

A child detached from home, attempting to gain success through school: A longitudinal case study

H D Sriyani Dhammika¹, G Kodituwakku^{2*} and D A S D Ratnayake²

¹ *Wanathawilluwa, Puttalama*

² *Research Unit, National Institute of Education, Maharagama*

To study using longitudinal case study method, how a Sri Lankan child participates in primary school education and develops his competencies at primary stage, a boy who studied in two rural schools in Puttalam, was selected. Researcher's monthly observations of child behaviour at the classroom, once a term observations of home environment, interviews with the teacher, teacher's perceptions, assessment records and classroom artifacts were the data collection techniques. Data were analysed to identify patterns.

According to the research findings, the child had been absent from school for 23 days in 2002 due to viral fever. In 2003 he had been absent for 21 days. With his mother's departure for foreign employment, he was admitted to another school on 24.07.2002 but came back to the previous school, this time not from his fathers' house but from that of a neighbour's. In 2003 too, as in 2002, there was not a single day that he came late to school. This was because coming to school was psychologically relieving for him to get away from the neighbour's house. Ruwan, who used to attend school with personal cleanliness, began to appear dirty since the 3rd term in 2002 when his mother went abroad. Even though the child had no opportunity to maintain healthy relationships with members of the family, because of classroom influence, he displayed leadership qualities in decision-making at the class by maintaining good inter-relationships with other pupils. The child could not read a single Sinhala letter at the beginning of 2002. But by the end of the year, he was able to read 5 letters and by the end of 2003, he could read the letters with 'alapilla'. The child learned to count 1-15 in 2002 and by the end of 2003; he was able to count up to 39. Throughout the two years, however, the developmental characteristics expected through the curriculum did not appear in the developmental patterns of the child. His minimum development was due to the influence of the classroom environment and the teacher. It should be appreciated that Sri Lanka has a school system that allows a child, in spite of family problems, to get admitted to two schools and still progress according to his potential. It will be possible by 2006, to reveal, through longitudinal investigation how the role of the class teacher, the seven pupils in his class, and the multi - grade system with other primary grades, will determine this child's future.

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* tuwakku@yahoo.com

Tel: 011 2851301