

Pepy – improving the quality of education

Colm Byrne writes about a collaboration that is benefiting teachers and students in Ireland and Cambodia

In July 2013 four teachers from Donabate Portrane Educate Together NS (DPETNS), Niamh Kershaw, Cormac O'Brien, Jenny Stanley and Colm Byrne, travelled to Cambodia and visited PEPY (Promoting Education Empowering Youth). They began sowing the seeds for a mutually beneficial partnership.

What is PEPY?

PEPY is an educational non governmental organisation (NGO) that aspires to improve the quality of education in the rural area of Kralanh in Cambodia. PEPY's vision is a future where Cambodians are empowered to achieve their dreams. Their mission is to invest time and resources in young people, working with them to raise standards of living and improve the quality of education in their communities.

PEPY's current programs focus on youth leadership and supplementary education.

The educational partnership

Since October 2013, DPETNS and PEPY have been collaborating. This partnership has been based on mutual trust, reciprocity between the parties and a shared responsibility towards achieving goals.

The partnership is a learning exchange, which seeks to enhance the quality of education in both organisations, with a particular emphasis on promoting global citizenship and wellbeing.

In May 2013 Balbriggan Educate Together NS (BETNS) became involved in the partnership.

Achievements

Education and awareness: Because of this partnership, the children in DPETNS have moved beyond simply learning the theory of equality and justice, to playing an active role as global citizens. All children in DPETNS have been taught class-specific development education lessons related to Cambodia. They have learned about Cambodian culture and events like Bon Om Touk (Cambodian Water Festival) have been marked throughout the school.

Students in PEPY's Learning Center have participated in development education workshops. Staff and students in PEPY have celebrated Irish culture through language, dance and sport.

Positive mental health: DPETNS has assisted PEPY in sharing various lessons online, (www.cambodiaireland.com) including a positive mental health programme



Colm with Cambodian students

developed within DPETNS and used in both organisations.

Personal connections: A 'penpal exchange' has been established and is now in its second year. A dedicated website enables students to communicate directly with one another through moderated exchanges.

Teacher Placement: Five teachers from DPETNS and one teacher from BETNS have travelled to Cambodia. There they have learned, taught and collaborated. In July of this year, Micheál Garvey, a teacher in DPETNS, facilitated workshops to share his knowledge about CV writing and job applications with the students. As a former principal teacher, Micheál was able to assist PEPY's management on effective leadership. Cecelia Gavigan from BETNS worked with staff sharing her knowledge on communications and ICT. Students enhanced their understanding about good communication with presentations on how to develop good oral communication, skills and practices.

The staff in PEPY and teachers from Ireland collaborated in devising lessons and planning future activities.

Fundraising: DPETNS carried out a series of fundraising events to raise funds to support the partnership and PEPY. Included in this was a sponsored children's run. During this event the 17 classes in DPETNS journeyed from Donabate to Siem Reap with each class running a section of the journey around our school yard, cheered on by our school

community. DPETNS contributed \$10,020 dollars to directly support PEPY's programs.

The future

Some of the activities planned are; a recording of a song on the theme of mental health, a celebration of cultural festivals, a cycle, video updates on cambodiaireland.com (weekly) and pen pal exchanges.

In April 2015 it is anticipated that PEPY representatives (two staff members and two students) will visit Ireland to learn, teach and share. PEPY teachers will be teaching classes as well as taking joint assemblies with teaching staff in ETNS. Students will be giving first-hand accounts of their own experiences growing up in Cambodia. We also plan a visit to INTO Head Office and, as DPETNS, PEPY and DCU are all Changemaker organisations, we hope to visit DCU during the visit.

Our partnership is strong and growing. It has benefited teachers and education more broadly in both Cambodia and Ireland. It has achieved much and is set to achieve much, much more.

COLM BYRNE teaches in DPETNS and is also the Learn Together co-ordinator. He is currently on sabbatical and volunteering with PEPY in Cambodia until April 2015. For more information visit cambodiaireland.com or see video www.youtube.com/watch?v=2g7FLf7uPPo. This partnership has received funds from the INTO Solidarity Fund.

If you would like to contact Colm directly, his email address is colmbyrner@icloud.com