Putting our heritage into young hands

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Many times when college students are asked how many World Heritage sites exist in Thailand, they exhibit uncertainty. Some guess three, some say maybe four.

The answer is five, and the sites are: Ban Chiang Archaeological Site; Historic Town of Sukhothai and Associated Historic Towns; Historic City of Ayutthaya; Thungyai-Huay Kha K Wildlife Sanctuaries; and Dong Phayayen-Khao Yai Forest Complex.

Then, when asked how they would safeguard these precious sites, many students are often lost for words.

World Heritage sites belong to everybody. Protecting a World Heritage site is not the duty of only one village or one country, but the collective responsibility of the global community.


The programme encourages youngsters to become active in safeguarding efforts by participating in various activities organised through the Associated School Project Network (ASPnet).

The Sukhothai World Heritage site hosted a workshop in 2000 that brought together a group of students and teachers from around Southeast Asia for the first time to put World Heritage education into practice. During the workshop, the group was introduced to an education kit produced by UNESCO for teachers called World Heritage in Young Hands.

Experts from the Fine Arts Department and teachers from local schools worked with visiting teachers and students to test the kit on-site.

"At the end of the workshop, I think they really understood the genius of the people in the past who constructed this World Heritage site, and they went away with a better idea of what 'heritage' is, what 'archaeology' is, and what 'ancient technology' means," said Mr Tharapong Srisuchat, director of the Fine Arts Department's Office of Archaeology.

The World Heritage education kit was developed by UNESCO experts and educators from ASPnet schools. It is designed to help teachers raise young people's awareness of the importance of World Heritage by incorporating World Heritage issues into various subjects in the school curriculum.

Download the education kit free at whc.unesco.org/en/educationkit/.

A new UNESCO programme called "World Heritage Volunteers: Patrimonito Rolls Up the Sleeves" includes the development of a new education resource kit for non-formal education.

The scheme also promotes World Heritage volunteer work camps, which facilitate World Heritage education outside the classroom.

Patrimonito refers to the mascot of the World Heritage education programme.

Twelve work camps were organised between June and October 2008 in 10 countries, and over 150 youth volunteers participated. Find out more information on the programme at http://www.unesco.org/cvivs/patrimonito.htm.

In Thailand, the first work camp was organised at Khao Yai National Park, part of the Dong Phayayen-Khao Yai Forest Complex World Heritage site.

Ten volunteers from seven countries took part in the two-week camp. The volunteers helped by creating tourist trails and planting trees.

Unesco has been promoting the use of creative arts as a teaching tool for World Heritage education since 2001. Creative arts can be used for discovering and learning about the historic environment in a way that inspires both teachers and students alike.

"The arts have the potential to play a distinct and unique role in bringing the ideals of quality education into practice. As a creative medium, the arts stimulate cognitive development, encourage innovative thinking and creativity, engender understanding of the importance of cultural diversity, and reinforce behaviour patterns underlying social tolerance," said Dr Sil Shaffer, director of UNESCO Bangkok.

All aspects of the arts can be brought into the learning process - visual, plastic and performing arts. To supplement the World Heritage Education kit, local teaching aids using the creative media that now include a series of short cartoons about diverse World Heritage sites.

The cartoons can be accessed at: whc.unesco.org/en/patrimonito/.

For more information about World Heritage education, send an email to culture@unescobkk.org.

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