during this delicate period (age 10–19 years) that many children miss out. By age 17, school attendance drops to around 30 percent. (UNICEF, 2018)

This is the milieu Mr. Maung Kyaing, a high school teacher in Mandalay, was operating in. In this difficult learning environment, growth and development was slow and pedestrian. This is where patience and grit were essential. “The uniqueness of being a teacher is patience,” he says quietly, “teachers teach with their heart and should be a role model for their students.”

A teacher in Kyaukmee

Maung Kyaing began his teaching journey in 2012 right after receiving his Bachelor of Education degree. He was assigned by the Ministry of Education as a high school teacher at the Basic Education High School in Kyaukmee. This is in Mandalay in the central part of Myanmar. Maung Kyaing’s focus is teaching English, a language that is spoken only by a minority of the population but which is growing in popularity and usage albeit slowly.

In 2017, while still teaching on a fulltime basis, Maung Kyaing pursued and received a Master of Education at the local university. He lives today in the village of Aygyi in Patheingyi Township in Mandalay with his wife and young son.

Maung Kyaing is the middle son of 5 siblings. His parents are farmers as are most of his students.

Mandalay

Mandalay is second largest city in Myanmar located on the east bank of the Irrawaddy River with a population of 1.2 million inhabitants (2014). Founded by King Mindon in 1857, the city replaced Amarapura as the new royal capital of the Konbaung dynasty. Annexed by the British in 1885, it remained commercially and culturally important. Mandalay is the economic center of Upper Myanmar and its main commercial, educational, and health center. It is also the center of Burmese culture.

Mandalay has been a magnet for immigrants, a large number who have come from Yunnan province in China since the late 20th century. Today, there is mix of ethnic Han Chinese, ethnic Bamar, and Indian immigrants, mostly Tamil.

Burmese is the principal language of the region though Chinese is increasingly used in the city's commercial centers as the second language. English is the third language but known only principally by some urban folk. Nevertheless, it is increasingly popular among the youth perhaps because of the internet.

Beginnings as a teacher

Maung Kyaing has been recognized as a teacher who brings a blend of real-life use of English language into his classroom to enhance learning outcomes. "I was inspired to be a teacher," he began, "because teacher is one of the 5 gems in Myanmar. The 5 gems are Buddha, Dharma, Monk, Parents, and Teachers."

One of the oldest ways of expressing faith in Buddhism is through what is known as the three jewels: Buddha (the exemplar), Dharma (the teachings), and Sangha (the community of practitioners).

Assigned to teach English, Maung Kyaing found that he needed to redo his methods of teaching. In reality, his personality is reserved and quiet. He is soft-spoken while the English language, he explains, requires loud and clear projection of voice to help students understand the pronunciation of words, many of which have strange rules and exceptions. "I," he said with a smile, "had to train myself to pronounce and teach English in a loud and clear voice to show them that for anything to be possible, it needs practice and determination."



The learning context in Myanmar

Myanmar as a country has been hit by two major long-term events in the last few years that has had a major impact on schooling and education in the country. The first was the COVID-19 pandemic which, like the rest of the world, shut down countries (and schools) for an extended period of time starting February-March 2020. The second was a military coup in Myanmar a year later in February 2021 which shut down the schools for another extended period of time. Combined, students were effectively out of school or at least deprived of face-to-face instruction for about two years, a major blow for young children.

Even before the onset of COVID-19, however, the state of student learning outcomes in Myanmar was already tenuous but was showing improvement, albeit incremental.

Estimates of the losses in learning of students resulting from the disruptions caused by the pandemic and the military coup reflected very low levels of learning outcomes in reading and math, and large disparities in learning outcomes across different population groups.

Between February 2020 and February 2022, schools were fully closed for 532 days and only partially opened for 77 days. Myanmar stood out as the country with the longest school closure in the East Asia and Pacific region since the start of the pandemic. Because schools were closed for such an extended period of time for COVID

and non-COVID reasons, only a small fraction of students returned to school when these reopened (WB, 2022).

Most affected were non-Burmese speakers, students from lower socio-economic classes, and those living in rural areas. For most of these, it was not only about learning loss; it was also a problem of lack of access. Thus, this became a question of equitable access and equity in learning outcomes.

Myanmar, being a multilingual population, has the added complication of learning in a language other than the ones children use and follow at home, that is, the mother tongue. The design and implementation of an appropriate language of instruction policy that recognizes the need to provide education to students in a language they understand, and which can systematically support the learning of all children is important. Myanmar has more than 100 spoken languages, though more than 80 percent of the population speaks one of five languages.

Learning loss

Learning loss means the loss of academic knowledge or skills previously acquired. It could also mean a pause in academic advancement, most commonly due to extended time away from school or in-person instruction.

<https://www.lawinsider.com>

Learning gap

The gap or difference between what a student is expected to learn by a certain grade level and what they have in reality learned till that level.

<https://www.teachertrainingasia.com>

To address the education needs brought about by the need to respond to this extended school closures, UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank designed the RAPID framework for establishing learning recovery programs focused on five policy actions (World Bank et al, 2022; World Bank 2022).

1. Reach every child and retain them in school:

- Reopen schools safely and keep them open.
- Conduct re-enrollment campaigns.
- Strengthen early warning systems to identify students at risk of dropping out and implement drop-out prevention strategies.
- Provide cash transfers to children from poor families to increase their attendance.

2. Assess learning levels regularly:

- Provide assessment tools to teachers for measuring learning levels of individual students for both formative and summative assessment purposes.
- Assess learning levels and losses at the national and sub-national levels; Identify learning equity impacts.

3. Prioritize teaching the fundamentals:

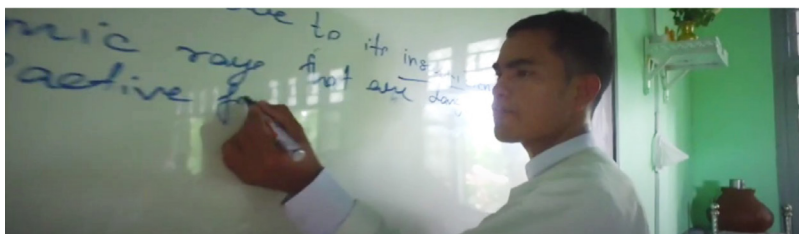
- Prioritize numeracy, literacy, socioemotional skills, and prerequisites for future learning by adjusting the curricula and rebalancing time allocations within and across subjects.
- Train teachers on the revised curriculum.
- Properly align learning assessments with content covered in class.

4. Increase the efficiency of instruction, including through catch-up learning:

- Use teaching-learning approaches such as structured pedagogy, teaching at the right level, small group tutoring, and self-guided and self-paced learning.
- Support continuous teacher training, coaching, and peer learning.
- Increase instruction time.
- Enhance learning with technology.

5. Developing psychosocial health and wellbeing:

- Build teachers' capacity to support their students' wellbeing and identify students in need of specialized services.
- Support teacher wellbeing and resilience.
- Invest in students' safety, nutrition, and access to water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities.



More than just a teacher

In this difficult learning environment, Maung Kyaing sees himself as more than just a teacher in the classroom. He sees himself as a mentor for any student who needs his help, a community activist, and a practicing Buddhist. In the latter, he performs regular merit, with donations to schools, teachers, and monks. At the monastic education school, Maung supports the education of orphans and the meals for children.

Aside from teaching his regular load, Maung Kyaing coaches other teachers in the new curriculum at the township level. As the matriculation examinations approach, he does review classes for students preparing them for this important exam. And in preparation for school opening, he runs extra classes for Grade 10 students (junior high school) on the foundations and fundamentals of the English language used in the upcoming schoolyear in senior high school.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, the Ministry of Education closed the schools for a period of months. As schools prepared to reopen, Maung Kyaing helped by taking a lead role in arranging a safe environment for students in accordance with MOE guidelines.

Despite his heavy teaching load and community involvements, Maung Kyaing continues to attend to professional development including a training course on the new curriculum for Grade 10 English content.

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BASIC EDUCATION IN MYANMAR

UNICEF, 2018 (excerpts)

To fulfil their potential, all children need a chance to receive quality and inclusive education. In Myanmar, many children remain out of school, and many schools struggle to give students the strongest start in life.

UNICEF provides vital support to the Government to achieve key targets for education under the Sustainable Development Goals. How UNICEF helps: Working to reach all children, from infancy to adolescence.

Giving children a head start

Only 20 per cent of children in Myanmar between ages 3 and 5 are attending an organised preschool programme. UNICEF works with the Government to significantly increase access, through implementation of the national policy for Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD). UNICEF helps the Government in setting up ECCD systems. It provides key learning materials around the country. UNICEF is boosting the building of inclusive education with pilot interventions that help children who have the potential to become developmentally delayed or atypical in development, to be on track so they transition to preschool and primary education.

Ensuring children access quality and inclusive basic education

Too many children are not accessing or completing primary school. Three out of ten children who start primary education do not complete it, 2014 census data shows. Fees related to education are one cause for many children to give up on schooling. Economic hardships in families are another.

Supporting adolescents

Adolescence is a period of great opportunities – as well as special needs and potential risks. Mostly, it is during this delicate period (age 10–19) that many children miss out. By age 17, school attendance drops to around 30 percent.

UNICEF works with the Government and partners to help ensure that children move successfully from primary to middle school, and complete middle school education. Children who missed out early on, may access non-formal primary and middle school education, giving them a second chance to re-join the formal school system.

Ensuring children continue their learning during emergencies

Natural disasters and conflicts are affecting the education of thousands of children. Around 278,000 children aged 3–17 in conflict-affected areas of Rakhine, Kachin and northern Shan States are most at risk of losing out on their education. UNICEF co-leads the Education in Emergencies sector and in 2018 it significantly scaled up support for children in humanitarian situations to access formal and non-formal basic education.

UNICEF in Myanmar delivering change for children

More than 78,000 children received education in emergency (EIE) support. Culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate materials developed in 25 languages for children aged 3-4. 13,301 children received a second chance to complete primary education through non-formal primary education with total of materials in 90 languages and inclusivity of education offered.

Over 8,000 teachers received in-service teacher training, benefiting 618,000 children in 2018.

Education needs to accommodate all children, regardless of their gender, socio-economic background, ethnicity, language competency, disability, and the geographical conditions where they live. UNICEF supports the operationalization of national quality frameworks and guidelines for schools and education workers that help make schools more inclusive and relevant to the most marginalized children's needs.

Reference: UNICEF

<https://www.unicef.org/myanmar/topics/basic-education>

PHILIPPINES

DR. SADAT B. MINANDANG

PMCA 2019

Story written by Udomluk Koolsriroj, Kasetsart University

The Street Educator

**“I am determined to help my community
and to never stop giving.”**

Helping out-of-school children in poor communities enroll and study in schools amidst the conflict in Mindanao is challenging. This is the context Dr. Sadat B. Minandang, the principal of a public primary school in Cotabato City on the island of Mindanao in the southern Philippines, found himself in. But he responded and went above and beyond the call of duty as school principal to reach out to out-of-school children around his school. And he approached this with enthusiasm, willingness, and a strong determination. “The job isn’t just the tasks to be completed in a single day in school,” Dr. Sadat said with a smile. “Handling and nurturing children and dealing with a diverse range of learners and situations whether in the classroom or in the streets is more of a vocation. This is a challenge that demands a strong work ethic, attitude, and values.”



ภาพจาก : กระทรวงศึกษาธิการฟิลิปปินส์

From an orphan to a dedicated teacher

Sadat's father died when he was just a year old, leaving him an orphan. His mother and his eldest brother both worked hard to support the family, but it wasn't enough to pay for the children's schooling. Sadat, the youngest, had to work extra hard to go through school to earn his bachelor and graduate degrees, much to his mother and siblings' delight.

Throughout the first two years of elementary school, he walked approximately two hours each way. As he only had one uniform, he had to wash and wear it every day. A piece of plastic cellophane functioned as both his bag and the packaging for his writing pad and pencil. The dust on his feet served as socks and he wore the same old slippers every day. "We were left with nothing but rice and salt to eat during the day," he recalled, "and there was no money for *baon*¹ (allowance for a snack)."

In 1994, there was armed conflict in his village forcing him to abruptly stop schooling in the third grade. For weeks, his family were all "internally displaced"² with no stable home to go to and with meager food allowance to live on. His family was compelled to flee to Cotabato City. There he enrolled in Datu Usman Elementary School where he continued his education while living with his uncle and helping with the housework. He graduated from elementary school in 1998 and continued his education, thanks to a scholarship program that allowed him to live on campus and work for four years throughout his high school.

He graduated from Shariff Kabunsaan College with a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education in 2006 where he was a grant scholar. He is the only member of the family to have completed his education. His parents were both unable to graduate from elementary school. Upon graduation, he began his teaching career. "My early life experiences were the primary inspiration for my career choice," Sadat said with a smile. "My experiences as an orphan, as a displaced kid, and as a working student inspired me to complete my education and pursue a career in teaching underprivileged students."

¹ Pronounced ba-on.

² According to the Guiding Principles on Displacement, internally displaced persons (IDPs) are "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or man-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized border (otherwise they would be referred to as "refugees")." (United Nations Human Rights Commission)

In 2010, Sadat married his wife, Noraine Dumato-Minandang, who bore him four children. Life, however, was not always easy.

In early 2013, Sadat became a public-school teacher assigned to Amirol Elementary School. But even as he was making progress in his professional life, his health was deteriorating. As his wife was giving birth to their second kid, he suffered from pancreatitis – the redness and swelling of the pancreas. As his wife was having a caesarean section, he had to have major medical surgery. He spent over a month in the Intensive Care Unit before making his way back to the classroom.

After serving for almost seven years as a classroom teacher at Amirol Elementary School, he was promoted from Teacher I to Teacher 3 in 2019 and then to Master Teacher I in 2020 when the Schools Division Superintendent designated him as the Teacher-in-Charge (TIC) of Darping Elementary School in the Schools Division of Cotabato City in BARMM-Philippines.³ Sadat served in this position for one year and ten months before being promoted from Master Teacher I (and Teacher-in-Charge) to School Principal I assigned to a larger school, Lugay-Lugay Central School.

Sadat had put in a lot of time and effort to become an effective teacher and school principal. His first training as a teacher was the internship he completed as part of the Bachelor of Elementary Education program in college. Since joining the Department of Education's public school teaching corps in 2013, he has participated in numerous trainings, seminars, workshops, and other related programs and activities. Examples of learning and development (L&D) interventions or training programs he took part in included School Child Protection Policy, Pursuing High Quality Literacy Education, Reading in the New Normal, and Assessment in Online Distance Learning.

³ BARMM is the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, a special region created by law as the historic homeland of Muslim Filipinos in the southern Philippines. There, an autonomous government was set up as in 1990 that allowed Shariah law, Madaris education, Islamic banking, and other Islamic traditions to be practiced so long as they did not violate the Philippine Constitution.

The path to becoming an exceptional teacher

Despite being young, he became a multi-awarded educator, a national and regional speaker on the topic of education, a classroom and street educator, a writer, an inventor, a researcher, and one of the COVID-19 first movers in his school's division. With the various initiatives, projects, and programs he has developed, he has been recognized as a unifier and promoter of peace within the school and the wider community.

Nine years ago, he entered Amirol Elementary School for the first time. "As a teacher, I always represent the principles that contribute to the intellectual curiosity and learning of the kids in my class, both in the school and in the community," Sadat believes. His interactions with children helped to create a positive learning environment that encouraged hard work and respect for each learner's unique abilities. His teaching pedagogy encouraged greater interaction amongst students, and the different learning styles of students were a focus of his lessons.

There are many different ways that people learn best. These are called learning styles. The idea of learning styles is founded on the idea that people frequently learn best in groups through their own unique and preferred modalities. The optimal way for a person to absorb knowledge, comprehend processes, acquire competencies, and comprehend how to use certain talents in the real world depends on their learning preferences. For instance, although some people learn best while reading materials on their own; others might do better in a setting that fosters greater collaboration.⁴ In the classroom, Sadat employs the instructional design strategies of contextualization, localization, and indigenization to catch his students' attention and interest.

⁴ Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer, & Bjork. (2009). Learning Styles Concepts and Evidence. *The Journal of the Association for Psychological Science*, 9(3), 105–119. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1539-6053.2009.01038>.

Instructional design strategies of contextualization, localization, and indigenization.

- **Contextualization** is the process of connecting the curriculum to a specific setting, situation, or area of application in order to make the competencies relevant, meaningful, and useful to the learners. Contextualization can be in the form of Localization or Indigenization.
- **Localization** is the process of connecting curriculum-specified learning material to local knowledge and resources in the learners' environment. For instance, a teacher can use local products such as potatoes, cabbage, carrots, or any product available in the community in teaching concepts in any subject area. He or she can also use the stories in the locality instead of foreign stories. By using these materials, students can relate more to the lessons such that learning can take place.
- **Indigenization** is the process of improving educational resources, teaching- learning methods, and curricular competencies in connection to the bio-geographical, historical, and socio-cultural context of the learners' community. For example, in Social Studies, the teacher can talk about a local hero instead of talking about Alexander the Great or George Washington.

Bancio. (2019, April 24). Contextualization: Localization indigenization. Retrieved April 22, 2023, from <https://www.pressreader.com/philippines/sunstar-bagui/20190424/281676846316731>

Making learning interesting

“Before I obtained my teaching license,” Sadat explained, “I worked for a non-governmental organization as a humanitarian worker who was primarily responsible for psychological intervention programs for adults and children. I really benefited from this experience in applying it to formal schooling and learners.” Because most of his students are products of a variety of circumstances and have been victims of unfavorable actions such as domestic violence, neglect, child labor, broken families, victims of bullying, poverty, and the lack of support from parents in terms of education which has resulted in absenteeism, he employs a psycho-social approach in his teaching.

Sadat introduced his psycho-social teaching approach using the following:

- a. **Attunement** – A soft approach to children both verbal and non-verbal, showing love and care in different ways. This sensitive approach establishes rapport and builds trust, connection and understanding between him and his learners.
- b. **Heart Contract** – Making an agreement on classroom policy, rules, and regulations led by the learners themselves and suggested by them, not by him as the teacher.
- c. **Positive Discipline** – Providing warmth and structure to help teachers and parents understand that effective discipline rests on loving, affectionate relationships with the children.

Sadat introduced his students to the learning tools he invented in 2017 – *KAHOGAMITAN (Magic BOX)*, *KALIMBANG NG KARUNUNGAN* (Bell of Knowledge), and *DURUNGAN NG KAALAMAN* (Windows of Knowledge).



Instructional Learning Material Innovations

- a. ***KAHOGAMITAN (Magic BOX)*** – Kahogamitan is a combination of two Filipino words KAHON meaning “box” and Kagamitan meaning “thing”. From the magic box, a learner picks something at the start of class which will be the object of discussion as the lesson of the day. This opens discussion on new topics outside of the planned lesson. This is intended to motivate students to participate in class discussion.
- b. ***KALIMBANG NG KARUNUNGAN*** (Bell of Knowledge) – This bell is the usual bell used by an ice cream vendor. The purpose of the bell is to call the attention of learners and is a sign that the class or session is about to begin, and everybody should be ready for learning.
- c. ***DURUNGAWAN NG KAALAMAN*** (Windows of Knowledge). – This is an art and crafts project using local and available materials in the community. This is to reflect through arts and crafts what students have learned.

His flagship project

The continuing state of on-and-off conflict in rural Muslim Mindanao that led to large numbers of internally displaced persons fleeing to urban centers like Cotabato City came with a myriad of other social problems. One of these was the problem of out-of-school children and the very real consequence of child trafficking.

This was the impetus for the design and implementation of Sadat’s flagship program, one of his most significant contributions to the field of education. He initiated this intervention program to identify internally displaced families within the school community using the Anti-Child Trafficking Law (RA 9208) to better prepare parents and children in case they chose to return to their places of origin.

The project's goal is to raise awareness of the many problems encountered by internally displaced people who are most vulnerable. This was implemented along with an innovative dialogue program – FaithAMALU (Faith-MaAyo*s ang Laging May Ugnayan*).⁵ This served as an avenue for reconciliation among the families in the community that are involved in the family feuds. The project gives these families support and encouragement to listen to God's words or Allah's teachings through invited resource speakers. "It made me sad," Sadat said, "to see children in these communities as victims of opposing actions, of family feuds called *rido*, of incompatibilities, and of differences of beliefs and interests among families and within a community."⁶



The first and second schools Sadat was assigned to were situated along the Rio Grande de Mindanao cut-off channel river. These schools are in the furthest reaches of Cotabato City in BARMM. The majority of these community's households (98%) live below the poverty line. Farming and small enterprises (vending) provide most of their income, and education is not a top priority. Furthermore, 70% of his students come from different communities and must walk approximately an hour every day to get to his classroom. 20% of his students are seriously wasted in terms of nutritional status because their families cannot afford to provide them with healthy meals. Every year, RIDO-caused violent conflict forces more than 30% of these households to flee their homes. The enrollment rate thus fluctuates not only from school year to school year but also within school years, and the increase in non-readers and "slow" readers are a direct result of these issues.

⁵ *Maayos* – "it is fine or well" (Tagalog, Filipino). *Laging* – "always" (Tagalog, Filipino). *Ugnayan* – relationship (Tagalog, Filipino). Literally, the phrase means: "In Faith – relationships matter to be successful."

⁶ These family feuds, called *Rido* in Muslim Mindanao among more rural, poorly educated communities, have their roots in literal religious doctrine or scripture (i.e., transgressions can be avenged "an eye for an eye"). Today, more moderate religious scholars and leaders (Imams) use a new less literal translation of scripture to promote peace and development.

As a means of mitigating and remedying these issues, Sadat has introduced them to his project and innovation, *TulaKaalaman* (Push for Knowledge), which Sadat ran from 2017 to 2019. A revised and improved version of the same was launched in 2020 under the name *Byaheng Kaalaman* (Mobile Knowledge).

The *TulaKaalaman* (Push for Knowledge) Project targets children who have not yet been reached by the formal school system and to address the issue of pupils at risk of dropping out of school (PARDOS). This opens the door for out-of-school youth (OSY) from the previous five years to get education in an alternative way. It supports the community and parents in their efforts to improve sustainability and livelihood and help improve the nutritional status of their children. Addressing living conditions is a much larger concern and promotes children's education. Sadat previously used a pushcart and then a bicycle-powered cart to move his mobile library of early reading books. With a donor's assistance, he bought a motorcycle to power his book cart, giving him the chance to visit his students in their local communities and carry out various activities and campaigns. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit and schools were closed to face-to-face instruction shifting instead to distance learning or a modular learning approach, his project gained added significance.

The *Byaheng Kaalaman* project consists of four main components:

- 1) Literacy and numeracy
- 2) Water, hygiene, and sanitation
- 3) Child protection advocacy
- 4) Feeding activities

His project is advantageous to both students and community members. "Through *Byaheng Kaalaman*," Sadat says with pride, "we can reach out to children who may otherwise go unreached by our teachers. Our project helps our primary school students on weekdays as well as out-of-school children on the weekends."

Additionally, through *Byaheng Kaalaman*, teachers can do quick home visits, conduct home learning assessments, do mobile story-telling activities, distribute hygiene kits, do psycho-social support activities, and distribute toys, school supplies and other personal belongings.



The Schools Division of Cotabato City has acknowledged TulaKaalaman and *Byaheng Kaalaman* as learning modalities used by the schools division.

The challenge of distance learning

In the case of Sadat’s school and community, it is not easy to transform learners into individuals who are meeting the desired levels of academic competence. With the current situation where his learners cannot afford to buy mobile phones, laptops, or computers and where there is weak connectivity and internet signal in many areas, if there is no internet connection at all, very real challenges have surfaced. Some of his students were given the opportunity to have hands-on experience dealing with basic computer work through the use of offline sessions and lessons with the assistance of the school’s ICT coordinator. He occasionally utilized his mobile device’s data to stream a documentary and other online material from YouTube.

“I encourage students to participate in online trainings, seminars, and workshops with guidance and help,” Sadat explained. “Student leaders participate in Zoom meetings on online leadership training provided by regional and national organizations.” He and his students have taken part in a variety of civic activities including community clean-up drives, greening programs, and adapt-a-home programs. These initiatives seek to teach young people how to form connections with others for their leadership and personal growth.

Sadat has been quite open about telling his story to the media in the hopes that it may inspire other educators to persevere in the pursuit of their goals despite the challenges they face. It is his method of motivating people in general as well as children who aren’t enrolled in school at the moment. His story was also featured on local television and radio programs to serve as an inspiration and motivation to those who had gone through difficulties in life.

A teacher shares what he has

As a teacher, Sadat sees his primary purpose in life as educating and helping everyone around him. He is generous with his time, expertise, and resources, passing them on to his colleagues readily. This is clear from the numerous trainings, seminars, and workshops where he participates as a speaker, facilitator, or trainer. He was invited by the Department of Education's International Cooperation Office to speak as one of its resource persons at a forum on international partnerships and commitments in basic education in 2019 and early 2020 before the pandemic and school closures which were attended by teachers, regional and assistant regional directors, school superintendents, and supervisors from various regions of the Philippines. He was also asked to present at the International Conference on Education for All in Thailand where he shared his initiatives and innovations for assisting children in the school community. At the 50th anniversary forum of SEAMEO Innotech Philippines, he was a resource speaker, which was attended by teachers, school administrators, and educators from across Southeast Asia.

Dr. Sadat Minandang's career as a teacher and school leader, first at Amirolo Elementary School, and later as teacher-in-charge at Darping Elementary School and as school principal at Lugay-Lugay Central School has been an inspiration to his co-teachers, his colleagues at the Department of Education, and to the parents, his students and his community.

"I have always wanted to be a teacher who encourages out-of-school children in poor communities in Mindanao to enroll in school and continue their education," he said with a smile. His actions and commitment to giving back to his community are evident in all he does. "I am determined to help my community," he avers, "and to never stop giving."



THE ALTERNATIVE LEARNING SYSTEM (ALS)

TARGETING DROPOUTS AND OUT-OF SCHOOL YOUTH

Department of Education, Philippines

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) is a parallel learning system in the Philippines that provides opportunities for out-of-school youth and adult (OSYA) learners to develop basic and functional literacy skills, and to access equivalent pathways to complete basic education.

A viable alternative to the existing formal education system, ALS encompasses both non-formal and informal sources of knowledge and skills. As a second chance education program, it aims to empower OSYA learners to continue learning in a manner, time, and place suitable to their preference and circumstances, and for them to achieve their goals of improving their quality of life and becoming productive contributors to society.

The Governance of Basic Education Act, otherwise known as Republic Act 9155, stipulates the establishment of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) to provide out-of-school children, youth, and adults population with basic education.

As defined in the new ALS Act, these are:

- Adults – Filipinos aged 18 years old and above who were not able to begin or continue basic elementary or secondary) education in formal school.
- Out-of-school children in special cases – children in the official school age who are not enrolled in elementary or secondary school due to special cases such as economic, geographic, political, cultural, or social barriers, including learners with disabilities or conditions, indigenous peoples, children in conflict with the law, learners in emergency situations, and other marginalized sectors.

The ALS primarily uses learning modules for its learners. Each module contains learning activities, and pre- and post-assessments. Modules for basic levels include a facilitator's guide, while modules for advanced levels are designed for self- or independent learning. These are provided by the ALS teacher to the learners.

Supplementary materials like text and non-text modules, self-learning instructional materials, learning activity packages, online or digital modules, textbooks, e-modules, or blended technology learning materials from the home or other sources may also be used. Learning sessions may be conducted at any place or space referred to as Community Learning Center (CLC) which is convenient to the learners. A CLC is a physical space to house learning resources and facilities of a learning program for out-of-school children in special cases and adults; and it is a venue for face-to-face learning activities and other learning opportunities for community development and improvement of people's quality of life.

CLCs are categorized into five types:

- Level 1 - Simple, makeshift, or temporary meeting place (e.g., chapel or any open multi-purpose area temporarily lent for learning purposes by the barangay or any private property) with tables, charts, and chalkboard.
- Level 2 - Semi-concrete structure mostly made of light materials such as nipa, soft wood, etc., dedicated to ALS learning sessions and related activities, and equipped with basic furniture and appliances (e.g., electric fan) and learning equipment.
- Level 3 - Typical barangay learning center, secured, and mostly made of cement and other concrete materials; dedicated to ALS learning sessions and related activities, and equipped with basic furniture and learning equipment (e.g., chairs, tables, chalkboard, library corner, cassette recorder) and basic appliances (e.g., electric fan).

- Level 4 - Two or three-story building fully equipped with basic furniture and advanced ICT equipment for learning, dedicated to ALS learning sessions and related activities.
- Level 5 - A permanent building equipped with ALS learning materials and other learning resources are being utilized by learners and other members of the community; the materials are either being transported from house to house or borrowed by interested community members from the CLC for literacy and continuing education.
- Learners taking ALS classes can take an Assessment and Equivalency (A&E) test if they wish to return to formal education. The test will determine the appropriate level for the learner.

Reference: Bureau of Alternative Learning Systems, Department of Education, Philippines

SINGAPORE

ANGELINE CHAN XIUWEN

PMCA 2019

Story written by Juan Miguel Luz

Understanding Special Education Needs

**“A good teacher can touch the life of a child
and build the child’s character.”**

It was a childhood friendship with a primary school classmate with a learning need that set Ms. Angeline Chan Xiuwen on her career path as a special needs teacher. “Though I made every effort to talk to him,” Angeline said, “he found it difficult to mix with others in the same class and eventually left the school.” It was at that time when she began to think about becoming a teacher specializing in supporting students with Special Education Needs (SEN).

To start her on this teaching journey, Angeline enrolled at the National University of Singapore (NUS) graduating in 2004 with a Bachelor of Arts degree. In 2007, she received her Postgraduate Diploma in Education from the National Institute of Education in Singapore. As she gravitated to Special Educational Needs education as her focus area, she began taking non-degree short courses in SEN. The one course that further focused this was special training in Dyslexia using the Yoshimoto Orton-Gillingham approach. Later still, she received an Advanced Diploma in Special Learning and Behavioral Needs.



After graduating with her first degree, Angeline entered the teaching field. She rose through the ranks until she became the Head of Department for Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and SEN and Values-In-Action (VIA) at the Anglo-Chinese School (Primary) in Singapore. She oversees programs and initiatives to support the learning of students with SEN as well as the professional development of teachers in this focus area.

In her school, she provides training support for new teachers to equip them with skills to support students with SEN. She engages parent volunteers to work as teacher aides in the classroom to provide in-class learning support for Primary One students with SEN to ensure their smooth transition into the higher grades.

Dealing with Dyslexia

To better equip her for her work with SEN children, Angeline was sponsored to study the Yoshimoto Orton-Gillingham approach to helping children with dyslexia. Dyslexia is a learning disorder that involves difficulty in reading. This is due to problems identifying speech sounds and how they relate to letters and words (i.e., decoding). Dyslexia is also a reading disability, the result of individual differences in the areas of the brain that processes language. Persons with this disorder see letters and words get jumbled making them unrecognizable or difficult to read. This can be overcome by parsing sentences and words slowly so that these become recognizable and processed in the person's brain accordingly. Dyslexia is not due to problems with intelligence, hearing, or vision. Most children with dyslexia can do well in school with tutoring or a specialized program of education.

Dr. Samuel T. Orton and his colleague, Dr. Ann Gillingham, did groundbreaking work on dyslexia in the 1920s and 1930s and their joint work is known as Orton-Gillingham (O-G). O-G is considered as the grandfather of multisensory structured language programs having been proven to be effective for more than 80 years. While other phonics and basal programs may impact decoding skills, O-G is structured to support spelling, vocabulary, and comprehension. It recognizes that reading and spelling are interrelated and works to connect reading, spelling, writing and oral language. Based on the best teaching practices, O-G provides a structured and sequential format moving from concrete to abstract and from simple to complex. Their method provides sufficient repetition to achieve automaticity and considerable scaffolding techniques to support students

at any level. These characteristics are now known as the Orton-Gillingham method applicable to all students with dyslexia and to English Language Learners as well as students in all subjects — science, math, social studies, and the like.

Originally designed to be implemented as a one-on-one intervention for students with dyslexia, Ron Yoshimoto built on the O-G approach by creating a solid method for teaching all kids to read, write and spell with an effective data-driven, time-tested approach. This approach has been labeled O-GI (Orton-Gillingham International) to distinguish it from the original program by Orton and Gillingham. Classes are designed specifically for classroom teachers, tutors, reading specialists, special education teachers, and home-school parents.

Every Learner with or without dyslexia is unique. O-GI trained teachers are taught to assess a learner's level of learning, prescribe the proper learning intervention and treatment, and adjust it based on the learner's response. An instruction guide is available to teachers so that they can continuously understand the needs of students and monitor progress which they can use to adjust their lessons as needed to continually achieve success.

While phonics or other O-G programs tend to have a “one size fits all” approach, O-GI is inherently customizable according to each student's individual needs. Teachers can easily produce effective, individualized lesson plans in a variety of subjects, which can be used as follows:

- Tier One — designed for all children.
- Tier Two — tailored to address specific needs for small groups.
- Tier Three — further customized for smaller groups or one-on-one applications for those who need more intensive help.

Furthermore, O-GI lessons are structured, sequential, and cumulative so that instruction uses data and multisensory procedures to reinforce information. These procedures are varied to prevent boredom and improve reading fluency and comprehension. They include:

- Card drills
- Decoding of words
- Spelling, introduction of concepts
- Dictation of sentences

- Structured and sequential learning experiences
- Repetition to enhance automaticity.
- Improved vocabulary
- Oral reading - passages, books, and other written material
- Writing

After implementing and varying the use of these procedures, the ultimate result will be comprehension. This was the special training Angeline received which she brought back to her school and shared with her fellow teachers.

The Anglo-Chinese school (Primary)

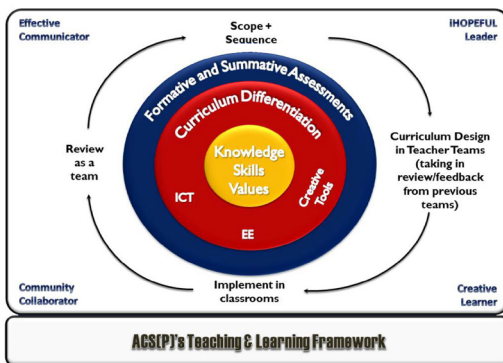
The Anglo-Chinese School is one of the oldest schools in Singapore founded in March 1886 by Bishop William Fitzjames Oldham as an extension of the Methodist Church. It originally started with 13 students. The name of the school came from its conduct of lessons in Chinese in the morning and English in the afternoon. Over the decades, the school grew until today, it is a system of campuses serving different levels of students from primary to junior college. Angeline's school is known as the Anglo-Chinese School (Primary) or ACSP. The Anglo-Chinese School (Primary) was separated from the secondary school in 1928 with both schools moving to different campuses.

The Anglo-Chinese School (Primary) follows a fourfold framework of domains in delivering education: Affective, Cognitive, Social, and Physical.

The **Affective domain** focuses on character development and emotional and psychological wellbeing of a child. Student's motivation, attitudes, perceptions, and values are important markers for every child. At ACS (P), teachers take this domain into consideration when preparing lesson plans.

The **Cognitive domain** involves knowledge and the development of intellectual skills following Bloom, 1956. "At ACS (Primary)," the school literature reads, "our focus is to build the intellectual capacity of the pupils through a forward-looking, broad-based, and learner-centered curriculum which strives to develop every child to his full potential."

To develop the child's cognitive domain, the school has adopted key focus areas namely: Curriculum Differentiation, Information and Communications Technology, Experiential Education, Creativity Tools, Subject-Based Pedagogies and also seeks to infuse values in the curriculum, where these are meaningful. In addition, the school strives to create a conducive learning environment that promotes creative and critical thinking. "We also believe," the literature continues, "that a vibrant arts education will enhance the cognitive development of the child. A comprehensive arts education can contribute to the cognitive development of the pupils by providing them with opportunities in the classroom to develop decision-making skills, conceptual ability, problem solving, and critical thinking skills."



For the development of the child in the **Social domain**, emphasis is on encouraging a strong ethos of care, social responsibility and a heart of service that ultimately will result in the pupil becoming a Community Collaborator. Green initiatives and opportunities are created for pupils to develop social responsibility. Social skills encouraged include being a leader and team player who is cooperative and an active member of society who learns empathy and conflict-resolution skills. The programs that support the development of the social domain are the:

- 1) Leadership Development Program
- 2) 6-Year Life skills Program
- 3) Values in Action (VIA) Program
- 4) Citizenship Program

The **domain of physical development** refers to the development of physical skills, known as motor skills, which give children the ability to make purposeful movements and learn the physical characteristics of self and the environment. The focus is on all-round physical development, physical well-being, and a passion for sports, arts-related and other physical activities.

Innovations in SEN teaching

Working with fellow teachers to conceptualize and develop a mass reading program, Angeline was instrumental in setting up the Reading Warriors Programme (RWP). “The program,” she explains “provides timely interventions with a tiered system of literacy support for lower primary students who face difficulties in reading.” Since 2009, many parent volunteers have signed on to be reading coaches assisting teachers after hours, including one-on-one coaching for lower primary students. “This has helped improve literacy scores and develop the reading habit,” she says with a great deal of satisfaction.

In another project to draw attention and to promote a greater awareness and understanding of children with SEN, Angeline and her fellow teachers created the Annual Purple Parade Awareness Carnival with the theme “Embracing Differences.” Purple was chosen to brand the annual festival as one of involvement, participation, and solidarity for the special needs community. Angeline explained further, “The festival implements a series of engaging activities for all students including assembly talks and game booths.” Students are among those who speak at these assembly talks and the game booths brings in a sense of fun to an otherwise serious topic.

Continuous learning

Despite being head of her department and SEN program in her school, Angeline takes time to learn more. She continues to upgrade herself professionally, pursuing an Advanced Diploma in Special Learning and Behavioral Needs at the National Institute of Education in Singapore.

“It’s important,” she says emphatically, “to provide a conducive and inclusive learning environment which meets students’ emotional needs, well-being, and learning.” This, however, she says cannot do alone. For this, she has received the support of her school leaders, colleagues, and parents. Through the collective effort of her peers at the school, she set up a Professional Learning Community (PLC). This PLC promotes collaboration among teachers to learn together different SEN instructional strategies for teaching, learning, and facilitating the exchange of learning experiences.

“I am determined to help my students with SEN succeed,” Angeline Chan Xiuwen avers. “No student should be left behind. For students with SEN, who have difficulties in reading and writing, we must patiently assist them until they are able to make good progress at their own pace. In this way, a teacher can touch the life of a child and build the child’s character.”



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Orton-Gillingham International

<https://www.ortongillinghaminternational.org>

Anglo-Chinese School (Primary)

<https://www.acspri.moe.edu.sg>

UNDERSTAND YOUR CHILD'S SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Ministry of Education, Singapore

Learn more about your child's special educational needs through a professional assessment. You may also get additional support from social service agencies for specific conditions.

What are special educational needs?

A child entering Primary 1 may have special educational needs if they find it difficult to:

- Write their name.
- Follow a simple story when it is read aloud to them.
- Communicate with others.
- Make friends.
- Access learning in school due to hearing, visual or physical impairments.

Consider a professional assessment.

If you suspect your child is facing one or more of these challenges, an assessment by a qualified professional is the best way to get a clear diagnosis and recommendation for support.

An assessment is necessary if you intend to apply to a special education school.

Early intervention

Early intervention is specialised support given to young children to aid their development during the most critical stage of development, from 0 to 6 years of a child's life.

Early intervention programmes can help your child:

- Develop skills to overcome some developmental delays.
- Improve physical, emotional, social, and cognitive skills.
- Minimise the development of secondary disabilities, such as mental health problems.

Supporting your child: A parent's guide for young children who need early intervention.

If you have a preschool-aged child with developmental needs, this guide developed by a multi-agency workgroup that includes the Ministry of Education, and led by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) and the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) aims to empower and support you to:

- Understand your child's development.
- Access early intervention (EI) support.
- Support your child's transition from EI to school-aged provisions.
- Access resources to support yourself and your family.

Special Education (SPED) Curriculum Framework

Introduced in 2012, the SPED Curriculum Framework of Living, Learning and Working in the 21st century sets a common direction for excellence in teaching and learning while providing flexibility and space for SPED schools to customise their curriculum to meet the unique needs of their diverse student profiles.

The framework articulates the vision of 'Active in the community, Valued in the society' for special education, and the education outcomes of 'living, learning and working'. The seven core learning domains are:

- Communication and Language
- Numeracy
- Daily Living Skills
- Social-Emotional Learning
- Physical Education
- Arts
- Vocational Education

The framework also affirms the importance of Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) as the foundation for a values-based special education, and the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as an enabler for teaching and learning.

Types of curricula

There are 2 types of curricula that children with moderate to severe special educational needs can take:

- Customized
- National

Customized curriculum

Special education schools generally offer customized curriculum aimed at providing a child-centered, holistic learning experience for children with special needs.

The curriculum is intended to develop students' potential and equip them with essential knowledge and life skills through key learning areas in as mentioned in the SPED Curriculum Framework.

National curriculum

Children with special needs can take the national curriculum at selected SPED schools if they have been assessed to have:

- Adequate cognitive skills, such as reasoning, working and long-term memory, to learn the national curriculum.
- Adaptive skills, such as communication, social skills, that require additional specialized support.

To better meet their additional needs, these children will also receive support in practical skills such as daily living skills and social-emotional skills.

After successfully completing the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE), your child can choose to study in a mainstream secondary school. The choice of secondary school will depend on your child's PSLE results.

Children with autism spectrum disorder can choose to take the national secondary curriculum at Pathlight School or St. Andrew's Mission School. Some children's needs may be best supported in designated secondary schools.

Reference: Ministry of Education, Singapore

<https://www.moe.gov.sg/special-educational-needs/>

THAILAND

SUTHEP TENGPRAKIT

PMCA 2019

Story written by Sitthikorn Sumalee, Kasetsart University

Life Skills, Literacy and the Sufficiency Economy

“Education is the key to peace and development.”

“A teacher can truly reach out to the community and make a difference,” said Mr. Suthep Tengprakit as he explained his reason for choosing to be a teacher. He was born in an isolated part of the country where it was not safe to go about on one’s own. In his early schooling years, Suthep had a teacher who was helping the community beyond just teaching. This teacher was settling issues within the community and caring for the villagers beyond the school. When a villager got sick, the teacher responded to their initial symptoms and traveled to the city to buy the required medicines. When villagers had difficulties related to property or construction concerns that could be a source of conflict, this teacher would help them with counsel and suggestions. “This teacher seemed to be able to reach out to all members of the community,” he said, “while others did not. Considering the situation, I was determined to follow my teacher’s footsteps to help build up my community.”



Early in his teaching career, there arose an opportunity for him to lead an educational activity for students of Bann Klong Nam Sai School, located in a remote area of the deep south of Thailand near the Malaysian border. It was during this experience that he was struck by the remarkably innocent children of this community. “I was inspired by this encounter,” he said, “and I resolved to provide them with greater opportunities and access to quality education.” As a result, he made the decision to ask for a transfer to Bann Klong Nam Sai School, motivated by the desire to make a positive impact on the students of this community and enhance their overall quality of life.

In his new setting, Mr. Suthep moved away from the traditional classroom in order to better address his students’ literacy and learning needs. “Under the current traditional approaches,” he said, “teaching reading and writing did not address the problem of remote students’ illiteracy. Consequently, I desired as a teacher to address these concerns more directly.”

Development as a teacher

Mr. Suthep graduated with a Bachelor of Education degree in Early Childhood Education. He later studied for a Master of Education in Educational Administration from Yala Rajabhat University. In December 1992, he was assigned his first government teaching position at Lubokpanyang School. The school is located in Lubokpanyang Village, Kabang District, Yala Province, the southernmost province of Thailand. There, 99% of the people in the community are Muslims.

Eight years later in March of 2000, he was transferred to his current school, Ban Khlong Nam Sai School in Kabang District, Yala Province, as an instructor. There, Suthep had his first experience teaching children of ethnic minorities living near the southern border area of Thailand next to neighboring Malaysia. The community he was assigned to was different from him in language, culture, and religion. They were not Thai speakers (though they were Thai citizens) and were practicing Muslims, not Buddhists. This was a major challenge for Suthep to overcome.

“My first teachers were my parents,” Mr. Suthep mentioned as he reflected on his pivot to becoming a teacher. His family was not wealthy, but his parents had always guided him to be a good child and taught him to be independent and self-reliant. This, however, was quite different in the community where he was teaching. Most of the children were without parental guidance, supervision or training, resulting in a lack of guidance on practical skills they would need for their future lives. He was aware of the problem and hoped to help parents guide their children so they would grow into responsible adults. “I am truly happy that many of my graduates can work and provide for their families now,” he said with pride in his voice. “It is the highest expectation a teacher can have and the best way they can contribute to the development of their community.”

Mr. Suthep’s school is located in the heart of a vibrant Muslim community. Because of this, he became fluent in the local dialect of *Bahasa Malayu Yawee*. This has enabled him to effectively bridge the gap between the Muslims and Thais, uniting them there into a cohesive community. He participates in various community-based activities to better the overall quality of life for those residing within the locality. One such engagement was the raising of funds to construct a community water supply system, one of the sustainable development goals (SDG 6: Ensure access to water and sanitation).



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Promoting life skills

“Learning is enhancing student’s experiences in reading, writing, studying, calculating, and career skills since these are fundamental components of life and development,” says Suthep with conviction. “If the students are happy, it is good learning. So, how do we work with our students to develop their learning skills for life? Developing life skills are essential for everyday life and can be used to improve society. If the learners lack knowledge and skills or have not learned new things, they will struggle in a rapidly changing world.”

To help him reach out to his remote community, Suthep set up a Learning Resource Center centered on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) of His Majesty, the late King Bhumibol (Rama IX). “The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy,” explained Suthep, “can contribute towards enhancing the quality of life for our students.” Under his guidance, he equipped them with vocational skills in carpentry, electricity training, sewing, hairdressing, mushroom growing, rubber planting, raising hens for eggs, and other agricultural skills. The promotion of local wisdom is also important. To further advance environmental sustainability, Suthep initiated several activities with conservation in mind such as energy-saving activities in school, growing vetiver grass to protect soil erosion, and cultivating bamboo to produce household products.



Sufficiency economy as advocated by His Royal Highness, King Bhumibul Adulyadej (Rama IX).

The philosophy called, “Sufficiency Economy” or “The Middle Path” was designed to help the kingdom advance, while retaining its tradition values. Sufficiency economy can also serve as a guide for individuals, firm, and families.

Principles of the Sufficiency Economy

Sufficiency economy is based on three principles that can guide any economic transaction. These principles are;

1. **Moderation.** His Majesty understood that most financial troubles are avoidable by living within one’s means. A good way to apply this is to avoid debt and buy items that you can afford. This quote from the King provides excellent advice we should all take to heart:

“Being moderate does not mean being too strictly frugal; consumption of luxury items is permitted... however, should be moderate according to one’s means,”
(Royal Speech, given at Dusit Palace, 4 December 1998).

2. **Reasonableness.** All choices made should be justified by ethics, law, justice, and social norms. For example, a person should not offend his or her neighbors by driving a car that is far more expensive than theirs. It also means you should obey the law and treat others with compassion and justice. One example of reasonableness is willing to pay taxes to support the nation.

3. **Self-immunity.** This concept is also known as resilience. It means developing the strength and resources to survive.

<https://www.krunssri.com/th/plearn-plearn/king-bhumibul-philosophy-of-sufficiency-economy>

“Ban Klong Nam Sai School is an opportunity expansion school for kindergarten to grade nine,” stated Suthep. “I get my students to design their own lunch preparation utilizing plants around the school. When kindergarteners start planting, they develop their motor skills. Primary students develop their critical thinking skills through various learning activities such as learning how to process agricultural products such as preserved and freeze-dried vegetables. Our Thai and ethnic students get to learn the new theory of agricultural concepts along with the Thai language through farming activities.”

The Sufficiency Economy

“Economic development must be done step by step. It should begin with the strengthening of our economic foundation, by assuring that the majority of our population has enough to live on...Once reasonable progress has been achieved, we should then embark on the next steps, by pursuing more advanced levels of economic development.”

~ ~ ~

“Being a tiger is not important. The important thing is for us to have a sufficient economy. A sufficient economy means to have enough to support ourselves...we have to take a careful step backward...each village or district must be relatively self-sufficient.”

~ His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej

Closely observing learners' development is important to determine how effectively students are learning. Authentic assessment is used to help analyze learning and how learners are taking to their lesson and their actual practice. "The teacher should avoid adopting only tests or exams because practical knowledge cannot be measured or evaluated through this method alone," expressed Mr. Suthep.

The community environment

"Ban Klong Nam Sai is a community of former political refugees who had invaded the national forest to cultivate their crops using shifting cultivation," Mr. Suthep explained.

"All the refugees are Muslim, uneducated, and possibly misled," he continued. "They were misled into joining the *Barisan Revolusi Nasional Melayu Patani* (BRN), an insurgency group. They were living in the forest as armed forces against the government to cause commotion and trouble in the south. When these people had children, they sent them to their parents in the community. Since they were viewed as rebels fleeing into the forest, the child had no rights as a Thai citizen." To correct this problem and give these children their rights, Mr. Suthep began authenticating their status in the community. Over a hundred children were granted full citizenship rights, enabling them to enroll in school.



Learning and teaching innovations

The Ban Klong Nam Sai School is a mid-sized school with 32 teachers. Over the years, the pattern has been for some teachers to ask for transfers to a better school in the city after four or five years. Some teachers, however, have been in the school for 15 to 17 years, including Mr. Suthep, who has been working there for twenty years. “All teachers have cooperated with the commitment of students and school development in all aspects, hoping to create a better quality of life for them,” he stated.

“The global evidence, and now evidence from Thailand, show that children learn best when they learn in their mother tongue in the early years,” Mr. Suthep believes. “This strong learning foundation provides children with the bridging skills to master the national language and other subject areas.” Thailand now needs to further integrate mother tongue-based education into national education policies and expand its use with non-Thai speaking communities across Thailand, to reduce education disparities and improve learning outcomes for all children (UNICEF, 2018).



To address the illiteracy of many in the ethnic minority community he is serving, Mr. Suthep developed learning and teaching innovations using mother tongue instruction since Thai is not their first language. He started by collaborating with the parents gaining their confidence and trust in teaching their children Thai, which was not their first language.

He would start by listening and speaking to them before moving on to reading and writing. At home, the parents would use their own textbooks that they had when they were young to help teach their children who were speaking *Bahasa Melayu Patani* as their first language.

“For a teacher to teach effectively,” says Mr. Suthep, “good listening and speaking skills are required for students who study Thai as a second language. The teacher should consider how language is learned in the first language. This then applied to Thai language development. Students can then concentrate on actual practice.” The whole language approach sees language as a whole entity where writing, speaking, reading, and listening should be integrated when learned. On the whole, learning language is built upon the real experiences and background of the learner.¹

Mr. Suthep continued, “students will be able to learn words and sentences, speak and listen quickly, and pronounce words correctly. Moreover, the teacher should integrate teaching techniques into relevant lessons to meet the needs of community members. For instance, linking Thai words from prior lessons to new words utilized from general contexts bringing into the classroom community culture and local conditions.”

“When students can listen and speak, they then need to practice Thai reading and writing through the exercises I have developed from the simple to the most complex,” he explained of his thought process. “Students practice until they are fluent, starting with an easy task, such as writing the Thai alphabet, then moving on to vowels, tones, sentence formation, spacing, and reading paragraphs.”

Adjusting to the pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Thai, Math, Science, and English teachers created home exercises, knowledge sheets, worksheets, and training sets for students following the Ministry of Education policy. Teachers focused on on-hand learning producing documents, worksheets, exercises, manuals, and activity packs to teach students at home. By making it easy to understand along with a guide for students and parents on what to do, the school delivered these various documents to students at home. On-hand learning was centered on home assignments given to students with other

¹ <https://files.eric.ed.gov>

methods relevant to the community context when students were unable to access the online materials. For online assignments, the Ban Klong Nam Sai Community provided an internet area for the local youth and adults to access learning materials. “I would assist the parents if they needed advice or help on their children’s academic needs through a Line group chat which I set up,” Mr. Suthep said.

Besides his Thai language learning intervention, Mr. Suthep also improved the school learning environment making changes in the physical layout in the small farms, the mounds within and around farms, the swampy areas near farms, and the clearing of canals. Through the concept of the Sufficiency Economy, he developed these areas applying His Majesty King Bhumibol’s philosophy to improve the problem of rubber plantation restrictions. As a result, 4800 square meters of the school’s land was converted for durian and rambutan growing, rice farming, and fish farming for the community.

Other innovations were in IT technology and school management systems. School improvements included an ethical and moral room, prayer rooms, a training room, a creation room, a library, a sports area, and toilets for the children. Environmental education and management became an important subject for students. The learning areas and facilities are provided for teachers, students, local citizens, and the community to participate in activities together. One detail to note: There is no teachers’ room since teachers are always in the learning areas.

“I have been committed to supporting the community and students in knowledge and life skills since 1992 and I strongly hope that the students will be able to utilize and apply this knowledge and the skills learned in their future lives,” reflects Mr. Suthep with pride.

Education is the key to peace and development, as can be seen from Mr. Suthep’s success in developing children and youth in the community for a better quality of life. Starting from the first factor, which is the importance of mother tongue instruction for early reading and literacy as a bridge to the national language that progressively becomes the primary language of instruction, the next factor is peace education – how a Buddhist Thai teacher can assimilate himself into a Muslim ethnic minority culture to become an active member of this community. This has made Suthep Tengkrapit an effective teacher who is trusted and listened to all.



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MOTHER TONGUE-BASED EDUCATION HELPS ETHNIC CHILDREN LEARN

UNICEF and Mahidol University, Thailand

Children whose mother tongue is not Thai do better in school, including improved Thai literacy skills, when they participate in mother tongue-based multilingual education, says a new report released by UNICEF and Mahidol University on the eve of International Literacy Day 2018.

Thailand now needs to further integrate mother tongue-based education into national education policies and expand its use with non-Thai speaking communities across Thailand, to reduce education disparities and improve learning outcomes for all children.

The report, titled “*Bridge to a Brighter Tomorrow: The Patani Malay-Thai Multilingual Education Programme*,” presents evidence from a pilot programme implemented in the far south of Thailand, showing how the mother tongue-based education approach

has transformed literacy and learning for children whose mother tongue is not Thai. The programme focuses on mother tongue-based instruction in the early grades, as a bridge to the national language progressively becoming the primary language of instruction.

In Thailand, children who do not speak Thai as their mother tongue face difficulties in learning effectively, the report notes. On average, they are more likely than the general population of children to be excluded from school; they do poorly in national exams and are more likely to drop out of school.

“Children whose mother tongue is not Thai clearly need special attention and a very specific approach to help them learn more effectively,” said Thomas Davin, UNICEF Thailand Representative at a forum organized at the Ministry of Education in Bangkok.

“The global evidence, and now evidence from Thailand, show that children learn best when they learn in their mother tongue in the early years. This strong learning foundation provides children with the bridging skills to master the national language and other subject areas.” Davin added.

While Thailand has made great strides in education, achieving near 100 percent of primary school enrollment and a 98 per cent youth literacy rate, about 1 in 3 youth aged 15-24 from non-Thai speaking households are illiterate in Thai, according to a national survey on the situation of children and women in Thailand, conducted by the National Statistical Office with support from UNICEF in 2015-2016.

UNICEF partnered with Mahidol University’s Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia (RILCA) and Thailand Research Fund to develop, to run and measure the results of a pilot programme in schools in Thailand’s far south, where Patani Malay-speaking children have, for decades, been among the lowest achieving students in the country.

The report presents the “why” and the “how” of the programme, its results, and the implications for education policy in Thailand. It is designed to be used by

Education policy makers to integrate mother tongue-based education into national education policies.

Professor Banchong Mahaisavariya, President of Mahidol University, said that the programme underwent several evaluations and tracked students' performance, demonstrating that children quickly developed better Thai language skills and improved learning across other subjects. The programme also gained strong support from parents and local communities, and has won national and international awards, including the UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize in 2016.

"I call on all stakeholders to take the steps needed to expand this innovation to other primary schools in the far south and to extend the mother tongue-based approach to other parts of Thailand as necessary, to help build a bridge to a brighter future for many more children." Professor Banchong said.

Associate Professor Sophon Napatorn, Assistant to the Minister of Education, said that as Thailand pursues education reform, policy makers need to have access to evidence of "what works" as well as tools to effect change so that all children in Thailand are included and learning.

"This programme can be a good model to guide education planning for Thailand 4.0," said Associate Professor Sophon. "It can help address inequities in the education system, reducing the gap between students in big cities and rural areas."

Leading Thai academics also joined the forum, including Professor Emeritus Dr. Charas Suwanwela, Independent Education Reform Committee Chairperson and Dr. Krissanapong Kiratikara, National Committee on Human Development and Empowerment Strategies Chairperson. They both highlighted the importance of literacy skills as the foundation for learning and human development, that will underpin Thailand's future development.

Reference: UNICEF

<https://www.unicef.org/thailand/press-releases/mother-tongue-based-education-provides-ethnic-children-fair-chance-learn>

TIMOR-LESTE

LURDES RANGEL GONCALVES

PMCA 2019

Story written by Juan Miguel Luz

The Child-Friendly School Champion

“My most important goal is organizing my school to become a place that is safe and calm for the students.”

The early morning chatter in the classroom came to a halt when Mrs. Lurdes Rangel Goncalves got the class to stand for the morning exercise-greeting. Soon the Grade 5 class was singing in unison, dancing to the beat, greeting each other. “Learning cannot be done passively. It must be done actively,” says Lurdes – Mama Lu to the dozens of students in this school in Matata, Timor-Leste which she and her husband built over two decades ago. “You gain knowledge from experience. Learning does not begin with attending school. Rather, learning begins from birth by discovering the world around you. We learn as teachers as well. Learning is not about what is good or bad; it is about what we experience.”



Matata is a small rural community high in the mountains of Timor-Leste some fourteen miles northeast of the capital of Dili. Like most of the country, its inhabitants are poor farmers working the soil. Their main commodities for the domestic and international markets are coffee, rice, corn, beans, carrots, cassava, cinnamon, cloves, and other such crops. Organic horticulture is an important industry in this, the youngest of Southeast Asian states.

The journey to becoming a teacher

Lurdes' formal teaching experience started in 2000, the year Timor-Leste gained its independence after years of fighting what the country called the War of Liberation against Indonesia. Today, the two countries live in peace but back then, Timor-Leste struggled as most of its professional human resources that were provided by the Indonesian state including teachers, health workers, and police officers were withdrawn. For the first three years of its existence (October 1999 to May 2002), Timor-Leste was administered as a United Nations protectorate to give it time to build its necessary human resource infrastructure.

“I wanted to be a teacher since I was young,” she said, “because of my teachers. They motivated me to become a teacher because of the way they taught us in an entertaining way and nurtured students.” She was enrolled in primary school in Ermera district before continuing her junior high school in a Catholic school in the same district. After graduation from junior high, she moved to another district for her senior secondary schooling.

Lurdes had just completed her studies when violence erupted throughout the country putting all education on hold. After the war, her teaching career began as a volunteer. There were no schools at that time. Many, if not most, were destroyed and the country was in shambles. Most of the trained teachers under the Indonesian government had left the country. There was no curriculum, no textbooks, or any teaching guides. Teaching activities took place wherever there was space – in chapels, in sheds, under trees, even out in the open. Teachers' activities were limited to storytelling, singing, and playing fun math to motivate students and spark their interest in learning. “It seemed that we were all starting from zero,” Lurdes recalled.

Those who were trained in the teaching profession (as well as many who were not) were called to help resurrect the education system in their respective villages. Lurdes and her husband, Manuel, went one step further and donated their land to the government to build a school for their community. This is now the Matata Primary Filial School for children from kindergarten to Grade 6. Both Lurdes and Manuel have been teachers in that school since its founding and opening, now over 20 years ago.

Ten years after their school was founded, Lurdes went back to school to earn a Bachelor Degree in Education.

Lurdes, the teacher

On top of being a primary school teacher,¹ Lurdes is a normal school teacher designated by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Timor-Leste to serve in critical jobs such as teacher supervisor, primary school curriculum developer, and trainer for curriculum implementation. In the school she co-founded, she is a teacher as well as the teachers' facilitator (trainer of teachers).

As a volunteer teacher at the start of her career, she had a tough time at first coping with the additional teacher training since she had to travel back and forth from the rural area to the city to attend teacher training provided by UNICEF and UNFPA. But she persevered. After completing the course, she became a trainer for her colleagues and was involved in many of the activities related to teaching. "It made me realize that we needed some changes in the country," she said. "I especially wanted to see some changes in our own community."

"There was no facility for education in our rural hometown," Lurdes continued, "because I am a mother of five children, I wanted my children to study in school to become intellectual and ethical human beings. That is why Manuel, my husband, and I considered donating our property to build a school."

¹ Normal schools are teacher education institutions; hence, a normal school teacher is one who teaches prospective teachers in a normal school.

In the beginning, she and Manuel gathered teachers who had teaching experience to start the school with them. Years later, “their school” was recognized by the government. It was then that she and her husband donated their land to the Ministry of Education to build a proper school.

In the school’s early days, it functioned as a traditional school where teachers were disciplinarians and students were expected to behave. “That was what we learned in our training, and it is what we were taught as the right way to educate a child,” Lurdes explained. “We were wrong, and we needed to learn better ways of teaching.”



The Matata Filial School is a public school offering free education to the students. The majority of Lurdes’ students are from her community, but there are others from nearby communities or from other areas that are farther away from the school. Most of the students’ parents are farmers with some of them being teachers in the school. Since her school has gained a good reputation as a quality school, many students from various locations are attracted to it though not all can be admitted because of overcrowding.

The school has a regular activity that promotes academic success. On weekends, reinforcement classes are held so students can keep abreast with their lessons. This is also a learning activity for the brighter students to share their knowledge and help tutor the weaker students. Sometimes, parents are also involved in the activity to assist kids who might be falling behind in class. The end results: Children in Grade 1 are better

able to read early and the Grade 6 graduation rate and entry into junior high school is among the highest in the country.

“There are, however, some of students in her classroom who are not so eager and motivated to learn,” observed Lurdes. “They only attend the class for entertainment. This is one of the issues I want to address and change.” To encourage students to attend the school, she provides them with the freedom to help plan what they feel is important to learn. The most challenging thing for her is when the students do not understand what she teaches. “I examine my mistakes through self-reflection. I really want my students to understand what I teach in the class. The reinforcement classes hopefully provide a solution to this problem.”

As a teacher in the school, Lurdes has developed a good relationship with her fellow teachers which helps to create a positive learning atmosphere for the students. All the teachers in the school normally have meetings every week, every month, and every semester to discuss and share their teaching strategies and challenges. “It helps improve teacher-teacher relationships in the school,” she smiles.

The child-friendly schools framework

Through the efforts of Lurdes, the Matata Filial School has become a Child-Friendly School subscribing to the UNICEF framework. This framework was developed collaboratively using field work from 155 countries. The model, developed in 2003 through 2006, focuses on child-centered and inclusive education. Lurdes learned of the model through her interactions with UNICEF immediately changing her teaching style completely. She shared these new teaching techniques in her school and was soon called up to become one of the national trainers for the Ministry’s Child-Friendly Schools program. From that engagement, she was chosen to become one of the teacher representatives on the Curriculum Revision Team for Tetun literacy for grades 1 – 6.

Tetun is one of the two official languages of Timor-Leste, and the one most widely spoken in the country. The other official language is Portuguese. Bahasa is also spoken by a sizeable portion of the population.

Child-friendly schools (UNICEF)

Some innovations that have helped make schools more inclusive. (Chapter 2.3)

(a) Local school mapping and community monitoring systems to help track enrolment and identify children who are out of school.

(b) Satellite schools that ensure younger children in remote communities can go to school close to home until they are old enough to attend existing primary schools farther away.

(c) Community schools that provide education opportunities for children who do not have access to the existing standard schools.

(d) Mother tongue instruction in the early grades and multilingual/ multicultural education designed to make the transition of very young children to formal education easier.

(e) Non-formal education programmes that are equivalent to the formal system but have flexible schedules to cater to the learning needs of children engaged in daily or seasonal income-generating activities (working children).

(f) Special efforts to combat exclusion and stigmatization of children affected by HIV and AIDS.

(g) Safe spaces to facilitate children's right to education in emergency situations.

(h) Promoting birth registration and strengthening community-based early learning opportunities that help meet the legal requirements for enrolment and better prepare children from disadvantaged populations for schooling (school readiness).

(i) Building partnerships through a mix of education and non-education partners who can promote the principle of inclusion.

Reference

Child-Friendly Schools Manual, UNICEF, March 2009

Lurdes' teaching philosophy and style

“There are three main methods I use to make sure that students are learning,” says Lurdes. “These are group discussion, doing presentations, and self-evaluation after everything is done.” When she assigns tasks to students and explains the directions clearly, she lets students go off in groups to discuss and explore different ideas from their friends. “I let them cooperate on to drawing conclusions. In this way, they will learn how to respect each other and have freedom to give ideas during the group discussion.”

During each presentation, she evaluates students' roles in presentation and group discussions. She can assess the students' knowledge and understanding from the assignment. In the past, she would separate students into three types: the ones who can do all the assignments, the ones who can do some assignments, and the ones who cannot do the assignment at all. For the students who cannot do the assignments, the means she has used to motivate them is to give them more opportunities to learn. “I let them make mistakes. This is a part of the learning process. Then I give them more time to complete the task. Self-evaluation helps students learn from other students not only from the teacher.”



As she focusses on developing her students, she is aware that there are about forty students in the classroom, all having different characters and abilities. Here, she separates the students into four groups by mixing the characteristics of students per group. “In this way,” Lurdes says, “I believe that students can turn themselves into the desirable characteristics learned or picked up from their classmates. The ones I want them to develop.” Moreover, as a teacher, she makes the classroom atmosphere pleasant as evidenced by the brightly decorated classrooms.

Innovations in education management

Most of the teaching strategies Lurdes applies in the classroom are in accordance with the standards established in the national curriculum which puts an emphasis on students and gives them freedom to learn. “I try to motivate and engage students in active learning such as collecting data through interviews and analyzing data,” she says. To this end, she creates lively and interesting lessons for her students to prevent boredom in her classes. The three main methods she mentioned earlier can help make her lessons more innovative, attractive, and dynamic.

For five months in 2020, Lurdes’ school was closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. After five months, the school resumed with health guidelines from the Ministry of Health. When students returned to school, she noticed that they had less confidence in expressing themselves in class. Some of them were afraid to come back to the school because of the fear of getting infected by the latest Covid strain.

Learning loss occurred. “Teachers had to reteach everything again because students had forgotten lessons, they had previously covered,” said Lurdes ruefully. “They had forgotten what they have learned.” The Ministry of Education tried to offer solutions by utilizing online education. Unfortunately, many of her students, if not all, did not have the chance to watch the lessons on the TV provided by the MOE.

One advantage of covid-19 was that she got opportunities to learn and use modern technology, such as smartphones, video recording, and online conference applications (Microsoft Teams, Line, Zoom). These, however, were mostly for her and her fellow teachers. After students returned to the school, the school committee and administration attempted to resolve the issue of learning loss. “It took a while to adjust to face-to-face learning again. We have had to restart the classroom discipline and encourage and motivate students to return to class.”

The future of learning in Timor-Leste

“The most important skill that young students need is the ability to read,” stressed Lurdes. “Our school, EBF Matata, stands out not only for its clean and organized appearance and lively, respectful atmosphere, but also because all children can read by the end of first grade.” To help children who are at risk of falling behind,

tutoring sessions are arranged with them one-on-one to ensure that all students develop early grade literacy. “We make sure that all our teachers (in Matata and in neighboring schools) can effectively help all children learn, regardless of their background, language, or special educational needs.”

“I have three overall objectives as a teacher,” Lurdes recites as her mantra. “First, I want all students to achieve success through science. Second, I am committed to making a transformation in their lives especially through their behavior. Third, I want children to be aware of how to take care of their own health.”

“My most important goal,” she continues, “is organizing my school to become a place that is safe and calm for the students. My role is not only as a teacher, but also as a counsellor to all children who need a sympathetic ear.”

Strengthening communities for a stronger school system²

With assistance from UNICEF, the MOE has taken steps to set up a teacher peer learning program as part of a comprehensive program of school capacity development designed with reference to the principles of *Eskola Foun* — the child friendly school approach – that improves access to quality primary and pre-secondary education across Timor-Leste.

This teacher peer exchange program recognizes that while significant progress has been made with the development of strong national education policies; it is at the local level where changes to education are realized. By building the capacity of schoolteachers and leaders, and encouraging greater participation from communities, this program of school development builds on the child centered *Eskola Foun* approach to promote safe, healthy, and inclusive school environments in which students can reach their full potential. Lurdes has become a national leader mentor in this program.

Schools under the Child-Friendly *Escola Foun* have seen a small revolution in community management and managing student discipline in schools. In the past, community members used physical violence to keep their children in line. After witnessing more non-violent ways of discipline used by the school, community members are now more creative and restorative in their disciplinary practices.

² From UNICEF, 2018.

“It is hoped that in the near future,” Lurdes Rangel Goncalves said in a talk she gave to other teachers, “our schools will become models for other schools offering a crucial opportunity for Timor-Leste’s schools to work together, learn from one another, and have a significant, positive impact on our students’ lives.”



Interview with Mrs. Lurdes Rangel Goncalves, October 2022

The 3rd Princess Maha Chakri Award Forum, 2020

UNICEF, 2018. Education through teacher peer learning in Timor-Leste | UNICEF Timor-Leste

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES FOR A STRONGER SCHOOL SYSTEM

UNICEF (excerpts)

Education is a constitutional right in Timor-Leste. But in a country still rebuilding its education system, getting children into classrooms is only half the story. Now, see how the Ministry of Education with UNICEF’s support is strengthening teachers and leaders and communities for a stronger school system for all.

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Designed to build on the strong legislative and policy steps taken in recent years by the Ministry of Education, this teacher peer learning session is one small part of a comprehensive programme of school capacity development designed with

reference to the principles of Eskola Foun—the child friendly school approach that improved access to and quality of primary and pre-secondary education across Timor-Leste.

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This teacher peer exchange recognises that while significant progress has been made with the development of strong national education policies in Timor-Leste, it is at the local level where changes to education is truly realised. By building the capacity of schoolteachers and leaders – principals and their deputies - and encouraging greater participation from communities, this programme of school development builds on the child-centred Eskola Foun approach to promote safe, healthy, and inclusive school environments in which students can reach their full potential.

The exchange also facilitates public-private schools cross learning, something that is not yet established in the country. In 2018, the Ministry of Education and UNICEF published the “Documentation of Good Practices and Lessons Learned in Church-run, Private and Public Schools” report to provide more insights into Timor-Leste schooling system. The exchange visits among schools held in October allowed for teachers and school leaders to see for themselves these good practices.

Teachers learning to improve their own classrooms

Teachers from Caitehu Filial School, Casait Basic Education Central School, and Matata Filial School spent the morning asking questions of teachers, students, and school leaders of EPS Cannossa – learning new ideas and approaches for classroom and school management and sharing experiences of their own.

School exchange visits like the visit to EPS Cannossa are part of a holistic programme designed to strengthen core aspects of a child’s learning environment—improving school governance and management, encouraging deeper community and parent participation, building teachers’ and school leaders’ skills, and ensuring the school environment is safe, healthy, protective, and inclusive for all learners.

Model schools for the future

Between June and December 2018 teacher training and governance training will be conducted in five basic schools in Ainaro and Ermera municipalities, with the aim of reaching teachers and school leaders in 17 basic education schools in four of Timor-Leste's 13 municipalities.

To complement the peer exchange, teachers from 35 basic education schools in Ermera, Ainaro and Liquica Municipalities were trained between June to December 2018 on school management, improving teaching-learning in line with the curriculum, including creating a nurturing learning environment, and engagement of parents and families. The 182 teachers who received the training will serve as peer mentors for other public schools in their municipalities.

It is hoped that in the near future, these 35 schools will become models for other schools offering a crucial opportunity for Timor-Leste's schools to work together, learn from one another, and have a significant, positive impact on students' lives.

One teacher noted that private schools have a large number of students compared to the Basic Education Filial Schools, but they somehow manage the school well and know each child and even their parents. This is an important realization for the teachers and school principals from the public schools to make the extra effort to engage parents by regularly communicating to them about their children's progress and inviting them to school activities.

Reference: UNICEF, 2018

Education through teacher peer learning in Timor-Leste | UNICEF Timor-Leste

VIETNAM

LE THANH LIEM

PMCA 2019

Story written by Chatree Faikhamta, Kasetsart University

Science to Solve Real-world Problems

“Linking my classes to community needs and situations is important for both students and the people in the community.”

Mr. Le Thanh Liem, a teacher at Him Lam Ethnic Minority Boarding School in Hau Giang Province located in the Mekong Delta in southern Vietnam, completed a bachelor's degree in information technology and pedagogical physics education in 2011. Upon graduation, he started his first job as a teacher. “I had always been interested in science as a young student,” said Mr. Liem. “At the high school level, I was particularly interested in physics learning about the laws of motion and how atoms and particles behaved.” Because of this curiosity and passion for learning, he knew he wanted to work in science. It was then that he made the decision to become a physics teacher earning his Bachelor's Degree in Physics Education.



Inspired by a middle and high school teacher, he developed a strong belief in the teaching profession. A high school physics teacher was a particular inspiration in his decision to pursue a career in teaching. “She did not only instruct us in formula memorization and problem-solving techniques,” Mr. Liem said, “but this high school physics teacher had a talent for making difficult topics simple and understandable, and who exuded a contagious excitement for the subject. This was someone he looked up to.” He wanted to spread his enthusiasm for physics and inspire his students in the same way.

“She was not only an excellent teacher, but she was also a kind friend, a giving mentor, and a good role model,” he continued. “She gave me the motivation to pursue physics education as a profession and taught me how to use the subject to further social justice and development. She effectively taught me to communicate, think critically, and ask questions. She demonstrated how physics was applied to everyday life and how it could aid in understanding and resolving global issues like poverty, inequality, and climate change.”

Reflecting on this teacher-role model, Mr. Liem said, “I learned from my teacher that teaching physics is more than simply a job or a profession; it’s a calling and a mission. In order to advance social justice and human dignity, physics can be used as a tool of service and empowerment. It involves giving up your time, effort, and resources for the sake of your students and attempting to improve their lives, even at the cost of your own.”

Mr. Liem teaches using various teaching methods, such as hands-on experiments, dynamic lectures, and interactive simulations, after remembering how his high school physics teacher made the subject enjoyable, intriguing, and compelling. Despite having taught the subject for over a decade, Mr. Liem is still constantly looking for new methods to motivate his pupils and enhance his system of instruction. He developed a reputation as a passionate and committed educator, and many of his students were motivated to pursue careers in science because of him.

Read and innovate

To keep abreast with scientific and technological breakthroughs in the world, Mr. Liem reads up and innovates on different teaching approaches for his students. Interestingly, he focuses more on an interdisciplinary science curriculum that includes

several subject areas – mathematics, physics, technology, engineering, and the social sciences. “I believe that learning basic subjects, such as chemistry and biology, in conjunction with technology, would equip me with more knowledge and enable me to integrate the content of various subjects in my teaching,” he said.

In 2018, the Government of Vietnam launched a new policy for teachers to innovate their teaching and learning in science and technology which Mr. Liem used as his guide.

In accordance with the policy, Mr. Liem invented and developed science teaching and learning material and equipment. He applied the tools he developed to teach students who then practiced using it. His innovations involved a self-developed homegrown tool that could be made from readily available, off-the-shelf materials and did not require the purchase of expensive science teaching equipment from stores. “These are obstacles which students face due to their lack of understanding of science,” he observed. “Therefore, I decided to use media or other innovations to aid student learning. What we created was not exclusive to our school but was made available to other schools, including remote schools and large schools.”



Mr. Liem also developed innovative teaching materials based on his expertise in technology. For example, he applied the Arduino program as a tool to teaching physics. Arduino is an open-source electronics platform based on easy-to-use hardware and software. Arduino boards are able to read inputs – light on a sensor, a finger on a button, or a Twitter message – and turn it into an output-activating motor, turning on an LED, publishing something online. Students can tell a board what to do by sending a set of instructions to the microcontroller on the board. The Arduino software (IDE) makes it easy to write code and upload this to an Arduino board offline. This is especially appropriate for users with poor or no internet connection.¹

¹ <https://docs.arduino.cc>

Mr. Liem believes that an integrated approach combining science with technology and society is a powerful tool for improving his students' academic performance. "Through an integrated approach," he said, "students will have a better understanding of science and will be able to use scientific experiments to develop their process skills. Students can also have a deeper understanding of physics ideas and how various topic areas are interconnected. They are more engaged and show higher-ordered thinking. Additionally, this approach aids students in understanding how science concepts are applied in real-world situations.

Context-based learning

In 2020, Mr. Liem developed an approach utilizing technology as a physics teaching tool. In addition, he melded this approach with a focus on context-based learning or on what he calls "situated learning" which helps students relate the course material studied to what they experience or see in their daily lives. "Instead of starting classes with theoretical content," he says, "I begin my lectures with everyday phenomena or situations. I encourage students to brainstorm, learn, experiment, explore, and do science activities on their own to learn the principles of science."

These learning activities help students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills identified as important skills for the 21st century, which is seen as increasingly more complex, uncertain, and ambiguous if not volatile.

Critical thinking, more specifically, is about developing certain mental abilities:

- Organizing information for analysis
- Structured reasoning
- Testing for evidence
- Subjecting assumptions to logical tests
- Building and evaluating arguments
- Communicating conclusions

Problem-solving skill can be developed by looking at two sub-components:

- Reasoning and analysis
- Interpretation of and synthesis of information

In the classroom, Mr. Liem acts more as a mentor rather than a lecturer. “I prefer to use peer-to-peer activities to enhance collaborative learning,” he says. “I provide advise only when needed to elaborate a learning or make a point.”



Although he believes that teachers should provide structure to the class, he maintains that students should be self-taught. “Therefore,” he continued, “I do not focus on telling them what is. Rather, I will advise students on science and technology topics and projects. Participating in projects can serve as a learning process for students. Projects can also be socially responsive and not be restricted within a lab. Through projects, students will have a better understanding of science and will be able to use scientific experiments to develop project skills.”

Project-based learning integrated with technology is another teaching strategy of Mr. Liem. His project-based learning approach has five key strategies:

- Project-based learning using technology
- Simulations
- Virtual labs
- Situational learning
- Collaborative learning

In order to help students better understand scientific concepts, Mr. Liem believes that good teaching should:

- Use real-world issues to inspire students to participate in project-based learning.
- Promote teamwork among students and give each member a specific responsibility to ensure that everyone participates equally.
- Offer guidance by giving a detailed project brief and outlining the criteria for the finished product.

In the science classroom, equipment and materials often suffer from breakage or breakdown. Mr. Liem fixes or develops alternatives for broken scientific measuring instruments such as thermometers, working with students on low-cost solutions replacing these with tools and materials readily available in the market. “I prefer developing cost-effective alternative on our own,” he says, “rather than wait for funds to buy new equipment.”.

Contributing to the community

Mr. Liem’s province is in the deep south in the Mekong Delta. This is a farming community. The delta is a fertile area. However, saltwater intrusion will damage farmers’ vegetable crops and orchards. Mr. Liem attempted to solve this problem by applying the concept of innovation to development with his students. He developed an automatic dam to prevent saltwater intrusion into the vegetable gardens and fruit orchards. This setup shuts off the supply of salt water from reaching the rice fields to avoid the destruction of the rice crop and the orchards. Because Vietnam is surrounded by sea, these innovations can prevent significant damage to the community. These innovations, he brought into the classroom for students to learn.



For Mr. Liem, linking his courses and classes to community needs and situations is important. His school is located in a difficult area with many socio-economic challenges. Students come from poor farming families and many of the problems can be addressed by working together closely as a community using scientific approaches. In addition, the school can provide a safe environment with an efficient boarding service to help ease the concerns of parents.

Mr. Liem developed a practical policy for the Ministry of Education in 2018 which serves as a guideline for teachers to foster innovation and development. “I believe,” he says, “that innovative solutions will make the educational system secure. I consider

the safety of students to be of paramount importance.” To this end, he allows students to participate in the creation and development of scientific tools instead of simply letting students use the tools. “In this way, the students get opportunities to learn how to develop innovative tools by themselves,” he explained.

Mr. Liem contributes significantly to the advancement of science education in different communities outside the classroom. He gives his time freely to plan science fairs, workshops, and other activities that encourage interest in science among people of all ages. He contributes to the growth of a broader public respect for science and technology by sharing his enthusiasm for science with the community. “During COVID, I installed a disinfection tool. An automatic disinfectant sprayer was placed at the entrance and exit of the hospital and toilets. The idea I developed was applied to other communities and public places. I also invited fellow science and technology teachers to help design this project and install the disinfectant sprayer tool in the hospital in my province.”

High school, in Mr. Liem’s opinion, is the ideal time in a student’s life when they start thinking about their future and what they would like to do in life, as their work and their careers. Would they want to pursue jobs in science-related fields like medicine, engineering, and research?

To encourage students in this direction, Mr. Liem initiated a student club at Him Lam Boarding School for Ethnic Minority which is called the “Scientific-Technical Research Club”. Through the Club, students are encouraged to develop ideas from their real lives and use these to make their hometown more beautiful and comfortable.

Problem-solving skills in Mr. Le Thanh Liem’s class are used in the community as opportunities for students to learn and practice science. “Students observe problems they encounter in the village such as floods which can destroy the fruit gardens of the village,” said Mr. Liem. “They then work together to solve this problem of flooding using knowledge of physics and science learned in class. By participating in the club, students can hopefully be inspired to pursue a career in science.”

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Interview of Mr. Le Thanh Liem, October 2022
PMCA Forum, October 2022

WORLD BANK: REVIEW OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND INNOVATION IN VIETNAM (excerpts)

Viet Nam's achievements and new challenges

Viet Nam's economic and social development has been impressive. High economic performance has translated into a rise in per-capita income and reduction of poverty. This has meant better lives for many.

Viet Nam is approaching a crossroads, nevertheless. GDP growth has been slowing in a less buoyant international environment. Previous sources of growth are diminishing in power, raising the threat of a “middle-income trap”. Viet Nam will have to rely more on productivity gains driven by innovation. This will require considerable improvements in domestic innovation capabilities.

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Strengthen the human resource base for innovation

Human resources are the key to innovation. A nation's innovation capacity depends crucially on the quality of education and training for scientists, technologists, and a wide range of professionals and on the inclusiveness of the education system. Viet Nam has made a substantial effort on education and skills. The results of the 2012 OECD PISA assessment of the performance of secondary students bode well.

However, there is still scope for increasing the quantity and improving the quality of human resources, particularly at the tertiary and secondary vocational levels. Funding of tertiary education has been insufficient to cope with the increase in technical and research students.

The skills supplied through formal education and training are often out of date or too theoretical and do not meet the demands of the labour market. In addition to financing constraints, the governance of higher education suffers from weaknesses in terms of information about skills needs and incentives for alignment.

The accumulation of innovation capabilities within businesses depends on the availability of specialised professionals. Broadening options for professional specialisation in upper secondary education and enhancing the standing of vocational training seem necessary.

It is also important to provide more opportunities for upgrading the skills of those already in the workforce and to improve the effectiveness of short-term training. An expansion of part-time tertiary education and other lifelong learning opportunities could help address gaps in “soft” skills.

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) could be used to encourage businesses to take greater part in the national effort on human resource development. Firms, especially SOEs and MNEs, should be encouraged to increase their training investments, to fund demand-tailored aspects of formal education and to partake in decisions over curricula and programme design.

Skills constraints in the public sector are a major constraint to the effective delivery of public functions. Meeting the government's ambitious targets to remove skills constraints in the public sector by 2020 should be a priority.

Reference: World Bank, 2019

<https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/EAP/Vietnam/Vietnam-STI-review-executive-summary.pdf>

THE ROLE OF PARENTS, HOME AND COMMUNITY IN LEARNING AND CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

A discussion paper by Juan Miguel Luz and Udomluk Koolsriroj

Introduction

Formal schooling is structured and systemic following a set of standards and delivered to students by trained teachers. To make sure formal learning is standardized and all learning institutions comply with these standards¹, formal education is governed by regulators (i.e., Ministries of Education). The elements of formal schooling include:

- Classroom-based learning
- Standard learning materials
- Trained and licensed teachers
- Standard curriculum for all students

The mass education model for education is built on schools providing a venue where children can gather and learn together under trained teachers. Teachers, specially trained for this purpose, teach students and learners based on a curriculum using teaching strategies they were trained to deliver.

Over the last three decades, however, the prevailing model has come under much review. One group that has begun to assert itself are parents who want to be more involved in their children's education. The most extreme case of this is home-schooling where parents convert their homes into their children's place of learning. But the vast majority of parents are not prepared nor equipped to do this. Hence, there are questions on the role of parents and the home in the learning process.

¹ Standard - A level of quality or attainment that is established for all participating or concerned stakeholders.

The questions

- How much of a role do parents and the home play in better learning by children outside of formal schooling?
- Where can parents and the home play a greater role in their children's learning and how?
- What home factors matter most to encourage, facilitate learning?
- What community factors affect learning? What community factors matter most to encourage learning?

A framework for school-home partnership

Professor J. Epstein et al have written a framework paper outlining the different types of involvement featuring forms of Family and School cooperation. This approach is officially known as “The approach of Six Types of Involvement for Comprehensive Partnership Programs and Sample Practices”.

When talking about the framework, Epstein and her colleagues stress that each type of involvement is a two-way partnership, and that ideally, educators and families should work together to make the partnership, not a one-way chance that a school has decided on its own.

The six categories of involvement are:

1. Parenting: Type 1 involvement occurs when family practices and home surroundings promote “children as students” and when schools understand their students’ families.

2. Communicating: Type 2 involvement happens when educators, students, and families “design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications.”

3. Volunteering: Type 3 involvement occurs when educators, students, and families “recruit and organize parent help and support” and consider parents as an audience for student activities.

4. Learning at Home: Type 4 involvement happens when families are given information, suggestions, or training on how to “help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.”

5. Decision Making: Type 5 involvement can be seen when schools “include parents in school decisions” and “develop parent leaders and representatives.”

6. Collaborating with the Community: Type 6 involvement is when community services, resources, and partners are incorporated into the educational process in order to “strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.”

The role of the home in student learning

The home environment plays a key role in supporting learning. Research shows that support from parents or guardians can have a positive impact on student performance from attendance and participation in schooling to achievement in class to relationships with other students and with teachers. This pattern holds across both developed and developing countries.

Parveen (2007), Codjoe (2007), and Muola (2010) reached the conclusion that the home environment is the most influential factor among all the mentioned factors. The home “is the first institution where a child starts to learn, and the mother is the first teacher for the baby”, while the role of peers is performed by the other members of the family.

The “home environment” is not an abstract concept. It is the combination of the physical and psychological environment for a learning child. It includes rooms, basic facilities such as water, shelter, clothes, food, and other physical needs of the child. The psychological environment of home includes the mutual interactions of family members, respect of siblings and/or parents, participation in family matters and such other things (Mukama, 2010; Muola, 2010).

Other home factors in the home environment that has a positive impact on learning includes nature of family, authority (i.e., the head of the family), educational status of parents, attitude of parents towards children, and the financial position of the family. All these factors in the home environment have a positive effect on child learning (Codjoe, 2007; Mukama, 2010; Muola, 2010).

Parents who take responsibility for children learning also resulted in increasing their kids' interest in the studies (Parveen, 2007; Moula, 2010; Bandhana & Sharma, 2012). These studies on the home environment and its relationship with students' educational performance were done in Pakistan.

The international test in Mathematics and Science for middle school children – TIMSS – did early research on the correlational relationship between resources in the home with the learning test scores. TIMSS collected information about various resources that are available in the home through a student survey of test takers. Data collected included the number of books at home, a quiet place to do schoolwork, and access to the internet and various digital devices, all of which correlated positively with higher test scores.

In research done for UNICEF on the acquisition of early reading skills, researchers found that in the countries studied, the share of children acquiring reading skills was higher in households where there is at least one book. In Bangladesh, for instance, 70 percent of children in households with at least one child-oriented book are able to read, while this is the case for only 48 percent of those living in a household without any child-oriented book. Differences were similar in Lesotho, Madagascar, Pakistan (Punjab), Sierra Leone, Tunisia, and Zimbabwe. (Brossardi et al, 2020)

A similar pattern was observed for numeracy skills but to a lesser extent. In Madagascar, 17 percent of the children who have access to at least one book acquire foundational numeracy skills, compared to only 6 per cent of those living in households without any child-oriented book.

Having someone reading books is particularly important for children in households from the poorest quintile. For example, in Punjab (Pakistan), the differences in reading skills between children to whom someone reads books at home and those without such support was significant, more so for children living in the poorest households. Among families in the poorest quintile, 29 percent of children with someone reading

books to them achieve foundational reading skills, compared to only 15 percent of children to whom nobody reads books. For children in wealthier families, differences are less marked. (Brossardi et al, 2020)

By the providing a home environment that encourages and supports learning, students are given an advantage in academic success. The opposite is likely to be true. When various factors are missing in the home environment, this is likely to have a negative impact and a low correlation with students' academic achievement.

Educational related activities can hardly be practiced or applied without relevant study material, school supplies, and other physical facilities. All these facilities and equipment are the basic needs of education. Parents that could provide the necessary means of academic success such as stationary, books, a separate study room, and homework facilities at home are more likely to see results in improvement of education-related performance. (Brossardi et al, 2020)

The role of community

The establishment of Parents' Teacher Councils or Parent-Teacher Associations in schools was also seen as an important step toward increased parent's involvement in the educational activities of children leading to improved student performance (Hussain & Naz, 2013; Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006; Davis-Kean, 2005).

In a broader scale during the pandemic and even before, community resources such as through alternative and flexible approaches using multiple channels and platforms, including online, mobile phones, TV/radio, and printed materials helped ensure a learning environment that could provide continuous learning especially in hard-to-reach, remote places where students are located (ADB, 2021). This, however, was not guaranteed to work always because of very real constraints with electricity availability and/or distance learning connectivity.

In Thailand, EEF Thailand (Equitable Education Fund), worked with rural, underserved communities during the pandemic to help keep these communities engaged in the distance education and learning of their children during the prolonged shutdown of schools. This assistance included food to communities for young children (in lieu of school feeding) during COVID-19, learning box toolkits distributed to homes, and community-based education volunteers who visited homes periodically (EEF, 2022).

Barriers to parental involvement in education

Academic performance depends heavily on parental participation. Parents' involvement in their children's education can be hindered by several factors.

Based on a small-scale study conducted by Hornby and Blackwell (2018) with 11 primary schools in the UK, these were the findings for the following questions:

1. Does the school have a written policy on parental involvement (PI)?
2. What do you consider are the main barriers to parental involvement (PI)?

Only one school had a separate written policy on PI, with 10 schools reporting that their PI policy was included in other documents. For the 10 schools, PI policy was included in their School Improvement Plan (SIP). For 6 of those schools, it was in their Home–School Learning Policy and for another 3 schools it was part of their Safeguarding Policy. Schools varied widely in how they made their PI policy available to parents, as the following examples of responses indicate:

- “We don’t tell parents we are committed to parental involvement, maybe we should tell them.”
- “PI is covered in the Parent Code of Conduct, the School Improvement Plan, the Home–School Agreement, and the Home-learning Policy – all available on the school website.”
- “PI falls into Home–School Learning Policy – a separate policy has not been needed but it could be something we develop.”
- “Behavior and Safeguarding policies state how we work with parents – all are available on the website or on request.”
- “PI appears in our vision statement, on the website, in the Home–School Agreement and in the School Improvement Plan.”

Hornby and Blackwell (2018) identified four barriers to effective parental involvement in education:

1. Parent and family factors

Eight schools reported parents' own negative experiences of school as barriers to PI, as indicated in the comments below:

- “Parents assume their child’s experience of school will be the same as theirs.”
- “Some parents don’t see the link between doing well at primary school and later chances in life.”
- “There’s an element of parents who had a bad experience of school and are scared of school settings.”
- “Parents’ own experiences of school have a bearing and their own educational levels. Sometimes our biggest challenge are parents who had a negative experience of school.”
- “Parents don’t want help partly as they had a poor experience of school and partly as they don’t want help. They don’t want to acknowledge they need help.”

Some schools noted parents’ own issues as barriers, for example:

- “Where parents have split up, for some their lives can be more chaotic and so parents can forget information.”
- “Some parents are reluctant to engage with the school because of their own low literacy levels.”

Three schools talked about the age of parents being a factor. Two schools stated that younger parents had fewer barriers, with one school saying that older parents were more confident engaging with the school, for example:

- “Schools have changed and are more open, but older parents don’t know this.”
- “You can talk to the Head or teacher now; they are more approachable. Younger parents are used to this approach, but for older ones you didn’t see the Head unless you were in trouble.”

On the other hand, the opposite was also expressed:

- “We have lots of young, single parents who have had a very difficult relationship with school.”

Two schools mentioned English as an Additional Language [EAL] difficulties which acted as barriers:

- “Some parents have EAL issues which can be a barrier.”
- “EAL is a barrier (in other schools where I’ve worked (but) in not this one).

One school noted issues regarding involvement of fathers, reporting that:

- “Eighty-five to ninety per cent of parents we see are mums. We seldom see dads.”

However, when prompted, most schools said they saw a good number of dads as well as mums, particularly at the end of the day, at evening events and school plays, or when special weekend activities are put on.

2. Parent-teacher factors

A wide range of comments were made by schools on this issue, including:

- “Teachers don’t have enough time to focus on parents. Sometimes this feels like an afterthought.”
- “Teachers don’t have the training to deal with parents and therefore are not confident. Teachers find it hard to have an insight into a family life that is not their own.”
- “Some parents don’t understand we have an open-door policy. We do a lot of training for staff in responding to parents and depersonalizing issues, and emotional literacy training.”
- “Parents can be worried we may criticize or judge them, so they are reluctant to come in when the child has a problem.”
- “Parents expected everything from the school in the past. Now we see it as more of a relationship.”
- “There can be issues of communication between children and parents. Children go home and tell certain stories not reflecting reality, so parents are then invited in to discuss the issues as they actually happened.”

3. Societal factors

Various societal barriers were identified by schools, with comments including:

- “If parents aren’t working then they can come to school and attend events, and this can be an advantage.”
- “School attendance is related to Pupil Premium, and this is related to PI. The parent is the key determinant of attendance.”
- “The PCSOs [Police Community Support Officers] are amazing, they come to school each morning to tell the Head what’s been happening in the community overnight.”
- “Many parents have mental health issues – mobility, isolation, agoraphobia,² financial problems, etc.”
- “We have racism. We respect diversity at school, but we have issues with parents when we try to educate the children. Children hear racist words at home, and it is a real issue amongst parents and children. We have had parents remove their children from school because they didn’t believe in us teaching Islam. Religion as an issue is new and it’s always related to Islam.”
- “We have to think harder about PI given our catchment area.”
- “We have punch-ups on site between families. We’ve had to ban parents and it can escalate out into the community, but this is just one element of the community.”

4. Practical barriers

Some schools suggested that there were practical barriers to PI, such as those indicated by the following comments:

- “The school opening hours are a barrier. We close at 3.30 pm. We don’t reach parents of families who are working.”
- “Office staff in schools can be off-putting and we are aware of that.”
- “Parents are not sure how to approach us.”
- “Time restraints. They [parents] want to be involved but they are full-time workers.”

² Extreme or irrational fear of entering open or crowded places, of leaving one’s home, or of being in places where escape is difficult.

- “Internet safety – using social media takes time when you have to check the images [for safeguarding reasons certain pupils can’t appear].”
- “No access to the internet is a barrier for some families.”
- “Parents are time poor and we’re not particularly keen to work beyond the school day.”

Furthermore, the increased pressure on parents as a result of decreased assistance for families from external organizations and services has resulted in schools taking on greater duties in supporting parents.

The experience of PMCA teacher-awardees

The experience of the PMCA teacher-awardees over the past three awards period do bring out the importance of relating with parents in the learning journey of their children.

Mr. Loy Virak (PMCA 2019, Cambodia) identified four factors for student success: (1) Family and teacher support, (2) School environment, (3) Community interest, and (4) Individual student’s personal drive. A key strategy he pursues in his school is working closely with parents. He feels that teachers do not only teach but also connect with the school community, especially with parents. Communicating about their children’s learning will help parents keep track of and facilitate their children’s education.

In Malaysia, Mrs. K. A. Razhiyah (PMCA 2019, Malaysia), spoke of the collaboration in her school with the families of students with special needs. The family and the school are two of the central living environments of students with special needs. “Visiting students’ homes is a normal procedure to ensure good rapport with parents,” she stressed. “Parents are the first to be informed so that they can track the students’ activities and work on this with teachers. Counselling services are done personally. Besides that, I always ensure my students’ family problems are solved, such as a proper place to stay, a good drainage system, and clean water supply. Positive collaboration and a relationship with parents can create an environment that promotes students’ emotional well-being as well as building a strength-based approach to help students be able to function and live their lives independently.”

Leopoldina Joana Guterres, (PMCA 2017, Timor-Leste), describes her school as part of a community school system. Around each of the schools are community agroforestry projects where children, parents and others plant trees and care for these as cooperatives. Water conservation has become critical throughout the country given an extended drought period. The schools, parents and community teach environmental protection with an active tree-growing and agro-forestry program. Since 2009, over two hundred thousand trees (200,000) trees have been planted to recover the deforested area around Baguia principally on private land.

To support this project, the school has set up a program for tourist trekkers. This program is in partnership with a program called WITHONESEED. In Tetun, the Timorese official language, this program is called “Ho Musan Idi” (HMI). The program focuses on afforestation and reforestation education. It engages the community in economic participation (they can earn from forest stewardship) and open education for climate change. Local, national, regional, and international partnerships have been formed such as the Forest Expedition where the community and students share their knowledge of forest food and herbal medicine with tourist trekkers.

In Timor-Leste, the role of parents in schools is more than usual. Because of the lack of resources in many schools and because the basic infrastructure is deficient and government is unable to provide, parents and the community-at-large have come together around specific projects: (1) furniture for the schools and community, (2) building community centers in each community, (3) local food preservation, (4) a solar lighting program in rural area who have no access to the electricity grid, and (4) a finance cooperative. These are not necessarily school-related, but without these in place, families find it more difficult to keep children in school and learning. Hence, the expansion of school-parents-home relations beyond the ordinary.

Ways parents can be involved

There are many ways that parents can get involved in their children’s education. Some of the most common include:

- **Helping with homework:** Parents can help their children with homework by providing guidance, support, and encouragement.
- **Attending school events:** Parents can show their support for their children's education by attending school events such as open houses, parent-teacher conferences, and school plays.
- **Participating in decision-making processes:** Parents can have a voice in their children's education by participating in school decision-making processes, such as serving on a school committee or joining a parent-teacher organization.
- **Communicating with the school:** Parents can stay informed about their children's education by communicating with the school regularly. This can be done through Facebook, email, phone calls, or in-person meetings.
- **Volunteering in the classroom:** Parents can contribute to their children's education by volunteering in the classroom or on a school committee.
- **Supporting the school:** Parents can show their support by participating in fundraisers, attending school events, or becoming a member of the school's Parent-Teacher Organization.

Some conclusions about parental involvement

Parental involvement is a critical factor in the success of children's education.

1. When parents are involved in their children's education, children are more likely to do well in school and have better social and emotional development.
2. Parental involvement improves student achievement, self-esteem, and behavior.
3. Schools with involved parents engage those parents and communicate with them regularly.

To improve home factors, schools and school leaders should be prepared to expand their roles.

- Provide support and guidance to parents and awareness building.
- Provide guidance to parents to play an effective role in the homebased learning of their children, particularly facilitate learning by very young children who are not yet autonomous learners.

- Provide guidelines to parents to ensure an adequate home study environment and access to devices in an equitable way in the household (ADB). The ideal characteristics for a productive home study space are five-fold:

- 1) Free of distractions
- 2) Easy access to learning materials
- 3) Good lighting
- 4) Good ventilation and temperature
- 5) Comfortable for learning (not for resting)

What does the future look like?

To help learners, particularly in the higher grades and with increased use of educational technology particularly devices that allow students to go online, parents and schools are going to have to work closer together to utilize such educational technology more effectively.

More educational technology will allow everyone to learn anywhere, including the home and community. This includes and requires improved internet connectivity and good educational television programming.

One risk the adults will have to monitor and watch for: Who watches over online content? This will be an expanded role for parents and community leaders and can be a contentious issue if overly restrictive.

Parent involvement in their children's education is mouthed by many but can still be a challenge for most. The benefits of parent involvement are clear: A growing body of research shows that successful parent involvement improves not only student behavior and attendance but also positively affects student achievement. Yet many schools continue to struggle with defining and measuring meaningful parental involvement, and many do not feel confident that their efforts are successful.

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This book reflects the passion of everyone involved in this publication. Together, we continue to promote and recognize outstanding teachers in Southeast Asia who have changed students' lives.

In the mass education model for education today, parents entrust the formal education of their children to schools. Teachers, specially trained for this purpose, teach students and learners based on a curriculum using teaching strategies they were trained to deliver.

The role of parents and the community in the education of children is oftentimes underestimated and undervalued. But it is becoming increasingly important as learning goes beyond the classroom and the school in what is now referred to as “a new normal” in education.

- How much of a role should parents and the home play in this new normal of learning?
- Where can parents and the home play a greater role in children’s learning and how?
- What community factors affect learning?
- What home factors matter most to encourage and facilitate learning?

These are the stories of teachers around Southeast Asia recognized by the Princess Maha Chakri Award Foundation for their excellence in the classroom or in leading schools. Their stories look at their teaching journeys and how they addressed the challenges brought about by a disruptive pandemic.

Hajah Noorliah Binti Haji Aspar, *Brunei Darussalam*

Loy Virak, *Cambodia*

Rudi Haryadi, *Indonesia*

Phaysaniith Panyasavath, *Lao PDR*

K. A. Razhiyah, *Malaysia*

Maung Kyaing, *Myanmar*

Sadat B. Minandang, *Philippines*

Angeline Chan Xiuwen, *Singapore*

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