Unesco posed two questions when calling for applications for the Asia-Pacific’s ICT in Education Innovation Awards 2007-2008: "Do you use ICT in your teaching or in your education work?" and "Are you using it in an innovative way?"

About 146 applicants from 19 countries, including two submissions from Thailand, responded with a resounding "yes" and backed up their claims with evidence of highly creative approaches to the use of ICT (information and computing technology) in the classroom.

"Learners are changing the way they learn, but the curricula of most Southeast Asian countries remain the same following the old pedagogy and thought that teachers control the flow of knowledge, that teachers are the only source of information," said Julito Aligaen, a secondary school teacher at Asuncion National High School in the Philippines.

The school received an accolade for its innovation in overcoming a lack of computer equipment.

Their "One Computer in a Multi-grade Classroom" solution scored top marks in the Education Planner and Administrator category. Thirty Grade 5 and 28 Grade 6 students were paired. Each pair used the computer for one hour per session. They also had the opportunity to use the computer after each pair had used their one hour allocation.

As a result, each pair of students received 1.70 hours of computer time per week - enough time to build both academic and ICT skills.

The ICT in Education Innovation Awards aims to document good examples to inspire and encourage others to use innovative practices and gain maximum benefits from them by conducting training workshops based on selected examples.

"First and foremost, teachers need to change their mindset that implementing ICT strategies to teach in class is time-consuming," said Dawn Ling, a teacher at Pei Hwa Presbyterian Primary School in Singapore.

"After all, the young generation thrives on ICT’s functionality, portability and adaptability. In other words, they live and play with ICT."

The Singapore school won the Teacher and Teacher Educator Award for its "Fractured Fairy Tale" approach to story presentation.

Primary school grade four pupils were introduced to ICT tools and software such as video gaming and editing, SIM 2, and dynamic microphones to record sound to compose and animate their stories.
The "Fractured Fairy Tale" programme used a story familiar to the students. Students modified every aspect of the original story - including characters, setting, points of view and plots - to match their imagination and creativity.

"There are many positive changes seen in my students," said Ms Ling. "First they become more imaginative and creative when they brainstorm for ideas for their compositions.

"They also have a better grasp of choice words to use for descriptions of characters in their story and narrations. More importantly, it developed the students holistically as they engaged in group discussions and [this] enhanced their negotiation and problem-solving skills."

The students no longer see writing as boring, but as an opportunity to be producers and directors of "real" movies, said Ms Ling.

The Indian Institute of Technology, Mumbai, won the Non-Formal Educator category for its "Adapting the Anchored Instruction" approach.

Children of migrant workers, between the ages of five and 17, were given laptops and audio-visual software to learn to count and associate numbers, colours and names with pictures and charts of items commonly found in their environment.

Educating nomadic children is challenging. For example, there's the need to cater to their mobility. This calls for portable strategies and flexible courses that will retain their interest and attention.

The school hosted three experimental school camps in western India to teach the children the three Rs - reading, writing and 'rithmetic - through discovery, interaction and participation.

Capitalising on the local setting and environment to provide the context and content of their lessons, the live anchored instruction sessions were video-taped in each camp. With the help of laptops and audio-visual programmes, the children were able to view the tapes of all three camps to provide them with broader perspectives of life beyond their own confines. Dr Muriyankulangara Ananthakrishnan of the Indian Institute of Technology said even parents were eager to learn basic reading and writing skills.

The winners have been invited to Bangkok to receive their awards and prizes - laptops sponsored by Intel - during a special event organized by Unesco from 24-26 June to celebrate the innovative spirit. Presentations of the award winners and training workshops will also be organised during the conference.

"We should not limit ourselves, or in fact our pupils, to our perception of their ability," said Lee Chia Liang, ICT department head, at Pei Hwa Presbyterian Primary School.

"Their 'can-do' attitude and innovative spirit prove they can."

The Asia-Pacific's ICT in Education Innovation Awards are supported by the Japanese Funds-in-Trust.

For more information about the programmes, visit http://www.Unescobkk.org/education/ict/innovative-practices.

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