Community

A quarterly magazine published by Traidhos Three-Generation Community for Learning and Prem Tinsulanonda International School

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A celebration of lifelong learning

Traidhos Three-Generation Community for Learning
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Curiosity - Critical Thinking - Powerful Learning from 3 years of age
Editorial

To say that much of contemporary living has become fractured, disparate and void of community is a point that is made in excess. We are so aware of our increasingly decentralized, self-gratifying lives – which we often attribute to technological advancements – that it is safe to say that we have become self-reflexively disconnected. Though the pace of media continues to speed up exponentially as we are confronted by a seemingly unlimited supply of information that considers itself ‘vital’, there is perhaps a topic no more crucial to our contemporary understanding than community. Though it might not carry the same type of flash as other issues that are often thrown into public discourse, its timelessness warrants our attention. In this issue of the Traidhos Quarterly, we take a moment to reflect upon this universal issue in pieces rendered at the personal scale.

Communities come in many shapes and sizes and are developed under a variety of circumstances; from athletic teams fighting for national glory (see page 20) to young students simulating the real-world challenges our modern cities face (page 6). Some communities are currently being fostered in order to tear down cultural barriers (page 22), while others are fighting to retain their identity that is threatened both culturally and environmentally (page 10). Other communities present themselves as obscure trends and can be found at your local coffee shop (page 13).

The Traidhos Three-Generation Community for Learning does not merely include this issue’s theme in its name – it lives it. Members from all parts of this community are dedicated to maintaining and improving upon their contributions to themselves and each other through their enthusiastic efforts and critical thinking. This edition of the magazine embraces this learning centre’s core value – forever a part of its namesake – and offers varying perspectives and insights into how communities can be formed and sustained.

Editor

Cover image – Participants march in Chiang Mai’s Pha Tat parade

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A great opportunity for young people to have fun and to develop confidence and interests in a safe environment during school breaks

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It Takes a Village

Can you remember when you were a student entering a new school for the first time? Can you still picture the scene? Can you recall what was on your mind? It is quite possible that you were preoccupied with thoughts about making new friends, “fitting in”, or about the teachers: would they welcome you into their classrooms and notice you or not? You might have even been concerned about your readiness to excel in this new environment and whether or not you would be safe. Does any of this resonate with you? Can you still feel the tingle of the unknown?

Pretty much all of us have the same basic psychological needs. We all wish to exist in a place where we feel positive about our emotional and physical safety and where we can find and cultivate close, supportive relationships that enable us to develop as caring individuals in a complex world. Equally, we want to ensure our autonomy, to have a say in what happens to us and to feel that we are capable of learning. These fundamental needs shape human motivation and are the same in the home as they are in an organisation such as a school. Yet the evidence from many educational journals indicates, I would argue, that sometimes things can go very wrong in a home. So imagine what can happen within a complex sociological construct such as a school.

The values of home at school

If we start our journey with the assumption that most homes provide a sense of support, trust, consistency, care and ‘space’ for an individual to develop his or her own identity, we immediately contemplate key words, such as inclusive, participatory and caring as essential to that successful home construct. We mention the triangle of home, school and student as indispensible in helping to create the appropriate environment whereby the child is able to live and to learn how to become a successful and caring adult. Therefore, in my mind, it makes all good sense that the school must also be a caring, inclusive, participatory locus for our students, so that there is a synergy across two sides of that triangle.

When a school meets those same basic psychological needs that are being met in the home, students become increasingly committed to the school’s norms, values and goals, as they perceive them to be complementary to their primary formation. And in so doing, students appreciate that the school is an inclusive and caring environment that serves as a community of support as they learn skills and concepts that will help them to shape their lives. Indeed, students in a school with a strong sense of community may be more likely to be academically motivated as well as to act ethically and to live a more responsible life.

Every year we undertake the Endicott Survey, and one set of questions seeks to evaluate the degree to which our school fosters a strong sense of community. We ask our students how much they agree or disagree with such statements as:

- My class is like a family.
- Students in my class help one another learn.
- I believe that I can talk to the teachers in this school about things that are bothering me.
- Students in my class can get a rule changed if they think that it is unfair.

Unfortunately, schools with a strong sense of community are rare. Indeed, the very definition of school community is considered by many to sound simple enough, though I would propose that it is not.
An evolving and complex meaning

‘Community’ is a term that is very often used in schools, but it is seldom used with exactitude; its meaning is unclear, and its interpretations for those directly involved are many. I would essentially propose that a school community is an assemblage of the people intimately attached to a school: its teachers, administrators, students and the students’ families. Yet I am aware that in the contemporary world this is not as potent a definition as may have been the case some years ago. Now I would have to adjust my thinking to consider the fact that the school community, though still composed of teachers, parents and students, has now been expanded to encompass many other overlapping communities. This is especially the case in a world that is hyper-connected by the Internet.

Our community is a group of people associated with one another who share common values about the education of children. Yet the school itself is not one community but rather many when we consider that our students have different cultural heritages, speak many different languages, work in different divisions and are admitted to different Houses that proudly define their uniqueness through different colour schemes. Our students can feel included when members of these different communities assume their responsibilities as one, and their parents can become full partners in both their and their classmates’ education. Teachers are not isolated practitioners of pedagogy, but professionals integrated into a common purpose and working in partnership with other adults, both locally as well as more dispersed, to provide the connected culture that will foster children’s development – all children.

An educational village

The phrase “school community” appears to be a simple one and one that ought to be totally understood, yet it is far from simple and may indeed have multiple definitions depending upon the individual views of the members of that community. Many years ago, I was thrilled to discover the old African proverb that states that, “It takes a village to raise a child.” Indeed, there is more in this phrase than I had originally thought. For in a village there is an undisputed chief who provides clear strategic guidance; there are elders who maintain the customs; and then there are the families that enjoy the inclusive environment that shelters them, sustains them and yet still provides them with a clear identity. The village is based upon three generations living and working together; perhaps that is the essence of a school community, or at least one that merits reflection.

Alun Cooper became the Head of School at Prem in August 2014. He is a highly regarded international school educator with over twenty-eight years of leading schools worldwide. He has worked with the IB curriculum in the Americas, Asia and Europe, and also has extensive boarding school experience.

Photos provided by Prem School and Brad Flickinger
Dispatches From the Mini City

Grade 1 students, along with the supervision of Ajarn Jeremy, imagine and construct the layout of miniature metropolis in order to better understand how big communities work.

In Grade 1, students have a chance to reflect upon their community by creating their own. We developed the concept of the Mini City with the idea of giving students a chance to make sense of the world around them and to come up with innovative ideas and solutions to problems that arise in urban communities.

Embedded in the Mini City were the Grade 1 units of inquiry 'How We Organise Ourselves' and 'Sharing the Planet' as well as real life practical implications of mathematics and literacy. The development and maintenance of the city brought the IB Approaches to Learning to life, as students were able to practice vital self-management, social, research, thinking and communication skills.

First steps

Students had hands-on control of the Mini City from its inception, as they carefully considered what landforms would be ideal for it. A large portion of the classroom was cleared for the development, providing the students with the space they needed to create mountains, rivers, valleys and a coastal area. Students were challenged to work together during this phase, adding to their excitement to be a part of the project. They quickly realized the importance of working together and taking turns in order to be effective. For instance, if everybody painted the ground at once, then they would not be able to work on other parts of the city due to wet paint. Students eventually assumed different roles, and they agreed to work on different sections of the city.

The teacher guided the students through the next phase, as they were challenged to consider the essential parts of the city. To help students think about the bigger picture of a city, they engaged with the SimCity BuildIt app which helped them to think of the elements that make a city run, such as electricity, sewage, education, water, factories, roads and bridges.

Environmental city

Students moved with full force to construct the elements of the city. This is where their understanding of 'Sharing the Planet' came alive, along with the central idea, ‘How we manage technology impacts the environment.’ Using creativity and innovation, students imagined water collectors that didn’t require electricity. They developed solar and wind power stations, as agreeing that the use of fossil fuels would be bad for their city. A group in charge of waste management created an intricate recycling system that was connected to the production factory.

Community systems

Connection was a concept that was explored during the development of the Mini City, and students further demonstrated this during the 'How We Organise Ourselves' unit with the central idea of, "People have many roles within the systems of a community." Students created different entities in the city, but they initially had no plan as to how they would work together. Together they created a postal system for the Mini City, considering the different roles that people play and the systems that need to be in place.
Eventually, students made further connections as they developed the Mini City. For example, a student who was working on the donut shop started to think about how he could get the flour to make the donuts. He started to work with a student who was making the farm as well as a student who was creating factories. The three students collaborated to create a system that would transport the flour from seed to factory to shop and that demonstrated their understanding of a complicated system. Another group of students created an intricate river transport system based on research and interviews they had done on riverboats in Bangkok. Students in charge of the road system needed to collaborate with students developing the train system so they could make the most of a set of land without clashing with each other.

**Mathematics and literacy**

As students were involved in developing all aspects of the Mini City, the topic was particularly appropriate for spoken and written reflection. Students have written about the Mini City regularly, whether it be a reflection about their designing and building processes, an information report about something they created, or a narrative using the Mini City as the setting. Students have since been able to relate to these texts, as they have had first-hand experiences for background knowledge. We also put the Mini City at the center of our non-fiction reading sessions, during which students researched waste management, road and rail infrastructure in order to deepen their understanding of how their city worked. Mathematical skills such as measurement, mapping and pattern identification were also embedded in our explorations. The Mini City was pivotal in helping students understand geographic coordinates as well as developing their ability to give and follow directions.

**Conclusion**

Grade 1’s Mini City was a powerful assessment tool to check for and help develop student understanding in many ways. Student ownership of the process helped to create a natural flow between inquiry and curriculum and was the primary reason for success.

A few weeks later, students were read “Where the Forest Meets the Sea” by Jeannie Baker. It is a cautionary tale of what can happen to nature if there is too much city development. After the story, the students resolved to tear down the Mini City and use the space to develop a rainforest, which they did. The fact that students were willing to undo months of hard work that they had put in in order to better care for our planet was the most rewarding outcome from this learning experience.

To get regular updates to what is happening in Grade 1, go to [http://ptisgrade1.blogspot.com/](http://ptisgrade1.blogspot.com/)

**Jeremy Gaysek** is a Grade 1 teacher at Prem Tinsulanonda International School in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

*Photos provided by the author*
At the end of Term Three, Prem International School had a spectacular Drugs Awareness Week consisting of reflections, competitions, assemblies, facts, speakers, workshops and simulations, all intended to spark more conversation and, ultimately, awareness about the dangers of drugs and alcohol use.

During the week, a competition was held for all Senior School students to send a message to other students about drug use through thought-provoking slogans. Students came up with a variety of poignant statements: “Don’t do pot or your brain will rot!”, “I’d eat bugs rather than do drugs!”, “No need to do weed!” and “D.E.A.D. (Drugs End All Dreams)” The students were creative with their messages and came up with some great ideas!

We held an experiment on the field behind the Senior School where students had the opportunity to wear beer and marijuana goggles, which simulated the experience of being under the influence. Students stumbled, fell, struggled to follow a guided path or catch a ball there were lots of giggles until Ajarn Stephen, Senior School Principal asked, “Imagine if you were this affected and you chose to get behind the wheel [of a vehicle]?”

Ten recovering addicts from a local rehab centre also joined us to share their experiences of addiction and recovery. The students were riveted by their stories and asked many questions. Many of the recovering addicts were in their late teens and twenties, and some had even attended boarding and IB schools. All of them shared how they had thought that drugs had been the solution at first, but that drugs had ended up ravaging their self-esteem, their relationships, and their identity.

The parents had lots of questions about this topic too, so we organised a workshop in order to educate them more about the subject. A range of topics were covered, including: which drugs are the most likely to be abused by teens, such as alcohol, marijuana, and prescription pills; detecting signs of drug use, such as loss of motivation, outbursts of anger, lack of eye contact, and drowsiness; the impact of drugs and alcohol on teens, such as the risk of dependence, interference with the brain’s growth, depression, decrease in motivation and concentration; identifying strategies for initiating a family discussion about drugs, such as having a conversation instead of a confrontation; and what to do if one suspects someone in the family has a drug problem, such as linking them to 12-step meetings like Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, accessing counselling, and entering rehab.

We ended the week with an assembly to celebrate the students’ collaboration and their inquisitiveness, as well as to remember all the lessons.

We hope more students will use the information that they learned to pause and think when asked to drink or get high, and ultimately choose to say no. We hope students will see a greater link between success, self-esteem and abstinence from mind-altering drugs.

Amandine Lecesne is School Counsellor at Prem Tinsulanonda International School Chiang Mai, Thailand. She has worked in the United States, France and Thailand and holds a Master’s Degree in Counselling Psychology.

Photos supplied by Parinya (Mee) Panyana
Ko Kret is a small, artificial island along the Chao Phraya River located 20 kilometers north of Bangkok. It has long been an attraction for local and international tourists, offering a contrasting experience to that of the hustle and bustle of the city. A car-free island, its population of approximately 6000 people comes from various religious and cultural backgrounds. Mon style pottery, an art that has been practiced on the island since its formation, is one of its top attractions today.

Bonded by more than pottery

The Traidhos Three-Generation Barge Program has incorporated Ko Kret within its trips for twenty years; exploring the large role that pottery making has in the island’s history and focusing on the strong sense of community within it. Throughout these years, students have carried out interviews with residents and stallholders, taught English lessons at the local school, partaken in pottery making workshops using traditional Mon techniques, explored flood and drought issues, and observed traditional fruit farming methods. During my time working with the Barge Program over the last year, I have visited Ko Kret on a number of occasions and have always been struck by the kindness and helpfulness of the residents and pottery makers. They are eager to share their history and local knowledge, the stories of the struggles they have had to overcome as a community (particularly the severe flooding in 2011), and not least their love of their home and community.

Endangered traditions

During interviews with pottery makers and stallholders, students inquire about family life, employment on the island, and the passing on of pottery making techniques to younger generations. While pottery is one of the main industries of Ko Kret, with pottery makers exporting their products as far as India, modern circumstances have undeniably influenced the community’s way of life. Many middle-aged citizens of Ko Kret spend their week working in nearby Nonthaburi or...
Bangkok and return to the island over the weekend to run their shops during the busy tourist periods. This leaves the grandparents and the grandchildren at home on the island during the week while the younger children in the family attend school. The middle-aged citizens of this island have been enticed by working in the city and the opportunity for a modern, western lifestyle. In the age of modernity, skills linked to culture and traditional arts have lost value, with younger generations eager to gain skills relating to modern technology and digital literacy. This explains the choice of many middle-aged residents of Ko Kret to abandon pottery making and pursue careers off the island. This new information raised concerns for me regarding the future of pottery making on Ko Kret and the question of who would pass on these skills once the older generations are no longer able to.

The Barge Program recently took students from International School Bangkok to visit Ko Kret as part of the school’s ‘Passion Day’, to learn to make and paint pottery in the local school. Here I witnessed teachers and students coming together to teach our visiting students, sharing their knowledge through generations. It was evident the younger generations are proud to show their skills and eager to teach this art form to new visitors as much as the older generations. It was wonderful to witness this community taking such pride in their local skills and traditions, when it has become increasingly common across Thailand for younger generations to lose interest in and the passion for the skills of traditional and local arts. An example of this is occurring in the Rattanakosin area of Bangkok, where local communities have been widely known for producing goods such as monks’ bowls, birdcages, and dinsor pong (white clay filler). Demand for these products has fallen; however, and the appeal for younger generations to learn the skills required to make the products has also diminished.

Preserving culture and the environment

Local residents have also used the pottery that they are so famous for to tackle environmental issues. On Ko Kret, as across much of Thailand, littering from plastic bag waste has been a major issue. Much of the island has been covered in the waste, making it unsightly to tourists and dangerous to animals and fish that mistook the plastic for food. To help overcome this issue, local vendors decided to swap the plastic bottles and bags that soft drinks were sold in into pottery cups incorporating traditional Mon designs. As a result, visitors can now buy a refreshing drink, receive an authentic cultural souvenir, and reduce negative environmental impacts. Local pottery makers make the cups with traditional patterns and designs, and stallholders have vowed to encourage the sale of these cups with their drinks in a bid to reduce plastic waste. The number of bins provided across the island has also been increased to help dispose of the plastic that is still used. Although the designs on the pottery cups are now less culturally related, with cartoon and Coca-Cola designs becoming more popular, the plastic pollution issue has been vastly reduced. This demonstrates a community actively working together and using their local skills to tackle a problem, which had been affecting their local environment and the island that they care for so much.

It is evident to me, in this age of modernity, how valuable Ko Kret is as a community that still values its traditional and local skills so profoundly. In the past, the future of pottery making on Ko Kret was unknown, as large numbers of younger generation citizens chose to seek work away from the island. However, rather uniquely, they have successfully reversed this trend. I have witnessed the current young generation demonstrating skills for pottery making that require true dedication, passion and pride. Mon style pottery is what Ko Kret is famous for, and thankfully there is little sign of the value of this pottery art diminishing in the future.

Sara Harman is an Educational Facilitator at Three-Generation Barge Program. She has also worked as a Primary school teacher in the UK and enjoys exploring the various cultures and traditions within Thailand.

Photos provided by Peerapong Prasutr, Dean Croshere, Claire Backhouse and the author.
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Reconnecting with familiar objects presented in an unfamiliar way, Head of Community Lynda Rolph considers how communities reconstruct symbolic meaning over time.

As I was growing up, the clinking of large glass Kilner jars heralded summer’s end. It was a ritual that I initially watched and then gradually began to participate in. It began with a foray under the sink to retrieve the hoard of empty jars, followed by a process of cleaning them, balancing them upside down on the metal rungs of the oven where they became mysteriously sterilized and then packing and preserving them. All of this led up to the most exciting part for me as an observing child: the moment when the jars were lined up on the wooden chopping board to test their seal. If the jar could be picked up by the rim of the lid, it had earned the right to have a metal ring screwed around the top. It would then be stored in the larder where it would keep its contents safe, ready for winter day pies and special occasion crumbles.

As I was growing up, Pyrex beakers belonged in the science lab. They would be balanced on metal tripods over the Bunsen burner in order to boil concoctions in them. I watched as they gave off plumes of coloured steam through their funnel, or as the liquid inside bubbled and changed state. They were used to measure substances that I did not quite understand, but which were important for that now forgotten science lesson. Afterwards, those beakers chinked against the deep stone sink in the corner of the classroom, as the too-cold water numbed the fingers that tried to wash away the experiment.

Kilner jars and Pyrex beakers... I had forgotten them until recently when I met both in the unexpected setting of a small cafe. Relieved of the burden of preserving fruit and the mystery of the science lab, the trends in modern living and communities of coffee drinkers have reinstated them as drinking vessels. I puzzled the ice coffee brimming from the glass beaker and momentarily checked myself, fearing to inhale or drink any contents lest I were to succumb to toxic vapours. My companion turned the ice tea around and around and I wondered if she was unconsciously looking for the metal lid to test the seal. My gaze went to other tables and, indeed, there was not a conventional cup to be seen. In fact, the rule would appear to be that anything that held liquid but did not resemble a cup and saucer could be used to serve a beverage.

I was distracted from enjoying the coffee, obsessed instead with noting the volume of each glug as I drank it. I could not distinguish myself from the pupil in the science lab. The experience of simply enjoying the coffee was overtaken by the years of training, noticing the scale on the side of the beaker and remembering the importance of being at eye level in order to measure it. The coffee shop was full of people talking, laughing, sharing good times or plying on their phones; I seemed to be the only one who was disturbed by the glass that was not a glass. As we got up to go, leaving frothy bubbles stuck to the sides of the beaker and an obstinate ring of tea, forever out of reach of the straw in the Kilner-jar-cup, my companion smiled and nodded to the container, “My grannie used to preserve plums in one of those.”

I smiled. For Millennials, tech savvy and ready to post a photo of an attractive meal or an artistic cappuccino to social media, they are united through the fashion of these non-conventional drinking vessels. For the rest of us, the world of coffee drinking simply reconnects us to moments of nostalgia, the kitchens of our childhood and the school days of our youth.

Lynda Rolph is Head of Programs at Traidhos Three-Generation Community for Learning and has been with the company for over fifteen years. She is a high respected environmental educator with teaching experience in United Kingdom and Thailand. She is a former director of the Barge Program.

Photos provided by Selma Broeder, PRHaney, and Yogbin.
Life and professional practitioner Peter Seidler reflects on how developing a mindful sense of self is the genesis for communal understanding in a fractious world.

“...through these practices we can shift our allegiance to the present moment”.

We all wake up every day and need to relate to an assortment of shifting situations in our lives. These everyday realities usually include relationships, making a living, and being a part of society. We usually try to organise ourselves in such a way that, if all goes well, these activities will bring us happiness, contentment or enjoyment. Sometimes they do.

Still, we all struggle at times with aspects of our changing lives, and sometimes we need to find guidance and support to deal with issues that arise in work and relationships. In answer to this, there is a truly mind-boggling avalanche of information out there. There are recommendations for apparently every conceivable aspect of our professional, romantic, societal and parental lives. Pundits offer views on a blizzard of topic around how we should live our lives, analyzing and offering many prescriptions.

In the so-called First World, and increasingly elsewhere, commercialized consumer lifestyles are what most people value. Being successful materially is considered life’s highest priority. Increasingly, consumerism appears to be the thing that matters most.

But we are also periodically made aware of how precarious that is. Financial insecurity has powerful effects and can create uncertainty and ruin. So how should we deal with that uncertainty? Sometimes, we use spirituality to deal with fear. We practice spirituality like some kind of alchemy, hoping it will solve our social or professional problems, longing for them to go away so we can continue with our happy life.

Yet somehow deep down we know this kind of escapism will not bring the confidence we need to deal with real issues when life goes off the rails. We need a powerful way to be in the middle of it all and not lapse into fantasy. We need to learn how to be present in our lives while we relate with the turmoil of actual work, relationships, society and death. We need to re-connect with the sacredness of our everyday lives. There are many authentic wisdom traditions that offer tools to accomplish this. Methods of connecting with the sacred are found in Buddhism, various contemplative traditions within Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and the spiritual practices of indigenous peoples around the world.

When catastrophe strikes in our personal lives it is important to find courage to face the fear. We also may find ourselves in situations where society fails collectively, as we see... present in our lives while we relate with the turmoil of work, relationships, society and death.”
happening right now in numerous places around the world. The migrant crises in Europe and the food and medical shortages in the failing state of Venezuela are but two current examples. In these situations, simplistic optimism or wishful thinking is insufficient. So is the thin and inadequate vapor of materialism’s promise.

We must develop ways to evoke inherent wisdom, the natural intelligence that is always available. We need to connect with Big Mind an awareness of reality that transcends the wholly subjective. Then we can reframe what’s happening in a vast perspective. The tools to do this have been around forever. Meditation for example, has been practiced and taught for thousands of years. Authentic wisdom traditions exist across societies with meditation and the application of meditative awareness at their core. They usually begin with ways to deepen our experience of kindness to others and ourselves and then apply that in our messy everyday lives. From this ground can arise a real confidence that transforms into a capacity to help us face challenges head-on.

At Traidhos we have a meditation group that sits together every week. We sit and practice mindfulness-awareness meditation together. This practice is the basis for finding the stability, clarity, and strength of mind to bring to our rich and sometimes hectic lives.

As my good friend John Baker often says, through these practices we can “shift our allegiance to the present moment”. This is the spirituality of the sacredness of our lives as they are in the present, as well as the sacred qualities of contemporary society. We can stay with what is happening because we have the courage to engage with our most demanding and troublesome experiences.

This passage from meditation master Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche says it all:

“With regard to your inquiry about my lifestyle, you must understand that I regard myself as an ordinary person. I am a householder, who makes mortgage payments. I have a wife and three children whom I support. At the same time, my relationship with the teachings is inseparable from my whole being. I do not try to rise above the world. My vocation is working with the world. . . . There is a fundamental idea which refuses to divide things into this or that, sacred or profane, right or wrong. That is why I write and speak of meditation in action. It is much easier to appear holy than to be sane. So the idea is to separate spirituality from spiritual materialism. This requires a practice and some courage.”

- Recalling Chogyam Trungpa by Fabrice Midal

**Peter Gabriel Seidler**, PCC is a Life and Professional Coach residing in Mae Rim, Thailand. As an entrepreneur he started several pioneering companies and recently founded The Asian Center for Applied Mindfulness. To contact please email: peter@seidlerventures.com

*Photos provided by Nicholas A. Tonnelli, Joydeep, T. Voekler and Lynn Greyling*
Ajarn Santi’s Trip to Prague

During the school break in April, I traveled to the Czech Republic to visit the Grammar and Music School of Prague in the Czech Republic. I was first met by Ms. Iva Rakova who brought me to the office of Mr. Jakub Waldmann, the Artistic Director of the school’s artistic director. I was greeted warmly, and we had a long interview conversation about school’s latest news. At the time, they were busy arranging a trip to an Austrian school in Linz to join their orchestra. It was an exciting moment, having the opportunity to meet the head of an institution in a city known for its beautiful music culture.

This gymnasium is a top grammar school (‘gymnázium’) in the Czech Republic, it offers a normal curriculum along with an intensive music program, as well as an extracurricular Music, Arts and Dance program for students from outside the school. Open from 7 am to 10 pm, there are 750 full-time students and 150 teachers – an incredible ratio that ensures that students will work closely with their instructors. Most of the teachers work part-time and are experienced professional musicians. Every city has a similar gymnázium; however, this is the only such school in the Czech Republic to combine a music curriculum with other subjects. The state pays for the teachers’ salaries, and the parents pay a little fee to cover the maintenance of the building.

The Music school division accepts students from the age of five to the prep level, offering lessons for theory, notation, singing solfège (pitch singing and sight-reading) and folk songs. These subjects help prepare the young students for the instrumental lessons when they are six. They have one year of observing older kids playing different instruments so they can develop an idea of which they would prefer to play. The committee can also decide to promote any talented student to the instrumental lessons sooner.

At age six, each student has two lessons per week, at twenty minutes and twenty-five minutes each. I found that this approach to learning – shorter lessons with greater frequency – was better for students than one hour-long lesson held once per week. These young students were able to maintain their concentration for the whole lesson. Later, as the students get older, the lessons will get longer. It is strongly recommended that parents sit in with the class in order to better understand the teacher’s expectations.

Each semester ends with an examination held in the gymnasium, and the end-of-year examination in June is particularly rigorous, reflecting the school’s high-quality reputation. Upon seeing the results, the committee will decide which students can continue their studies here. Students must demonstrate their commitment to practicing regularly and, beyond the classroom, their interest in experiencing music elsewhere in their lives if they want to continue at the school. Just the same, the committee will recognize a student’s room for improvement if they appear to take their practice seriously, even if their performance is not of the highest quality.

After the interview, I had a tour of the gymnázium. I was shown the six-storey building, the two concert halls, the general subject classrooms, the indoor swimming pool, the cafeteria and the music rooms. There are even seventeen double grand piano rooms! On the walls of the main hallway, there are pictures of many students who have won international competitions, although they are not pushed to compete.

The school appears to be committed to developing close relationships with its students and with the wider music community in the Czech Republic and Europe. Student performances are held daily. Once a year the students can audition with the city philharmonic orchestra. Beyond their immediate community, the school also hosts an international guitar music competition, opening their facilities to many different performers.

I felt as though I had won a lottery having had the chance to visit a warm and welcoming place such as this. I will use what I have seen to improve our instrumental program here at Prem School as much as possible.

If you would like to know more about the school you can have a look at their website.

http://www.gmhs.cz/studium/

Ajarn Santi is the music teacher at Prem Tinsulanonda International School. He also runs his own music program, Santi Music School, in Chiang Mai city.

Photos provided by author
Unwind totally at Vivo bene Village in Doi Saket. Book two or more nights at special rates of Single Baht 1,500 Double Baht 1,900 nett per night including breakfast, and if you wish, take two on-site medical tests - without leaving the resort!

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Community in the Public Sphere

The Traidhos Quarterly editor Nick Reale attends the latest event aimed at improving how Chiang Mai makes use of its public spaces.

Brainstorming to music

Each of the five teams participating in the workshop is tasked with proposing solutions specific to Chiang Mai’s latent problems in the public sphere. Their topics range from transforming Chiang Mai’s green spaces to improving parking arrangements in the Old City. The event requires participants to utilize interdisciplinary skills, from fieldwork, analysis, design and outreach with the greater public. Divided into two segments, the first round of workshops – of which I am here on the third day – is focused on the creative ideation for what will be more formally developed during the second round in a few weeks. For now, I am here to be a student of a new way of thinking about Chiang Mai’s communal issues. But workshop leaders Nattapong and Donlaporn have other ideas; they encourage me to participate as well.

Co-founders of Bangkok-based Cloud-floor, an architectural firm that is, according to their website, “an alternative architectural practice and global think-tank committed to improving the intelligent urban structural systems and its physical network,” Nattapong and Donlaporn bring a sense of youthful levity to their energetic, dynamic workshop. For them, it is important that students not only develop well-designed projects, but that they can be effective in benefitting their communities as a whole. And what better way to do this than to segue from the introductory lecture into working groups than with a chorus of electronic dance music? Fuse gets everyone to stand up and actively exchange their initial ideas.

During this brainstorming phase, teams are encouraged to “think wildly” and “defer judgment” while “building off the ideas of others” in order to let their creative juices flow. Through the echoing din of this free-for-all, Nattapong assures me to participate.

“They may look busy, but not [they] really [are not]. You should join!” he insists.

Innovating community

I approach a group working on improving the tourist experience in Chiang Mai’s Old City, specifically with navigation. They consider their subjects as one community despite the fact that the vast majority of their members will only know Chiang Mai for a few days. The group is keenly aware of the unique habits of different tourist demographics; Western foreigners tend to seek out adventure activities, whereas the city’s growing contingent of Chinese tourists frequent Buddhist temples and historic sites. Thai tourists, which constitute the largest portion, tend to enjoy Northern Thai amenities (mostly restaurants and coffee shops).

Despite their research, one of the group’s members admits that they’ve had a hard time getting reliable information from tourists, which they have attempted to get by conducting interviews on the street.
Two days ago we went and interviewed foreigners, but they didn’t really give the information from the heart. They all said that they “I don’t know what to say,” one of the group members recalls.

Understanding the hesitation many travelers experience when in a foreign country, the group is brainstorming an idea, tentatively called “Follow Yellow”, to place infographic posters featuring notable landmarks accompanied by lines painted onto the adjacent sidewalk at strategic intersections in the Old City. Though simple enough, the craft of their plan will come in its design, which will forego the use of text in favor of diagrams and other visualizations in order to communicate universally.

Another group, developing a plan to repurpose abandoned spaces around the Chang Phueak area north of the Old City, also demonstrates a fidelity to pragmatism. Their plan to reconvert derelict telephone booths into donation boxes, with proceeds intended to go into repairing nearby temples, is cost-effective and directly impacts their community. One of the group members, Nook, is aware of the need to attract donors, and he offers a few ideas about how the booths can give back to those who offer up their pockets.

“When you donate, the box will play music for you to dance,” Nook explains, “…maybe EDM?” Everyone laughs. But he adds that people are more inclined to donate to a cause when it comes with an interesting story or a sense of fun.

**Chiang Mai & beyond**

Recognizing their students’ creativity, Donlaporn and Nattapong are both keen to present some of the students’ work to local community groups and Chiang Mai’s provincial government. For Donlaporn, keeping in contact with students and fostering long-term relationships is key for actualizing their projects.

“We would like to see how they could start their own business or perhaps return to lead their own workshops for us,” she says. When I asked her why Cloud-floor chose to use Chiang Mai as their “laboratory”, she instantly pointed out the intimacy of the city’s communities. “It’s easier to connect people together and to start projects here.”

Nattapong then asks me how I had heard of the Urban Rangers event in the first place, which gets me thinking for a moment. I grin and admit that I had caught wind of the event the old-fashioned way, through a friend of a friend of a friend. But that’s the essence of Chiang Mai: innovative enough, but never too loud for word-of-mouth – no matter what sort of music is playing.

**Nick Reale** is the editor of Traidhos Quarterly. A recent transplant to Chiang Mai from New York City, he spends his time researching, telling stories about, and designing maps of cities of all shapes and sizes. You can find more of his work at thisisnotreale.com.

For more on this event, you may visit TCDC’s website: http://www.tcdc.or.th/calendar/activities/25531/#心裡 petits- Urban-Rangers-Creative-Thinking-for-Our-City

For more on Cloud-floor, you may visit their website: http://www.cloud-floor.com/

Photos provided by the author
The Power of Sport in Building and Strengthening Community

Prem School Athletic and Activities Director Preben Gietz notes the binding powers sport has within cultures of various backgrounds and sizes.

“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than government in breaking down racial barriers.”
- Nelson Mandela

In 1995 South Africa hosted the Rugby World Cup. Nelson Mandela had only been president for one year, and divisions between races were raw following decades of apartheid, a system of racial segregation. During this time, rugby was considered to be a sport for white people in South Africa, and its World Cup team had just one black player on the roster, Chester Williams. In some ways, the country’s rugby team represented the former, unpopular, white ruling class. Within this context, Mandela saw the World Cup as an opportunity to start the reconciliation process in the country. If he could get black South Africans to rally behind the team, and if his support of the team improved the perception of Mandela amongst white South Africans, a path could be laid to peace and mutual understanding.

Mandela understood the significance and symbolic power of sport in society. The story of the 1995 World Cup team and its role in improving relations in South Africa is depicted in the film *Invictus*, starring Morgan Freeman as Nelson Mandela and Matt Damon as Francois Pienaar, the team’s white captain. It is a tale of the effectiveness of sport in building a spirit of community, both in the broad context of society but also within one team. The title of the film originates from a poem by William Ernest Henley, which provided Mandela with strength during his incarceration on Robben Island for his opposition of apartheid. The last two lines of the poem read:

“I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.”

The theme of self-mastery, being in control of one’s actions and decisions, is key to building a sense of community on a team. A successful team must focus on the things it has control over, such as the attributes of strong work ethic and discipline.

At the youth sport level, community is everything. Promoting positive character traits and an understanding of the importance of teamwork are essential elements of coaching youth sports. While everyone enjoys winning, these intangibles and their role in building a community within a team, and in a broader context, are of far greater
importance. A 2011 study of American athletes aged 5-18, conducted by Michigan State University, found that 65% of young athletes participate in sport to be with friends. The social aspect of sport, the relationships that are built and the shared experiences that are created, have significant potential to shape the characters, attitudes and behaviours of young people. A successful coach will build a strong sense of community on the team and will not allow any disruptions to the team’s culture.

Sport also builds community outside of the immediate context of a team and its coach. A thriving and successful school sport program can form a closer connection between parents, alumni and the school. This can happen at various levels. On one side of the spectrum is high school American football in many parts of the United States, which is traditionally played on Friday nights and, in certain regions, entire towns will come out to support their team. Communities are so closely linked to their teams that in some cases the team defines the community. Shops and restaurants proudly display the school’s logo and colours and local radio covers the team and upcoming games extensively throughout the week. A slightly exaggerated and dramatised example of this phenomenon can be followed in the popular television series Friday Night Lights, which takes place in a fictional Texas town.

A smaller-scale version of school sport building community can be found at many international schools around the world. School spirit and a sense of belonging to the school community are strengthened by competitive school sport. Student-athletes are not merely competing for themselves, their teammates and their coach; they are representing their school’s community of staff, students, parents and alumni. School sport has the unique ability to not only bring together all members of a school’s community, but also to create regional and international communities in the form of leagues, founded on a shared sense of purpose of the member schools. In Nelson Mandela’s words, sport, “...has the power to unite people in a way that little else does.”

In the case of South Africa, sport was seen as a tool to start building a community, while at schools all around the world, sport unites and strengthens communities.

Preben Gietz is the Athletic and Activities Director at Prem. He is currently completing a Master’s of Education in athletic administration. As a student, Preben competed in a league of international schools himself and has since gained years of experience being involved in the administration of sports and coaching at international schools.

Photos provided by author, Tony Randell and Luigi Mengato
When working with non-English-speaking coworkers, Scott Burfiend of the Visiting Schools Program sees linguistic barriers not as a hindrance, but as an opportunity for inclusion.

Community is a word that gets thrown around often. It is used to describe organizations of all shapes and sizes; from work colleagues to schools to religious groups and even to whole cities or countries. But what does it mean to be part of a community? It can often be described as a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals. On the Three Generation Farm we strive to make our diverse staff team feel like a single shared community, welcoming all guests and students into this collective.

To be able to share this common goal and sense of fellowship, communication is essential. Within the farm team we have staff members from three different countries who collectively speak four native languages. In order to bridge these cultural and linguistic barriers we have recently begun offering shared language classes for our whole team. The main focus of these lessons is to teach English to our farmers, who all come from Karen hill tribes in the Samoeng District, west of Chiang Mai.

These lessons have proven very popular with the whole farm team, with other members of the wider Traidhos community offering to help out and seeking to join the classes. We have had members of the Traidhos Camps and Visiting Schools Program come along to help prepare and deliver the classes, as well as expanding our class size by welcoming members of the gardening staff to the class.

Beginning with basic conversation and identifying farm animals, we are able to encourage our farmers to practice their English language skills both during the lessons and while working alongside our education staff. This is also greatly beneficial for our foreign staff, who are able to practice and improve their Thai language. By sharing these skills the whole farm team is able to communicate more effectively, forging stronger links and relationships within our community. As a result of these classes, we are also sharing and learning about each others’ cultures, giving everyone a greater understanding of their colleagues.

We hope that through these lessons, the farmers will also be able to communicate with students who come to the farm. This will allow our community to grow and to welcome more people. Our farmers have a wealth of knowledge about farming techniques and local Thai wisdom, which would greatly enhance learning opportunities for our students. Unfortunately, language is often a barrier to accessing their skills and ideas. By equipping our whole team to be able to communicate effectively we can remove this barrier. It will also empower our farmers to share their knowledge with students by giving them the skills and confidence to speak in a foreign language.

For me personally, teaching English as a language to complete beginners is one of the hardest educational challenges I have faced. My personal journey as an educator began volunteering at a youth club for children with special educational needs, progressing to a teaching assistant before moving to outdoor and environmental education during my university studies. Continuing in this field I am most comfortable taking students into a natural environment and exploring the wonders that we can find there. To apply my knowledge and experience of teaching techniques to a completely different learning context is pushing me to develop and adapt in new ways. Ultimately, is this not the purpose of a community, to support each other to achieve a shared goal while we assist each other to grow in the process?

By learning from each other and developing new language skills we are able to embody the ethos of the Traidhos-Three Generation Community. We are focusing on lifelong learning, equipping everyone with invaluable communication tools that will aid them well beyond the parameters of their daily work. These skills can then be shared professionally at the Three Generation Farm, as well as personally within the lives of each individual when they pass on their knowledge to future generations.

**Scott Burfiend** is the Head of Farm Education for the at Traidhos Three-Generation Learning Centre in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

*Photos provided by Marta Prieto*
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