



Rural Training Center-Thailand (RTC-TH)

REEEPP 2007 NEWS UPDATE

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Community-based environmental education for the self-sufficiency and sustainability of small rural family farms



Meeting with Na Fa Elem School leaders



Many discussions to overcome schedule challenges



Serving students, preparing for the future.

REEEPP PREPARATIONS

Saifon and Gregory Lee met with Ban Na Fa Elementary School administrators, faculty, and staff to finalize details for the coming volunteer REEEPP effort in January 2007.

A series of challenges arose regarding the schedule. The annual Teacher's Day fell on the Tuesday of the week of REEEPP. This event usually takes place at school, but this year the education authorities centralized the festivities. Thus, Na Fa teachers must report to another school for Teacher's Day forcing the closure of the school.

On Thursday and Friday, several Na Fa teachers are to participate in a UNESCO sponsored teacher training workshop. This reduction in staff severely impacts the ability to care for all the students. At the same time, key faculty would not be able to coordinate the REEEPP closing banquet ceremonies.

Brainstorming and quick thinking produced a series of compromises. The adjusted schedule was prepared. Classes would be cancelled for K-1, K-2, and grades 1 and 2 for Thursday and Friday. A special welcoming ceremony will be held at the beginning of the program with a reduced program for the close of the program. These departures from the ideal are necessary to keep REEEPP on track.

The tentative compromise plan essentially gives the K-1, K-2, Grades 1 and 2 about 6 hours of contact with the volunteers, while Grades 3-6 get about 14 hours each, for

a total of 80 hours of contact time. "While not ideal, we have to face reality and make the best of it," said Greg Lee. "The goal is to serve the students to the best of our ability." ☺



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LEARNING ENGLISH: TOP PRIORITY AT NA FA

“We really want the students to use English in their daily lives,” said Mr. Wittaya when he met with RTC-TH coordinators in summer 2006. One of our suggestions was to put English labels for common objects all around the school. The idea was repeated exposure to the common words would help build vocabulary.

The Na Fa faculty continued the Green School, Habitat, and NASA CERES S'COOL activities combined with English. Daily weather observations were made. Students practiced English by writing a simple weather report of their observations. This helped get students more familiar with the cloud types and practice identifying them through direct observations. “We hope this will enable them to do the NASA CERES S'COOL project better,” said Mr. Wittaya.

The National Wildlife Federation magazines provide a wide variety of colored photos to stimulate the students. Natural curiosity is a strong motivator for learning. Habitat students made drawings of habitat scenes with English labels.

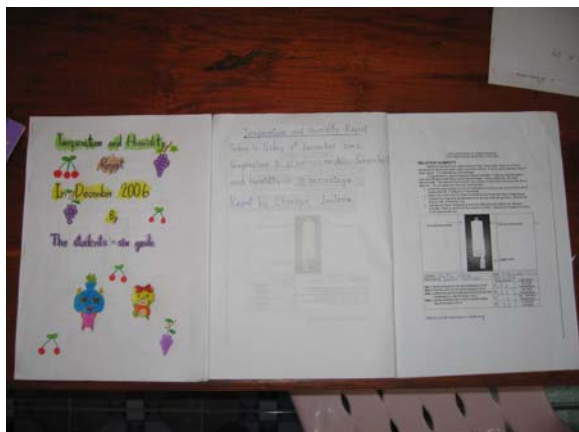
“The students are excited about the volunteers coming and about learning more English,” noted Safion Lee. ☺



Students watching a satellite broadcast English lesson.



English labels on common school features for English practice



Practicing weather observations and English



Learning about Habitats and English





The campus back of the classrooms has been transformed



The new green house and cinder block compost bin



Habitat students eagerly helping to water the garden beds

NEW HABITAT GARDENS

Previous REEEPP volunteers may realize the transformation of this part of the campus. The old chicken coop is gone, replaced by a green house, a cinder block compost bin, new garden beds, and tables under the trees near the banana grove. The new garden beds beautified the campus.

“When we used the compost we made in the bin constructed with the volunteers, we were all amazed at how well the flowers bloomed!” exclaimed teacher Duangnapa.

After lunch, students in the Habitat group eager line up to help water the gardens. “They all seemed to know what to do and were watering the garden beds without instructions from any teacher,” observed Greg Lee. “It was obvious they were enjoying the activity, behaved quiet orderly and were very congenial with each other.”

This year, more students were brave enough to venture forth and take the first step to speak English as the advance team visited the school. A few students approached to ask for help preparing questions to ask the volunteers. They were writing out practice questions and sentences to say.

The excitement and interest levels are very high. This is the kind of “magic” that paves the way for learning. This is the stuff that makes for a successful project.



WEATHER OBSERVATIONS IN ENGLISH

Some Ban Na Fa Elementary School students are making daily weather observations in English. They use worksheets written in English to guide their observations. Previous PowerPoint shows made in English provide the basic training and vocabulary for the teachers and students.

These are the RTC-TH weather observation lessons given to the school in summer 2005. Two different student teams make daily observations. One team observes sky conditions. They are practicing cloud identification for the NASA CERES S'COOL project. Another team takes measurements of temperature and relative humidity.

After doing their observations and measurements outdoors, the students return to the classroom. They must make an oral report to the class using English. Then they must make a written report in English.

"This is part of our effort to integrate the student learning process," explained Mr. Wittaya, who supervises the weather observing activities. "It is part of our education reform effort."

The RTC-TH community-based environmental education approach is very much at home here. The weather lessons combine math, science, technology, and English. It also fits the current Thai reform effort of "teachers and students learning together."

"Many of the teachers are learning English and environmental science along with the students," noted Greg Lee. "This cannot be easy for the teachers. So we very much appreciate their willingness to work with us. And you can see how that attitude spills over to the students. The enthusiasm is very evident."☺



Student teams make daily weather observations.



Students practice keeping regular data records.



They give an oral report in English to the class.



Students practice writing weather reports in English.



HOST FAMILY PREPARATIONS

A key REEEPP component is a commitment to cultural diversity and cross-cultural exposure. This is really a two-way street, and extends REEEPP beyond the school to the community. This part of REEEPP requires coordination with the local head villager and other local authorities. It is largely behind the scenes and transparent to most REEEPP participants. But it is a time consuming effort for the coordinators.

We are fortunate that the head villager, Mr. Jamnian Suttisan is actively participating as a host family. This kind of local “buy in” really adds to the ultimate success of REEEPP. So while the RTC-TH often works at the grass roots level, sometimes it helps to get things done from the top down. Another local leader, Mr. Lek Oupta is a council member of the local Subdistrict Administrative Office. Both were host families for the summer 2005 REEEPP effort.

Host families get some preparatory information about the volunteers and cultural pitfalls. An open mind and flexibility are helpful to allow “wiggle” room for cultural differences. Host families also agree to provide a separate room with window screens or mosquito net, a clean bathroom, and provide breakfast and dinner for the volunteers. Lunch is provided at the school.

The ability for REEEPP to go beyond the school adds realism to the English training at the school. English is no longer just another subject you study in the classroom. It can actually be used in the community, too! ☺



Meeting with the head villager to plan the host family assignments.



Host families, a vital cross-cultural program component



Interviewing and preparing families to avoid cultural pitfalls



Host Family – Volunteer Assignments



Margarita Rodriguez, hosted by the Jamnian Suttisan family.



Tuyen La, hosted by the Somkid Suttisan family.



Robert Rodriguez, hosted by the Lek Oupta family.



Erika Rodriguez and Andy Arboleda hosted by the Umporn Suttisan family.

Host families are a vital part of REEEPP. With no hotels in the village, the RTC-TH relies on villagers as volunteer hosts. The RTC-TH is truly a volunteer organization from top to bottom; everyone is a volunteer. ☺

