

ChildFund Australia

Development Effectiveness Case Study

**Fresh Perspectives on Learning and Teaching
Management Processes**

Physical Education and Arts Education

THEME: Access to Assets

Relevant Outcome Indicators:

- OI3:** % of boys and girls aged 12-16 years who have completed primary education
OI4: % of children and youth who perform at or above their current grade level in reading

Country: Laos

Date: November 2015

Project area: Paknguem District, Vientiane Capital

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Informed consent secured: Yes

Recommended for external publication: Yes

Experiencing things in practice and student's participation helps the learner themselves to develop their understanding, skills, concepts and attitudes concerning a given subject. This is one of the reasons for bringing this issue up when discussing Physical Education (PE) and Arts Education (AE), which helps students to learn and apply what they learn in their daily lives and their study of other subjects.

The content presented in this case study comes from the experiences of a teacher at a primary school in Pakngeum District, Vientiane Capital, one of five ChildFund partner schools. The school covers all primary grades from P1 through to P5 and has 10 classrooms, 274 students, and 10 teachers (9 women). The school is situated at a distance of 60km from Vientiane Capital.



One of the teachers, aged 35 years, graduated from Dongkhamxang Teacher Training College and has been a primary school teacher for 14 years. She is currently a P3¹ class teacher and has 32 students, (17 girls). As is the case with the other teachers, she teaches the 8 subjects specified for primary education and these include physical education and arts.

Our conversation with this teacher taught us that she had been teaching physical education and art on a regular basis but selected only the lessons of which she herself had an understanding while the lessons she was unable to teach were omitted and she never read up on them or asked other teachers about how to teach them because she understood that these two subjects were merely supplementary subjects. The students used to attend class regularly but showed little interest in these two subjects and the teacher was teaching them just to get to the end of the time allotted for the class. The teaching varied little from that which was specified in the teacher's handbook and everything was done as specified in the curriculum, where-by the theory was taught first and then put into practice and there was no

¹ This refers to Primary Grade 3.

assessment of the knowledge or skills of the students whatsoever. It appeared that the students did not recognize the importance of physical and art education at all. There was no learning taking place as a process and the learners did not solve problems by themselves. The students were unenthusiastic, came to class just to relax, and this had no effect on their end-of-year scores for going up to the next grade. The teacher was of the opinion that when the students studied these two subjects, they lacked concentration and were not all that interested, which was evident from the fact that they never came up with questions to ask the teacher about the lessons and never answered the teacher's questions when asked when the teacher called out their names. The opposite was true for other subjects, such as mathematics, Lao language, and the world around us².

After receiving the training from the Ministry of Education and Sports with the support of ChildFund Laos, the teacher said: "Support from the implementation team of the pilot project **Promoting Physical and Arts Education in Primary Schools for Lao Children** has helped me to see that after my 14 years of experience as a teacher, I still lacked a clear understanding into the aims and expectations of learning, including the importance and meaning of physical and arts education. Following the training provided under this project, I am able to plan my lessons in accordance with the recommendations in the teacher's handbook provided for the training and apply these in practical terms. At first, the teacher used to be the main person doing everything and there would be few activities for the students. Little connection was made between the content taught in these subjects and other subjects. The project implementation team came to monitor the learning and teaching taking place, looked over my lessons, and observed my classes, keeping a record of their observations and of any weaknesses in my lessons and how I taught them. They summarized that I was still planning my lessons in accordance with the stages in the teacher's handbook and especially, placing more emphasis on the teacher's activities than was necessary while including few activities for the students and when teaching, it was I, the teacher, who was doing everything. The team then gave me all kinds of advice on how to improve my lessons and teaching, especially with respect to placing emphasis on having plenty of student activities in which the students would be the ones doing things and on keeping the activities consistent with the learning aims and expectations".

She added: "I then made an effort to improve my lessons by placing emphasis on increasing student activities by including games and allowing the students to participate in the classes and understand that they had to do things for themselves. The role of the teacher is to advise and provide the necessary information to the students and to set up a form of learning in the classroom which is based on the lesson. Sometimes, especially for physical education, you can actually take the students outside and do the class in the playground. These days, I take time to plan my lessons and find ways to link these subjects up with other subjects to the extent

² This is a Lao school subject similar to general studies.

that my knowledge allows. I also prepare teaching materials for each lesson, especially games which are appropriate for the topic of the lesson and based on the fundamental knowledge of each child. I keep everything relevant to the daily lives of the students and adjust things as circumstances require. My teaching methods involve asking open questions to allow the students to brainstorm but I mostly use open-ended questions to get the students to express their opinions as much as possible. I also use group activities and some activities involve the students conducting their own research and presenting their results. From what I have observed, the learning results of the students over this short period have improved remarkably. Although everything is not yet 100% perfect, I notice that the students are more enthusiastic about learning than before and that they express themselves voluntarily and answer the teacher's questions each and every time, also asking questions to the teacher about things they do not understand. The students are able to explain things to their classmates and summarize what they have learned during a given class."

She concluded: "In my personal opinion, teaching by doing and by linking things up with other subjects is a more convenient method because the teacher acts only as an adviser, provides assistance and information, explains how to do the activities, and supports the students. The students do group activities and exchange knowledge with each other. There do, however, remain difficulties because my specialized knowledge in these subjects still lacks depth, my teaching experience is limited, and there is still not enough variety in the lessons I prepare so I will have to take time to develop and improve. I will do my very best to continue to plan lessons based on the principle of learning by doing and linking activities up with other subjects when teaching. I shall practice this method of teaching on a regular and ongoing basis in order to gain expertise".



The evaluation of the pilot project found that it had already made a positive difference in terms of pedagogical approaches to Physical and Arts Education. Many

teachers reported many improvements in their teaching methods. Most of them try to improve their teaching methodology especially by considering the active teaching method. At the policy level, officials who are directly involved in this project are convinced of its relevance and benefits. But despite the fact that this approach is considered positively by teachers and school directors, its application in the classroom is still weak.

It is essential to carry on training with pilot teachers. The lack of curiosity and desire to learn more about the content taught during PE and AE lessons are the teachers' main weaknesses. In general, teachers should pay more attention to the study of the PE and AE contents in order to better prepare their lessons. Most of the teachers say that the main problem to teach PE and AE is their lack of skills and knowledge about those two subjects. If a teacher doesn't know how to teach the Lao traditional dancing, his first action should be to find information resources (DVD, books, internet) in order to improve his knowledge or understanding about a specific subject. ChildFund could develop a set of information resources related to PE and AE contents. Teachers can also find support from "local advisors" such as experienced teachers or experienced school directors in order to prepare better their lesson. This preparatory work is essential in order to improve the quality of the lesson and allow teachers to develop new teaching designs. To facilitate this preparatory work, School Directors should supervise more regularly the teachers, evaluate their needs and organise some group work between teachers of a same grade. They should encourage teachers in the same school to work closely together – by making sure that the teachers meet regularly with each other to discuss ongoing work, plan together and make resources. Pedagogical advisors from Department of Education and Sports Bureau (DESB) should also cooperate more closely with school directors³ in order to assess teachers' needs. Once difficulties related to the knowledge and understanding of several PE and/or AE lessons are identified, it is conceivable to implement refresher courses on PE and AE contents.

It is also important to develop their teaching culture by observing and learning others ways of thinking and doing (Fleck, 1979) from outside. To touch as many partner teachers as possible, it can be done with video sessions showing others teaching practices. Cross-school exchanges with others districts in Laos or with

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³ Both of them have to encourage teachers to be creative and develop their own ideas and approaches to teaching.

⁴ In Thailand, the PE and AE curriculum is designed in particular for improving competences in analyzing, problem-solving, expressing and working cooperatively. It is also focused on interest in learning and ways of working, creativity and application of knowledge in decision making and problem solving in daily life and work.