



Cooperative Education Report

Experiential Learning with Social Enterprise in Thailand: A Case study of Bamboo School in Buriram Province, Thailand

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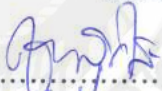
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Abstract

This report is the documentation of an internship, which is a three-months program designed as an academic requirement for BBA program. Through this internship, the university has made an attempt to let students relate their learning to real world environment by working in organizations of their choice, by working in real life situations.

I completed my internship in Mechai Viravaidya Foundation, which is an organization that primarily focuses on education and youth philanthropy. The main objective of this report is to learn about the operation of social enterprise and how CSR can benefit an organization. Living in the school, along with the teachers and students helped me understand the curriculum and the operations. The results found that the school has not only helped the disadvantaged students attain quality education but it has also helped the members of the community.

Keywords: Education, Experiential Learning, and Social Enterprise

Acknowledgement

I take this opportunity to express my special thanks of gratitude to Kathmandu College of Management in partnership with Siam University for allowing us to complete four months of internship in the final year of our Bachelors program. I not only enjoyed during the internship, but also learned a lot of new things. I am also grateful to the President of Mechai Viravaidya Foundation, Mr. Mechai Viravaidya for giving me an opportunity to work for his organization.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Mr. Isadore Reaud for guiding and helping me learn the culture at the Mechai Bamboo School. I also wish to thank several employees of the company whose help with the internship has helped me boost my learning skills. This internship has helped me grow as professionals and even as an individual on a base level to be more prepared for the inevitable future.

Thank you

Shreya Karki

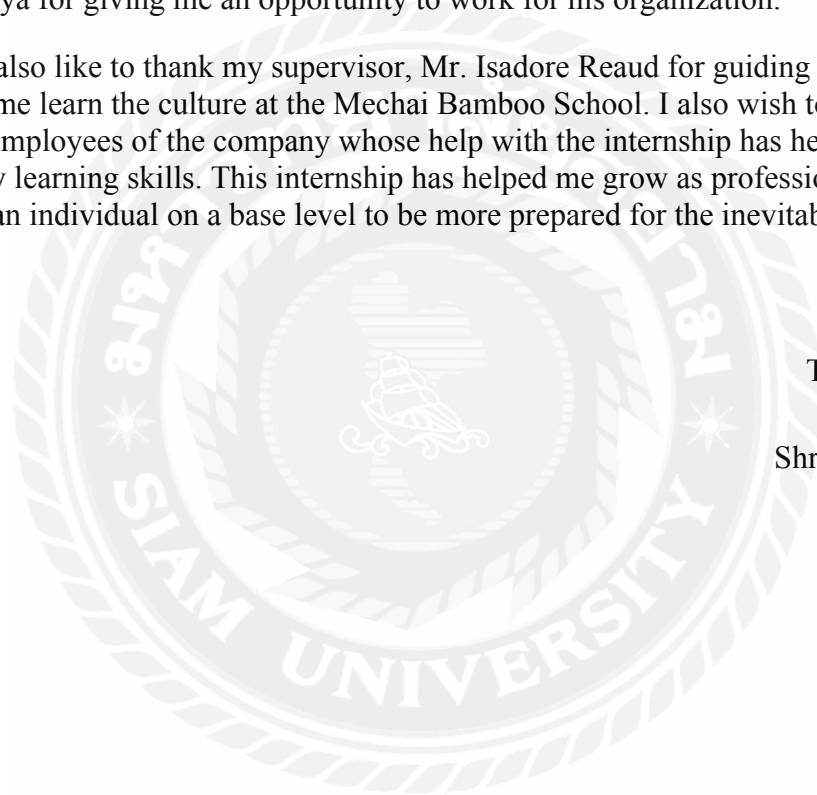


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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Organization Profile

The Mechai Bamboo School is an innovative secondary educational institution, which is also engaged in community development and is operated under the Mechai Viravaidya Foundation. This rural boarding school was established to become a lifelong learning center for all and act as a hub for social and economic advancement in surrounding villages.

The school serves to provide two basic functions: the first is to provide education to the 150 students that it accommodates. The other arm is community development, which provides assistance and cooperation to small rural schools and their surrounding communities (Mechai Pattana School). The school is located at Lamplaimat district, Buriram province of Northeast Thailand. The objective of the school is to be a lifelong learning center that will foster good citizens who are:

- Honest and willing to share
- Practice and promote gender equity
- Possess life skills and occupational skills
- Know how to manage
- Become community social entrepreneurs and development leaders.

The students come from various part of the country and compared to other schools in Thailand, Bamboo school is diverse and inclusive in nature as there are many students that belong to the ethnic minority as well. These students not only learn the basic subjects as the ones taught in other schools, but they also learn life skills like, planting, growing crops, doing business and helping the community that they live in. The students learn to live in peace with nature, protect nature, and learn practical skills to make a living in positive relationship with nature.

The Bamboo School is financially supported through sponsorships from private companies and individuals, Mechai's salary, and income from the social enterprise activities run by the school and other Mechai-associated restaurants and resorts. These financial inputs cover students' expenses for school fees, meals and accommodation, about THB 100,000 per student, per year. The school has been sustainable under this financing scheme for the past ten years and is intended to remain so without taking money from the students, who pay in kind with their parents through community service and tree planting.

As a Life Long Learning Center, Bamboo School students provide business training to villagers in surrounding communities, ranging from vegetable to out-of-season limes and food processing. The students also have established a training facility for wheelchair-bound people to learn how to grow vegetables. This “Wheelchair Agriculture” model has been launched in schools for students with disabilities with financial support from the business community. The expectation is that people with disabilities will be able to earn income at home while staying with their families. A program to teach agriculture for the blind is currently in development.

1.2 Organization Structure

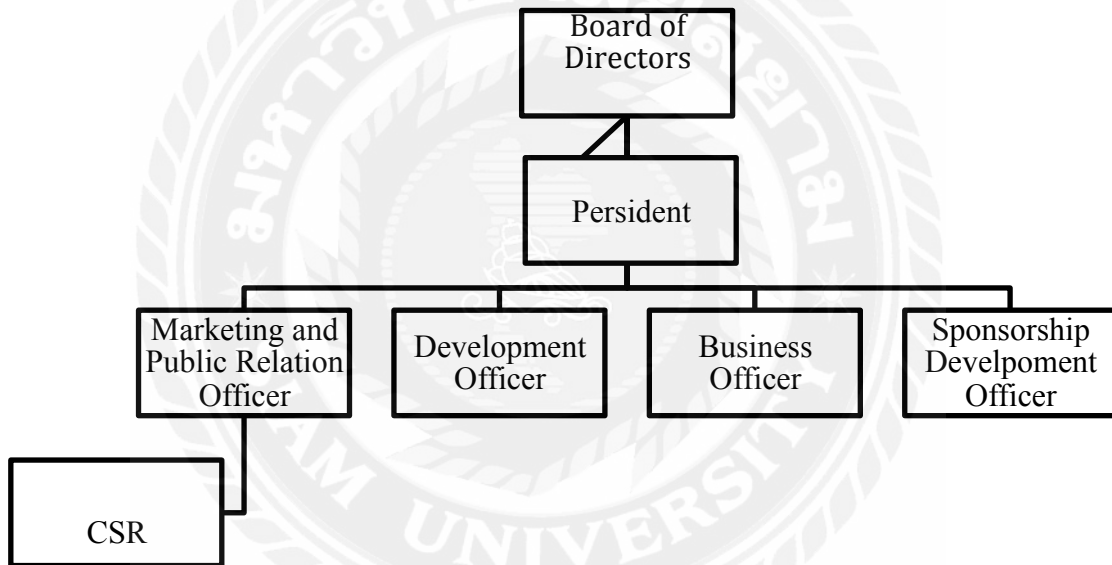


Figure 1: Organization Structure of Mechai Viravaidya Foundation

1.3 Objective of the study

The main objective of this paper is:

- To learn about the operation of the school
- To learn about corporate social responsibility and its application.
- To get an in-depth understanding of the Bamboo School and School-BIRD curriculum

- To understand the life of students in the school

1.4 Expected Outcomes

The rural sector in Nepal faces similar difficulties to that of rural Thailand. There are government schools that provide basic education but that is not enough when compared to the private sector or the average standard of education. There are still many children in rural area that are deprived of education because of their poor financial background. Rather than spending their time studying they are busy doing household chores or helping out their parents by doing agriculture.

This is the reason why Nepal requires schools like Bamboo School, which will not only help educate these children but also help out the families by educating them about agriculture and the myriad business opportunities that are available in the village itself. A school like this would further enhance the quality of living of the villagers and they will no longer have to face problems like before.

In order to familiarize myself with the operation of the school so that similar schooling system can be started back in Nepal was the main reason for my association with Mechai Viravaidya Foundation. After the completion of the coop education, I would be able to use the knowledge to work in similar organizations back in Nepal. There is a school called United World School that work in rural Nepal and helps provide education to poor children.

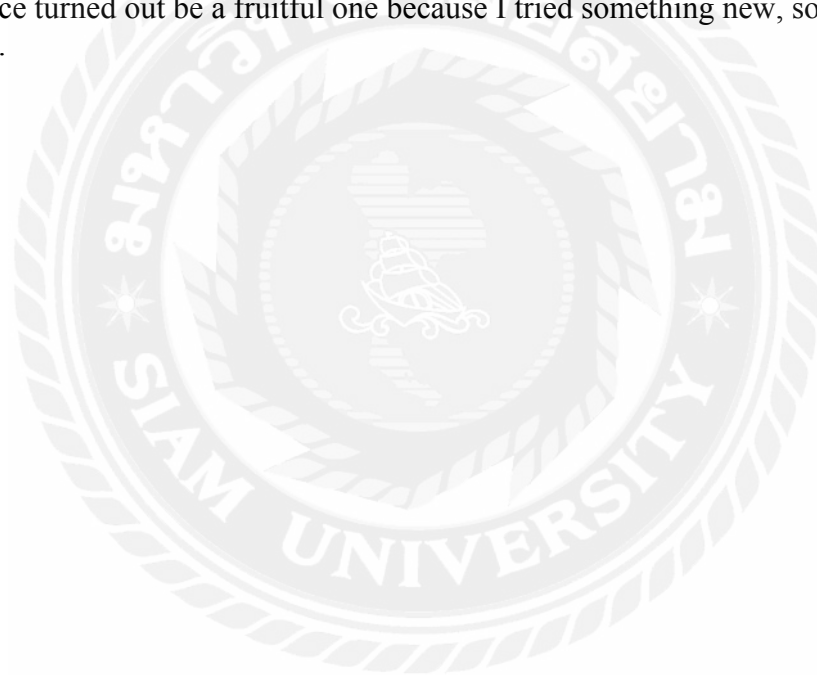
1.5 Limitation of the study

The internship opportunity provided by the university has been a great way to learn and put our knowledge into test. Having said that, there are some limitations that were faced during the internship period. For the most part of the internship, the volunteers had to stay in the school, which is in Buriram, far from the head office in Bangkok. Staying far away from the head office had its own setback as my participation in meetings and corporate work was very limited. Having said that, living in Buriram increased my interaction with the volunteers and the teachers.

Furthermore, the duration of the internship was short. As a result of which, supervisors hesitated to assign me task that took long time to complete as my stay was short. Having said that, they still gave me an opportunity to prepare proposals, start a crowd funding for scholarship for the ethics minorities in the group. However, more work and learning could have been accomplished had my stay been longer and not limited.

One of the major limitations faced, was the language barrier. As most part of my internship was based in Buriram, working alongside local Thai teachers was a must. The teachers were not fluent in English and neither was I in Thai so this led to a communication gap between the teachers and the volunteers. Not only the teachers, but also there was a communication gap between the students and volunteers as they were not fluent in English.

Lastly, being finance major one expects to work in a field related to the major. Working in a related field would allow students to use theoretical knowledge into real life situations. It would further help add value to the education and turn out to be a good way to enter the desired field. Nevertheless, teaching the students English and carrying out marketing campaigns was out of the box for me but this experience turned out be a fruitful one because I tried something new, something different.



Chapter 2: Literature Review

This part of report focuses on theories related to social enterprise. The Bamboo School basically runs on Mechai's income and from his many social enterprises like resorts and restaurants. Some of the theories that will be discussed are as follows,

2.1 Social Enterprise

There are various activities that need to be carried out in a country and the one source of income available is the government. But in reality, most government are unable to provide all the needs of the society and we people need to be more realistic as the gap between government promises and their services, can be quite wide. There are NGO's that are working to provide better facilities to the needy but then their supply of fund is also limited as they themselves run on funds injected by others. This why these NGO's must find a sustainable source of cash and that is through business activities.

In the article, "Social Enterprise in the UK" written by Mark Richardson, he defines social enterprise as a business that combines the values and ethos of a public sector with entrepreneurial skills of that in private sector (Richardson, 2015). Countries all around have seen a massive growth in the focus on social enterprise. He mentions that people can start social enterprise in any sector; digital and media, healthcare, social care and many more. There are numerous purpose that can be assigned for the establishment of social enterprise, some of the reasons maybe; to help certain community like youths, homeless people and so on, also to enhance the quality of living of certain geographical location. These growing problem in the communities lead to increase in social enterprise, which in turn helps, solve the problem as well as aids in the development of the country. In order for these enterprises to flourish they must be provided with specialist support and an encouraging community, only then will they be able to do good. The article mentions the support that companies have received from the government as well as the community in terms of grants, social impact bonds, crowd funding has led to an increase in social enterprises in the UK (Richardson, 2015).

These companies can establish a separate legal entity to do business, which is known as 'Social Enterprise'. In this kind of business the funds generated can be used for reserves, business expansion and lastly charitable activities. These companies like any other companies aim to make profit but it is used so as to fund

its charitable causes (What is it all about?). Companies no longer have to rely on donations from other donor as they are self- sustainable. Birds and Bees Resort in Pattaya and Cabbages and Condoms Restaurant in Bangkok are the social enterprise started by Mechai Viravaidya to help support the expenses of the school and provide scholarship to all the students.

2.2 Human Social Responsibility

There is a mentality amongst people that only certain types of organizations are wired to do charities and help out the society. But, what they fail to notice is that good can be done by everyone; all the companies, every NGO, government and the entire citizen. Regardless of the size and the structure of the company people are at the heart of everything (Hutchisson, 2016). It is the responsibility of each and every citizen to do well for its country and help out the ones in need.

Too much attention has been given to corporate social responsibility and that corporations should be helping out organizations that are in dire need of funding. This is where a line must be drawn, it is not the responsibility of just profit making organizations to help out the destitute, and rather it is something everyone must help out. By doing so individuals are fulfilling their civic duties, which leads to the welfare of the society and economic growth. Moreover, the center of all of the businesses is human; therefore they are the ones that define the CSR values and competencies. They pave the way for CSR in an organization and have a major role in its success. Like it has been mentioned earlier, CSR is not just about giving back to the society its rather the way the organization operates that is, improving the value chain and ensuring that the employees follow the code of conduct.

In the article written by Sharma S., Sharma J. and Devi A. they have mentioned that scandals and the scams that have been caused in huge businesses like Enron, UTI because of the illegal practices had let to people questioning the ethics and operations of these business houses (Sharma, Sharma, & Devi, 2009). It highlights the importance of human resource management in strategically planning the CSR activities as this department ensures and encourages sustainable practices. Furthermore, new employees or prospective candidates are attracted by the level or degree of CSR that the organization applies. Several factors like, quality of products, relationship with employees, the way they are treated all of it affects the reputation of the company. An organization is a place where individuals from various backgrounds come together and work towards a common objective. This means that it is the responsibility of the HR department to maintain the peace, harmony and respect is maintained. Alongside, the must also

put into consideration that a safe work space is provided so that other employees mistreat no one.

The article further states that, in order to follow ethics and maintain good working practices in any organization, the employee performance review should be periodically conducted. This ensures that employees are getting best training and career advancement platform, which further leads to motivation, success for the company and a better reputation. The article mentions an example of British Gas Company, which started an initiative of employee volunteering; this helped formulate policies within the company to help raise funds and devote some of their time to help the community. Therefore, we can say that in order to have a good CSR practice in an organization they should always start with the people and then move upwards.

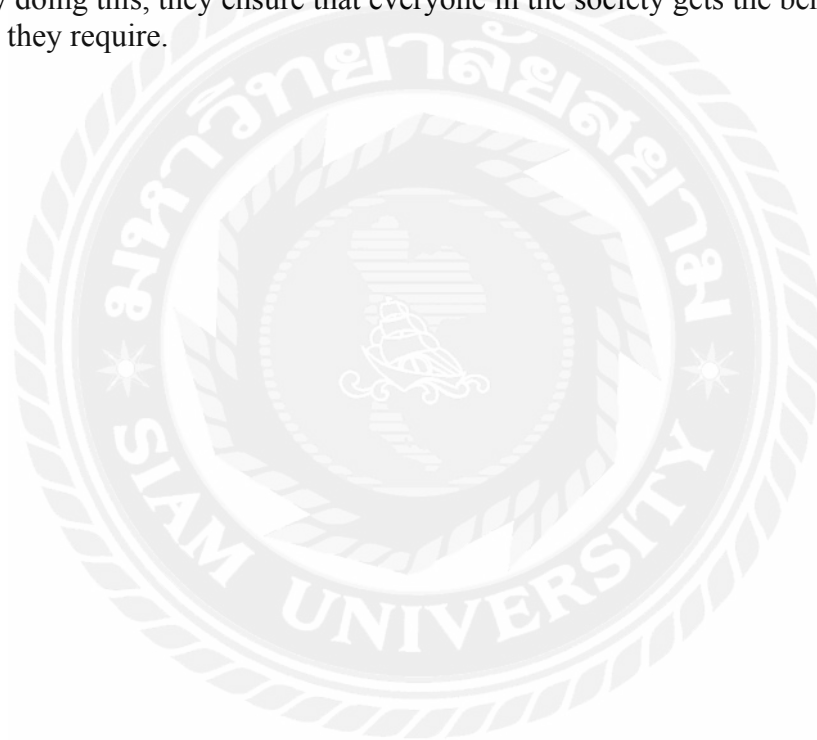
2.3 Economic and Social Sustainability

This theory states that any business or country should be able to produce the same level of economic production not only for the short-term but also for indefinite time in the future. In terms of business, it means to utilize the assets of the company efficiently to make the business profitable for a long period (Economic Sustainability). Having said that, the steps taken in order to gain economic sustainability should not negatively affect the environment, society or the culture.

Social sustainability is an aspect of CSR that it often overlooked as more focus is given to environment and economic sustainability (ESG Solutions, 2018). It basically means, doing business activities that meets the current needs without compromising the resources or ability of the generations to come to meet their own needs. It is doing what it takes to get along with each other so that we can collaborate peacefully and attend to solving problem locally and globally. There must be communication, sense of respect so that people are not afraid to share their ideas and values.

In the article written by A.D Basiago (Basiago, 1999), he has mentioned that the concept of sustainable development was derived from a discipline in economics that states that Earth has a limited resources and it will give life to or support life on it. Furthermore, the population of the working is growing but the resources are only limited, with the excessive use and its depletion might lead to problems of scarcity for future generation. Moreover, there has been a growing concern that this economic discipline gave rise to and that is the shortage of supply of resources and a major possibility of extinction. Another major problem is the non-renewability factor of the natural resources, many companies are based on these

sole resource that take thousands of years to formulate and with the current level of usage it will not be long before these companies will run out of business. Therefore, in order to stop the nature from depleting and thing of future generation in mind, the concept of economic sustainability was raised. Mechai Viravaidya Foundation works by the policy of economic of social sustainability, as the foundation believes that it is the responsibility of each and every individual to care for the environment and the future generation. For this purpose, the school has been declared a no plastic zone. Furthermore, planting 400 trees pays the tuition, this ensures that the environment is not affected and the future generations can enjoy the resources as well. The students also help out the villagers by teaching them ways to enhance the productivity of the land and many more. By doing this, they ensure that everyone in the society gets the benefit and help that they require.



Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Roles and Responsibilities

Bamboo School is a unique school, with not just a different teaching system but rather different approach altogether. The school has its own farms where students learn agriculture and they sell the produce in the city, also it has its own poultry farm and the produce from it are also sold to make money for the operation of the school. Because of the unique way of operation many visitors and volunteers from various countries come by to help, stay, learn and understand the culture and the way of life. Therefore, one of the major tasks was to communicate with visitors and volunteers and make necessary arrangements; room, date and itinerary as per their feasibility.

Alongside project co-ordination, the school wanted to maintain a presence in social media so that it could reach more people all over the world. As a result, daily social media posts had to be posted from the school's Facebook page and the followers had to be updated about the events and activities going around in the school. Furthermore, the school and the organization was looking for ways to raise funds for the ethnic minorities we were given the responsibility to raise funds for them. For this purpose, proposals were made in order to approach potential investors. Along with this, we were constantly working to start a crowd funding so that we could reach a larger base of audience and attract donations from all over the world.

Apart from the behind the desk work, the volunteers were expected to teach English to students from grade 7 to grade 12. They already had books that were being used by the previous teachers but there was not a set plan so, as a part of the job description we had to make a curriculum for the remaining school year. The existing teacher constantly provided support to help formulate the curriculum as per the Thai government standard.

Teaching English was a part of the volunteer work that every interns had volunteers had to perform. A special responsibility was given to me to carry out interview with students of every grade as well as teachers teaching each subject. This project was done in collaboration with Peace Corps as they were publishing second book of Mechai Viravaidya. One of the chapters of that books includes the progress of the school, so, for this purpose, responses from the teachers and students had to be gathered. The roles and responsibilities assigned during the term of the internship are listed below:

3.2 Project Detail

“From Cabbages to Condoms” is a biography about Mechai Viravaidya, which describes about his childhood, teenage and adulthood. Not only that, but it also describes about how he started his philanthropy projects in Thailand in detail. As a part of the internship project, they had assigned me a research project. The project was to interview the students and the teachers in Mechai Pattana School and document their responses. These responses gathered would be used to write a second book about Mechai Viravaidya, which will include the progress of the Bamboo school and the impact it has had on the communities.

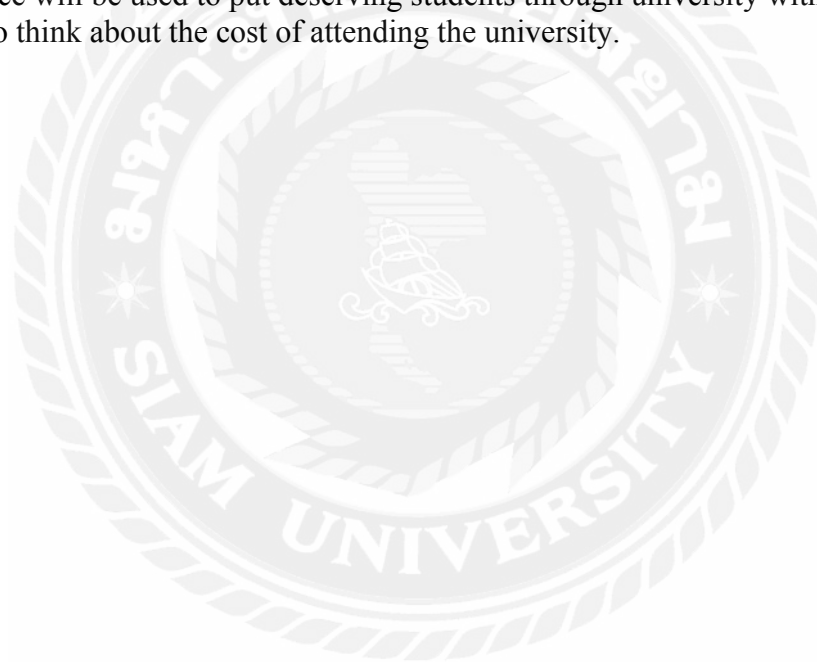
For the purpose of gathering as many answers, two students, one boy and one girl, from each grade (7-12) and one teacher from each subject were chosen to carry out the interview. The questionnaire had been prepared beforehand and was made so as to address the changes that have occurred in the students and the teachers after joining the school. It provides emphasis on the skills that has been imparted by the school to the students. There are numerous skills that the students get to learn during their time in the school like, agriculture, community development projects, School-BIRD and social enterprise. They also get to do internship with big companies and learn skills that they can go back home and use to help their community or even start a new business of their own.

All the volunteers in the school are required to teach English to the students. The students in each grade are divided into 3 sub-divisions; they are beginner, intermediate and advanced. They had assigned me to teach the advance students from grade 8 – grade 12. Even though the students were in advanced division they still lacked proper conversation and grammatical skills. For the first week, they assigned me as an assistant to the teacher so as to learn how to teach the students because this was the first teaching experience of mine. After the teacher left, they gave me full responsibility to teach the advanced students. The school had been following English book published by Cambridge, so the same book was followed and the students were being taught accordingly. The students from grade 10-12 had to prepare for ONET exam where they would be asked a bunch of vocabulary questions. In order to prepare students for the exam, they were being introduce 10 new vocabulary words daily and were asked to make flashcards so as to remember the new words.

Furthermore, the school receives a lot of visitors from various countries that stay there for the weekend and it is the responsibility of the students to introduce and give them a tour of the school. For this purpose, the students need to have a good conversational skill. Therefore, every class would be backed by some kind of

classroom activity so as to improve their communication skills. For the most part of it, the teachers used to show them short movies or ask them to read short stories. They would then have to come up and talk about the movie and the story that they read about.

The school also houses students that come from ethnic minorities and currently has ten such students. These students don't have a citizenship so they and their families are denied basic rights and their situation is so worse that they can't even get into universities. For this purpose, the foundation wanted to help raise funds so as to send these students to universities. Therefore my teammates and me worked collectively to formulate an abstract and video that could help attract possible donors into a great cause. We chose Gofund me website as the medium to present our case and connect with possible donors. The funds collected from this source will be used to put deserving students through university without them having to think about the cost of attending the university.



Chapter 4: Result and Discussion

4.1 Contribution made during the internship

The internship with Mechai Viravaidya Foundation has been an educational experience altogether. I got to learn things that I wouldn't have been able to learn had I done my internship in any other organization.

During my internship the major contributions I made was to help out with the research project; to identify the progress that the students, teacher and the school has made over the years of it operation. For this purpose, I stayed in the school for two months. During my stay, I interviewed the teachers and the students that are enrolled in the school. This interview was conducted so as to help write a chapter in the second biography that is soon to be published about Mechai Viravaidya. The book will entail all the changes that have occurred in the community, school, students and the teachers. The book will focus on the benefits that the community and its members have received from the operation of the school. As for my role in the project was to focus more on the changes that has occurred in the students and teacher since joining the school.

Not only this, but I also helped the teachers plan out English curriculum for the students for that year. I assisted the teachers to teach English to the students. Learning a new language can be difficult if the students lose interest, for that purpose we used to incorporate a lot of games in the class so as to teach them English without making them feel like they were studying a subject. Most of the time, we asked the students to watch English movies or read short books so as to familiarize themselves with new words and sentences. Later on they would have to talk about the movie they saw and book they read. This ensured that the students were talking in English everyday and improving their communication skill. Despite the fact that the curriculum was different, they still had to appear for the board exam so they were taught new vocabulary words that would appear on the exam. All the volunteers worked together to help students understand foreign culture better, for this; we used to make students bake cookies, make smores, jam, pizza and many more activities. These kinds of activities further enhanced their communication skill; as they would have to look up ingredients online, communicate with us for the procedure.

The situation of ethnic minorities in Thailand is very difficult. One of the main problems is that people belonging to this community face is that they are not provided with citizenship which makes it difficult to do anything. They are not

paid well or are paid below the average wage, which makes it difficult for families to send their children to study in a school. This is where Bamboo School stepped in and has helped to provide education to students coming from a disadvantaged background. Therefore, my teammates and I helped the organization to raise funds for the ethnic minorities that are currently enrolled in the school. We collectively worked on preparing proposals to donors and also started a crowd funding in go fund me.



Figure 1: Ethnic Minorities in the school

Also, Teenage pregnancy is a significant problem in Thailand, which has one of the highest rates in Southeast Asia. These mothers face many barriers which includes: being forced out of school, not receiving the support necessary to continue attending school, not having time because they are caring for their child and many more. Schools are not willing to have pregnant mothers as a fellow student because of the view that this will negatively impact other students. This has led many young mothers to opt for vocational schools, as she now has to earn a living for not just her but for her child as well. Bamboo school from this year has taken a teen mother to live and study in the school itself. For this reason, we helped draft proposal to donors so that we can raise funds to cover the expenses incurred by the mother and her child.

4.2 Details of learning from the internship

The internship opportunity has led me to learn a lot about the school, its operation, the curriculum and its purpose as a lifelong learning center for all. My learning from this internship is that discipline, sharing and respect for others are not so much taught as learned. The Bamboo School creates the environment, conditions, and opportunities for students to learn the values as well as multiple opportunities to act on those values as good citizen and social leader.



Figure 2: Internship at Mechai Pattana School

The opportunity of working and living in the school itself helped me experience the life and learning at the school. Students' learning experience at the Bamboo School takes place as much out of the classroom as in. Student life on campus and expectations for behavior create a climate of individual responsibility as well as team work. These norms and expectations reinforce the learning of discipline, which the school considers an important characteristic of being a good Thai citizen.



Figure 3: Students making paper from vegetables

Another aspect of my learning was about the Bamboo School Curriculum, which, is based on creativity rather than rote memorization. The Bamboo school learning standards exceed the current Thai Basic Education Core Curriculum, clearly articulating that students should learn for use in life at each level. Each day, the classes that follow the Thai curriculum run from eight in the morning to two in the afternoon and they go back home, but in bamboo school they participate in many extracurricular activities that provide a broad range of experiential learning opportunities. The teaching and learning methods are very student-focused as the methods are very interactive and include research by the students.



Figure 4: Students doing group work

In addition to the life in the school, involving in CSR department of the organization helped me understand more about the operation, economic and social sustainability. People these days are more focused towards CSR and they believe that it is the duty of either the government or the big companies to help the ones in need. Mechai Viravaidya Foundation doesn't live by this virtue; the company believes that it the responsibility of each and every citizen to help the one's in need. Rather than focusing on corporate social responsibility everyone should start thinking of human social responsibility.

The organization working for a good social cause should start their own social enterprise so that they can fund their social activities. This is what the foundation has been doing for a long time now. This doesn't mean that they don't ask for donation because they do but, the main idea here is be self-sustainable even if there are no donations coming in. Therefore, working in CSR department area helped me enhance my communication and writing skills. Writing proposal for the current and future activities by working with team members helped develop my team working skills as well.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

5.1 Self-assessment as future professional

Nepal faces similar problem to that of rural Thailand. The situation of destitute families is getting worse day by day and nothing is being done to help alleviate the persistent problem. Time and again we are reminded that children are the future of the country, despite the fact, neither the government nor the public has taken preventive action. Children are still working in farms, getting married at an early age or are doing labor work so as to help their family.

The main solution to this problem is to alleviate poverty but it's easier said than done. We need to enforce quality education alongside provide better income opportunities so that families will no longer have to withheld children from pursuing education because of lack of funds.

The internship opportunity has opened up doors for a wide range of possibilities in the days to come. As discussed earlier, the problem is the same so why not make the solution similar. Working in Mechai Viravaidya Foundation has made me realize that a similar approach is what Nepal requires. It will not only help children pursue their dreams but it will remove the financial burden that the families would have faced had they gone to a different school.

The time spent with the teachers and students has made me understand the curriculum and the operation better. The knowledge gained can be used to work with like-minded organizations or individuals to help make a difference in the lives of the destitute. There are organizations like United World Schools that are working to solve the education problem in rural parts of Nepal so in the future I look forward to associate with them.

Having said that, I still want to pursue further education so that I can open up an enterprise of my own. The income generated from it can be used to further sustain or fund the social projects that I plan to work on because one thing I have learned from this internship is to be self-sufficient and sustainable.

5.2 Comparison of practical learning VS theory

Corporate social responsibility is a term we hear very often. The general conclusion that people make is that; it is preventing bad practices in the organization, making profits using environmentally friendly practices and donating a lot of money to charity foundations and thus do good. This mentality is completely wrong, because it is all about how companies make profit and not how they spend them. Rather than focusing more on the ethics and business part, people look into the bigger picture that is the donations that companies are making. As long as the companies are helping out social organization and doing charities, they have a good CSR practice. People fail to question the ethics, morals, norms and business practices that the company is following.

Learning about CSR in university helped me clear out any misconceptions I had about it. I learned that it is more than just helping out the society in need but it is rather about the internal and the way profit is made in an organization. A company is said to have good CSR practice if it has implemented an ethical and environmental approach in all of its value chain process.

Working with the foundation helped me understand CSR in a better way. The foundation and all of its social enterprise operate by keeping the environment, its ethics and the society into consideration. A great deal of importance is given to maintaining the environment and running the business in an eco-friendly environment. For instance, the school has its own farm, does its own poultry farming and families pay tuition by planting 400 trees per child. Also, the company gives a importance to sustainability as the society cannot be dependent on just government and corporations to solve their problems.

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