



EIU Best Practices Series
Bhutan

No. 21

"EIU School-based Initiatives in Bhutan"

EIU Best Practices 2010



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization
국제연합
교육과학문화기구

APCEIU

Asia-Pacific Centre of
Education for International Understanding
under the auspices of UNESCO
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Foreword

As a regional centre mandated to promote Education for International Understanding (EIU) towards a Culture of Peace in Asia and the Pacific region, Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding (APCEIU) under the auspices of UNESCO has been engaged in various endeavours aimed at fulfilling its mandate since its inception.

Faithful to this mandate, APCEIU launched the Best Case Studies in 2006, and it was renamed EIU Best Practices in 2009. The EIU Best Practices Programme aims to support existing, and encourage future, local initiatives on EIU in consolidated effort with 47 Member States in the Asia-Pacific. The EIU Best Practices Programme advocates “Learning to Live Together” - the most important of the four pillars of education set forth in the Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century (Delors, 1996) - by stimulating participatory learning and critical thinking to develop understandings of oneself and others. Over the past four years, the EIU Best Practices have explored and supported a wide range of manifold approaches to “Learning to Live Together”. Thanks to continuous support from the National Commissions for UNESCO in the Asia-Pacific, APCEIU has published 16 monographs of selected cases and disseminated them throughout the region. This year, APCEIU has selected and published 5 new cases, issue numbers 17 to 21.

Issue No. 21 introduces a case from Bhutan on how school-based initiatives can successfully articulate EIU within the existing curriculum. In this

respect, Bhutanese educators have favorable settings for the implementation of EIU in that its educational framework of the Gross National Happiness (GNH) sets conditions for EIU to easily fit into the existing curriculum and thus flourish in the school settings. The case presented in this series highlights some of the nation-wide educational practices in Bhutan that are in line with EIU, while it also showcases how innovative school activities can optimize the GNH framework for the promotion of EIU for children and their community.

May this case, among many other best practice cases, spread the inspiration to construct a more open, more equal, and more diverse education system, as well as motivate us to reflect on many other issues that are essential for building a more peaceful world. I hope that through this endeavour, various EIU Best Practices can be shared among educators, scholars, and activists who are committed to promoting a Culture of Peace in the region. I expect this project to provide a platform to share and exchange our experiences and perspectives.

December 2010



Lee Seunghwan
Director

EIU Best Practices is...

APCEIU has been committed to the promotion of a Culture of Peace since its inception, in line with one of the pillars of education “Learning to Live Together.” A Culture of Peace has been a key principle at the core of UNESCO’s ethical mission. It involves a set of values, attitudes and behaviours that can be taught, developed and improved upon to enhance mutual understanding and conflict resolution. Attaining a Culture of Peace requires transformation of institutional practices, as well as individual values and behaviours in which education plays a crucial role in the process. As a major educational tool aimed at promoting a Culture of Peace, EIU addresses issues related to cultural diversity, globalization and social justice, human rights, peace and sustainable development. It focuses on increasing the capacity of learners to deal with issues of everyday life, to resolve community conflict and to enjoy human, political and civil rights to a greater extent.

APCEIU launched EIU Best Case Studies in 2006 in cooperation with the UNESCO Member States in the region to encourage educators, scholars and activists to implement and share local initiatives on EIU. It is an outreach programme that invites them to share their efforts in promoting education for a culture of peace in different social and cultural contexts. Now renamed as EIU Best Practices in order to further encourage the participation of practitioners in the field, the programme seeks to promote and collect innovative practices based on optimal classroom conditions and activities, school climate, community and social atmosphere, and

disseminate them throughout the region.

The programme is conducted through the following steps: 1) Call for Applications: APCEIU sends announcement letters along with application forms and guidelines to the 47 National Commissions for UNESCO, UNESCO field offices, major National Institutes of Education in the region and APCEIU's MOU partners in the region; 2) Screening and Selection: Submitted applications are reviewed by the Screening Committee, composed of experts, who then select the best practices; 3) Field Visit: APCEIU staff undertake field visits to the programme sites of the selected cases to confer the EIU Best Practices awards, conduct field observation and interviews, and provide the selected applicants with the guidelines for the final report; 4) Submission of the Final Reports: Selected applicants submit the final reports to APCEIU based on the guidelines; and 5) Publication and Dissemination: Final reports are published as a monograph series and disseminated throughout Asia and the Pacific region.

Given the favorable and enthusiastic responses from the region, and support from the National Commissions for UNESCO, APCEIU wishes to expand the positive momentum built thus far and further its efforts for the coming years.

APCEIU encourages educators, scholars and activists from Asia and the Pacific region to apply and share their experiences and perspectives. The Centre expects that through the EIU Best Practices, diverse practices of EIU will be widely shared throughout the entire region, thus contributing towards achieving a Culture of Peace.

Author



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Acknowledgement

First of all, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to the Asia-Pacific Center of Education for International Understanding (APCEIU) and the Bhutan National Commission for UNESCO for giving me the opportunity to attend the 8th Asia-Pacific Training Workshop on Education for International Understanding in 2008. The workshop truly transformed my perspective and commitment with which I have started reorienting my work in the view of EIU.

It is truly a great pleasure to extend my appreciation to APCEIU for selecting my report as one of the best EIU practices 2010. I would also like to thank Ms. Jeongmin EOM, Chief of the Education & Training team of APCEIU, for all the support and the field visit made.

I would like to convey my heartfelt gratitude to Ms. Supatra Ponpiboon (Education and Training Team, APCEIU) and Ms. Chimi Wangmo, (Bhutanese student, Hanyang University, Seoul) for their support in editing the report. I highly value Mr. Yezer, (Lecturer of Sherubtse College, Kanglung) and Ms. Kesang Youden (Principal, Rinchen Kuenphen Primary school, Thimphu) for rendering their kind support and suggestions to successfully complete this work.

I would also like to acknowledge all my colleagues of Yonphula Lower Secondary School (YLSS) in general and two assistant coordinators, Mr.

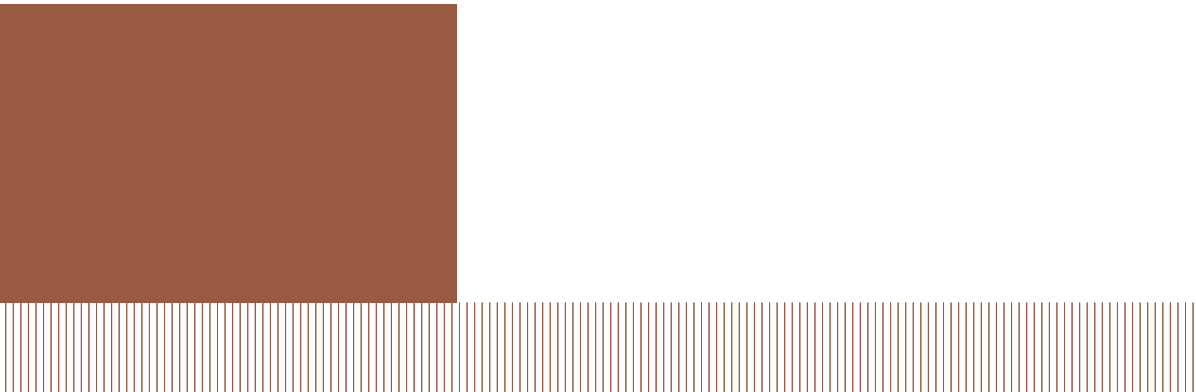
Tendel Wangdi and Mr. Tandin Wangyel, in particular for giving immense support to organize Nature club and UNESCO club activities. In addition, I would also like to thank our two caretakers and all the members of Nature club and UNESCO club 2010 for their support.

Lastly, this project would not have materialized without strong moral support and inspiration from my parents and family.

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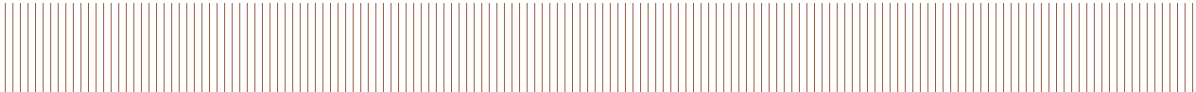
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EIU School-based Initiatives in Bhutan

1. Background

The concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH), the term coined by Bhutan's former King Jigme Singye Wangchuk, is widely accepted by the people of Bhutan as an indicator that measures the quality of life or social progress in more holistic and psychological terms than gross domestic product (GDP). GNH is based on the belief that the purpose of development and the role of the state is to create conditions within which people can pursue and find what they aspire for most in life: HAPPINESS. GNH suggests that the beneficial development of human society takes place when the material and spiritual development occur side by side to complement and reinforce each other. There are four pillars of GNH: the promotion of sustainable development, preservation and promotion of cultural values, conservation of the natural environment, and establishment of good governance.

The term EIU is not merely an ideological one. It encourages learners to critically reflect their ideas on EIU practices and to go one step further with attitudes and actions. It emphasizes critical reflection on the EIU practices and empowerment. EIU is taught with emphasis on a vision of and action for a peaceful and sustainable future. It also highlights understanding of cultural diversity and learning through practice. The main aim of EIU is to promote a culture of peace, but peace not only refers to the absence of war. Peace needs to be sustained through ensuring sustainable development, human rights, cultural diversity, justice, and equity as well as the absence of violence.



The participation in the 8th Asia-Pacific Training Workshop on EIU held by APCEIU, enriched the perspectives on the linkage between GNH and EIU. The workshop was an eye opener and inspiration to bring the knowledge alive. EIU can be implemented by anyone, regardless of the size and nature of the institutions. The case of school activities presented here is implicitly based on the interseching ideas of GNH and EIU in Bhutan.

We can comprehend some commonality if we correlate the concepts of GNH and EIU. They accentuate the value of education and repeatedly solicit the true goals of education in this competitive society. The overlapping areas of GNH and EIU highlight the importance of education in promoting cooperation and fairness. Both encourage the respect between people and to the environment, as well as emphasizing well being and happiness. GNH is also included in the school curriculum of Bhutanese education system.

This report indicates that the EIU practices already prevail in Bhutan because numerous schools have been undertaking the practices as specified in the ensuing report. The key is to improve the understanding and sustainability of EIU. This case also demonstrates how the EIU practices and activities can be applied in a local community such as Yonphula Lower Secondary School, Trashigang in Bhutan.

2. Introduction to the Education Curriculum

2.1 Value Education

In Bhutan, value education is a part and parcel of the school curriculum to prompt the importance of education to create awareness on topics related to culture, GNH, and the environment. This programme was introduced to impart values to students, under the Ministry of Education, with the ultimate goal of promoting peace and bringing harmony to society. To this end, various useful literary activities and games are utilized, and furthermore, each class is allotted one value education period per week. In these periods, students are taught important lessons ranging from life's values to other pressing issues that beleaguer the community and society. The school prepares a yearly lesson plan and teachers work according to the plan, notwithstanding some degree of flexibility at times. Furthermore, in order to make value education schooling more effective and sophisticated, we equip our teachers with knowledge in advance through training and provide refresher courses. Aside from this, important measures, such as monitoring and providing feedback, are carried out by the school administration.

Co-curricular activities are an important facet of our value education system and it is only through these activities that students get a chance to pave their career paths in life. In order to make sure that every student gets an equal opportunity to participate in these activities, the system has been compartmentalized. Under this rule, the school administration categorizes four fraternities of students and each fraternity has two monitors to oversee the activities being carried out. Among these fraternities, a myriad of activities like debate and extempore speech competitions, quizzes, cleaning, and gardening work are carried out. For instance, gender equality, promotion of culture, or tourists in Bhutan can be important topics for debate. GNH is included in most of these activities to hone student's knowledge of GNH. Through such activities students learn the importance of preserving the exquisite environment, unique culture, and the concept of GNH.

In order to achieve the mission of improving the quality of education, a survey is conducted every year in the local community to find children who are not being admitted to school and possible reasons for not being admitted. During surveys, a questionnaire is distributed among respondents regarding the importance of education in our society. At times, we persuade parents to send their children to school and lecture them on the benefits of education both in the short and long runs. In a similar vein, parent-teacher meetings are conducted regularly to ensure that parents give the necessary support to their children and make sure that every child is attending school. Sometimes we lecture parents on proper nourishment for children and the importance of giving ample time for studying at home. In recent years, the literacy rate of our country has soared and the dropout rate has plummeted dramatically; this trend of improvement could be partly attributed to the aforementioned activities carried in our school and elsewhere.

2.2 Promoting the Concept of Gross National Happiness

Promoting GNH in our school, including family and community, is still the main topic in the value education class. One of the four pillars of GNH is preservation of culture and heritage. The concept of GNH emphasizes collective happiness, where the happiness of each person is enhanced by the appreciation of interdependence. We are convinced that happiness can be achieved in two ways—firstly by physical wellbeing and, secondly, by inner peace and contentment. Our physical wellbeing can be achieved through economic prosperity and the equitable distribution of wealth, whilst inner peace and contentment can be achieved through knowing our own mind and being considerate. We believe that inner peace can be achieved through meditation. Meditation is all about training our mind. It is about having peace of mind and making ourselves aware of our inner thoughts and emotions.

3. Living with Compassion and Justice

The majority of the country's population is Buddhist, and values such as compassion are deeply rooted in the hearts of each and every person. Likewise, with Bhutan becoming a democracy in 2008, and in order to strengthen this burgeoning democracy, ensuring justice has been one of the top priorities of the government. Justice and compassion are also inseparable factors of the development policy of GNH which takes happiness, wellbeing, quality of life, living standards et. al. into consideration. Accordingly, numerous programmes have been implemented and put in place at the grass roots level by the school administration to develop a sense of compassion among students and ensure justice in the community.

3.1 Non-Formal Education for Illiterate Parents

Non-formal education (NFE) is introduced in our school with a motive of not only educating a substantial number of illiterate people but also to educate those unfortunate and disadvantaged children who did not have the fortune of going to school owing to financial constraints and family reasons. As a result of this programme, the number of illiterate parents has



▲ Adult women enrolled in the NFE programme

plunged drastically and this has further aided people to understand and solve common problems through cooperation and understanding. The NFE programme is conducted in evenings to suit the convenience of the

parents keeping in mind that the school where this programme takes place is not free during the day.

3.2 Ensuring Equity in School through Uniformity

Generally in Bhutan, the schools follow a norm in which all the students are made to wear uniforms on school days. We also discourage students from bringing mobile phones and wearing expensive shoes, ornaments, and earrings. Taking into consideration the economically disadvantaged students, we also suggest that all the female students use black hair ornament. Even the finding of my study, done as partial fulfillment of my M.Ed. programme, on how school dropouts share their experiences about school norms and educational stakeholders has shown that the main reasons for dropping out of school are personal or family problems and lack of support from parents and guardians. Therefore, we believe that uniformity and homogeneity in the school may encourage the students to concentrate more on learning.

3.3 Providing Moral Support through Student Support Service

The Student Support Service (SSS) is another body in our school that caters to the needs of the economically disadvantaged and academically weak students. This body's aim is to provide an effective learning environment to the economically disadvantaged students and also to cater to community welfare. Through this service, students are provided with basic necessities such as stationery, clothing, shoes, and umbrellas. SSS also provides support and helps the local community by providing things such as rations, clothes, and even help with the farm work.

To sustain SSS, funds are generated through donations, contributions from teachers, and also through fundraising activities of the school. The funds are maintained by the SSS committee, and meetings are conducted if needed. SSS also seeks financial help from the nearby institutes and organizations such as Sherubtse College, Tarayana Foundation Club, and His Majesty's Welfare Fund. The SSS committee identifies the students who

are economically disadvantaged with the help of the teachers according to the following criteria:

- 1) Orphaned children
- 2) Single parent homes
- 3) Large families with low income

After identifying the needy students, we either provide support through the school or seek support from other institutes. This year we received support for five students from Sherubtse College. When those five students were provided with support, there was a marked increase in their motivation. The school also collected unused clothing and other items for the needy students.

Some of the strategies for this support are:

- Providing support, moral as well as financial, at the time of a fatal accident;
- Arranging sponsorship for the economically disadvantaged children;
- Developing a system to express condolence in times of misfortune; and
- Identifying needy students with the help of teachers and encouraging the practice of remedial classes.

To support the slow learners through remedial classes and peer-tutors, all teachers are encouraged to hold extra and remedial classes after the instructional hours to give more attention to the slow learners. This gives an opportunity for these students to learn and compete with the other students. Since summative assessment is given more emphasis than formative assessment, it is very important for each student to perform well. Remedial classes are either led by the teachers or the students who are better in studies. Normally, remedial classes are conducted during the evening or early morning hours. We found out that these classes greatly help our students to enhance their learning and competency.

The school also carries Mass Guidance Programme on Youth Issues to the

students and staff. The school identifies different pertinent topics to be presented and shared among teachers. The aim is to address youth related issues which are widely prevalent in Bhutan. This programme enables our youth to complete their studies and also prevents them from engaging in other unnecessary activities such as gang fights, drugs, teenage pregnancy, and vandalism. We also organize examination seminars where students are briefed on what to do before, during, and after examinations. Moreover, we teach them time management, which is very important for their lives.

4. Promoting Human Rights and Responsibilities

4.1 Ensuring Safety and Discipline

Promoting human rights is a central tenet of every society. Therefore, the issue of human rights is taken seriously in the school. Teachers are prohibited from punishing students; rather they are advised to create an atmosphere conducive to effective learning. It is always expected that our teachers work towards caring and loving students. The safety of the children is also given top priority with frequent reminders to the students about the safety measures against disasters and epidemics. We often read the rules and regulations of the school to minimize disciplinary problems and inculcate desirable traits. Recently, our school came up with the guiding policy for discipline management. All these efforts help in making our school a best place for learning.

The strategies are:

- Organizing mass counseling whenever required;
- Rectifying the misdeed when wrongdoers are identified;
- Correcting the students from their misdemeanor;
- Developing a positive attitude in their day to day activities and life;
- Maintaining a record of counseling; and
- Making the career room informative and educational.

4.2 Health and Hygiene Programme

School health support provides basic health services to prevent certain diseases. This helps students not to miss classes, but any patients with serious conditions are referred to nearby hospitals through this service. The working health support committee renders financial and other assistance to sick children who do not have any one to support them. This committee monitors daily cleanliness of the students as well as the school area. The committee also carried out various awareness activities on hygiene, diseases and observed World Health Day, World Water Day, World Aids Day, etc.

The policies of the health programme are:

- Preparing and implementing an action plan on health activities;
- Creating awareness on personal hygiene among children;
- Organizing health activities;
- Checking students' personal hygiene;
- Arranging routine health checkups in the school;
- Ensuring proper sanitation within the school premises;
- Maintaining records and assisting the sick children;
- Collecting information on local diseases and warning the children;
- Providing subscribed medicines; and
- Observing International Health Day annually.

5. Building Cultural Respect, Reconciliation, and Solidarity

Besides the learning inside the four walls of the classrooms, the school also organized fieldtrips and excursions to various sites such as the forest, temples, and other sightseeing areas. Sometimes the students are taken for an overnight trip where they can learn and perform activities such as bird watching, environment-related games, singing competitions, and treasure hunts. With these activities, students learned values and life skills. To promote the exposure of students to a wider array of views, the school

organized an exchange program between the students of different schools. The main aim of this programme is to allow students to learn from each other and also develop a deeper understanding of themselves and others. This also helped to foster social networking among the students.

Objectives for the exchange programme are as follows:

- 1) Providing a platform in order to share experiences, learning, and good practices as well as identifying difficulties and challenges.
- 2) Instilling the values of cooperation, understanding and respect for each other.
- 3) Developing leadership among the members.
- 4) Creating awareness in combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases.

Nature and UNESCO club members of the school initiated a weekly bulletin. Updated international, national, and local news as well as environmental and global issues were announced. It was used as a news centre for the teachers and students.

6. Nurturing Inner Peace

Psychological wellbeing is one of the main domains of GNH. This wellbeing is considered an important component of being mentally healthy and promotes inner peace. It is strongly believed that we can achieve psychological wellbeing through practicing our religion (Buddhism in the case of Bhutan). Various programmes are conducted in Yonphula Lower Secondary.

6.1 Meditation Programme

Buddhism is highly valued by the people of Bhutan. To instill religious value, students are taught in the school and at home about the importance

of religious teachings. In the school, teachers are made to meditate with students at the beginning of the first hour before the class begins, immediately following lunch, and before school is over. We have also made it standard practice to have a short meditation period at the beginning and end of every staff meeting.



▲ Students meditating in their classroom

6.2 Religious Discourse and Rituals

Religious discourse is arranged with the aim of creating inner peace. The school also invited a monk to deliver religious discourse for the staff and students in order to make them more mindful in their conduct and behavior. Some parents and community members who are interested can also take part in this discourse. Such discourses primarily focus on



▲ Performing rituals in the school

preventing students from getting involved in youth-related problems. The school organized an annual ritual at the beginning of the academic session for the benefit of the students, staff, parents, and community. A monk was invited to perform the ritual to pray for the peace and good luck and to drive away misfortunes and illness.

7. Living in Harmony with the Earth

7.1 Enhancing the Relationship between School and Environment

Conservation of ecology is another of the main pillars of GNH, and the country strives to maintain at least 60% forestation at all times in the future. To address the importance of our natural environment, our school has established Nature Club (NC) which aims to work on global climate change, environmental pollution, waste management, conservation and preservation of nature. To create awareness, the club performs various activities such as planting trees, fencing the flower gardens, and preserving marshy areas and nature reserves. The other critical activities carried by the club are news readings during assembly, field trips/camping, observing international days, waste management, and educating students on zero waste. The NC members also carried out activities such as making flower and rock gardens in and around the school. They also took a field trip to Lhakhangs (temples) to inculcate Buddhist values and help them learn and identify ancient paintings and statues. During this visit, members were also taught religious values by offering butter lamps, incense, and money. They were also taught to maintain good intentions and pray for the wellbeing of mother nature and for themselves. Through these activities, our students learned the importance of natural resources.

This club functions on volunteer membership from the students whereby they perform their work based on the action plan developed during the beginning of the academic session. The club has executive members such

as the coordinator, the secretary, and a treasurer to carry out club activities. To further carry out the activities of the club, different groups were formed such as International Day group, Bulletin group, Waste Management group, and Beautification group. The students participated actively and learned how to care for our environment.

7.2 Activities to Promote the Importance of the Natural Environment

Tree Plantation

The first activity carried out was the plantation of trees, which is considered one of the most important activities for the club. Therefore, the school and club sought support and help from Renewable Natural Resource (RNR) center for tree saplings. This year our school received 20 walnuts, 140 tea plants, and 10 chestnuts saplings. In addition, we also received flower seeds to be planted around our campus for beautification. To commemorate Social Forestry Day, our school organized a mass plantation programme and the school planted around 400 locally available plant saplings.



▲ Mass plantation in the school



▲ Teachers and staff planting tree saplings

Nature Club

The Annual Club exhibition demonstrates the importance of plants in our environment which we need to protect before they become extinct. To mark the annual event of the club, the school organized the club exhibition to acknowledge the club achievements and also to demonstrate and examine students' learning from the club. The exhibition of the club

showcased the following items: biodiversity, medicinal plants and their value, flower varieties in and around the campus, habitats of animals, the ecosystem, waste management, and the important message of nature.



▲ Club members exhibiting to the staff and students

Nature Reserves

The club took the initiative to create two nature reserves within the school campus to promote conservation concepts. The reserve was well fenced and protected. The club also tried to maintain water sources and a few old trees located within the campus. This was done with the intention that water sources around the world are on the brink of drying up, and water becomes scarcer each year. Therefore, to preserve our water sources, we submitted a proposal to the Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN). Recognizing the importance of water, RSPN granted financial support to protect and preserve our water sources. With the financial support from RSPN the following activities were carried out:

- 1) Fencing in the marshy area and the water source in order to preserve and sustain the area.
- 2) Planting about 300 locally available saplings such as peach trees, rhododendrons, and alder in the protected area.
- 3) Making a small natural pond for collecting water for beautification and to use as teaching aids. It could also be used during a disaster.

4) Making a few sign boards with nature quotations in the reserved area.



▲ Nature reserve area of Nature Club

Encouraging Proper Disposal of Litter

Normally, wastes are dumped into open pits since there are no proper disposal areas in our school. In the past, students used to burn the rubbish despite knowing that it would cause air pollution. We now discourage the burning of any waste. Currently, we either recycle the waste or we try to cover up the filled pits and use a new pit. Most non-biodegradable are sorted out before dumping the other waste into the pits. These activities are carried out by the Nature and UNESCO club.



▲ Mass cleaning campaign



▲ Cleaning campaign in the local community

Occasionally, the club members collect non-biodegradable waste such as plastic, tins, and bottles which are commonly thrown into the area. These wastes are reused in the making of plastics bags, plastic containers, and flower vases in our school. In order to maintain a clean surrounding,

our school organized a mass cleaning campaign to spread the awareness of waste and the importance of our environment to the students and local community. We found that it was very effective to inculcate the importance of environment to the students and the community.

Field Visit

A field visit to Thimphu, Bhutan was conducted from 4 to 9 December 2010 by Ms. Jeongmin EOM, Chief of Education & Training Team of APCEIU. The visit carried out the following missions:

- 1) to confer the EIU Best Practices Award, 2) to make field observation of the activities in the school, and 3) to provide the guidelines on finalizing the report.



▲ Ms. Jeongmin EOM, Chief of Education & Training Team of APCEIU (left) conferring the award to Ms. Rinzin Wangmo (middle) in the presence of Hon. Thakur S. Powdyel, Minister of Education of Bhutan (right)



▲ EIU Best Practices' field visit on the Bhutanese national newspaper