

BUILDING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY - PREPARING STUDENT WITH MDVI INTO THEIR ADULT LIFE

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Abstract: *While students with MDVI are at school, they receive various supports from their school system. Educators and related service providers explore teaching strategies and activities with the students in an effort to ensure their success in life. However, through our experience, those supports are not enough to prepare students with adequate skills and services needed when they become adults. In Indonesia, many schools for students with MDVI have residential programs. This environment can restrict their chance of learning in a natural environment. Students do not have the opportunity to interact with other people other than their teachers and family. They also become secluded from their community, causing the community to develop a negative stigma about students with disabilities. In Bhakti Luhur Bandung, a partnership was created between the school and villagers in a local farming community. Students work with villagers on the farm, where the students learn to identify, plant and cook vegetables from the garden. The farming partnership, which started in 2014, provides an essential functional learning opportunity for the students. The farm involves 10 Villagers who happily teach the students, although they don't have any background working with students with MDVI. Currently, students sell their crops in the local market, which allows them to become more visible and recognized in the community. This presentation will share testimony from the villagers, values and beliefs about students with MDVI, and the impact of strengthening the relationships within communities. This relationship expanded the worlds of both the children and the community.*

Keywords: Transition, Community involvement, Real Life Experience

INTRODUCTION

Through interactions and technical support with Perkins Interaction, the program at Bakthi Luhur, Bandung questioned their preparation and education of the children under their care. They understood that no matter how much effort we place on teaching the student in school, without understanding the nature of their future life, it won't help them to be an independent individual. One of the goals of education is to ensure that every student takes part and responsibility as a community member. However, this has often become the hardest part to reach, due to the lack of awareness and willingness of the school to seek appropriate teaching methods and curriculum. Many students with MDVI don't have access to real life experience activity and are disconnected from their community. In fact, they should be an active community member. On the other hand, the other community members should provide opportunities for

them and support them to be an individual who fits into their society. An ideal situation is where there is a strong relationship between them, based on mutual relationship, respect and responsibility. For many, this is just a dream and hard to implement and reach in the real situation. With some understanding of social inclusion and creativity in thinking of strategy, it can become possible. Even the best school environment is not enough to support every student to be independent in their society; they need to learn in different environments and from different resources not available in school setting. Our society is full of natural resources for students which are often inexpensive and meaningful for them.

Lack of awareness and even ignorant attitudes toward children and people with disability within community seemed to be popular excuses we have heard for long and have become belief in the field of disability. But, are we willing to break out of this

“belief”? Are we really willing to explore possibilities to change it? Will they really ignore and be reluctant to take responsibility to educate our student with disability if we reach out and empower them? With the guidance and encouragement of Perkins Internations, Bakthi Luhur, Bandung began a new experiment with the community.

This project has proven that community members will participate and take responsibility to support our student. They are happy to do this when we use their expertise, and integrate our student into their daily activity and environments. This experience has given them greater confidence and they are proud of the great impact of what they do. They appreciate that we value their contribution and find spiritual value in their participation.

Process:

When the school principle learned and realized the importance of transition for each student as well connecting them with community, she began to explore and identify resources in the community. The basic thought was that every student should be community member and live in the community when they finish the school. Although, Bhakti Luhur Bandung known as an orphanage, they have the dream that children should not be in the institution when they grow older. The orphanage could be an ideal place to learn many skills, but it is not a real world. The real world is out of the institution, and these children must learn right from the beginning to be able to survive in the real world.

Because of the thinking, Bhakti Luhur created partnership between the school and villagers in a local farming community. Students work with villagers on the farm, where the students learn to identify plants and cook vegetables from the garden. Every week, students travel from their school to the farm, where the villagers always wait for them with happy faces. Student would learn about various local foods and cooking methods. They get skills like traditional ways to cook on fire; chop the wood for fire; pick the appropriate vegetable for different cuisines; and breed fish. At the same time, they also develop skills on planting different crops and vegetables; taking care and harvesting the crops. Currently, students sell their crops in the local market, which allows them to become more visible and recognized in the community. Surprisingly, customers always recognize their product and will happily choose them as they believe there isn't any chemical being used.

The farming partnership, which started in 2014, provides an essential functional learning opportunity for the students. The farm involves 10 villagers who happily teach the students, although they don't have any background working with students with MDVI.

Outcomes:

This relationship expanded the worlds of both the children and the community. Villagers found values

and beliefs about students with MDVI, and the impact of strengthening the relationships within communities. Teachers also reported positive impact to student's behavior. Before this farming program started, they have many students with behavior challenges such as high temper, wandering and self-injuring behaviors, difficulty in maintaining focus, and lack of anticipation skills. Since then, students have great anticipation skills and always look forward to the farming day; they are calmer and have better attention skill.

The news about this relationship spread out to the entire village and more people came to contribute and support based in their expertise; a person good in breeding fish; a business planner on marketing and farming; cooking different local foods and many came just to chat with children. The common thing among them as one of them explained is, “they enjoy being with the children; find personal values; and have stronger bonding each time among them” These words are the best expression of the success of this endeavor.

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