

A Tamil student in a school in Mathulu Danawwa

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In order to investigate how a Sri Lankan girl child develops her competencies during the five years of primary stage, a longitudinal case study was conducted on Meena - a Tamil girl child - who studied in grades 1 and 2 in an estate school in the Matale district. Quantitative and qualitative data from observations, informal interviews, perceptions, assessment records and exercise books were collected and triangulated to identify patterns.

The girl came to school accompanied by her brother during the first 2-3 days of commencing schooling in 2002 and later all by herself. She was able to ask questions related to her needs and converse only with 2-3 children. By 2003, she on her own started talking with other children. By November 2002, when her guardian aunt left for employment abroad, her personal cleanliness diminished. The girl, who used to bring nutritious food to school earlier, started bringing just two slices of bread with or without sugar. Towards the end of 2003, due to continued guidance by her teacher, her cleanliness improved and she brought rice with some curries for her meals. At the beginning of 2002, the girl carried out classroom responsibilities under teacher's guidance but later took the initiative herself and was on the offensive when other children attempted to take over her responsibilities.

By October 2002, she managed to add three sentences to the letter her father wrote to her mother who was working abroad. In 2003, she could write short essays and read story books. In 2003, she could count from 1 to 9 in sequence and out of sequence and was able to count up to 100 by the end of the year. She was able to master all the essential competencies of the curriculum and was ahead of others in classroom participation and in the development of competencies. The teacher and the classroom environment had greatly contributed to this situation. The existence of a clean, free and spacious environment for growing up children, in place of the estate line settlements, they were brought up earlier, had immensely supported the development of the potential of the child. It is hoped that this longitudinal study will reveal how the classroom with an organized learning environment, the role of the teacher and the classmates will determine the future direction of the child.

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