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Vietnamese children's perspectives on learning and the provision of primary school education within the rural Na Ri district in Vietnam

Consolidated report on a pilot project

Compiled by Dr Renata Phelps and Professor Anne Graham
for a collaborative research project between ChildFund Australia and the Centre for Children and Young People, Southern Cross University Australia.

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A new way to think

Education must involve a meaningful learning process that develops not only literacy and numeracy, but also life skills and the capacity to think and to reflect. Education should encourage initiative, flexibility and adaptability, the personal qualities that are conducive to greater empowerment, behavioural change and access to a wider range of livelihood opportunities.

(Passingham, et al., 2002, p.1).

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Note that a full report on this research project has also been prepared as a separate document and an associated picture-based report for children is also available, titled:

Feeling Glad and Proud: Children in Rural Vietnam Have a Say about Learning.

All these publications, and subsequent papers, can be accessed at:

www.ccyp.scu.edu.au

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Background to the research

This research was initiated by ChildFund Australia as part of its increased commitment to research that enhances knowledge of children's experience, builds organisational expertise and contributes to improved effectiveness in aid operations. The research is a collaboration between ChildFund Australia and the Centre for Children and Young People (CCYP) at Southern Cross University, Australia.

About ChildFund Australia

ChildFund Australia is an independent and non-religious international development organisation that works to reduce or eliminate poverty for children in the developing world. They are a member of the ChildFund Alliance, a global network of 12 organisations which assists more than 15 million children in 55 countries.

The ChildFund Alliance has a focus on children's wellbeing. It aims to place children and young people at the centre of its operations and provides for them to actively participate in decisions which affect the design, delivery and evaluation of programs. ChildFund seeks to better understand children's experiences so that its operations are influenced by a deep understanding of, and respect for, children's lives.

ChildFund works to support children to realise their basic right to education in a safe and stimulating environment by building the capacity of teachers and education managers, providing school facilities and infrastructure, and raising awareness for parents on child care and development and education. Where formal school systems are inadequate ChildFund helps communities to organise non-formal education activities, enhancing youth leadership skills, engaging them in civic activities and developing literacy and life skills that enable them to fill positive roles in their societies (Wessells, 2005).

A major focus of ChildFund, then, is building the agency of children and young people by providing opportunities for them to contribute in age appropriate ways to activities that set high expectations of them, focus on their strengths, foster their resilience and prepare them for adulthood while retaining choice, challenge, fun and friendship (Schwartzman, 2005).

While advocating a child centred approach, ChildFund is aware that talking directly to children and young people about issues affecting them has not traditionally been common practice and that their voices are often overshadowed by those of parents and other adults (Schwartzman, 2005). The organisation recognises a need to view young people not as beneficiaries of programs but as actors in their own development. ChildFund has thus sought to engage in research which incorporates and investigates child-focused participatory methodologies and methods.

About the Centre for Children and Young People

The CCYP promotes the status and voice of children and young people through its research, education and advocacy activities. The work of the CCYP is facilitated by a team of multidisciplinary researchers working collaboratively with practitioners and policy makers to enhance the wellbeing of children and young people in their families, schools and communities.

The collaboration between ChildFund Australia and the CCYP has been underpinned by a commitment to child-centred and participatory research. Together we share a deep respect for children's lives, a focus on supporting their wellbeing and an aim of giving children a voice on issues that affect their daily lives and their chances for a better future.

The context of the study

Developing countries face an urgent imperative to improve the equity, quality, relevance and authenticity of their education provision if they are to develop a literate but also creative and innovative population to support their continued economic development. Yet many such countries are faced with significant challenges in terms of infrastructure, equity in service provision, teacher supply, experience and qualifications, and inadequate participation rates due to a complex array of social and economic factors. Education systems are often under-resourced due to limited governmental revenue raising capacity or decisions about budget allocation. An increasing number of international non-government organisations (NGOs) seek to support developing countries to improve their provision of education and to enhance educational outcomes for children.

Vietnam has made remarkable progress in relation to alleviating poverty and inequality. While approximately 40% of the population has risen from poverty since 1993 progress has slowed in recent years, especially in rural regions. Around 16% of Vietnam's population (around 14 million people) still remain in poverty, which in 2010 was defined in rural areas as a household with income below 200,000 Vietnamese dong/month (approx. $12 Australian).

With 41% of its population under the age of 18, Vietnam is committed to enhancing both participation rates and quality of education. While school attendance in the early years is now quite high, there are significant issues in student retention in secondary schools, particularly in high ethnic regions. Children in remote and disadvantaged areas of Vietnam, particularly those from minority groups, have high levels of non-participation and face considerable social and economic inequities.

Vietnam's traditional educational practices, like those of other Asian countries, are text-book driven and focus predominantly on rote memorisation, passive learning approaches, print-based knowledge, competition rather than collaboration and an overly academic and theoretical engagement with subject matter (Ha Thi Tuyet Nhung, 2009; Hamano, 2008; Peyser, Gerard, & Roegiers, 2006; Roxas, 2004). Most recently, these approaches have been recognised as resulting in poor problem solving skills and creativity, as well as limiting the capacity of students to work independently (Duggan, 2001; Pellini, 2008). Yet, in contexts of poverty and disadvantage, lateral thinking and problem solving can enhance children's coping capacity by enabling them to identify alternative options to their current circumstances and devising creative solutions (Feeny & Boyden, 2003b).

Since 2002 the Vietnamese government has introduced a new curriculum promoting 'child-centred learning'. However, there are major challenges in implementing this curriculum, particularly in rural and remote areas, where recruitment of appropriate teachers is problematic, teacher quality and motivation is low and in-service training and professional development is difficult to provide.

A number of international NGOs have been active in Vietnam, supporting development and provision of educational services, particularly in rural and remote areas. Some, including ChildFund Australia, have been interested in supporting the implementation of curriculum reform and in promoting and fostering more child-focused pedagogy.

Recent research in the area of community development emphasises the importance of building the agency of children and young people by recognising their perspectives and providing forms of assistance that focus on their abilities and potential as change agents rather than on their adversity (Boyden, Eyber, Feeny, & Scott, 2003; Feeny & Boyden, 2003a, 2003b; Lyytikainen, Jones, Hutty, & Abramsky, 2006; Schwartzman, 2005).

Research Aim

The aim of the research was three-fold, namely to better understand:

a) Vietnamese children's experiences of, and views on, learning and primary schooling in rural and remote communities (within the district of Na Ri, Bac Kan province);

(b) how their views about learning and education might inform the development of quality, basic education provided in a safe and stimulating environment; and

(c) the ethical and methodological issues involved in undertaking culturally appropriate research in Vietnam that incorporates children's views and voices.

In entering into a partnership to conduct collaborative research in Vietnam, both ChildFund Australia and the CCYP were interested in exploring the environments and contexts where children's learning occurs and which are meaningful for children themselves – whether these be institutional or non-institutional. Such an approach, it was felt, could 'help adults become more attentive and responsive to places that engage children, physically and emotionally' (Rasmussen, 2004). This approach is consistent with contemporary socio-cultural perspectives that children and childhood are worthy of investigation in their own right, that children are knowledgeable, competent experts on their own lives, and have a valuable contribution to make.

The location for the research

Bac Kan province is located approximately 170 kms (3-4 hours drive by car) north of Hanoi and is a mountainous province covering some 4,800 square kms. It is home to approximately 291,700 residents and has a diverse and complicated topography, with many rivers and springs.

Bac Kan remains one of Vietnam's poorest provinces with inadequate infrastructure, low income per capita, unsustainable economic achievements and limited access to public services. ChildFund works in two districts in Bac Kan (Bach Thong and Na Ri), and supports 13 communes across these districts.

ChildFund began working in Na Ri district in 2008. This area of 864 square kms has a population of 40,000, including 10,519 children (aged 0-18) and a sizeable ethnic minority population. The main product and source of income for the population is agriculture and the average annual income per capita (in 2008) was 3.4 million Vietnamese dong (about $208 Australian). Around 45% of households are considered poor.

Development challenges include poor transportation and road facilities, lack of irrigation, poorly built schools, lack of electricity and communication, unsafe water, lack of improved agricultural practices, poor accessibility to markets, poor health services and limited knowledge of people regarding health care. Overall the standard of living is low.

ChildFund's work is currently focused in 7 communes in Na Ri, in which 4579 children reside. A major focus of ChildFund's work in these communes is on enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. In terms of its education program ChildFund is focused on two components: the teaching and learning environment and capacity building. New classrooms are being built to replace thatched classrooms and work is being done to equip classrooms with basic resources and facilities to ensure a stimulating teaching and learning environment. The knowledge and skills building component focuses on teacher capacity in relation to child-centred methods and school leaders' efficiency in school management and planning.

Overview of the research process

The research involved in-depth interviews, utilising photo- and drawing-elicitation methods, with 46 children aged 9-10 (upper primary age). Children were drawn from four different schools. The study took place between September 2009 and April 2010.

Support for the project was obtained from the District Education Office and ethics approval was gained through Southern Cross University's Human Research Ethics Committee. Sampling and initial recruitment and briefing of children, parents and teachers involved close collaboration and support from ChildFund's Education Project Officer from Bac Kan province, Doan Thi Linh.

The first field trip occurred from 6-9th December 2009. Two focus groups were held involving 20 children. This was an opportunity to further explain the project to the children and to provide them with a camera, which they were asked to keep for 24 hours to take photos showing aspects of their day-to-day life that tell a story about their learning and schooling. The intention was then to interview the 20 children, however due to problems with the cameras utilised in the first field trip, interviews with only 10 of the 20 children proceeded.

Data was then transcribed and translated and returned to the CCYP researchers. After initial analysis, Dr Renata Phelps from the Centre for Children and Young People visited Hanoi and worked with the Vietnamese researchers, providing feedback on the initial data, and refining the methods and interview questions.

The second field trip occurred from 24-27th January 2010, where a further four focus groups and 36 interviews took place (including those children whose cameras hadn't worked in field trip one but excluding four children who missed the interview due to a sporting event). Again, data was transcribed and translated and returned to Australia for analysis. A full report was drafted by the CCYP researchers, in collaboration with ChildFund staff and the Vietnamese-based research team.

Children's perspectives, ideas and photos were also documented in a children's book titled *Feeling Glad and Proud: Children in Rural Vietnam Have a Say about Learning.* The purpose of the book was to explain some of the key findings to the children in a positive and affirming way. A presentation was also made to teachers and other educational representatives in Na Ri to convey the project findings to them. The findings of the study were also reported to ChildFund Vietnam staff at a professional development day in May 2010.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Learning Out-of-School

The children interviewed were very capable of performing a wide range of domestic and agricultural tasks from an early age, many of which involved risk, and may seem frightening or physically demanding for Westerners.

Buffaloes like running... if I have to graze one of them, he will run following the others, and I can't catch him and make him come home (Donald).

Taking water is very hard. I take water from a pond. I take a big branch of a tree to go down to the pond and take water (Mickey).

Going uphills to collect wood makes me exhausted (Minh).

They predominantly learn these tasks from parents, siblings, other family members or by teaching themselves through observation.

When we don't know the way to ride bicycle, we learn to do that, the first time we grip the bicycle, we also can't ride. We should practice more time. If not when we ride, we will be afraid of falling (Thinh).

I like watching the plough- tractor… I'd love to drive the plough-tractor (Rùa).

No gender stereotypes were revealed relating to either parent playing a more central role or teaching particular types of tasks.

There are many community-based activities which children participate in.

At my hamlet, I take part in the activity of digging the ditches or clearing sewage… So that the water will flow into the paddy-fields… I did that work with some people in my hamlet… I learn that by digging and clearing the drainage system or ditches, the water flows into the paddy fields where other farm products are planted and it helps them grow better and we will have bumper crops (Huy).

Almost all children indicated intrinsic happiness from learning new things and genuinely enjoy contributing to their families' lives through domestic tasks.

I feel glad and proud because I have done many things to help my parents (Thúy).

Because I like helping my parents… So that my parents' work is less hard (Lac).

Whenever I sweep the house, I feel better…If there is any place dusty, I sweep and I feel glad so I find it easy (Chuyên).

Children demonstrated a strong sense of autonomy, self-responsibility and agency. They embraced and enjoyed the challenge to become self-sufficient in their out-of-school lives.

I want to learn how to work in the fields to help my parents… to cut the wild-grass in the fields. I [also] want to help my parents sow the corn seeds (Lac).

Many children saw themselves – their ability to try their best and to pay attention - as the most important element influencing their learning success.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Learning at School

Children generally spoke of feeling happy and confident at school. They particularly liked the opportunity to play with friends, listen to the lessons of their teachers and gain new knowledge.

I like to see my friends play with each other. They are happy and I am happy, too (Nga).

I like teachers. Because they teach us good things to become good people (Trang).

Having a clean environment with lots of trees was important to many.

We keep the environment clean. We pick up rubbish and throw it into the dustbin and then empty it out...(Cá).

Trees make the environment clean, green and more beautiful (Cá).

Because in summer the weather is very hot. If we have more trees pupils can stand under their shadow to be cool when they go to school early (Len).

School had intrinsic value and provided enjoyment and self-improvement. Mathematics was predominantly the favourite subject.

Because in the future when I grow up, I will know how to calculate when selling something (Mai).

English was the least favoured subject, however, all children seemed to view it as important.

When we are in the other country to learn, if the people there speak English, I can talk with them (Chuyên).

While most children were comfortable seeking help from their friends or teachers, some were reluctant to ask for assistance from teachers, particularly during class time.

Children didn't like being scolded or punished at school, especially when they didn't understand the lesson.

I don't like being scolded and punished when I don't understand the lesson… They make me stand… if I don't understand and don't know the lesson, I will get bad mark…I feel sad (Huệ & Bili).

That said, there didn't seem to be a culture of children being unduly or overly reprimanded or punished by either teachers or parents.

Teachers were identified as the key element in helping children learn. However, for many it was not the teachers' personality, or the child's relationship with the teacher per se that was identified by children as helping them to learn. Rather, emphasis was placed on the value of teachers' lectures and instructions, their examples, demonstrations, explanations and exercises.

My teachers instruct it to all of us until everybody in my class can understand the lesson (Bubi).

All children had regular or daily homework and generally felt that there was help available to them if required, mainly from parents, siblings and friends.

Children were conscious and critical of the behaviour of their peers and attributed issues and problems, as well as solutions to these, to their own actions and behaviours.

I do not want my friends to quarrel with each other (Của & Em).

I think pupils should pay attention to their teachers' sayings (Rùa).

We will be more obedient and obey them (Xanh).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Relationships and Support for Children's Learning

There appeared to be a strong culture of support for children's learning in these rural communities. This challenged stereotypes and assumptions, frequently referred to in Vietnam, about ethnic minority families' lack of interest or value placed on formal education. Children themselves shared this commitment and embraced the value of learning, recognising and appreciating the role adults played in supporting them.

> *Because the teachers are dedicated to teaching us… The teacher has a lot of knowledge and she uses her knowledge to teach us (Em).*

Most children reported that their parents were very active with their school, attending parent meetings and doing voluntary work on school buildings and grounds. Children very much liked their parents being involved in these ways.

> *Because my parents are interested in my studying (Bubi).*

None of the children who were interviewed stated that they had too many house or farm chores to complete their homework or that they missed school because of a need to help their families. However, there were indications that some of their peers and older siblings in secondary school may do so.

Many conveyed a close and warm relationship with their teachers and there was some evidence of genuine care by teachers for their students.

> *My teachers really love us and my school and my class… They are very friendly (Cá).*

Almost all children believed that their teachers liked school, liked them as children and were committed to helping their future.

> *Because they teach me with all their heart… They want to help us become the people who can do something good for society (Huệ & Bili)*

Children really valued when teachers talked to them about matters other than school work, shared personal or topical stories or used humour and recognised that this helped them to learn.

> *She talked about old stories…. I felt important (Khanh & Trang).*

> *She told us about poor families, floods, runaway hostage and drifting downstream (Duc).*

> *She asked after my family… asked about my grandpa's health (Len).*

Some children indicated that teachers didn't talk to them in this way.

> *I want them to talk with me because I want to have a closer relationship with them… so that I can remember what they teach better (Khế).*

Children evidenced a deep respect for adults and placed a strong emphasis on morality and moral behaviour. School played a very important role in transmitting and reinforcing dominant social norms and values, such as respect and obedience.

> *We have to learn how to behave respectfully (Hang).*

Children appreciated receiving praise and encouragement from their parents and teachers. Although a small number spoke of receiving gifts or rewards, most were very grateful for oral praise and many comments revealed that children gained intrinsic happiness from helping their parents and teachers.

> *My parents and my grandparents say that I do well… I feel glad (Hue).*

> *I feel very happy. Because I am praised by the teacher (Em).*

> *This is the picture of me studying. There are my mother and my father standing by me. I'm proud of this photo because my parents are always beside me; they take care of me and help me to finish my homework (Len).*

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Constructions of 'Learning' and 'Teaching'

In the traditional Vietnamese context, 'learning' is perceived in solely formal academic terms – that which happens at school, and through school work taken home (i.e. homework). Such perceptions were held by the young participants in our study. Only through extensive discussion and prompting did children come to a broader understanding of 'learning' consistent with the interests of this research.

Children had considerable difficulty articulating 'how' they learn and it appears that metacognitive learning processes are rarely practiced in Vietnamese educational or social systems. Memorisation through repetition and practice played a central role in children's learning.

> *She assigns the homework to us. We need to write 5 times at home (Thuy).*

There was little evidence of teachers providing children with process-based support, such as strategies to aid memorisation or recall.

The challenging nature of the curriculum and the emphasis on content over learning process significantly influenced the learning experiences of children. Content appeared to be covered in discrete subjects with no indication of rich integrated tasks and little evidence of teaching approaches such as experiential learning, inquiry-based learning, or reflection. Issues related to authenticity and relevance of curriculum to children's' lives were also evident.

All children were enthusiastic about their text books, particularly appreciating their pictures. Many seemed to have difficulty disassociating the text from the subject itself.

> *Because the textbook has easy puzzles. They help me gain much knowledge……They help me have more knowledge about the history of former generations (Của).*

Very few children talked about other resources or pictorial materials in their classroom or in the local environment and fun or humour was rarely mentioned.

Many children spoke of being involved in group work, however in most cases this seemed to refer to sitting in a group to do individual work.

> *Studying in group means…when our teacher gives one question and we study together and we answer later… individually (Tép).*

The findings suggest a considerable disjuncture between the social and cultural constructions of 'learning' and 'teaching' and children's understandings of their own agency and learning capability.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Thinking About Their Futures

Most children had clear views on what they would like to do when they grow up, with professional roles such as teaching, policing or medicine most frequently cited. Only two children mentioned roles more representative of the agricultural work typically done by adults in their hamlet.

All of the students perceived value in their schooling for their future careers, particularly regarding literacy, numeracy, practical skills such as sewing and morality.

> *When I am good at studying, then when I will be a teacher, I will impart what I have studied since I was small to kids (Ti).*

> *The subjects such as technique can help me know how to sew and embroider and when I grow up, I can sew for the poor children so that in winter, they can keep warm (Chuyên).*

> *Learning moral education can help me have good morality and have good behaviour so that the patients respect me (Khế).*

Environmental issues were of significant importance and children's agency was reflected in their frequently articulated commitment to pursuing positive environmental outcomes in their community and (through their future careers) in their country. The children clearly recognised that they could make an immediate impact on their local environment, particularly at school, through their own behaviours, as well as through advocating for environmental issues amongst their peers.

Children's Suggestions for Change at School

Children initially showed reluctance to identify suggestions for change at their school and also tended to attribute responsibility for many of the issues with their school environment to the behaviour of their peers. Toilets, sanitation and cleanliness were major issues for children, affecting their ability to play in breaks and their willingness to go to the toilet.

> *Some parts of the [classroom] wall are going to collapse… Others are going to crack (Vu & Long).*

> *I wish my school would have a yard paved with cement, in order that we could do physical exercises during rainy and stormy days (Hương).*

> *I wish the school ground will be cemented so that the mud won't stick on the students' shoes when they come into classrooms. If there is no cement, the classroom will become dirty again after it is swept (Huy).*

> *I only use the toilet when I have bellyache (Lac).*

Also mentioned by some children was a desire for more teaching resources or equipment.

> *I think school must have enough teaching and studying tools to help us study better… (Cuc).*

Minimal exposure to media, or to communities and schools beyond their own hamlet inevitably impacted on what they were able to suggest. Generally, children seemed accepting of their learning environment, just wanting it to be clean and safe.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Children's Involvement in the Research

Children enjoyed immensely the opportunity to take photographs and to talk to the interviewers and they appreciated that adults were interested to hear their views.

> *Because I can know how to take photographs, and I like to talk with you because you are humorous and kind (Tiên).*

> *Because you come here to find out about my learning at school and at home (Bubi).*

> *Because my study is cared for by you (Sang).*

Children also indicated that they had learnt from the interview process, particularly from thinking further about their own learning.

> *Because it helps us to learn better (Khanh & Trang).*

> *When participating in this project I will understand my studying… I learn about subjects, I learn how to talk… We learn not only at home but also at school (Lan).*

> *I like you... you ask me some question… Because those questions are also the difficulties for us to overcome (Thinh).*

Children perceived that it was important for adults to listen to children's views. They saw it as a valuable way for adults to know how they could best help children, but also so adults could better understand and show respect for children.

> *Because it is not good if the adults don't listen to opinion of children, just children listen to the adult. The adult should listen to the ideas of children (Xanh).*

> *Because we can raise our voice. If we want someone to listen to ourselves but they don't, we will be dissatisfied (Tiên).*

Some children viewed it as a responsibility and right for them to have a say. One child pointed out that respect for children, and communication between adults and children, was an imperative emphasised in their textbook of moral education.

> *In the text book of moral education, it is said that adults and children should listen to each other. It is also said that everyone should respect children. If children don't like to do something, adults cannot oblige them (Khế & Chuyên).*

Our Cultural Learnings as Researchers

As a team of both Australian and Vietnamese researchers we have gained many insights into each others' cultures and have learnt *together* about the issues of conducting research with children and young people. ChildFund's role has been essential and the research would not have been possible without such strong commitment from both individuals and the organisation as a whole.

Children's responses were, at times, complex, nuanced and contradictory, revealing the need for researchers to continue to probe and seek clarification from children around ambiguous responses. The ability to do so, however, is integrally tied to the interviewers sharing a common understanding of the issues and interests relevant to the project, and these shared understandings are inevitably influenced by culture.

Re-presenting children's perspectives in any research is fraught with difficulties and this is further complicated where translation is involved.

While there was some indication of power imbalances, cultural assumptions about children's views not being heard or respected were somewhat challenged by the findings. While children were a little reserved and evidently respectful of adults they did feel able to raise suggestions and make some criticisms within the limitations of their knowledge and experience.

The Key Issues

Since 'learning', in the traditional Vietnamese context, is constructed as a formal activity that takes place predominantly in schools, the significance of informal learning that takes place at home and elsewhere is largely hidden from view and hence remains under-recognised and under-valued.

Children's agency is evident in their learning capabilities, independence and resourcefulness out of school. However, their more passive and dependent engagement at school has implications for their identity, learning self-efficacy and wellbeing. Gillies and Khan (2008) highlight that such issues are not uncommon in developing countries and teachers are typically *not* adept at engaging students in metacognitive processes. Students, they state, are often perceived as passive recipients of learning rather than active co-creators of knowledge.

By challenging children to think of how they may be able to find solutions, teachers have the potential to transform children's thinking (Gillies & Khan, 2008, 324).

There was little evidence in the findings of an emphasis in schools on *how* children learn. Enhancing the focus by children and adults alike on the *processes* of learning, and actively engaging children themselves in metacognitive reflection, can enhance their control over their learning and foster their sense of agency. Ensuring that learning experiences are authentic and relevant to the lived experiences of children is more likely to provide them with the capacity, innovation and independence to become agents of change in building positive futures for themselves and their communities.

The findings of the research have considerable implications for teachers, educational managers and policy makers. For Vietnam to successfully introduce child-focused curriculum and pedagogy it will be essential to consider the underlying socially and culturally constructed nature of 'teaching' and 'learning' and to challenge teachers and policy makers alike in relation to their assumptions about educational improvement. Constructions which institutionalise 'teaching' and 'learning' and position these as processes done 'to' children, rather than 'with' children will limit the success of educational reforms.

Many of the development activities currently being implemented for teachers appear to work directly at the level of introducing new teaching strategies, such as experiential learning. While such professional development work is essential and highly valuable, this needs to be accompanied by reflective processes that prompt teachers to think in different ways in order to have a major impact on practice. Just as this research has challenged children by asking the basic question of 'how do you learn', so too must teachers be asked the fundamental question of 'how do you teach?' and even more importantly, 'how do you help children learn?' For teachers to adopt child-focused pedagogies they need to understand, or be open to understanding, the factors that influence *how* children learn.

Developing a sophisticated level of metacognitive engagement in a classroom is not something that comes effortlessly to teachers in either developed or developing countries since it challenges deeply held personal and professional values, beliefs and assumptions not only about 'teaching' and 'learning' but 'children' and 'childhood' itself. It requires teachers to move from constructing children as 'incapable' and 'dependent' to 'capable' and 'independent' and recognising the capacity which they demonstrate in out-of-school contexts.

A change to child-focused pedagogy is also seated in the relationships that exist between children and adults. Again, for children's capacity to be most effectively realised, children need positive, respectful but also enabling relationships with adults; teachers and parents alike. This study has shown that the children in Na Ri have such a foundation in place. By building on this strong community commitment to their children's learning, and the enthusiasm and commitment of children themselves to learn, ChildFund Australia is well positioned to continue making a considerable difference to the lives of these Vietnamese children.

Teachers and Educational Managers at the Na Ri District Education Office with Judy Cashmore and Renata Phelps from Southern Cross University.

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- ChildFund management and staff who supported the project.

From left to right: Ha Thi Tuyet Nhung, Ha Thi Quynh Anh, Le Dan Dung and Ton Thi Tam; Renata and Nhung presenting the research to teachers in Na Ri.

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Statistical data are derived from a combination of sources including local educational data direct from regional departments, together with sources such as national government media releases and the World Bank.

Being treated with dignity and respect means being recognised as a person rather than a 'problem', and being listened to without being judged… Being listened to because what you have to say is considered valuable is a sign of respect and an acknowledgement of competency… Thus agency – the ability to take control of your life – is linked clearly to dignity and respect, and being treated with dignity and respect can increase feelings of self-respect and a sense of agency

(Nevile, Bessel, & Moore, 2007, p.1).

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