

Teach productivity early

Nuzzling up close with nature, students tackle tasks that teach them to be more productive in their personal lives and school work



Students bid a final farewell after two days of becoming more productive.

‘We shouldn't let the idea that we are already doing the right thing stop us from improving ourselves," says 16-year-old Supawadi Sriyapai, or Praew, from Chaiyawittaya school in Surat Thani.

Confident and eloquent, Praew is revealing the core of what she learned from the two-day, three-night productivity youth camp held at the Erawan National Park in Kanchanaburi province from May 31 to June 2.

Joining the camp with nearly 80 of her peers from 10 schools in Bangkok, Saraburi, Songkhla and Surat Thani, Praew feels she can improve and make her personal and school life more productive, even at her young age.

The younger the better

Although this is the first attempt to organize such a camp for young people, Thailand Productivity Institute — which normally provides consulting services and seminars about productivity to entrepreneurs and business firms — has been engaging

the education sector since 2005 by teaching productivity to different Thai schools in the central and southern regions.

As the institute's productivity promotion department manager, Chantaluk Mongkol hopes students will be introduced to productivity at a young age, rather than learning about it at university or after they enter the workforce. In contrast, most Japanese and Singaporean youngsters are introduced to concepts of productivity and efficiency at very early ages.

"I hope that the fun activities (at the camp) will develop the skills and experience needed for students to make use of methods of productivity in their everyday lives, during school or later in their careers," Chantaluk elaborates.

Cooking up productivity

Although there are gazillions of activities at the camp, a group cooking activity is representative of the camp's goals.

The overall idea in the activity is that students must imagine that they are in the service sector,

preparing a high quality meal at the lowest cost to keep their customers (in this case, their teachers) satisfied. They also need to prepare the meal timely so as not to keep the customers waiting. The task forces students to become organized to complete assigned tasks as efficiently as possible.

To achieve the goal, students follow the Plan, Do, Check, and Act (PDCA) concept, which is a step-by-step approach to problem solving that helps to increase individual and group efficiency.

Each team of students must prepare two edible (but not necessarily delicious) meals. As in every household, there's a problem deciding what to cook, and if there are no budding chefs among the group, the resulting dish might be a disaster for the taste buds.

After settling on what dish to prepare, students decide on the ingredients, which they must "buy" at a make-believe auction, using points earned in games played earlier in the day as imaginary money. The ingredients range from garlic to fresh cabbages.

Planning is now crucial. Students must buy the correct ingredients, at the best prices and in the right amounts. They must also buy everything at once; there won't be a second opportunity.

The 'do' step in the PDCA cycle requires students to cook the meal while frequently 'checking' the quality and taste. If the meal is not to their liking, the group must 'act' to improve it by adding additional ingredients, such as sugar, fish sauce, and so forth. That completes the four steps of the cycle.

Additionally, however, students are required to reflect on whether they have been efficient in producing the meal. These are the same steps every business must take to become successful and to remain competitive. The four-step PDCA process is intended to address normal problems of everyday life too.

Underlying lessons

The cooking activity also teaches many important lessons in a subliminal manner. They include lesson about safety, morality, the environment and even ethics.

For example, while cooking with hot oil, operating a burning stove and using sharp knives, issues of safety should be of paramount importance. Similarly, every member of the group must do her or his fair share of the work and the group must properly dispose of any waste to help protect the environment. Moreover, good planning helps to reduce waste to an absolute minimum in the first place.

The activities teach students to get in the habit of being efficient: avoid wasted efforts of having to make many return trips to get forgotten ingredients, separate needed from not needed materials, move foods and spices close to the stove, and generally to be pragmatic. These may be considered common sense, but they are quite often not practiced in people's personal lives, in school or in the workplace.

Bonding with nature

Besides the games and activities, there was time

reserved for the 15- and 16-year-olds to bond with nature during their hour-long climb to the different levels of the Erawan waterfall to have a refreshing dip in the cool water.

Even the enjoyment of the waterfall has an underlying purpose: students who frequently bond with nature develop a greater tendency to love, share, and protect it for future generations.

Accordingly, later in life when today's students are corporate presidents or factory managers they will think twice about emitting hazardous materials into the rivers or odious gases into the atmosphere. This, of course, will make whichever industry they work for more productive.

How will I improve?

Following the experiences of the camp, Akkhanont Pradab, from Rajavinit Bangkok school, says he has learned to better manage his personal life and to make clear plans before undertaking any task or activity.

"By coming here," he said, "I learned a systematic method of approaching activities and problems, starting in my personal life, with my friends and in my workgroup."

Similarly, Praew says she has learned to plan her time better. "After learning about productivity, I can improve my life by planning my agenda daily and using my time effectively," she says.

Praew is a very active person who is also a high achiever. Now that she has learned how to apply principles of efficiency and productivity to her social and academic life, she feels she can do even more.

Productivity in Thai schools

Department manager Chantaluk feels that teaching productivity and efficiency in Thai classrooms is still a long way off. She says most teachers in Thai schools spend too much time doing administrative tasks, rather than teaching. "There are too many exercises that are not meaningful to students and which don't teach anything," she explains.

And because students are not taught to be efficient, they often fall behind, resulting in lower quality students. The institutes that produce teachers in Thailand must also be improved so they can produce better quality teachers, Chantaluk says. "We need to develop teachers who think and work systematically. If teachers are rational thinkers," Chantaluk concludes, "students will be motivated to become the same."

Conclusion

There were many activities designed to boost students' productivity, too many for the students to fully digest in such a short amount of time, but kids nevertheless return home with a belief that there are things they can do to improve their lives and to make themselves and their future careers more productive and efficient.

For more information about Thailand Productivity Institute, call 02-619-5500 ext. 420. For further information on the PDCA concept, visit <http://www.hci.com.au/hcisite3/toolkit/pdcacycl.htm>.

Story
and picture by
**WEENA
NOPPAKUNTHONG**