

# VIET-NAM BULLETIN

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EDUCATION, PRIMARY (11-69)



**PRIMARY EDUCATION**

# PRIMARY EDUCATION IN VIETNAM



**Over 3 million  
young children  
in schools by  
1978 is target**

As modern teaching methods catch on, primary education in South Vietnam is beginning to contribute more effectively to the counter-insurgency effort by involving both pupils and adults in village development.

Attending primary schools today are more than two million boys and girls — 76 per cent of all children between six and 11 years of age. This is an enrollment growth of nearly 3.7 per cent each year since the Saigon government launched its decade-of-development program of educational reform six years ago.

More important than the steadily rising attendance is the fact that primary teachers are moving away from the traditional «shout and holler» method of instruction by rote. Rapidly they are adopting the modern concept of learning by problem-solving. And in Vietnam the problems are not just arithmetic sums involving apples and oranges, but real problems — long-standing community problems plaguing many rural areas.

Schools using this new teaching method in all five primary grades are called community schools —

and with good reason, for as the children study community problems, their parents become involved. Problems may range from rats in the rice warehouse to garbage in the streets. Analysis of problems moves from the blackboard to the village square and often on to the village council. When the problems analyzed in the classroom are solved — usually by self-help projects involving cooperation between the village people and government agencies — the community benefits not only from the practical solutions but from the mutual involvement.

The community schools thus have joined the Revolutionary Development campaign, for the central purpose of RD is to involve as many of the rural people as possible in local government and village development. «For long-term results,» says one Saigon educator, «primary education is becoming the single most powerful weapon in the pacification program.»

### Forty Excellent Schools

Community education is still very new. There are 5,265 primary schools with 20,248 classrooms in the nation's 44 provinces, and 1,744 of the schools are large enough in student body and teaching staff to offer instruction in all five grades. So far 1,377 of these grade schools have been classed as community schools. Fifty of them now are considered to be fully developed according to the concepts of community education. Forty have been rated excellent.

Within the next year another 1,000 schools are due to join the category of community schools. Despite an anticipated 25 per cent increase in classrooms as a result of new construction before the end of the decade-of-development program in 1972, 80 per cent



Whether in a big city school in Saigon (above) or in rustic one-room schoolhouse in Hiep Hoa hamlet, Phan Rang, more and more children are seeking an education.

of all primary schools — some 24,000 classrooms — will be community schools by then. Even in rustic one-room schoolhouses the trend toward problem-solving and away from memorization will be evident by then. Eventually only old-timers will remember when the teacher called out a word, phrase or sentence and the class echoed it back in deafening chorus. Along with this «shout and holler» routine, soon to be forgotten will be the drudgery of pupils copying and memorizing copious blackboard notes — a system which educationists say produces non-thinkers unable to apply to any practical purpose the information they acquire in class.

Problem-solving is used around the world to train pupils to think, but rarely do pupils have such problems to solve as Vietnam's. The 40 community schools rated excellent by Ministry of Education inspectors have dealt with such problems as these, with positive results in community participation: public sanitation; prevention of diseases like tuberculosis, malaria, cholera and typhus; obtaining the birth certificates needed for public school enrollment; improving methods of growing papaya and IR-8



«Miracle Rice,» and eradicating insects, worms and mice which destroy crops.

### New Concepts

According to community education concepts, the local school has an important role to play in improving the environment and enhancing the people's social and economic life. Community education is particularly suited to the Republic of Vietnam today, because these same objectives are the aims of the nation's political strategy of pacification. Both the community school and the counter-insurgency program seek full participation of the people in self-help projects. These projects involve the pooling of the people's labor with the material, technical and financial support of the government, thereby bringing the people into greater contact with government agencies and accustoming them to people-government partnerships. The community school is the agency which helps the young pupils — and through them, the adults — to contribute their own resources to solve problems of everyday living. School activities grow from the needs and the interests of the people of the community served by the school. The curriculum stresses using the community itself as a laboratory. Formal school work is supplemented by discus-

sions, local excursions and field trips. Pupils and teachers find that learning is easier in a problem-solving situation. The youngsters learn also the value of individual and group contributions to undertakings, they develop positive attitudes toward work, and they derive satisfaction from visible signs of achievement within their community. All this reinforces learning and provides motivation for study.

In practice, the teacher presents the pupils with a problem, encourages them to discuss that problem, to go out and gather data pertinent to the problem, to analyze the data, to debate alternatives, and to choose a course of action that seems most likely to solve the problem. In practice, this inevitably involves the adults, for the collection of data on a community problem by a horde of eager young pupils, that step alone is an event that cannot very well be ignored in any community as close-knit as a Vietnamese village. No village elder could let his grandson usurp his civic responsibility, so when it comes time to implement the solution of a local problem, the adult community is deeply involved.

### Mud and Water

The An Phung school, directly across the river from Can Tho's waterfront market, has emphasized community education since 1964 and currently is completing two major community projects a year with the support of large numbers of parents and other adults. The school's biggest project so far lifted the community out of the swamp it was built on. The pupils were presented with the problem: their daily lives were plagued by mud and water. The students inspected the area, discussed alternative solutions and finally decided that the community needed elevated roads and paved sidewalks so nobody need slog through the gumbo mud. News of the project spread through the hamlet. Able-bodied members of the community — men, women and children — volunteered their labor. The pupils collected piasters in a house-to-house drive. A delegation of pupils and their parents «sold» local U.S. aid mission representatives on the project, and the necessary amount of cement was donated. Pupils and parents formed a committee to buy rock and sand. Another committee designed the proposed pattern of roads and byways. A committee of the village council obtained the technical assistance available from local government services. Today the community has literally been lifted from the mud by the construction of five kilometers of paved roads and sidewalks.

The pattern of adult involvement in community school activities thus was set in An Phung, and a number of other self-help projects quickly followed: campaigns against insects and rodents, methods of increasing pork and poultry production, a get-out-the-vote campaign during local elections, a malaria control drive, immunizations against endemic diseases. The community came to life under the



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«Shout and holler» method of instruction is being discarded in these classrooms, giving way to the modern concept of problem-solving.



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school's stimulus. Yet the academic achievements of its busy pupils did not suffer; examinations were passed at a level higher than ever before. The An Phung school demonstrated that involvement in community projects, far from distracting the pupils from their work, provided better opportunities for learning. The pupils today enjoy school more, as evidenced by better attendance records, and their parents, absorbing some of their offsprings' enthusiasm, have come to identify with the school. But the teachers insist they have not usurped the role of a community development officer. Their job is teaching the young, and they do so through problem-solving because it stimulates the learning process. Any benefit to the community is a fortunate by-product.

Community education is spreading quickly. Last year 15,000 teachers and principals attended courses, exercises and seminars to learn the basic concepts and the teaching techniques of community education as well as the proper use of textbooks to escape from rote instruction. Some 14 million textbooks designed for community education already have been distributed, but another million are needed if the 1969-72 goals are to be achieved.

Another 2,200 principals and senior teachers will study the concepts of community education, leadership and the use of textbooks this year. At the same time, the corps of inspectors will be increased and improved to provide better supervisory services at the provincial level. Forty-two new inspectors will be hired this year; 48 joined the service last year.

### Teacher Shortage

One major handicap to further expansion of community education in Vietnam is a shortage of trained teachers. The expansion of enrollment since the Vietnamese took over educational responsibilities from the French has been the cause of the teacher shortage as well as education's most outstanding achievement. Enrollment has gone from 441,000 primary school pupils in 1954 to 1,450,000 in 1963 to 2,047,000 today. And more children, despite economic pressures, are staying in school term after term; the number graduating from primary school has increased by 100 per cent in the past decade.

This mushrooming attendance has called for a major classroom construction program — from 12,879 primary school classrooms in 1954 to 20,248 today.

In 1969's first quarter alone, 2,326 new classrooms were built — 2,017 by the Ministry of Revolutionary Development, 109 by the Ministry of Education and 200 by the people in self-help projects.)

This expansion of facilities in turn demanded the recruitment of thousands of new teachers, particularly after the decade-of-development program of

educational reform was launched in 1963. Teaching standards were lowered drastically at that time. Almost anyone with a good reputation and a minimum of education could get a teaching job in hamlet schools, yet some hamlet schoolhouses stood vacant for months after their construction because no teachers were available. (Hamlet teachers earn about 3,400 piasters a month — US\$40 — while normal school graduates start at 6,000 piasters and work up to 12,000 in 20 years.) The situation is slowly changing for the better as teacher-training programs become more effective. But few of the 32,000 teachers in public primary schools or the 13,000 teachers in private primary schools have had the benefit of adequate training. Only 2,000 of the public school teachers are normal school graduates with two years of training. Fifteen thousand have had 90-day crash courses of instruction, and about 15,000 have had no formal training. Many of them, however, are doing good work even if they do have to keep one page ahead of their pupils in the syllabus.

### Teacher Standards

«The next major step is to raise the standards of teacher instruction,» says Pham Van Thuat, assistant to the Minister of Education for primary and secondary education. Having studied at the Sorbonne and at the University of California at Berkeley, Professor Thuat lectured at Hawaii's East-West Center and now teaches at Saigon University's Faculty of Pedagogy. «We hope our training courses eventually will bring all our teachers to the normal school level. Twelve hundred will be retrained in Saigon this year. And starting this summer a series of courses in provincial capitals will train thousands more. We hope soon to be able to add incentives to encourage educated people to become teachers. At the moment only a few of the students at normal schools receive financial assistance, and then it is only 200 piasters a month. Teacher-trainees at the 90-day courses get 1,900 piasters, and this is very little.

«Another of our hopes,» says Thuat, «is to encourage more primary school graduates to attend high school. In three months we hope to add the first grade of secondary school to some primary schools as an experiment. Then we plan to institute a crash program to build more high schools with an emphasis on technical training. But first we must establish a strong national policy in community education at the primary level.»

### Target Goals

If all goals of the decade-of-development program are to be met, Vietnam will need 120,000 primary teachers, or nearly three times the current total. Other targets for 1969-72 include:

\* Add 5,900 more primary classrooms to the present 20,248;

\* Restructure primary education to do away with



The little ones raise voices in a song of cheer.

the distinction between the hamlet school program and the community school program and to get community education concepts at work in 80 per cent of the primary schools;

- \* Increase enrollment in primary schools to more than 2,316,000, or 86 per cent of all children in the six-to-11 age group;

- \* Train 6,850 more hamlet school teachers;

- \* Provide in-service training programs emphasizing community education for 40,000 teachers;

- \* Reduce the pupil-teacher ratio from 60:1 to 55:1 by 1972 and eventually to 30:1;

- \* Improve programs in the nation's five normal schools (At Saigon, Qui Nhon, Ban Me Thuot, Vinh Long and Long An) and introduce a better course credit system;

- \* Reprint and distribute 7,400,000 copies of arithmetic, science and social science textbooks;

- \* Create at least one primary school library of 200 books in each of the 44 provinces;

- \* Provide a leadership training course in a foreign country, probably one in Asia, for 60 teachers and educators, to be followed by in-country training;

- \* Arrange a 90-day study tour of the United

States to give 20 educators a direct working experience with community school concepts.

## Budget Funds

To help achieve these aims the Vietnamese government is allocating a greater percentage of its funds to education. Some 2,400,366,000 piasters were spent on education in 1967 and 3,193 million in 1968. The 1969 total of 3,492,806,000 piasters (nearly US\$30 million) represents about six per cent of the national budget. Fifty per cent of this year's education budget is earmarked for primary schools, and 20 per cent of that amount for community schools. The Ministry of Education has recommended that the primary school allocation be increased nearly threefold in stages from 1970 through 1974. The increases will be used mainly for the stepped-up in-service training of teachers and the reprinting of millions of textbooks.

The Ministry of Education has made such strides towards its goals that some areas of U.S. aid to elementary education are gradually being phased out. According to Dr. Hal O. Hall, chief of primary education support at the Agency for International Development (U.S. AID), the United States spent US\$3,500,000 on assistance to primary education in 1968 out of a total outlay for all U.S. educational assistance to Vietnam of \$12,615,000. This year the total outlay will be cut to \$8 million. U.S. elementary education specialists in Vietnam have been reduced from 29 last year to seven this year. All but two of the 15 members of the Southern Illinois University contract team that had been helping improve curricula at the five Vietnamese normal schools now have gone home.

The Ministry of Education estimates that it costs 2,974 piasters per year per primary school pupil. In 1978, when it is anticipated that South Vietnam's population will reach 22,500,000 (compared with today's 17,400,000), it should cost 3,324 piasters per year for each of the 3,159,000 children expected to be in primary classes. This would represent 94 per cent of all children in the six-to-11 age group.

«We are not entirely satisfied with what has been done in primary education,» says Professor Thuat. «Our 1967 Constitution says that elementary education shall be «free, universal and compulsory,» and as soon as possible we want to reach the stage where we can implement the Constitution completely. We are not satisfied with 76 per cent of our young children in school now, or 86 per cent in 1972, or 94 per cent in 1978. We will not stop pushing until all the children are in primary school and illiteracy is completely eradicated. My people are hungry for education. Colonialism taught them that educated people get the best jobs. They want a future for their children. They want to prepare them for a life that they themselves could never hope for. We are trying to meet the needs and the hopes of the community.»

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