Khu And Tru, From Vietnam Doing Well In Local School

By Ashtan Benton

Brisbane. It might be expected that two small boys whose family fled from their home land, lived in a refugee camp, and then moved to a strange land would be withdrawn and shy... but such is not the case with two young Vietnamese boys recently enrolled in Northsall Elementary School.

"They're really doing great," said Kay Hiller, first grade teacher, in whose class the boys were placed.

The boys are Thanh Song Kho, age nine, and Thung Song Tru, age seven. They are the children of Thanh Song Quan and Ngo Thanh, who left, hand and became a part of a population commonly referred to as "boat people" refugees.

The family lived in a Hong Kong refugee camp for six months before coming to the United States under the sponsorship of Bethel Presbyterian Church, and is now living in the church manse.

The two boys, Kho and Tru as they are called, are currently learning to speak English at school by use of a "language meatball" teaching device.

This device uses pictures of various items, with the names beside the pictures, and the boys speak the names of the items into a recording machine and then listen to themselves - frequently smaller children.

However, Mrs. Hiller said that their instruction is not limited to this method.

"Whatever works is what we will use," she said.

The boys have an intestinal attitude toward their school work. They don't know what they are going to get, but they are not afraid to help Kho and Tru with their work.

Although the boys don't speak any English when they arrived, they did know the capital of the world and that they lived in the refugee camp. The boys, Kho, Vietnamese - but no French. Vietnamese women who live in the local area have been serving as their interpreter and

teaching them English, and Mrs. Hiller said that Kho and Tru are also teaching their parents some of the words they learn in school.

Cultural Differences

As might be expected, cultural differences have caused some confusion as Kho and Tru attempt to adjust to a different way of life.

"One thing I was doing wrong was putting the boys on the head and shoulders when they would do something good," Mrs. Hiller noted. "I found out that, to them, putting on the head is the highest honor."

Mrs. Hiller said she has dealt with this problem by making a point of putting other children on the head when they do well, in view of Kho and Tru, so that they can realize that in our culture this is a compliment instead of an insult.

An incident that may illustrate the parents all over have the same feelings occurred the day before the boys were to be enrolled in school. When Mrs. Hiller invited the mother - through the interpreter - to come to the school the first day, there was a lot of talking in Vietnamese, and then the interpreter said, "She said she would come in school, but children do better when mother is not around." Mrs. Hiller