

Learning through fun: Educating students in disaster preparedness and response

Interest Story

30 July 2014

Ayutthaya, Thailand – 330 students from ages six to eighteen sit anxiously on a concrete gymnasium floor in Thaluang Witthayanakul School. Yellow, Fluorescent Pink, Pastel Pink and White student uniforms indicate the four schools in attendance. Thaluang Witthayanakul, the host school, is a high school. The other three schools, Wat Kaijone School, Wat Hua Hin School, and Wat Jampa School, are primary schools and kindergartens. Though the students differ in age and their schools differ in curriculum they all share a common vulnerability to natural hazards. Ayutthaya was among the worst provinces affected during the 2011 floods in Thailand and all of the students were either directly or indirectly affected by the floods.

The project to Strengthen Capacity of Vulnerable Schools for Flood Preparedness and Response aims to build the capacity of school teachers and students to be more prepared for a flood situation in Ayutthaya province. It is supported by Seagate through Give2Asia. The project is implemented in partnership with the Ayutthaya Provincial Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Office, the Office of the Basic Education Commission, the Primary Educational Service Office area 1, Secondary Educational Service Office area 3 and Tambon Administrative Organizations of Tha Luang and Champa.

The school flood safety campaign is part of an awareness campaign designed by the 4 target schools to raise awareness of teachers and students on flood safety together. The methodology of the campaign was adapted from the 1st Red



Students use recycled water bottles to make a life vest.

Bear Survival Camp organized in Thailand by the Japan Foundation, Design for Disaster and NPO Plus Art at Somthavil School where the school teachers and students had a study visit in June 2014. Each activity is designed to be both informative, to ensure learning, and also enjoyable, to maintain student interest. While students are unlikely to retain all the details of the skills taught throughout the day, engaging and enjoyable activities guarantees maximum retention.

Students were divided into 15 groups of 22 students. The 15 groups rotated across 15 activities. Activities covered topics from basic firefighting, preparing for different types of hazards, caring for people with disabilities to providing basic emergency healthcare. One activity that the students enjoyed,

taught the students how to correctly put out fires. In particular the activity educated students on available types of fire extinguishers, their chemical components, and their correct operation. After a brief introduction each student had the opportunity to use real water based fire extinguishers. Instead of real fires students aimed the extinguishers at images of frogs that rotated when they were sprayed. Each student used a combination of fire extinguishers and water buckets till all the frogs were rotated.

Another activity that the students enjoyed, taught the students basic procedures to prepare for different types of hazards. After a brief introduction students were lined up. The student at the back of the line was given procedures to whisper to



In one activity students lined up and whispered natural hazard preparation procedures to one another. The student in front of the line then guessed the type of hazard they were preparing for.

the student in front of them. Using the procedures whispered from the back of the line, the student at the front of the line would then guess whether they were preparing for an earthquake, a landslide, or a flood.

Aside from these activities, each school also prepared their own school's flood awareness activities, which included painting, drawing, writing essays, writing poems, creating mottos, and organizing swimming competitions.

This project was not only an opportunity for students to break away from their normal school life by participating in fun activities, but also an opportunity to build resilience among children, one of the most vulnerable demographics in a disaster situation. In a disaster situation children should not be viewed as a hindrance and a responsibility. Instead children should be viewed as an important asset in preparedness and relief.



In another activity blindfolded students led themselves through an obstacle course with a cane. This activity allowed students to sympathize with the plight of community members that may have disabilities.