

VIET NAM

Improving student – teacher communication and feedback through promoting students’ and teachers’ participation in classroom and school activities

Le Thi Thu Hang, Mau Thi Lan Phuong, and Do Danh Bich.

1. Introduction

Even though Viet Nam is a developing country, it was the first country in Asia and second in the world to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child on 20th February 1990. In addition to the law on Children’s Rights, their rights in education have been stated in school charters (see References) issued by the Ministry of Education and Training, such as:

Article 17: Classes, student groups, grades, satellite schools

1. Students are organised in classes. Each class has a class president, one or two vice-presidents elected by students or designated alternatively by homeroom teacher during the academic year. Each class must not exceed 35 students.
2. Each class is divided into groups of students. Each group has its head and deputy head students elected by group members or designated alternatively by form teacher during the academic year.
3. Classes which possess the same academic level are organized into grades to coordinate joint activities.
4. Depending on local conditions, primary schools may have additional satellite schoolsatellite schools in different areas to facilitate students’ convenience of going to school. Principals assign one vice-principal or form teacher to be in charge of the satellite school.

Article 42: Students' Rights

1. Students have the right to enroll in a school, class or other educational institutes providing primary education program at residential areas; or to choose any school outside residential areas if it is capable of receipt.
2. Students have the right for grade skipping and repetition; and confirmation upon their completion of primary program.
3. Students have the rights for protection, care, respect and equal treatment; are guaranteed provision of time, facilities, sanitation, and security for learning and training.
4. Students have the right to participate in activities that help develop their talents; to receive care and inclusive education (for students with disabilities) as promulgated.
5. Scholarship and social policy beneficiaries as promulgated.
6. Students reserve other rights as promulgated by law.

However, these rights have not been fully realized in reality.

2. Frame of Reference

Viet Nam has been participating in the International Training Program on Child Rights (CR), Classroom and School Management since 2004. In Viet Nam, there are now 38 Change Agents - 16 in Hanoi, 20 in Ho Chi Minh City, and 3 in Buon Ma Thuot, representing local, regional and national levels. Since then, 13 change projects have been conducted throughout the country, focusing on different aspects of CRC.

In the last few years, even though bearing many challenges, Viet Nam has made progress in eco-social development and political security maintenance. Particularly, Viet Namese regulations have changed positively in the light of establishing legal boundaries so as to ensure as much effectiveness as possible for the implementation of international commitments on human right. Viet Nam, as the first Asian country and the second country of the world, has signed and adopted Convention on the Rights of the Child which came into force in the early 1990s.

Viet Nam has adopted Law on taking care, educating and protecting children; Law on gender equality, Law on providing primary education for all children. In addition, Prime Minister approved in a decision dated 31st May 1999, a Planning Act on the protection of the children and those children in especially difficult circumstances. The implementation of the Rights of the Child is a process of coordinating multiple activities of intervention and support, and everyone including children has the responsibility to assist the State to implement and monitor the implementation process of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Viet Nam has put forth a number of decrees, decisions, organized many programs and projects to realize the children's rights with the aim for the best interest for children

such as Government Decree No. 36/2005/ND - CP dated 17 March 2005 detailing the implementation of a number of articles of the Law on Protection, Care and Education of Children.

While the government of Viet Nam is very committed to delivering universal basic education for all children of primary age, there remain great challenges to ensuring that all children receive a good quality education. Currently, Viet Nam Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) is promoting Innovations in Viet Nam Education which better reflect child rights principles, especially in enhancing students' participation in the learning process.

Nguyen Tat Thanh lower and upper secondary school (NTT) was founded on July 4th 1998 as a practice school under direct management of Hanoi National University of Education (HNUE) and Hanoi Department of Education and Training (DOET). The school is located in Xuan Thuy Street, Cau Giay district, Hanoi. There are 172 teachers and staff, 2262 students from 11 to 18 year old and 52 classes from 6th grade to 12th grade.

In recent years, students of NTT have been encouraged to participate in classroom and school activities. However, the students only participated to implement the activities which had been planned and designed by teachers. Furthermore, their participation in giving feedback to teacher in improving teaching and learning quality was ineffective. That is why our team wants to do this project on participation and communication between students and teachers. This project is related to the article 12 and 13 of CRC.

3. Purpose

To enhance the communication between students (grade 6 – lower secondary) and teachers at Nguyen Tat Thanh lower and upper secondary school through promoting active participation of students in classroom and school activities.

4. Methodology (Activities)

The methodology and activities are based on the child-right based and participatory approach, as a way to involve teachers and students who will apply the knowledge learned from workshops into their classrooms.

5. Results

5.1 Obtaining the approval of school's principal

After returning from Sweden, members of our group had discussions about the project plan. Each member reported the training course in Sweden. Representative of the

Ministry of Education and Training - Ms Le Thi Thu Hang has worked with the principal of Nguyen Tat Thanh junior high school and high school - Ms Nguyen Thi Thu Anh about the implementation of the project “Improving student-teacher communication and feedback through promoting students’ and teachers’ participation in classroom and school activities” at school.

5.2 Training for teachers about children’s rights and implementation in school

Right after the training from Sweden, the CRC team conducted a one-day training for 15 teachers at NTT School on CR and how to apply CR in school context. Through inspirational presentation delivered by Ms. Hang from MOET and intriguing questions and activities conducted by Ms. Phuong from Save the Children, teachers gained more in-depth understanding about CR, how it was implemented in Sweden, how it benefitted children and teachers, why it was necessary to apply CR at schools, and how CR could be integrated into classroom and school activities at NTT.

5.3 Training on “Applying some modern teaching techniques towards students’ capacity development” for teachers (November 2014)

In order to develop teachers’ capacity, Nguyen Tat Thanh School collaborated with experts from Hanoi National University of Education to train teachers with modern teaching techniques to maximize the capacity of students along with encouraging their involvements in learning process during class. 40 participants attended a two-day training organized by Doctor Nguyen Manh Huong (History lecturer from Hanoi National University of Education) in November 2014. After the training course, the majority of teachers have mastered teaching techniques in order to promote students activities and initiatives.

5.4 Training for teachers on “Understanding students - the correlation between students’ development and surrounding environment” (January 2015)

25 teachers including subject teachers and homeroom teachers attended a full day training on “Understanding students – the correlation between students’ development and the surrounding environment”. During the training, teachers were introduced on some theories about the development of children, including ecological systems theory developed by Urie *Bronfenbrenner*, Erik Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development, and Lawrence Kohlberg’s stages of moral development. Through these theories, teachers would be able to understand various factors which influence the development of students’ physiology and morality, majority of which are school, friends and teachers. Teachers also learned how to create a healthy learning environment, provide love and

conditions for a good life of children, and establish good interaction between the family and school to provide children with a favorable environment for development.

One of the key activities conducted in this training was teachers' revelations about advantages and difficulties during the teaching along with communication and feedback process from students. Teachers were organized into groups to share advantages and difficulties when educating students at Nguyen Tat Thanh School, then shared them along with solutions. Via this activity, teachers understood that educating students was a challenging process in which the communication, feedback between teachers and students were crucial.

Each student is like an apple was a glittering star. The star is sometimes not visible, it is hidden away by the crust and thick flesh"

5.5 Organising the programme “Active Citizens” for students (from March 2015)

In order to improve students' abilities to participate in class, school and social activities, NTT collaborated with the British Council in Viet Nam and Centre of Sustainable Development to organize a program entitled “Active Citizens”. A 3-day program was carried out for 30 students with the objective to enhance students' self-awareness and self-discovery abilities, especially on how to engage into social activities. The program helped increase the awareness and responsibility of students about society and community problems in order to encourage them to become active citizens. After the training, students proactively constructed mini community-projects to aid the school and surrounding community.

5.6 Teachers' implementation of knowledge from the trainings into teaching (from February 2015)

After participating in various training sessions on children's rights and active teaching methods, many teachers started to adapt the obtained knowledge and skills into their class. CRC team discussed with teachers on how to design the feedback form for students to reflect the teaching and learning process (Appendix). The first piloting round was conducted with two 6th grade teachers (Physics and English) and four 6th grade classes during the second term of 2014-2015 schoolyear. The CRC team worked together to design the feedback form for 6th grade students based on the learning experience from Sweden and the feedback forms used by *Spyken* secondary school. Ms. Do Danh Bich, the vice principal, proactively worked together with 2 teachers to introduce the purpose of feedback and using feedback forms with the students.

The students were very happy for having the right to give feedback on their learning process and speak out their expectations on teachers' teaching methodologies as well as their responsibilities in order to improve the learning effectiveness. Teachers also found

the students' feedback very helpful for them in understanding students' needs and expectations and how to improve their teaching.

During the first piloting round of applying students' feedback, the project team learned some lessons for improvement in the second round. When a student of one 6th grade wrote on his feedback that the English teacher should be stricter because students were noisy in her class, other students objected to him. To prevent this situation, the CRC team discussed with teachers to ensure confidentiality of the students' feedback and asked the homeroom teachers to provide thorough explanations to their students on the objectives of giving feedback, which aimed at enhancing teaching and learning efficiency. Home room teachers would also directly give and collect the feedback forms from their students.

After the progress workshop in Indonesia, the project team continued to implement the second piloting round of applying students' feedback. Further trainings on roles and purposes of students' feedback were organized for teachers (i.e. How students can proactively participate in teaching and learning process? How can teachers measure the teaching and learning effectiveness of individual students in their classroom? How do teachers understand the expectations and needs of each student in their subject? Which information can help teachers adjust their teaching and communication methods with their students to enhance teaching and learning quality?). After the training, subject teachers worked together to adjust the feedback questions and design suitable with their subject. Nine subject teachers participated in the second piloting round starting in November 2015, including Math, Physics, Biology, Literature, and English teachers. Through students' feedback, teachers collected many helpful information through which they understood better their students' needs and expectations so as to adjust their teaching and interaction methods for better teaching and learning quality. By using the feedback forms, teachers continuously improved the questions and design in order to collect information suitable with their subjects and differentiate their teaching methods.

5.7 Exchange program with Spyken secondary school

Given the support and recommendations from Professor Per Wickenberg and restless efforts from CRC team and Ms. Thu Anh – NTT principal, an exchange program between NTT and *Spyken* secondary school has started with a visit of *Spyken's* headmaster and four vice principals from 20-25 February 2016. During the visit, two schools had in-depth discussion on active citizen program, students' participation in such school activities as students' clubs and groups, students' feedback and management approach of school managers, and the relationship between NTT and Hanoi Education University. *Spyken* delegation had opportunities to interact with NTT school managers, teachers and students during their visit. NTT students representing different clubs (i.e. E4E – English for everyone, EOC – event organizing club, YRC – Youth reporter club, Science Passion Club, Green Environment Club, Making Colors Club) proudly introduced about their clubs and confidently performed songs and other works in front

of *Spyken* audiences. *Spyken* delegation also discussed and shared experience with the students on club activities with the students.

The Deputy Head of Secondary Education Department, MOET attended the meeting between two schools and encouraged the partnership between two schools in exchanging activities to enhance students' participation in the learning process. He also emphasized that as a practice school, NTT had opportunities to pilot new approaches and programs for Hanoi University of Education and the MOET.

Two principals and deputy principals discussed to develop some exchanging future projects, including Active Citizens and Global Understanding projects. Through these projects, teachers and students from two schools will have opportunities to exchange experience from each other. Under Active Citizens project, students from two schools will cooperate with each other in developing environmental protection campaigns and promoting researches on environment-friendly products. Under Global Understanding project, students from two schools will learn about culture and people from different regions in the world and experienced activities to learn more about their surrounding world together. In addition, teachers and students from two schools will also raise charity funds to support poor students in the remote areas.

6. Discussion and Reflection

During the first stage of the project, Ms. Thu Anh, the principal, only played the role of a supporter of the project. But with more in-depth involvement in the project implementation, she understood better about the project's benefits to her school, especially to her students, *she has proactively been a strong change agent herself*. Now she has been playing a key role in the change project together with CRC team and actively enhanced the collaboration with *Spyken* secondary school from Sweden to enable future cooperative projects between students and teachers from both schools.

Due to the fact that Nguyen Tat Thanh School is a practical school operating under the authorisation of the Hanoi National University of Education therefore in addition to the support from the Ministry of Education and Training, the implementations of projects at the school also received great support from professionals, lecturers who are working at different faculties of the university.

Teachers and students who participated in activities were very positive and willing to improve children's rights in the class and school. The feedback between teachers and students need to be extended for all teachers in the class hence students will have more realistic and practical feedback to improve the teaching - learning process.

Challenges

Resistance to change: Some teachers hesitate to empower students to practice their rights, especially participation, when students are given too much power and rights without being fully aware of their responsibilities. Others find it hard to accept the students' points of view related to their own teaching methodology.

Lack of recognition from education administrators at central level on CR projects: 38 change agents all over the country have implemented various successful projects on integrating CR into the education system. However, there have been no advocacy attempts conducted to introduce the fruitful results to the Ministry of Education and Training. This also pose challenges over the dissemination of project outcomes in localities and nationwide.

Ineffective national networking: CR national network has yet a clear organization and structure with assigned roles and responsibilities of each change agent. Additionally, there have been no specific working agenda developed for CR network, spreading from the North to the South. As a matter of fact, geographical proximity remains an obstacle for organizing national network meeting.

7. Way Forward

CRC team will continue to replicate and introduce the feedback process between teachers and students in NTT schools and searched for opportunities to disseminate this model in other schools. Constructive feedback enables each teacher and student to adjust and improve the quality of the teaching - learning process.

CRC team together with NTT school managers will continue to enhance the partnership between their school and *Spyken* in their future projects. This is the best way for a Viet Nameese school to learn and adapt advanced approaches and best practices from Swedish school to promote CR in general and children's participation at classroom and school activities. The collaborative projects between two schools are one of the key factors to sustain the project results.

During the dissemination workshop in Cambodia, Ms. Mau Phuong actively worked with other change agents in Ho Chi Minh City on the sustainability of CRC projects throughout Viet Nam. We learned that in order to put the project into action to achieve the goal, it is not the work of any individual but the whole community "School-Family-Society". This requires collaboration and commitment of not only individual change agents but also social organizations such as international and domestic NGOs, MOET, DOETs, BOETs, etc. A national conference on CR capitalizing all experiences and successes from 13 change projects hosted by MOET needs to be held as a follow-up activity of Impact seminar 3. This conference should attract participation from MOET, DOETs, BOETs, CSO, NGOs, etc. The objective of the conference is to demonstrate the status and outcomes of 13 change projects, arousing the involvement and commitment of MOET for future implementation of CR across the country. Another point is how to train teachers and education managers of all levels to ensure

continuous application of CR from primary to secondary schools throughout the country. In order to make it happen, there is a real need to develop a training manual on CR capitalizing all successful models of CR projects to be used at national training program for all teachers. At teacher training colleges, a handbook on CR application should be designed to serve as a guideline for the future teachers. Last but not least, an important factor for sustainability is the involvement and commitment of the MOET in creating a systematic mechanism for applying CR in Viet Namese schools. In other words, CR need to be directed by MOET and specialized in the school missions.

Networking

A CR centre should be established with clear structure, working agenda, assigned roles and responsibilities so as to plan, implement, follow up, monitor, and evaluate CR practices nationwide. This CR centre will be responsible for operating online and of-line networking activities on CR. CR membership must be expanded beyond CR change agents to involve people from various agencies and organizations.

8. List of References

1. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, the National Political Publishing House, 1997.
2. Save the Children, training material on "the Convention on the Rights of the Child", the National Political Publishing House, 1999.
3. High school charters, Ministry of Education and Training.

Appendix

Half-term Feedback Form

Subject: Physics

Class:

Please tick each answer for the questions about the level of quality for the subject following the below form. You do not have to write your name.

	Not good	Below average	Average	Above average	Very good
	1	2	3	4	5
The teacher dedicated for the preparation of the lesson (Experiments, Illustrations,)					
The teaching objects are clear					
The teacher's explanations are clear and easy to understand					
I can understand the content of each lesson					
I can do my homework					
Homework is enough for exams preparations					
The tests (15 minutes, 45 minutes, half-term, end-term) are at appropriate level compared with the homework					
My exam marks are what I expected					
Teacher is dedicated to the teaching					
Teacher cares about the improvements of students					
Teacher treats students equally					
I feel excited about the subject					

Should the teacher continue his/her current teaching method? Why?

.....

How can teacher change his/her teaching method to help you improve your study experience?

.....

What change do you need for self-improvement?

.....

Thank you!