Innovative Practices Issue 1:

Child-to-Child Networks

EDUCATIONAL
SUPPORT TO
CHILDREN OF
UNDERSERVED
POPULATIONS
(ESCUP)

Innovative practices series:

Child-to-Child Networks - Issue 1
Community Teachers - Issue 2
Intermediate Classrooms - Issue 3
Integrated Pest Management - Issue 4
School Mapping - Issue 5

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ESCUP Facts

- 3 ½ year duration period:
  April 2005 – September 2008

- Partners:
  American Institutes for
  Research (AIR),
  World Education,
  Kampuchean Action for
  Primary Education (KAPE),
  CARE

- Works in four provinces:
  Kampong Cham, Mondulkiri,
  Ratanakiri, and Kratie

- Works in three technical
  areas: Teacher Education,
  Access and Quality, and
  School-Community
  Parnterships

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Child-to-Child Networks

The EQUIP1 Cambodia Educational Support to Children in Underserved Populations (ESCUP) Program is a USAID-funded initiative designed to improve access to a basic education of quality for marginal groups in Cambodia - namely, ethnic minority children, girls, disabled children, and the poor. ESCUP focuses on districts that lack the resources to support children in need and consequently endure high rates of absenteeism and repetition. To address these issues, ESCUP has creatively developed a way to utilize the most dynamic and readily available resource in these communities: the children themselves.

Child-to-child networks seek to utilize children as a resource in improving the quality of education in schools by organizing them into informal help networks. These networks allow children to assist their peers that are in need. The activity also seeks to enhance the moral development of children by instilling in them the importance of helping behavior from a very early age. The attraction of student help

networks lies not only in the assistance that it provides to children at risk, but also in the behaviors and habits it fosters, such as cooperation, compassion, and mutual respect - habits that are essential to the emergence of civil society.

Methodology

Child-to-child networks are developed locally to facilitate community initiative and fit the needs of local schools. Opportunities for children in child-to-child networks may take the form of tutoring younger children, assisting a disabled child to get to school, building ramps at schools, establishing homework clubs, tutoring, absentee follow-up, or simply talking together supportively. These activities are not only important in and of themselves, but also provide concrete training in civics and moral development through the helping behavior that it instills in young children.

![EQUIP1 logo - Educational Quality Improvement Program - Classrooms • Schools • Communities]

Child-to-Child Activities

Child-to-child networks have been introduced for the following ESCUP activities:

- Developing language skills (cross-age peer tutoring)

- Helping children write pen pal letters (same-age peer tutoring)

- Organizing homework clubs (same-age peer tutoring)

- Assisting disabled children (same-age peer tutoring or cross-age tutoring)

- Encouraging students who are frequently absent to attend classes in school (same-age peer tutoring or cross-age tutoring)

Pen Pals

An example of the interesting activities that these networks have created is a 'pen pal' system in which children in different schools correspond with each other through written letters. In addition to expanding the ability of children to understand each other, the pen pal letter system helps to strengthen language development skills by putting written language in a meaningful and interesting context. By developing a relationship with students from other regions, students gain an understanding of life in different geographical areas of Cambodia. For example, this activity allows children from the mountains of Mondulkiri and the rice plains of Kampong Cham to better understand the world beyond their own villages.

Impact

The number of schools with child-to-child networks has grown to over 100 throughout the provinces of Kratie, Mondulkiri, and Kampong Cham. Over 4,000 students have benefited from peer tutoring; nearly 2,000 students have benefited from pen pals; 600 physically challenged children have been assisted, and there are nearly 700 help networks for absent children. Almost half of the children who have benefited are female.