

Competencies related to the money earning motivated cane industry, and the competencies expected of school learning

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

Samitha lives in a village famous for the production of cane furniture. Bookracks and chairs are produced in Samitha's home too. Samitha also has the skills to make a toy teapoy, chair or bench using the saw, hammer, and nails, strips of wood and rattan. Samitha who comes to school from this environment had been absent for 10 days in 2002 and had been late to school on 9 days, the same year. But in 2003 the number of absent days increased to 23 and the late comings decreased to eight. This was because he was suffering from phegrum. His participation in the economic activities at home was not the reason for the absenteeism.

At the pre-school, attached to the temple in the village, the child had acquired the basic competencies of working cooperatively with children: of being concerned about others, of following advice and of adhering to religious rituals and moral principles. He entered this school as it was the parents' wish and the innocence, hospitality, religious mindedness, working in a leisurely manner that he displayed in the first week of his admission to school, were continued throughout the two years in the school. In 2002, Samitha had achieved the essential learning competencies. Samitha was ahead of others, especially in creative activities. In extra curricular activities, he was a skilled "hevisi" drummer in the school junior band. He was good at dramatization at concerts. Even though the environment he lived in was not very motivating, yet due to his mother's encouragement and the teacher's concern and interest Samitha gradually acquired the competencies. Through this study, it was possible to understand how a pupil maintains balance between the competencies he acquires from the community and those he acquires from the school. Financial assistance by UNICEF is gratefully acknowledged.

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