A celebration of lifelong education

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Free copy

Students playing on a new tyre playground – see story on page 14.
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Chiang Mai is an area rich in natural resources, with mountains, rice fields, sites of historical and cultural significance, rice fields, flowering trees and many rivers. Grade 9 students at Prem have been studying the physical process of these essential waterways as well as ways that people interact with them.

Some of the work has been in the classrooms, but recently twenty intrepid explorers and their teachers travelled to a series of nearby river sites where they got wet and muddy while putting into practice many of the scientific testing procedures they had worked on in their classrooms.

In preparation they studied the proper techniques required to maximise the precision of their measurements. The day before the trip, the students practised their teamwork and procedure on a small stream on the Prem campus. This is an invaluable opportunity for many, as they had never been on a river excursion like this before. Tape measures were dropped into the water, pencils were broken or lost in the swirling waters, but the whole experience gave the students an idea of what they could expect the following day.

The next morning, the students boarded the vans to travel to three different sites on a tributary of the Ping River. Rebecca Somers from VSP (Visiting Schools Program) at Prem came along as a chaperone and also as an experienced ecologist. The students were clearly excited. Was it in anticipation of the learning experience ahead, or merely because they were out of uniform and out of class for the day? Probably a little of both.

The first site visited was thirty minutes away. Classroom teacher Donal O’Connell said, “Having led this field trip before, it is always interesting to me to see the changes that take place in the river from one month to the next. This location unfortunately had a lot of rubbish, which had been blocked by a fallen branch. The students were disappointed, and even a little confused, at how such a state of affairs had come to pass.”

Boys will be boys …

As usual, the boys jumped right into the river, which was quite shallow, while the girls more tentatively paddled into the water. Each of the groups was assigned a different segment of the river and they began the bevy of measurements and calculations required for their group assessment. By measuring width, wetted perimeter and other standard river measurements, as well as performing tests for nitrate and oxygen levels, the students learned a great deal about the health of rivers in the area of Mae Rim, Thailand.

As the day of discovery wore on (“Is it lunch time yet” … “When do we go back to school?” … “Do I really have to get in? It’s too muddy!”) the groups conducted their experiments at different sites and observed how nearby features had an impact of the different results of the tests.

Students had to draw sketches of the river and its environment: rice fields which may have had chemical fertilisers added, local houses whose owners had scooped out river sand to make concrete walls, pipes in the river being used either to pump water out for irrigation or acting as drains from settlements, and convenient bends in the river for the unfortunate practice of dumping plastic bags of litter.

Their teacher summed up the day saying, “I was happy with the way the trip went. The students were all involved and worked well as a team at each site we visited. They learned a lot and turned their classroom learning into practical experience, which is always a good thing.” Fortunately for the students, a desert study is not required as this part of their Humanities course.
A Journey Well-travelled

The lyrics from the well-known Whitney Houston hit caught my attention as the taxi waited for yet another change of lights at a busy intersection in Bangkok.

Give them a sense of pride to make it easier
Let the children's laughter remind us how we used to be...

We inched forward and came to a stop again.

The greatest love of all....

My mind latched on to the word greatest, and I thought about Maxine Driscoll, the Head of School at Prem Tinsulanonda International School, whom we are preparing to farewell at the end of the summer term, after her nine-year journey with Prem.

The lights turned green and we started to move forwards.

Teach them well and let them lead the way...

Maxine's journey continued when she accepted the role of Deputy Head of School and since August 2009 Maxine has been in the driving seat at Prem as Head of School.

Coincidentally, Roman history suggests that the meaning of the name “Maxine” is “the greatest” so it is interesting that during her time as Head, Maxine has endeavoured to motivate staff and students to believe in themselves, and challenged the school community to be “great by choice” after the popular book by author and teacher, Jim Collins.

Maxine has shown herself to be passionate about learning and thinking about how best to create an environment in which staff and students are able to learn. During her time as Head of School she was selected, as one of only eighteen heads of schools from outside America, to attend the Fellowship Programme at the Klingenstein Centre Teachers’ College, Columbia University, New York USA.

Teach them well and let them lead the way...

... the chorus repeated as if urging its listeners to take heed.

Under Maxine’s leadership, students have been encouraged to be leaders. Emulating the IB learner profile, Maxine is a risk taker herself, perhaps never more so than when she gave the design leadership of the current school uniform over to students, letting them create the very branding of their school. On another occasion, inspired by futures thinking ideas, Maxine drove a new type of interactive strategic plan, known internally as FuturePrem.

Show them the beauty they possess inside...

Maxine and her husband Rod joined Prem from Kardinia International College, Australia, where she was Junior School Head, to experience the International Baccalaureate (IB) in a different type of international school. The temporary visit soon became a permanent move when Maxine was offered the position of Junior School Principal.

Her Prem journey continued when she accepted the role of Deputy Head of School and since August 2009 Maxine has been in the driving seat at Prem as Head of School.
Under her leadership, the culture of the school Maxine leaves behind has grown and developed from the one that she joined. Maxine has witnessed most of Prem’s ten graduating classes. She has encouraged staff and students to be innovators, to value creativity and the arts, she has kept the “big picture” of Prem and learning in sight while driving us as an institution to try new things, to do things differently, to start to embrace the new type of education that 21st century learning demands. It has not been an easy journey, people have not always understood, but Maxine’s belief that Prem should develop to become one of the greatest boarding schools in SE Asia has not wavered.

A quiet supporter

Maxine’s journey at Prem was not hers alone, so as we farewell her, Prem and the Traidhos Community will also farewell her husband Rod who has quietly supported her behind the scenes and shared his skills by embracing many aspects of school and community life. He has been found working at the back of house during school productions, or toiling as Chief of the BBQ at social events. He has been a knowledgeable contributor to the Operations and Health and Safety team as well as an advisor and resource person for school projects. We will miss Rod’s cheerfulness, reliability and friendliness.

I believe that children are our future...

I reached my destination as the Whitney Huston lyrics started to fade and I surmised that in the context of Prem, Maxine has reached her destination too. As the taxi drove away to begin its new journey, I acknowledged it would be the same for Maxine.

Her belief in children as our future continues to drive her as an educator and will continue to do so as she and Rod return to Australia to be closer to their family and to continue their life travels to influence the opportunities available for young people and to inspire more teachers to be innovative in their work.

We join together to thank Maxine for leading Prem, for challenging us and for loving us, for motivating us to be great by choice and for her sense of fun. We know that her passion for learning and her belief that children are our future will continue to drive her to provide opportunities that will teach them well, enabling the next generation of young people to indeed, lead the way.

Art is a very popular subject at Prem, and students from the very youngest to those in Grade 12 enjoy exploring its many forms. Recent exhibitions at the school and at Chiang Mai University Gallery have featured some outstanding works by students from Grade 1 to Grade 12. The images on this page give a hint of the talent that is beginning to emerge ... and the creative students whose work is displayed.
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Andrew C Revkin, award-winning non-fiction, science and environmental writer, reminds us that by 2050 or so, the human population is expected to pass nine billion. Those billions will be seeking food, water and other resources on a planet where, scientists say, humans are already shaping climate and the web of life. In his blog Dot Earth, Revkin examines efforts to balance human affairs with the planet’s limits and looks for sustainable answers. At Prem Tinsulanonda International School and Traidhos Three-Generation Community for Learning we have been focusing on creating Change Agents for Sustainability for almost a decade. Prem and Traidhos believe that the concept of sustainability enables people to realize their potential and improve their quality of life in ways that simultaneously protect and enhance the Earth’s life-support systems.

Prem, as a part of Traidhos Three-Generation Community for Learning, models the vision of a sustainable world in educational practices as well as in leadership and governance. Students, staff, parents, the administration, the school board and local community members are all actively involved.

Prem uses the Sustainability Compass that was first developed in the late 1990s by Alan AtKisson, founder of the AtKisson Group, as a contribution to an international research programme on sustainability indicators. AtKisson’s framework grew from a platform for indicator development for communities, into a general sustainability framework with several different applications, which eventually included Compass Schools. Prem is proud to be the first of many Compass Schools around the world and is constantly working towards integrating sustainability into school planning, curricula, lesson planning, teaching and learning and even school infrastructure and maintenance.

See the World through Different Eyes

Compass Education advocates looking at the world in different ways, seeking connections between each part and teaching in different ways to change how we think. In order to truly understand how our actions influence the world around us, we need to examine the many systems that make up our world. Ultimately, sustainability requires that we learn to see the world in new ways. Learning to think differently and seeing the world differently does not come easily without useful aids and a clear reference point. Always wanting to improve our practices Kate O’Connell, Grade 2 teacher, and I recently attended a Master Class for Sustainability where tools and skills for leading change were presented by AtKisson Group experts Alan AtKisson, Axel Klimek, and Robert Steele. We learnt more about the skills and tools required for leading change in organisations and communities towards the sustainability condition that we all wish to see manifest during our lives and for our children. The tools are practical in all aspects of life and work, and have been adopted by a number of large corporations, cities, universities and schools around the world who share similar interest to improve our quality of life and wellbeing, through the restoration of nature and innovative thinking and systemic actions in business and government.

We brought many new ideas back to Prem to continue our drive to create Change Agents for Sustainability. We have already trained seventeen teachers as “change agents”. Our Grade 5 students recently shared their ‘Visions of Sustainability’ Exhibition (see also page 24 of this magazine) to the school community as change agents, as did our Grade 5 students last year. Next year we will introduce an annual programme to train our Grade 10 students as Change Agents for Sustainability. Sustainability concepts are linked to our curriculum across the school. We are committed to bringing about the change required to balance human affairs with the planet’s limits and to continually look for sustainable answers. Are you?

See also page 24 of this magazine.
The idea of writing computer code fills most people with immediate fear. The idea of this strange language of zeros, ones and strange commands makes about as much sense to most people as speaking the Klingon language – and Star Trek fans would understand that one.

However, most of us know that computer code exists and that it is used to operate computers, but few of us have any real understanding of what this really means. For the common user, a computer is just a tool that makes things happen.

A simple way to understand code is to think of it as a list of instructions. Forget about the language itself and focus on the list of instructions. In its simplest form the list is a list of jobs for the computer to do, and the order in which the things are to be done. When you switch on your computer it may have a thousand tasks to do before it’s ready to use: wake up the screen, light up the keyboard, display things on the screen, connect to the Internet and check for updates.

Inputs and Outputs

Another way to think about it is to think of inputs and outputs. The computer is waiting for these inputs at all times. For example, when the ‘G’ key is pressed, a ‘g’ is shown on the screen. The input is the key press and the output is displayed on the screen. Of course, lines of code within the computer’s operating system control this, but the fundamentals are the same.

Programming is generally a logical set of instructions that comprise of “If this happens then do this”, or “Go here, or start again”, or “Make a random choice”. Behind the complicated code is a set of rules that the computer follows in the order it is told to. If it can’t find the next line of code it will probably freeze or do something that appears wrong. We often refer to this as a ‘bug’.

So now you understand that there is simplicity behind the code you might like to give it a try. There is a growing interest in coding around the world, and in UK schools next year, code will become part of the mainstream curriculum for children as young as five years of age, so it can’t be that difficult!

Why not find out just how simple it is? If you like simple challenges then why not challenge your children (and yourself) to complete all the levels on: http://learn.code.org

These fun games will teach you all the basics of coding.
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A game that grew out of a need for Britons to have something to play during World War II air raids finally became known to the world in 1949 as the wonderful board game Cluedo (or just Clue in the USA). Its designer, Anthony Pratt, would have found its success very rewarding – and would have had no idea that the sorts of questions players asked would become the basis for immensely popular television shows such as CSI Miami and CSI New York.

“Is it Colonel Mustard with a fireplace poker in the library?”
“How about Mrs White, with a candlestick in the dining room?”

These sorts of questions challenged the game players, and real-life scientists ask similar questions today whenever faced with the evidence of a violent crime – whether it happened in a library or a dining room – where the detection of fingerprints and the examination of gruesome blood spatter patterns on the library wall may help the investigators identify "Whodunit".

Challenging Young Minds

Whenever real life can be linked to what is being done in the classroom, the students are the ones who enjoy and learn from these real-life experiences. At Prem recently, Grade 8 science students under the watchful eyes of their teachers Emma Shaw and Mala Dorset spent a whole term studying forensic science as part of their IB science course. While there are formal components teachers must cover in the Grade 8 year – biology, physics and chemistry – teachers have one unit where they can be a little more inventive and creative to challenge young minds, and this year it was the unit on forensic science.

“They absolutely loved it,” said Dr Emma Shaw, one of the teachers, adding that one student in particular, who had never shown much interest in science, now had an absolute passion for it.

Using animal blood to create blood spatter patterns, the students examined the shape and size of the droplets to determine the (theoretical) height of the victim, where he or she was standing and the velocity of the presumed blow. In real crime scenes the assailants may try to clear away all evidence by scrubbing the blood from the walls or carpets. The Prem students found that by using hydrogen peroxide and luminol, they were able to detect even the faintest traces left after a thorough cleaning: criminals beware!

Fingerprinting each other and their teachers showed students how everyone has a unique set of prints and they were quick to learn the different identifying whorls and loops that scientists can use to identify the owners. A tiny strand of hair may be all that a researcher needs to prove that Colonel Mustard – or someone else – was indeed in the library at the time of the crime. Using the facilities of the campus, the Grade 8 students collected and examined many different types of hair: human, dog, guinea pig, rabbit, cat and even the bristly hair of the tame water buffalo in the local rice fields. It is highly unlikely that a Prem forensic scientist would now find some buffalo traces in the dining room and mistake it for evidence of a human invader.

Further scientific research was necessary as the students examined fly larvae in the entomology section of their exciting term’s work. Using an on-line site, the scientists were able to determine the age of an imaginary victim.

“It was good to see the students think logically and apply the nature of the science to the problems we gave them to solve,” Mala Dorset said. Microscopes, chromatography papers, centrifuges and digital scales became almost every-day tools as the students battled their way through the “evidence” to determine what might have happened.

Although the unit of study started with some easy time – watching an episode or two of the television series – the hard work during the eight weeks led to some fun time at the end as the students wrote and solved mini-murder mysteries of their own – and even made mini CSI Chiang Mai movies featuring different aspects of their new-found learning.

None of the students was spotted wearing a deerstalker hat or clutching a pipe between his or her teeth, but each of them would have been proud to say at the end of the exciting science unit – “It’s elementary, my dear Watson.”
Sustainable Tourism

ASEAN’s tourism attributes attract an increasing number of tourists to the region, most of whom are hoping to experience authentic and culturally rich, exotically diverse environments. As well as attracting these elements of mass tourism, ASEAN is in a strong position to tap into growing niche travel markets, ranging from “Community-based” to “Eco”, “Adventure”, “Culture” and “Heritage” tourism. This industry as a whole acts as a major and beneficial generator of revenue, jobs and infrastructure, while at the same time it helps increase environmental awareness and contributes to the protection or conservation of vulnerable or sensitive sites.

Unfortunately, though, tourism can be a double-edged sword by causing damage to natural environments, creating negative socio-cultural impacts, and exploiting local communities, whilst other not so welcome economic factors may provide leakages of expenditure and increasing prices of real estate that local people cannot afford. In more popular destinations, as hotels and infrastructure spring up around the attraction, the destination can quickly start to lose its appeal through overdevelopment, with overcrowding, busy traffic, pollution and general damage to the natural environment being the main negative after-effects.

Sustainable tourism, therefore, is a concept that requires a long-term holistic approach from all stakeholders to protect current and future forms of tourism. This will benefit both the tourist as well as the host region. The World Tourism Organisation defines it as the “management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems.”

Acceptable limits of change?

The ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan puts an emphasis on the development of sustainable tourism, and lists the criteria for clean, green tourism. However even with a move towards sustainability there are some very difficult questions regarding the maximum number of tourists that a destination can handle. What are the acceptable “limits of change” and is it necessary to include zoning to protect particular areas? Is there a need for capping the number of visitors through “Ecological Footprints” in order to guard against overusing productive land and sea areas?

While ASEAN can be a provider of a framework and synergy, the tourism industry as a whole is reliant on all related stakeholders to believe in and uphold the concept of sustainability, rather than just using these concepts as good PR and promotional tools. National governments, sub-regional groups, national tourist organisation and the private sector all have a big role to play in developing policies, cooperating, regulating, providing support and funding. There also needs to be public information and awareness programmes in order to educate tourism and hospitality companies, local communities – and, of course – the tourists themselves.

Countries and tourism associations in ASEAN need to be encouraged to develop their own “Green Ratings Index”, or some other kind of awards programme, by which tourism organisations can be accredited or endorsed internationally by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council. Thailand, for example, was recognised in 2012 by the Pacific Asia Travel Association for its “7 Green Tourism” campaign, which helped raise awareness and understanding of green tourism by involving different stakeholders in the industry, including travel agencies, hotels, restaurants, recreation facilities and individual tourists. Other countries and travel associations have their own versions of “Green City and Hotel” awards, which need to be expanded to educate all involved in the tourism industry for long-term benefits.

All types of travellers have the (admittedly) huge responsibility to be “green” and ethical while travelling, whether they are “Mass”, “Elite”, “Explorers” or “Alternative” tourists. Education plays an important role in raising awareness, and it is important that we follow international principles handed down from UNESCO and the World Tourism Organisation. The concept of sustainable tourism has gained a large amount of support in recent years, particularly in the Western hemisphere, and this is something that tourism organisations need to be aware of. For example, Nielson’s Market Research Survey in 2012 found that 66% of consumers around the world prefer to buy services from companies that have implemented programmes that give back to society. Furthermore, 46% are willing to pay extra to those travel companies with good Corporate Socially Responsible schemes.

Sustainability is a wide-ranging and complex concept, with many conflicting factors to consider. It needs to be supported throughout the process of tourism planning and its implementation for the ASEAN region can only result in a positive experience for tourists, tourism organisations and local people alike. With better education on sustainability it is hoped that all stakeholders involved in tourism will behave and act accordingly so that future generations can enjoy the wonders of the ASEAN countries, while minimising the negative impacts of tourism on culture and the environment.
“We first started by researching various play structures that could be constructed using used tyres,” Tamayo said. Narrowing the choices down was difficult. Should the new playground have more tyre swings? Perhaps it could feature seesaw flowers, tyre cargo nets, Heaving Hoops, caves or even a rocket ship or two?

“Students voted on the structures that they wanted to construct and narrowed the choices down further by taking into consideration different constraints that we have. We finally decided on the four structures – a Mayan Pyramid, Zigzag Tyres, a Maze Mini and a train - which we were going to build.

“Students came up with various ideas as to how to arrange the different structures on the playground by sketching them on paper. During that process, we looked into the concept of a ‘continuous playground’ where the play structures are interconnected as part of the bigger whole play structure. From the sketches, we again voted on the structure that the students thought was the best.

“Students then made a three-dimensional model from the sketch using cut gift-wrap rolls to simulate the tyres. They estimated the number of tyres that they would need to complete the playground and called the tyre shops to see how much they would be willing to sell the used tyres for. It required over 300 tyres to complete the project. Every week, we asked the Traidhos staff drivers to collect about forty tyres from the tyre shops so that we could paint them in readiness for the building project,” Tamayo added.

As this edition of the Traidhos Quarterly goes to press, Tamayo, her willing students and the energetic Traidhos gardeners and engineering staff members have completed the Mayan Pyramid that is the main component of the playground and have started work on the Zig Zag Tyres and the Maze Mini. There is still a lot of work to be done – but as a project that featured students’ planning and risk-taking, and showing them that their contributions to the community are important, the new Prem tyre playground is sure to be a great success.

Tyre Playground

In his book Entyrely Fun Playgrounds, James A Jolley says that all children need safe stimulating places to interact with all the elements of their environment:

In a truly enlightened community, importance is placed on the growth and development in positive ways of all the members of the society and community. This not only helps children meet their full potential as human beings but ensures that a community stays strong and healthy, not only physically but also emotionally and intellectually as well. Through play, children make sense of their constantly evolving and changing world and it becomes even more important to give them positive messages of how they are viewed in the larger community. By giving them rich and varied environments that allow them to explore as individuals and as a group their own innate potentials, the message that they receive is one of concern and respect.

Let’s Take Action!

Early Years teacher at Prem, Tamayo Gaysek, was looking for ways she could encourage Junior School students to take action with sustainability, and thought it would be fun and engaging for the children to create a playground mainly using recycled tyres. In October last year, she started offering an after-school activity which put students in control of many aspects of designing and building the Junior School’s first tyre playground, which now complements the other play equipment in the area.

Tamayo Gaysek
EY1/EY2 Homeroom teacher
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The American organisation Random Acts of Kindness Foundation reaches out to many corners of the world and it is not uncommon to see RAK signs on school noticeboards or in public places. The Foundation aims to inspire others to practise kindness and to pass it on to others. The Visiting Schools Program at Traidhos is in many ways a fine example of passing kindness on to others.

Every year, almost three thousand students from seventy schools world-wide – Australia, Canada, Singapore, Sudan and Belgium to name just a few – arrive in Chiang Mai as guests of VSP to experience a week or two of fierce challenges - physical, emotional and cultural - as they put into practice very real acts of kindness. As well as learning about Thai culture and perhaps visiting elephant conservation parks or high-level zip lines through the forest, all schools participate in specially designed projects assisting local communities and organisations. For many, the experience is one which challenges and changes the students as they meet people living and working in remote parts of the Kingdom, or who have been orphaned or abandoned, who are political refugees from the Shan state in Myanmar, or who are suffering from simple medical problems almost forgotten in the western world.

Students visiting Thailand work with children in Chiang Mai orphanages and with children and adults in nearby and remote hill villages. They work and play with the refugee children, planning and conducting English lessons and assist with the construction of such facilities at lavatory blocks, classrooms, dining salas – or even a new library. One visiting school raised funds to buy a new engine for the village boat used to transport school children from their village on one side of the river to the nearest school – on the far side of the river.

The students from one Australian school regularly work in the Koung Jor Shan refugee camp in the Wieng Heang district of northern Thailand. Two years ago they learned from the village Headman that it was difficult for any of the refugees to complete any form of study beyond primary school. In a true example of a RAK, the students agreed to sponsor three young Burmese refugees, raising the funds to purchase schooling necessities and to allow them to attend university – the first students from this camp ever to do so. A Grade 11 student from the Australian school said:
We could see the dramatic impact that it would have, not only on the students but for the whole community. We were inspired to give the same opportunities that we have, to people who are less fortunate but highly deserving.

Michael Cumes, Head of VSP, added, “Students involved in the community outreach and service programmes see and do things they have never done before. This year the schools that have participated in the various outreach programmes have raised an amazing THB 1.5 million. Because of visiting students’ different and often very affluent backgrounds, seeing how others live is a life-changing experience.”

THB 1.5 million raised

This is perhaps best indicated in the words of Julia, from an international school in Belgium:

“I know that I’ll be more aware of how much I take things for granted. I’m really going to push myself to give back more to the community, as I now realise that there is so much more we can do to help or eliminate problems.”

Staff and students from another school visit a remote village near Mae Hong Son each year, where they have developed strong friendships with children and adults. In 2013 they identified one local boy for special attention. Fourteen-year-old Dam had been born with a cleft palate – a condition that afflicts as many as one in seven hundred children born each year. A caring member of the school group immediately offered to assist. The boy was brought to Chiang Mai as a guest of VSP, specialists’ examinations and an overnight stay in hospital were soon followed by successful surgery – and Dam is now back in his village with a proud, happy and handsome smile for the first time in his life.

To paraphrase nineteenth-century writer Anne Isabella Ritchie, it might be a generous act to give a starving man a fish for his dinner ... but it is far better to give him a fishing rod, as he will then be able to catch fish for himself and for his whole village. The many schools that visit Chiang Mai through the Visiting Schools Program may not usually bring fishing rods with them, but they do bring cash to buy concrete and steel, they bring school supplies such as pencils and books, but above all, they bring with them a willingness to share, to learn, and to reach out to help others.

My Country: Myanmar

Prem has a small number of students from Myanmar but over the last ten years there has been a small group of students from the country that used to be known as Burma. This is the story of two of those students.

Myanmar is one of the most unexplored and mysterious countries in the world today. Due to decades of military dictatorship, human rights abuse and economic sanctions, the country has been left untouched by most of the world. Our country still has many of its cultural traditions left intact. Growing up in a country like this may sound like a bad thing, but what you get to experience is extraordinary.

Rico and I were born in 1996 in the now ex-capital city Yangon. We grew up in a small neighbourhood close to a large Indian community and also one of the major football stadiums in Myanmar. Every day we would be woken up by the morning Islam prayers and have an Indian-style breakfast of samosas and naan bread.

We went to an international school in Yangon. Poverty was visible in most parts of Yangon especially near our neighbourhood. Every morning on our way to school, when we would stop at a certain traffic light, there was always a lady begging for money as cars stopped. She would come up close to our car, beg for money and bless us when we give her 1000 kyats (about one US dollar). It might not seem a lot to most people, but that 1000 kyats is enough to feed a whole family for a day.

We would get frequent electricity blackouts both at school and at home. The Internet speed in Myanmar is certainly one of the worst in the world. The average Internet speed is only about 10 Kilobytes per second. In other words it meant that it was impossible to stream YouTube videos on the Internet, and you would have to wait about thirty minutes to download a single MP3 song.

We would see police and soldiers standing guard at the end of almost every street. They were always carrying guns and also of course their handcuffs. In Myanmar you were denied most of your basic thirty human rights. You were denied your right to say what you want, and also even the right to marry the one you loved. If you did happen to do any of these things, you would most likely have a police officer knock on your door that night and your future could become very unpredictable.

All photographs by Yar Zar Htun
But other than that, Myanmar does have a lot of exciting and positive things that many countries don’t. For example we have the famous Shwedagon Pagoda. This pagoda is the heart and the soul of the Myanmar people. It is a pagoda 368 feet tall and is constructed mostly out of gold. But most of the exciting places to see in Myanmar are not just in Yangon.

Beautiful Bagan

There is the famous ancient city of Bagan, which most foreigners are keen to see. It is one of the few unspoiled ancient cities left in the world today. On a visit to Bagan you will see a few modern hotels and restaurants for tourists, but there aren’t any modern streets, skyscrapers, or even train tracks in the whole area. Even today, there are just dirt roads and a few farmers still living in temples. We also have one of the most beautiful landscapes you will ever see in a your lifetime. Shan State is a must-go place when visiting Myanmar. It has the Inle Lake, which is one of the largest lakes in Southeast Asia where you will see people living in huts floating above the water, sort of like Venice in Italy but with just huts and no buildings.

I most certainly would say that it was a privilege to be born and raised in a country like Myanmar. Sure you felt isolated from the rest of the world, and had a pretty tough life. But you also got to experience things not many people do, and for that I am honoured to be a Myanmar citizen.
Since its establishment in 2013, the ASEAN Commission has been readying the school for the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), which will begin in January 2015. This academic year we have further raised our ASEAN and AEC awareness campaigns.

We set up an ASEAN booth during the school’s International Day as well as establishing a group to assist with the initiative. Grade 12 student Viritpol (Sun) Sunprugksin has been the leading force behind all things ASEAN at the school, but as he graduated in May, the baton was handed to Sabrina Makmur in Grade 10, and she will be overseeing all the ASEAN-related activities that will be happening in the future.

As the school and Thailand are gearing up towards the last few months before entering the AEC, the ASEAN Commission at Prem has been working on a number of initiatives that would further prepare the students. These activities will be announced in the future once they are ready to be performed. The ASEAN Commission believes that it is vital for all students to understand our actions and our campaign to enhance their readiness and awareness; and that it is equally important to provide similar actions for the teachers, staff and parents as well.

Our most recent project was the ASEAN Food Booth at the Dance Fest, where we sold finger foods, desserts and drinks. All profits went towards a local charity benefiting less fortunate children. Future plans for the next academic year include ASEAN Partnerships with other international schools, an ASEAN expedition to Singapore to visit the Headquarters and to learn about the ASEAN cultures from museums and exhibitions.

We believe that starting up the ASEAN group in Prem has been a great start in increasing the exposure of the AEC among students of the school. Not many of our fellow friends knew about the ASEAN and AEC, and how it would benefit them as well as the region (Thailand included). We feel that it is our responsibility to share with others the knowledge and understanding that is to come with the development of ASEAN. We hope that we will be able to have an impact and make a difference on the thinking of students, to become more open minded in the near future. Lastly, we would like to thank all the teachers, especially Ajarn Maxine, who has provided us with great support in starting up this committee.

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The sixth annual Dance Fest this year was a blast!

Two other Chiang Mai international schools joined us to give a total of nineteen dance performances - the largest number of performances we’ve had since Dance Fest began. Dance Fest is a celebration of dance for students to interact in a non-competitive manner and for everyone to enjoy the amazing dance talent we have in Chiang Mai. For the schools that have Dance as a year-long academic subject, this is the highlight of their year and the students were so excited to come to perform on Prem’s large stage: with all the lights and sounds, the night was set to be a hit.

Prem’s surprises this year included a late inclusion of a performance by Grade 7 students Aim, Kokkak, Konan and Owen, who combined popping and hip hop. Grade 6 girls Amanda, Fond and Michelle performed the dance they created during Health and Physical Education lessons, as did Grade 7 students Pim, Primp, Smile and Team. Grade 9 students Krissie and Dedee also surprised us with the performance they created just one week earlier. This year also saw a different style of dance being included and there were contemporary solos by Prem students Eskie (Grade 9) and Jenny (Grade 6) leading the way. Returning from last year were Grade 10 students Ai, Bam, Earn Earn, Kiera and Paew who worked extra hard to create and perform two dances. They have been performing together since Grade 6 and have developed their skills over the years, having lots of fun with it as well.

A big thank you goes to all those who helped make the night a great success: the Audio Visual Group with their lights and sounds skills, the backstage crew, our photographers and videographers, the Masters of Ceremonies Irene and Pema, the Front of House team, and a special thanks to Grade 12 Julian who took a break from his IB exams to teach the AVG crew how to get it right on the night.

Helping Others

As well as being an opportunity to showcase the onstage and backstage talents of so many students, Dance Fest also raised money for a local orphanage for special-needs children: Kingdom Kids. With door sales augmented by the snacks and drinks sold by Sabrina (Grade 10) and the ASEAN group, we raised THB 25,000 in total - an outstanding effort from all involved. This will provide specialised equipment aimed at improving the Kingdom Kids children’s proprio motor skills. The new equipment will be located in a specially made area at their new school.

The audience thoroughly enjoyed the evening and the students did a wonderful job of running the whole event – they should be very proud of themselves. It’s easy to see what great talent we have - not only in our school but in other schools in Chiang Mai as well. Dance Fest 2014 was huge effort by everyone but it was a night to remember … and now for next year’s festival …

Relle Maxwell
HPE Teacher and HPE Curriculum Leader
Visions for Sustainability

In Chiang Mai, students at the different international schools follow different curricula, depending on the philosophy and direction of the school. Some will study an American curriculum, others a Swiss or a German or a British curriculum, while others will follow the International Baccalaureate – or IB. The IB has three programmes designed for children aged from five or six years to Grade 12 students who are eighteen or nineteen years of age.

The IB declares that the Primary Years Programme (PYP) exhibition represents “a significant event in the life of a PYP school and student, synthesizing the essential elements of the PYP and sharing them with the whole school community. As a culminating experience it is an opportunity for students to exhibit the attributes of the International Baccalaureate learner profile that have been developing throughout their engagement with the PYP.”

The "learner profile" is an important aspect of the IB programmes as it encourages the children – and their teachers – to be risk takers, to be open-minded, to be reflective and to be balanced. In all, there are ten key elements in the IB learner profile, and these are continually used through the children’s education by their teachers and by the students themselves who are given numerous opportunities to learn the skills necessary to communicate with others.

Ambassadors for Sustainability

A high level of good communication was certainly in evidence when the Grade 5 students presented their PYP Exhibition, an annual project that they had been working on for over nine weeks. The exhibition was titled “Visions for Sustainability”. Throughout their time in the Junior School, students work towards their Grade 5 Exhibition, combining the skills they have learned across their schooling. This year the Exhibition also encouraged students to be ambassadors for sustainability, supporting the school’s mission to ‘work together for a sustainable future’.

Rather than working as whole classes, learning about and solving singular issues, students had more ownership over what they were studying. At this year’s Exhibition, the thirty-two students were divided into twelve different groups, where they shared their knowledge and the actions they have taken on issues such as endangered species, pollution, child labour, animal rights, discrimination, energy use, deforestation, health and the use of media.

Whilst studying the theme of “Sharing the Planet” students chose problems that they believed were the most significant in the world. They conducted secondary research about the causes of these issues. They also held interviews, designed surveys and went on field trips to find out more about these issues on a local scale, and to see what they could do to help. The next stage of the exhibition process was “to take action.”

The “action” related to the issues students had selected for the Exhibition. Groups of students formulated their own recipe for dog shampoo for homeless dogs, designed video games to inform the public about what products affect endangered species, and created comic books to describe people’s experiences of discrimination.

The final step of the Exhibition was for students to present their process. Each of the groups of students set up a display and made fifteen-minute presentations for visitors. These presentations explained the process that they had gone through and how they took action. Each group repeated its presentation several times throughout the two days to audiences that included parents, teachers, students from other schools, and other Prem students.
Kiang said that his work on discrimination found its inspiration in a simple way. “I saw a beggar in the street,” he said, “and he was homeless and did not have any arms or legs. I now know that some beggars are fakes, but we can raise money to give to suitable charities which will help children escape child labour.”

In their work for the Exhibition, Kiang and his teammates Ben and Risa identified aspects of discrimination including skin colours, size and race. Elena and Emily, who argued eloquently for animal rights, explored discrimination of quite a different sort.

“We saw so many abandoned dogs and felt sorry for them and wanted to help,” Elena said. The girls visited several local temples and interviewed others who were working to provide care for the temple dogs. Finding dogs with fleas and poor skin, Emily and Elena conducted further research and devised an organic shampoo that will help alleviate the dogs’ suffering.

“The conservation of energy is important for everyone in every country. It is easy to prevent waste,” said Raynah, “and simply by turning off lights when you leave a room or closing the door to keep the air-conditioned air inside will help.” Raynah, Jeff and Lena put their heads together, and devised a way of making a difference. They borrowed some money to buy automatic door closers for the Grade 5 classrooms so that cool air does not escape. Now they plan to conduct bake sales to raise the money to pay back their “start-up capital.”

Pollution, endangered species, the effective use of media to bring people together, solar energy, community response to natural disasters and deforestation: these issues were also examined by the students. The IB states that the Exhibition is to provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate independence and responsibility for their own learning, and to provide them with an opportunity to explore multiple perspectives while engaging in an in-depth, collaborative inquiry.

For many of the Grade 5 students, their action doesn’t stop at the presentation of their Exhibition; many students will continue to work on their actions and help to make the world a better place.
Although early cavemen probably discovered that a banana leaf held overhead would keep the sun’s rays off their hairy backs, it was not until a much more recent era – only 3000 – 4000 years ago – that umbrellas similar to the ones we see today were being used in Egypt, China, India and other areas of early civilisation. They came to be associated with rank, and religious or royal leaders were seen to have multi-layered umbrellas. In modern times, His Majesty the King of Thailand still includes the magnificent Nopphapadon Mahasawetachat (nine-tiered umbrella) in his royal regalia, and Chiang Mai has become world-famous as an umbrella-manufacturing centre that draws on the ancient and specialised skills of local artisans.

In many local villages, and once the rice harvest was safely gathered, rice farmers and their families traditionally made umbrellas for their own use or for occasional sales. Shaving bamboo slats, hand-drilling holes in slender umbrella ribs, boiling up glue on the family cooking fire and gluing paper on the skeletal frames was a family affair.

Some twenty years before a former Thai politician became famous for coining the phrase, people in different villages in the Doi Saket, Bor Sang and San Kamphaeng areas were specialising in a “one tambol one product” cottage industry. Doi Saket was known for its production of small umbrellas, while San Kamphaeng drew upon the fine cotton fabrics woven locally to produce much larger umbrellas. However, prices for a finished umbrella were very low, and the dream of higher wages and greater comforts in the city lured people away. Many of the valuable old skills were in danger of being lost forever.

**A Man of Vision**

Thavil Buacheen was a man of great vision. From his background in a developing tourism industry he knew the allure of hand-made products. In 1978 he called upon family and friends to work together to manufacture umbrellas in the traditional way. Thavil proposed establishing a place where the skills of the old could be practised year-round, preserving art forms that may otherwise have been lost, and creating high-quality products for sale locally – and increasingly further afield. Almost fifty years later, the Umbrella Making Centre employs over one hundred and twenty people with an additional three hundred or more working in their rural homes, contributing one or more parts to the finished umbrellas.

The Umbrella Making Centre makes an amazing range of umbrellas of all sizes, colours and patterns old and new. Thavil’s foresight has ensured that the ancient Lanna skills are not lost, and through the on-going work of his daughter, Kannika Buacheen, local school children have become involved in the process, learning in the time-honoured way at the feet of their older mentors. Kannika also arranges umbrella-making workshops for visiting groups from Japan, Indonesia and China, so traditional skills are being exported to countries which themselves have histories of umbrella making.

Unlike many shop-bought umbrellas, the traditional Chiang Mai umbrellas found in Bor Sang are usually fully organic.

Locally woven silk or cotton, or saa paper made from the bark of Tonpao village mulberry trees, are used to cover the umbrellas. The upper and lower “heads” of the umbrellas and their tips are made from softwood from Baan Noi village, and the bamboo for the ribs is harvested in three nearby villages. Natural glues incorporating persimmon extracts are used to assemble the different parts, which may then be coloured using the rich red soils of the area mixed with tung oil to produce the impressive sun- and rain-proof red umbrellas that now make a dramatic impact in so many gardens around the world.

In a world where sustainability and recycling are increasingly important, the workers in Bor Sang let nothing go to waste. Left-over shavings from the bamboo are used as fuel to boil the glue solutions, trimmed-off scraps of the rayon used in making small decorative umbrellas are woven together to make ropes used to bind customer’s purchases, and even odd scraps of saa paper are either recycled to make larger sheets of paper, or are used to make tiny Christmas light covers.

In an era where faster is often thought to be better, it is reassuring that the slow old ways of yesterday are being preserved, promoted and protected – and passed on to a new generation. Chiang Mai’s vital saa paper umbrella cottage industry celebrates centuries of tradition while gently moving forward to meet growing demands, creating new designs while celebrating and re-inventing traditional Lanna designs. It is an industry of which Mr Thavil and all the other workers can be very proud.
Sustainability and creativity are key ingredients embedded into the delivery of many of the programmes at Traidhos. The importance of creativity and imagination in addressing and solving environmental issues is an area of expertise valued by many of the world’s key decision makers. We were fortunate to welcome to the campus writer, filmmaker and environmental policy maker Paula DiPerna, an advisor to multiple past US presidents and fresh from meetings with Barack Obama and Hilary Clinton, to take part in a recent artist residency.

There are few women in the world like New Yorker Paula DiPerna, whose creative contributions in the arts and environment complement her high-level policy involvement both in the non-profit and in the private sectors. Her commitment to environmental activism is total: as chief policy advisor and writer for the legendary explorer and filmmaker Jacques Cousteau, DiPerna travelled the world in the celebrated vessel Calypso at the side of the formidable adventurer, writing and co Producing some of the world’s first environmental documentary films.

At Prem she worked with students from across our organisation and in a diverse number of subject areas. In all her work, the message of creative thinking in approaches to sustainable living was clearly delivered in a series of engaging, relevant and inspiring workshops. Paula used her own experience, her films and her books to deliver a message that always had our students and their responsibility at the centre.

A Yearning for Expression

When asked what she had learned from the children during her time on the Traidhos residency programme, DiPerna replied, “I’ve learned that there’s a yearning for expression, and that society is not giving that agency. As much as it’s possible to sit there and do all these things through technology, when you really ask someone to express himself or herself in a pretty free environment, that freedom is paralyzing.

“This is similar to environmental policies in America. They’re so daunting to talk about that we get denial. Instead of just going for the solutions, there’s a layer of delay, like the tyre of fat around people’s waists. It’s so difficult to act that people don’t, which has created a whole culture of inaction - that actually looks like action! The creative energy that exists in all of the young people I have worked with here is a resource that I wish I could harness more often, as it’s raw, powerful and above all, honest.”

Watching our students in Paula’s workshops was a wonderful experience for me, as it affirmed the importance of our arts and creativity programme. Her residency demonstrated a perfect balance of agency for young people, relevance of learning outcomes for our teachers and the importance of channelling the key strengths of any delivering practitioner.

From the Whitehouse to the Prem campus, it was clear by the end of the residency that Paula DiPerna’s is a voice that needs to be heard and celebrated more often.
All Prem past students are invited to keep in touch with their former school by emailing the editor (christopherh@ptis.ac.th) with news of where they are and what they are doing.

Udit Pandey

I was at Prem from 2005 to 2007 when I completed Grade 11 and 12 there. I currently work as a Management Consultant for T-Systems and am based in Cologne, Germany. The industries I focus on are telecommunications and automotives and my topic areas are wholesale strategy development and organisational design and restructuring. I have been operating extensively in the geographies of Middle East and Africa.

Kylie Nealis

Kylie graduated in June 2006. She began attending Prem in January 2002 and was a foundation boarding student. Originally from Northern California, Kylie moved back to California after graduation where she attended The University of California at Santa Cruz. She graduated in 2010 after completing two majors with a BA in Community Studies and Politics. Her university studies led her into the field of non-profit environmental and social justice work. After graduating, she spent two years working at Global Exchange, an international human rights organisation based in San Francisco. During that time she held several positions including Community Rights Program Associate, Interim Director of Operations and Fair Trade Campaign Coordinator. At the end of 2012, Kylie took a brief sabbatical and returned to South-East Asia where she spent two months traveling and visiting friends and family in Chiang Mai.

Since May 2013, Kylie has worked for the Sierra Club, the largest and oldest environmental grassroots organisation in the US at their National headquarters in San Francisco. In her role as Executive Office Assistant, she provides administrative support to the Chief of Staff, assists with scheduling, event planning, and coordinating meetings for the Board of Directors.

At the beginning of 2014, Kylie travelled to Cuba on a people-to-people licensed exchange trip. Kylie has a strong passion for environmental conservation, climate justice and international travel.

Ami Okuno

Following her graduation from Prem in May 2012, Ami started a pre-med biology degree at Furman University in South Carolina, USA, where she completed her second year. Virtually all students lived on campus – and the “Furman Bubble” meant that with everything so close to hand, exploratory trips further afield did not happen very often. During last year’s summer vacation, however, Ami travelled to London to do some research into bacteria and this summer has accepted an internship at Okinawa University in Japan to study biochemistry. Ami feels the rewarding experiences will provide good groundwork for her future career as a surgeon.
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