

Introduction

During the summer of 2018, a total of 14 HKU students from the Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Civil Engineering went to Vietnam for a cross-disciplinary internship. We provided financial and tangible support to the non-governmental organization of World Vision which mainly works for the well-being of children. The project included the physical construction of a hygienic toilet for Trung Dung Secondary School alongside carrying out tasks of surveying the nearby villages regarding the issues of water, sanitation and waste management.

Gaining Technical Experience

Having never paid attention to the works of civil engineering, it was truly a new experience to see myself participating in the construction process. Being completely unaware of the procedures and rules to be followed in this process, I really appreciate all the help and guidance I received from the local construction workers and my fellow civil engineering group mates. I gained a substantial amount of technical experience pertaining to cement mixing, bricklaying and wall smoothing. Overall, apart from feeling extremely exhausted on certain days, I believe I really enjoyed this hands-on experience and working together with everyone.

Enhancing Social Skills

Apart from the technical application, we were also required to carry out tasks that would enhance our social and soft skills. The most important one was the Need Assessment wherein we had to survey nearby communes regarding the issue of waste management. This was the first time we had to integrate theoretical knowledge into practical applications as having learnt all about how to conduct

interviews, I had never actually done one myself. It was an enriching experience to visit local households and gain an understanding of their issues and concerns.

Another task which was writing the Most Significant Change Stories was also very enjoyable as we personally got to see the drastic improvements that some households have experienced in the recent years.

Bonding with the Children

A lot of our time at the school was spent in interacting with the local children. We gave them lessons on good hygiene and sanitation practices, prepared performances with them for the inauguration ceremony and also decorated the communication corner in the classroom and the stairway of the school. Throughout our interactions we experienced a great amount of cultural exchange as the children were very excited to know more about us and our culture and vice-versa. We were able to form strong bonds with the children which was a wonderful and meaningful experience.

Reflection

The 7 weeks I spent in Vietnam proved to be an exciting and significant learning experience. The idea of cross-disciplinary learning was executed well and was very effective. It provided me with several instances to learn about new social science concepts as well as civil engineering technical skills. I personally learnt the social skills of effective communication with unfamiliar people, critically evaluating the needs of the village and entertaining children. There was also a lot of cultural exchange that happened among HKU students (since there was a mix of local Chinese, Indian, French and Korean students). Apart from the academic perspective, we also visited places in Vietnam such as Hanoi and Da Nang and were able to gain a holistic cultural exposure to local food and traditions. Overall, I believe this was a wonderful learning opportunity that provided me with immense opportunities to enhance my social

skills, increase my self-confidence as well contributed to my overall personality development.