

The Associated Schools Project Network in Thailand

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The Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet) aims to promote international understanding, human rights, tolerance, and peace under the framework of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which supports the network. Its success lies in giving teachers and students control over their learning process.

ASPnet, the UN, and UNESCO

... since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.

Preamble, Constitution of UNESCO

Thailand became a member of the United Nations (UN) in 1946 and joined UNESCO in 1949. In 1958 Thailand joined the UNESCO Associated Schools Project in Education for International Understanding and Cooperation. Two teacher-training colleges enrolled as its first members, joined by a number of schools and colleges in Bangkok and the provinces.

Topics suggested by UNESCO—the UN and its agencies, human rights, and countries of the world—were introduced into schools' curriculums, and extracurricular activities such as exhibitions, debates, role play, exchange of letters and documents, and special programs to celebrate important days such as UN Day, etc. were encouraged.

ASPnet's objectives are as follows:

- Establish a network of schools to develop new approaches, methods, and resource materials to build a culture of peace.
- Develop a multiplier effect by incorporating ASPnet results into the national edu-

cation system and ensure the international sharing of experiences.

- Promote intercultural learning and contacts between schools worldwide.

ASPnet is under the External Relations Division of the Ministry of Education, which serves as the Secretariat of the Thai National Commission for UNESCO and as the coordinator of ASPnet. Over 100 schools and colleges participate in ASPnet, the maximum number recommended for a national network, ranging from primary and secondary schools to technical institutes and teacher-training colleges.

Meeting the UN's Goals

School curriculums in Thailand have been reformed many times since World War II. The 1990 national curriculum emphasized learning English as the first foreign language. Based on the National Education Act of 1999, the new national curriculum emphasizes learning about neighboring countries, the region, the world, the UN, human rights, and universal values. The curriculum aims to promote independent thought, self-reliance, and national and international cooperation.

In the past decade, schools have been asked to include global-related content in their cur-

riculums, such as environmental protection, AIDS prevention, anti-drug abuse, human rights and nonviolence in schools, etc. At the same time, schools have always stressed learning about local and national values and culture. Cooperation through the Ministry of Education with the UN and its agencies such as UNESCO, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), etc. has inspired many new ideas and changes in education.

Human Rights Education

The National Education Act emphasizes educational rights and duties under Chapter 2, Sections 10–14:

Section 10. In the provision of education, all individuals shall have equal rights and opportunities to receive basic education provided by the State for at least 12 years. Such education, provided on a nationwide basis, shall be of high quality and free of charge.

Persons with physical, mental, intellectual, emotional, social, communication, and learning deficiencies; those with physical disabilities; or the crippled; or those unable to support themselves; or those destitute or disadvantaged; shall have the rights and opportunities to receive basic education specially provided.

A number of educational programs and activities promote human rights education:

- The 40 social welfare schools serve disadvantaged students—hill tribes, the poor, orphans, and those who live in remote areas.
- There are 41 special education schools for the disabled and the handicapped.
- The Action Plan for Human Rights Education in *rajabhat* institutes (teacher-training colleges) (2001–2002) has been introduced all over the country, and programs and activities on human rights and

democracy are being integrated into various subjects.

- The Action Plan for Child-Friendly Schools Project under the Office of the National Primary Education Commission, Ministry of Education, integrates human rights education into school curriculums and emphasizes the rights of the child. The ministry cooperated with UNICEF and Save the Children (United States) on this three-stage project for 119 primary schools in 19 provinces in 1997–2001. The activities included setting up a management information system, conducting school self-assessment, using a child-centered approach in teaching and learning, raising awareness of child rights, developing life skills, providing an appropriate learning environment, and encouraging community participation. Orientation for supervisors, administrators, and teachers; workshops and training courses; and evaluation were organized.
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was translated into Thai, published, and disseminated to schools nationwide by the Ministry of Education.
- Teaching and learning materials such as posters, and a pamphlet titled “Teachers and Child Rights” were disseminated to primary and secondary schools. A video on child rights was shown in communities.
- Exhibitions to publicize child rights have been set up in a number of schools. Child rights have also been included in the website on human rights education aimed at students in *rajabhat* institutes.

ASPnet and Human Rights Education

The Recommendation Concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education Relating to Human Rights Education and Fundamental Freedoms was adopted at the 18th Session, General Conference in 1974. In 1983 the Thai

delegation joined UNESCO's International Conference on Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education Relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in Paris. In 1988 Thailand joined UNESCO's four-year pilot Interregional Project to promote a multiplier effect among member countries. The Thai National Commission for UNESCO began a number of ASPnet activities and submitted proposals for financial support from UNESCO for the following projects:

- international youth camp to preserve the environment (1992);
- international youth seminar to conserve the cultural and natural heritage (1994);
- culture-of-peace festival for children in Asia (1995);
- English quiz program to commemorate UNESCO's 50th anniversary (1996);
- youth forum on the role of youth in the 21st century concurrently held with the consultation meeting of the national commission for UNESCO of the Asia-Pacific region (1998); and
- national seminars for ASPnet administrators and teachers (every two years), national youth camps, and exchange programs for ASPnet teachers and students.

The commission has increasingly involved ASPnet schools in many major national and international events by allowing the schools to join or organize meetings during international conferences of UNESCO. ASPnet students made their own recommendations to UNESCO and the Thai authorities. Students thus learn not only from teachers and textbooks but also from their own experiences and interactions with one another.

In 1997 ASPnet school members began a national campaign to promote human rights education and democracy to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The human rights education program for media people was

launched on 11 December 1997 by the Minister of Education and Director of the UNESCO Office in Bangkok. A workshop was organized for teachers and directors of various rural schools. Some ASPnet teachers were invited to demonstrate how to integrate human rights education into secondary-school curriculums in Thailand's four regions. Three schools were selected to launch this project: Ammartpanichnukul (Krabi province in the south), Benjamamaharaj (Ubonrachathanee province in the northeast), and Phisanulok Phittayakhom (Phitsanulok province in the north). Teachers and directors from neighboring provinces were invited to workshops and meetings to test lesson plans. The teachers were encouraged to write their own lesson plans and incorporate human rights into them.

Questionnaires were distributed to each participating student and teacher to evaluate lesson plans and materials. The responses showed that teachers and students considered human rights education to be important and useful, and found the lesson plans well prepared and the teaching and learning methods relevant and stimulating. The program was, therefore, successful, and ASPnet schools now emphasize integrating human rights education into their curriculums.

Panel discussions were held on Education Toward Peace to commemorate the 50th anniversary of UNESCO (1996), and on Human Rights Education in Thailand to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the UDHR (1997), by ASPnet schools and the Center for International Understanding.

2000 was the International Year for Culture of Peace and the year before the UN International Decade for Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World (2001–2010) began. ASPnet organized a students' drawing and motto contest on the Culture of Peace and a national seminar for ASPnet teachers.

On 13–14 December 2001 ASPnet held a national workshop to introduce the Peace Package (UNESCO's primary-school kit), includ-

ing human rights education and child rights, to ASPnet teachers. By 2002 this material should be translated into Thai, published, and disseminated to ASPnet schools.

Problems encountered

The National Commission for UNESCO encountered the following problems:

- ASPnet activities depend upon the enthusiasm of school administrators.
- School demands prevent teachers and students from joining ASPnet activities.
- Most materials and documents supplied by UNESCO and some national commissions are in English.
- Since principals or administrators are regularly rotated among government schools, a school may have a new principal who may not be familiar with or appreciate ASPnet.
- Some UNESCO programs such as Human Rights and the Culture of Peace are difficult to implement. The National Commission thus plays an important role by organizing workshops, training courses, and youth

camps to encourage teachers and students to learn and participate in the activities.

ASPnet helps promote environmental protection, human rights education, peace, and tolerance. The 21st-century programs and activities of ASPnet schools are based on the four pillars of learning advocated by UNESCO: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together.

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