

Teaching productivity

The esteemed English-language daily The Bangkok Post, in an article by Oratip Nimkannon in its online Learning Post edition of 23 May 2006, covered the Thailand Productivity Institute (FTPI)'s Primary and Secondary Productivity Education Project, launched in 2005 in collaboration with the Ministry of Education's Basic Education Commission Office (BECO). Mass media coverage of specific grassroots efforts is vital in propagating the productivity message to the widest possible audience, and The Bangkok Post's gracious permission for the APO News to excerpt that article for our readers below is very much appreciated. The Learning Post (www.bangkokpost.net/education/index.htm) is an excellent language-cum-information resource on the APO region and beyond.

In the original *Learning Post* article, FTPI Productivity Promotion Department Manager Chantalux Mongkol was quoted on the impetus behind the project: "Schools are the main suppliers of the labor force to the industrial sector.... For competitive reasons, it's too late to start productivity at the university level or later." Initially, 13 pilot schools were chosen to teach how to apply productivity tools like 5S and kaizen to increase efficiency in daily life. At the outset, most teachers and students had little idea what productivity was or how its tools could benefit them but soon learned that increasing productivity means "managing resources efficiently." Taken out of its business context, productivity begins at home, e.g., with steps as simple as turning off electricity and tap water when not in use.

The FTPI developed instructional materials for all primary and secondary grade levels, but the pilot schools decide whether to select specific topics and integrate the lessons into other class subjects or set up a separate class teaching all aspects of productivity. The FTPI recommends the latter, since it allows students to grasp more advanced topics while progressing from one grade to the next. As noted by a teacher from Nakornluang School in Ayutthaya, although obvious behavioral changes after studying productivity included better organization of students' desks, a cleaner and more orderly environment is merely a by-product of the process of learning to maintain self-discipline which is inherent in the 5S philosophy.

One year after the start of the pilot project, Chantalux admitted that both students' and teachers' perceptions of productivity improvement remained grounded in physical terms and that while awareness had increased, fundamental changes in behavior would involve a lengthy process, requiring long-term commitment from both the FTPI and BECO. BECO Deputy Secretary-General Areerat Wattanasin called for student projects that reflect systematic increases in efficiency, such as "a conceptual framework on how to reduce poverty or eliminate the debt cycle within the students'



Display of student productivity projects at a pilot school (photo courtesy of the FTPI)

own family or community." The most important question, Areerat added, was whether the process could help students create a better tomorrow by saving resources.

The FTPI's Chantalux looks forward to incorporating productivity education into a wider network of schools, which will then pass on the knowledge and practices to families and local communities and ultimately to the students' future workplaces. The focus for the 2006–2007 academic year will be on assisting teachers to devise customized curricula for each community, while the FTPI continues to train teachers and school administrators in its year-round workshops and activities. "Increasing productivity, not only in the workplace, but also in a person's daily life, leads to a better standard of living," Chantalux said, "and increasing people's standard of living is our ultimate goal." 