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O40 - A Place-Based Youth Astronomy Camp in Khon Kaen, Thailand: Connecting Astronomy with Local Dinosaur Heritage

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Inspiring youth to pursue astronomy requires authentic learning experiences that combine hands-on practice with meaningful connections to the local context. Such an approach helps make science more accessible, engaging, and relevant to learners. Based on this concept, the Regional Observatory for the Public, Khon Kaen (ROP-KKN), under the National Astronomical Research Institute of Thailand (NARIT), has developed a youth astronomy camp that integrates astronomy education with the unique geological heritage of Khon Kaen Province.

The Khon Kaen Youth Camp (KYC) is a three-day, two-night astronomy camp held annually in Khon Kaen Province for Thai youth aged 15–19 years from across the country. The camp aims to inspire young people to pursue astronomy, increase their interest in the field, broaden participants' awareness of astronomy-related careers, and provide authentic learning experiences through night sky observations and hands-on use of astronomical equipment. A distinctive feature of the camp is the integration of astronomy activities with Khon Kaen's dinosaur heritage, including field-based learning at one of Thailand's important dinosaur excavation sites. Together, these activities create an interdisciplinary learning environment that connects Earth and space sciences.

Over the past two years, the camp has attracted strong interest from students nationwide, receiving more than 100 applications annually while accepting only 50 participants each year. Although the first year faced challenges related to activity design and unfavorable weather conditions, participant feedback collected through post-camp evaluations was used to improve the program in the following year. Major improvements included replacing a museum visit with field learning at a dinosaur excavation site and increasing opportunities for participants to practice using astronomical equipment. These changes resulted in higher levels of participant satisfaction and engagement throughout the camp activities. The experience demonstrates that integrating astronomy education with local geological heritage, together with continuous program improvement based on participant feedback, can create meaningful learning experiences that inspire youth and enhance engagement. This approach may also serve as a practical model for designing place-based astronomy outreach programs in other regions.

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