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'A fun version of homework'

More students sent for overseas competitions on social causes, design



by **Ong Dai Lin**

05:55 AM Nov 18, 2009

SINGAPORE - For 14-year-old Nur Shafiq Amira, a one-week stint in Denmark with youth from all over the globe was a dream come true, after she spent six months doing research on Singapore attractions to introduce to overseas youth.

Called the Backpackers' Passports project, 40 Pioneer Secondary students formed 10 groups to create travel itineraries and videos that were uploaded online and shared with youth from 11 schools in six countries from Asia and Europe. The youths from the other countries reciprocated with their own travel itineraries.

The project was one of three winners of the AEC (Asia-Europe Classroom) Award 2009 that was given out in October in Denmark by the Asia-Europe Foundation. The latter was founded in 1996 to promote collaboration between Asia and Europe through intellectual and cultural exchanges.

Shafiq represented her class in Denmark to present the project with her teacher.

"I learnt presentation skills because I had to present in front of 100 people and now I have more self-confidence ... It was also fun to socialise with other people. The project is like a fun version of homework," she said.

Going beyond the usual Mathematics and Science competitions that students here have been participating in, schools are making a foray into international contests in other areas like social causes and design.

Henderson Secondary sent two teams of students from its Design and Innovation Club to a model building competition organised by the National Centre for Research on Earthquake Engineering in Taiwan.

The students travelled to Taipei in September and had to build earthquake-resistant building models which were placed on a shaking table for assessment.

The teams clinched the second and fourth place in the competition.

Teacher Eileen Ang, who guided the students on their projects, said: "Our students tend to have a lower self-esteem because they are neighbourhood school students, so this is good exposure and an eye-opener for them because they can learn from other international schools."



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Shafiq (far right 2nd row) with her teacher, Ms Yuen Chai Lin, and fellow project mates. ONG DAI LIN

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Madam Ang added: "Once the students reach the national level, you want to tap them at the international level. That is the next level to go."

Said Hwa Chong Institution principal Ang Wee Hiong, who sent students to participate in the Stockholm Junior Water Prize in August: "Such social competitions with real-world impact also raise awareness of humanitarian concerns and develop in them a sense of social responsibility."

And it is not just the older students who are getting the opportunities for the international exposure. Primary schools are also giving students the extra exposure.

Six CHIJ (Kellock) students were winners of the "Young Voices, Horseshoe Crabs in the Arts" competition 2009 organised by the US-based Ecological Research and Development Group to encourage students to create poems, stories and pictures about horseshoe crabs.

The school's principal Clara Lim-Tan said such competitions signal that schools increasingly recognise student achievements beyond the academic and they are crucial in developing interpersonal and life skills.

A Ministry of Education spokeswoman said: "Participation in international competitions related to social causes can enthuse and stretch our students in their learning, and help them to develop a global view towards different issues such as environmental conservation."

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