

Batticaloa West Education Zone Teacher Empowerment Project
TEACH FIRST SRI LANKA / CHILD ACTION LANKA

Project Summary

The aim of the project was to support the schools that faced the pressing issue of teacher shortages in the Batticaloa West Education Zone. By training ten young, advanced-level-qualified teachers for deployment in three high-need schools within the Eravurpattu division. These teachers, that were identified within the local community, underwent a three-month training course from March - May, including one month of pre-service teacher training and thereafter in-service training with ongoing weekly guidance provided by a Supporting coach. After which the volunteers would continue teaching for 6 months till November. The program not only addressed teaching but also aimed at helping these volunteers to become effective community leaders.

The main problem that we identified was that many qualified teachers who are brought in from outside the community failed to continue to teach due to the challenges associated with visiting a rural community. Furthermore, there is a trend in which good quality teachers and students leave for better opportunities at schools outside of this rural community. This project is a strategic attempt to identify talent within the community and help them serve the schools in their capacity by serving as voluntary teachers.

The project also seeks to test the feasibility of cultivating leadership dedicated to addressing educational inequity. Employing A-level graduates has been an effective solution that the schools and zonal offices have worked together on to address the shortage of teachers in the area. However, they have not offered these teachers any training and support due to funding constraints. This project was focused on identifying the right candidates to ensure that they are given the support needed to be effective in their role.

Teaching Fellows' Placement Schools (BWEZ)

SCHOOL NAME	SCHOOL CLASSIFICATION	School Type	NO. OF STUDENTS	NO. OF TEACHERS	TEACHER SHORTAGE	NO. OF DROPOUTS (2023)
Marappalam GTMS	Very Difficult	Primary	34	3	2	0
Karadiyanaru Hindu Vidyalayam	Difficult	Primary	180	5	1	0
Veppavedduwan G.T.M.S.	Very Difficult	Primary	35	2	3	0
Karadiyanaru Maha Vidyalayam	Difficult	6-12	574	36	3	33
Kithul Sri Krishna Vidyalayam	Difficult	1-12	445	17	2	10

Chronological Summary of Activities

February 2024:

- We first released an application form at the beginning of February along with an announcement that this project will be conducted and what applicants would expect.
- We had over 70 applicants, which we shortlisted and invited 30 of them to an assessment Centre.
- On the 15th and 16th of February we conducted an assessment Center at which we asked candidates to:

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- Work in a group to plan a community project and present it.
- To do a mock lesson for 5 minutes
- Conduct an interview with them.
- We had 24 candidates complete the assessment centre and we had selected 12 individuals.
 - However, only 9 trainees chose to continue on the programme.
- On the 29th of February, we conducted an induction program at which:
 - We introduced them to Child Action Lanka as an organization.
 - We conducted a program that educated the candidates in the Child Action Lanka policies including – Child Protection, and Conduct.
 - We introduced them to the Batticaloa Child Action Team.
 - We also did an in-depth introduction to the program and the broader goals we hope to achieve.

March 2024:

- The Teacher Empowerment Pre-Service training commenced on the 4th of March 2024.
- The first week of training was conducted by Mr Weere Weerasingham that conducted programs on Education Inequality and the role of teacher leadership.
- Week 2 to 4 was handled by CAL inhouse trainers Rajeeeka, Ramesh and Jeremy to ensure that they understand key areas for effective teaching including areas such as: Classroom Engagement, Managing Behavior, Activity Based Learning, Lesson Planning, Working with Slow learners etc.
- Visits from the Zonal Education Team were also made during this time.
- During the last week of March, CAL began sending the teachers into schools to take on lessons that were planned and evaluated.
- Teachers were given individual feedback for their further improvement.
- The pre-service training ended in March.
- At the end of the Pre-Service training we had another teacher exit the program.

April 2024:

- Teachers were placed in schools based on their capability to teach specific subjects.
 - Please refer to Annexure 2; to see the schools the teachers were placed in and refer Annexure 3 to refer details about the schools that they taught in.
- Teachers begin to teach at the Child Action Lanka Centre for minimum of three afternoons per week.
- Teachers met for weekly learning circles to discuss their challenges.
- On the 27th of April 2024, we had the In-service Advisor for Primary Education from the Batticaloa West Education Zone extended her support by conducting training for our teachers on Play-Based Teaching for Primary Math's and Tamil teaching.

May 2024:

- From May 6th – 15th the teachers had school holidays and therefore we conducted additional training that was focused on improving lesson planning and formative assessments for classrooms.
- Third Space Global (TSG) to organized peer-to-peer support for our teachers and began to offer continuous support via fortnightly meetings.

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June 2024:

- 4 teachers left the program due to them wanting to re-sit their Advanced Level exams, after their results were released.
- 1 teachers was absorbed into staff for the program.
 - Leaving Tharshini, Jethusha and Vithurshana to teach on the program in Veppevettuwan School and Karadiyanaru Hindu School. Both schools are primary schools.
- Third Space Global (TSG) organized peer-to-peer support for our teachers and began to offer continuous support via fortnightly meetings.

July 2024:

- The teachers worked and supported Child Action Lanka as facilitators to conduct a Child Rights Awareness Program with children that attended the centre.
- Tharshini, another teacher had applied to the national Teacher Training College and had been selected.

Aug – Nov 2024:

- Vithurshana and Jethusha, continued to work within the two schools and at the centres.
- During this time, they focused primarily on Lesson Planning, which was assessed and feedback was given by a coach.
- Further assistance was offered by the TSG volunteer peer mentor.
- The teachers also worked on assessing and improving the slowest children.
- The teachers created a Teachers Vision Report that will be presented.

Details of Teaching Fellow Placements

Teachers Name	School Placement	Subject	Grade	No. of Students
Pavaprashani Puvanesvararasa	Kithul Sri Krishna Vidyalayam	Primary	Grade 2	24
Vishvanathan Ushanthini	Marappalam GTMS	Primary	Grade 2	6
Thudharsan Tharshini	Karadiyanaru Hindu Vidyalayam	Primary	Grade 5	30
Jethusha Jeanthiran	Karadiyanaru Hindu Vidyalayam	Primary	Grade 4	21
Vithurshana Veerasingam	Veppavedduwan G.T.M.S.	English	Grade 4	6
Santhanam Daksana	Karadiyanaru Maha Vidyalayam	Science	Grade 7 - 9	G9 – 25, G8 – 29, G7 - 27

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Ravi Lakshika	Kithul Sri Krishna Vidyalayam	Maths	Grade 6 - 7	G7 – 32, G6 - 22
Yathugulan Vanniyasingham	Kithul Sri Krishna Vidyalayam	ICT	Grade 6 - 9	G9 – 34, G8 - 40 G7 – 54, G6 - 43

Teaching Fellows' Vision Reports

Name of Teacher: Jeyanthiran Jethusha

Date of Start: 6th March 2024

Date of Assessment: 30th Sep 2024

School: Karadiyanaru Hindu Vidyalayam

Grade: 04

Subjects Taught: Tamil, Maths, Religion and Sinhala

Vision: “To help children improve their ability to pay attention and for it to be reflected in their grades”

Classroom Objectives

1. Reduce conflicts between children during lessons.
2. Pay more attention to simplifying teaching components
3. Engage children with questions.
4. Improve student grades.

Indicators that objectives are being met

1. Level of collective attention improving.
2. Reduced distractions.
3. Answers to questions display stronger comprehension.
4. Improved motivation and performance in school exams.

Implementation of Activities (tactics and strategies used by the teacher to overcome challenges)

1. By showing empathy to build stronger relationships between the students and the teacher. Focus on building strong classroom relationships. Thereafter children will feel that the classroom is a safe environment for learning.
2. To stop depending on the blackboard to teach, but to integrate activities and games that children will enjoy. Through group work children would learn to work together and remember their experiences.
3. Help children learn sections that the children did not understand through activities.
4. Conducting continuous assessments and mini-exams to help track students progress.

Description of Challenges in the Classroom

Since Jethusha, was appointed as classroom teacher, she is responsible for teaching all subjects. Which is challenging to manage versatility between subjects. The students lose focus easily and would often decide to play rather than pay attention to the classroom activities. Fighting is also a common practice among children in class. Due to a lack of attention children are unable to learn.

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Progress Made

At the beginning, Jethusha did not use any activities or games. So the students found it hard to continue in their education. Also while learning they did not show any interest. These were often barriers to their performance in school. In her class she had 21 students and fights would often erupt. Her observation was based on how much attention they pay when she teaches and how they respond to questions asked.

1. Accordingly, she made a few changes in her teaching and introduced the following:
 1. Mini breaks during the lessons.
 2. Since, she wanted all of her students to enjoy reading. She would take the children outside under a tree and read to them.
 3. She began to divide them into groups and to have competitions with them.
 4. She would come up with a variety of games or activities in an attempt to make teaching fun.
Eg: To teach certain subjects she would give children secret chits with right and wrong answers and ask the children with the right answers to hand their answers in.
 5. She would display questions on the blackboard and invite students to answer on the board.
 6. They would play indoor games, that were not related to the lesson.

After she made these changes she felt that there were significant changes among the students. When teaching they paid more attention. They reduced the amount of fights that they had amongst themselves (They didn't stop all together, but there was a reduced number of occurrences of fights). Students had more respect for her and would listen to her. There was more of an interest to answer questions when asked a question. Even children, who did not know the answer for sure felt comfortable to share the wrong answer. These changes made her happy.

When she had to fill their report cards with their term marks, she would include small notes about the children's progress. This also encourages the students and parents to do more work as it is constructive. For example: one student had got 69 for religion and she encouraged the child to do better and the child had got better grades.

Another student that showed potential had come in at 10th places became the 6th in class in the next term. She has noticed that the children that listen to her show improvement. As a teacher she felt as though she had done her duty. The children's interest and effort were important to her.

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

Engaging all students is still a challenge. Those that show progress, progress but those who don't are harder to teach. In the classroom, students will work in groups. In the groups there will be a mix of students who study well and there will be students who do not study well. This intentional decision will need to be communicated to children, to ensure that they understand that they need to work together to progress and not alone. She believed that this would show a significant improvement in their work.

Personal Growth

Through the Teacher empowerment program there are many ways in which she felt personal improvement. During her A/L's she worked as a Chess Coach for a period. After, she got this opportunity she was scared, and when she went to the interview she was anxious. When asked to take leadership and speak up in front of her colleagues, she was also scared. But now she is teaching in school.

She feels that there are many changes and improvements in herself. She has been able to speak at the school assembly in front of 209 children and teachers and also take on responsibility at the Child Action Lanka Centre. She feels much more confident. People have noticed this and when Ramesh (Coach), said is this the "Jethusha, we had before", she felt happy that people noticed this change.

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Name of Teacher: Vithurshana Weersingham

Date of Start: 1st March 2024

Date of Assessment: 30th Sep 2024

School: Veppavettuwana Vidyalayam

Grade: 04

Subjects Taught: Tamil, Maths, Environmental studies, Religion and Sinhala

Vision: “To help all children improve their ability to read before they go to grade 5”

Classroom Objectives

1. Increase the basic reading and writing skills of children.
2. Increase the speed of reading and Pronunciation
3. Improve the clarity of children's reading and writing skills.

Indicators that objectives are being met

1. Stronger interest in attempting to read more.
2. Ability to identify letters, read words, paragraphs and chapters.
3. Interest in learning and reading.

Implementation of Activities (tactics and strategies used by the teacher to overcome challenges)

1. Setting aside time daily for reading exercises and progress monitoring (ie: 20 minutes)
2. Ask children to practice and familiarize themselves with words that they don't understand.
3. Use words daily and practice using difficult words.
4. Individual feedback for each student based on their ability to read.

Description of Challenges in the Classroom

Children face challenging situations because they come from farming families that can't give the best study environments at home. Therefore, most dependency is for the work done at school and some children are unable to make it to school regularly.

Progress Made

In Vithurshana's class room she had 6 students, which is 1 boy and 5 girls. When she began teaching she analysed the students reading, writing skills. Except for one student, all others were able to read and write well. Accordingly she targeted her classroom objectives towards helping that one student. Along with this she aimed to develop the reading and writing skills of the students that will progress to grade 5.

In order to achieve her vision and objective, at first she would allocate the time to read the visuals in the classroom, and afterward progress to lessons. Everyday this was done before their morning assembly. Next the children will be given dictation on specific words and give them marks, with the correct spellings.

Compared to the others that one student found it harder to read. She found it more difficult to identify individual letters. So she gave the student individual attention and formed a bond with the child. Then she gave the child the opportunity to speak freely and express herself.

First, she introduced individual letters, and give the all the students the same exercise, then she would take the child struggles to sit with her and work. Using the materials in the classroom to help the child become more familiar with letters.

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Later she would teach two letter words and asked the student to use and practice with the words that she knows and understands first before she moves on to the words that others are learning. She would gradually introduce sentences from the school text book and move on to reading paragraphs. Gradually she introduced more words for reading and then for dictation. She was particularly happy with the progress that child made despite her learning difficulty and this improvement made her more passionate about her work.

This improvement was not made easily, especially because the students attendance also played a major role in the development of the child. As the family depends on the income that comes through farming, they move from one place to another and therefore her attendance was irregular. This is a problem that cannot be solved. However, on days that she did attend school, even if she wasn't at her best, there was some kind of progress when compared to when she first started.

To increase the motivation of all students, when the students felt tired they would sing the song called "How are you, or "Walking". By doing this she was able to see children improve their mood and receptiveness to study.

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

In the past few months, she learnt the importance of creating a happy and joyful environment for the students to learn. She also realized the importance of taking the time to learn the students background so that she can come up with solutions for the challenges that she faces on a daily basis.

To record students literacy and numeracy skills ASER was introduced. There are 6 levels in this test. In literacy skills, 4 out of 5 of my students got full marks. One student obtained 3rd level in reading. In numeracy skills, 2 students got full marks and 3 students are in stage 4. However, she is confident that she is able to help with the areas that they struggle with. Writing skills, Pronunciation, reading skills, Number skills are some of the abilities that she is working on with her children. For the way forward, she would try to encourage the children who come every day to help the children whose attendance is low.

Personal Growth

The Teacher Empowerment Program has created a change and improvement in the way she works. After completing her AL's she was looking for an opportunity to teach. She was able to learn about other aspects that are involved in her teaching career. Her ability to speak increased, her management skills increased. The group work, responsibilities and its importance were some of the many things that she learned. She also enjoyed the exposure she got by being within the school system in her own community. She learnt to accept praise, criticism and achievement all equally. She also learnt that just one teacher can either build or destroy the future of a child. The discipline in education is something she was something she was able to help children value.

Comparing the SWOT that was done during her training and after, she feels that there are many more improvements. At the beginning leadership, self-confidence and speaking were skills that she struggled with, but now she can see and improvement in these skills. Her weaknesses have now become strengths. Before, she had very few opportunities in life but now she believes that she will be able to go through to the next stage in life.