

Experiential learning programme in Vietnam (15th June – 31st July, 2015)

8 Civil Engineering and 8 Social Sciences students participated in an experiential learning programme in Vietnam this summer. The main responsibility of Civil Engineering students was to help a local school to upgrade its facilities including lavatory, ceremony stage, storeroom and medical room. Meanwhile, Civil Engineering students also helped Social Sciences students conduct need assessments to two new communes. We also taught English and computer skills for school children. After one and half month staying in Vietnam, we experienced local life and culture.



Fig. 1: Group photos near Vietnam airport.

Construction of School Lavatory

In week 1, the main tasks for us included setting out of the building lavatory outline, excavation to the foundation level and start of foundation construction. We dug the ground by using shovel, mixed cement with water and sand, and used trolley to deliver materials. It should be our first time to have a real experience of being a worker like this. The main material for foundation construction is brick and we formed human-chain line to deliver brick by hands, which was a good chance to establish cooperation between our teammates.

In week 2, the works included construction of brick work foundation, soil filling inside the foundation and construction of reinforced concrete beams. We tried the reinforcement fixing and it was our first time to try it. While watching the workers doing that, it seemed quite easy and interesting. However, skills of doing that is not that easy to learn.



Fig. 2: Reinforcement Fixing.

In week 3 and 4, the site work was mainly the construction of exterior brick wall. After the brick walls were completed, the local workers constructed reinforced concrete slabs for the toilets to provide a flat platform for the installation of the water tank. Then the roof of the lavatory was constructed and the septic tank was also built to store the human waste.



Fig. 3: Brick wall construction.

In week 6, the main site work was the construction of indoor facilities like toilet stalls connection of pipelines. Also, well drilling was carried out to ensure there is adequate water supply for toilet flushing and hands washing. It was a good chance for us to observe how the workers divide their works for different components like painting and installation of pipelines.

In week 7, the whole construction was finished and the school organized an inauguration ceremony to celebrate the completion of the lavatory construction.



Fig. 4: Group Photos of us in front of lavatory with interpreters.



Fig. 5: Children are washing their hands with friends in front of lavatory.

Needs Assessment

In week 2, we have been to two communes to conduct needs assessment for preparing report to World Vision Vietnam (WVV). In order to collect information, we interviewed the head of a health care station and the representative of Commune Project Management Board (CPMB), and had group discussion with children at school, and visited the household in local villages. We combined the knowledge and ability from people with two different backgrounds.



Fig. 6: Briefing for needs assessment in a new commune.

School Services

Apart from the new toilet, we also helped the school to upgrade their storeroom, medical room and ceremony stage. Also we cooperated with the local students to improve their school facilities. For example, we helped the school to install the new computers for the purpose of computer teaching.



Fig. 7: Replacement of ceremony stage.

Teaching English

We also had a chance to teach the local students English. We found that the students had basic English communication skills already. However, there were still rooms for improvements. In addition to basic grammar, we also taught them other knowledge, e.g. the HIV-AIDS.



Fig. 8: Teaching local students English.



Fig. 9: Teaching local students English.

Teaching Computer Skills

The lessons with the local students were very interesting. In the computer lessons, we were not teaching them some complicated things since their level of computer skills is not high. We decided to teach them how to use the painting software to draw their own cartoon characters and their school. It did not only enhance their computer skills but also enhance their creativity. They also



Fig. 10: Teaching local students about computer

learnt how to use PowerPoint to present themselves and it combined the skills of English and computer applications that we taught them during the lessons.

Commune Services

After we finished the work at school, we went to the commune to help build the fences in order to keep the children safe from drowning. We used water and cement to make mortar and used the mortar and bricks to build the fence.

Get Along with Local People

In this experiential learning programme in Vietnam, one of the largest problems was the language barrier. Although there were 4 local university students accompanying us during the trip as interpreters, since we had 16 people, some of us might find it difficult to find an interpreter when we wanted to talk to the local people. The local students are very shy at the beginning when we met them. However, they became more active and were more willing to talk to us after the English and Computer lessons and playing games with them. We also played sports with the students, such as badminton and football.



Fig. 11: Celebrate with the interpreters after inauguration ceremony of construction.



Fig. 12: Group photo at the new ceremony stage.

Cultural Exchange at School

At the end of the project, there was a ceremony to celebrate the successful construction of the toilet. The students danced and sang to express their happiness and we also performed on the stage. Dancing and singing with the locals was a valuable experience. After enjoying the shows, we received thank you cards from the students. At the end, they gave a speech to thank our efforts which was really touching.

Student participants from Department of Civil Engineering:

Chan Lok Tin (Dayday) (II)

Fung Kwun Tang (Myron) (II)

Lee Chak Fai (Fai) (II)

Lee Chun Man (Raymond) (II)

Miu Chun Yi Thomas (II)

Shin Joey Jun Yu (II)

Wan Siu Yeung (Sam) (II)

Yang Zi Yuan (Marcus) (II)

Student participants from Faculty of Social Sciences:

Fan Chun Ying (Asta) (I)

Gesang Zhuo Ma (Erin) (II)

Ho Chun Yin (Kenji) (III)

Lai Yin Kwan (Jane) (III)

Leung Chung Yan (Stephanie) (II)

Ni Ming Hui (Libra) (II)

Shum Wan Yu (Sarah) (II)

Chang Ling Chi (Gigi) (II)