Creativity - Critical Thinking - Powerful Learning
Editorial

To harness one’s creative potential, that generative energy found in ideas that reach far beyond the confines of oneself, is to try and capture lightning in a bottle. The sustained effort to create is called many things: a process, an exploration, an experimentation, and can be found in a variety of disciplines—sometimes in places where we least expect it. One thing is for sure, though: this trait is tightly bound to human existence.

Consider, for a moment, a world stripped of the artistic process or the scientific method, two of the most robust creative methodologies to have ever existed. Remove them from our collective history, and we instantly fall into an unrecognizable, disorienting realm. It is therefore of the utmost importance for us to gain as deep a perspective on this elusive quality as best we can.

This is why Traidhos Quarterly has dedicated an entire issue to this subject, where amongst these pages you will find creativity taking form on both the stage (page 16) and on the farm (page 6), through people whose creativity feeds their livelihood (page 13) and whose creative action saved lives (page 8). Some individuals use their imagination to turn everyday life into a creative adventure (page 4), and then mature into those who dedicate their lives to bringing together other creative people in communal settings (page 20).

Creativity is one of the core values celebrated at Traidhos Three-Generation Community for Learning, and it is emphasized in both the everyday and long-term education of all the students engaged in its programs. To be engaged in this unique process is to have the benefit of a supportive, nurturing environment, where as much effort is done to guide as there is to provide the freedom of space. After all, if you’re going to catch lighting, you’ve got to let it come to you first.

The Three-Generation Community is a unique educational centre. It offers Prem Tinsulanonda International School (an IB World day and boarding school), several sporting academies, a dynamic Visiting Schools Program, the exciting Traidhos Camps, an artists’ residency program, an educational farm, and a converted rice barge used for environmental educational studies on the Chao Phraya River in and around Bangkok.

Cover Image – Freedom From Oppression, 2016, ink on drawing paper, Thomas Brunning (Year 12 at Prem School)

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What Colour is Your Imagination?

Head of Community Lynda Rolph sets the tone for creative thinking by looking to the sky and imagining a world through our surroundings.

When did you last look up at the sky? Do you remember lying back and staring up at the fathomless blue and imagining the adventures of dragons and giants as you mused the shapes of the clouds? A patch of outside space, an outdoor classroom, is a great place for exercising imagination. I recently supervised outdoor exploration time with a group of five- to nine-year olds. While they initially stayed near the center of the field, clinging to the balls and hoops that were familiar playthings, they began to wander to the edges of the space as they grew more comfortable in this natural area. There, they picked up sticks and snail shells, leaves and stones, and began inventing scenarios and stories that only they understood.

I watched as a long stick first became a bridge over a small ditch and then unexpectedly a bus. Gradually, several children joined in, standing astride it and running with it to the next imaginary bus stop. The game lasted a long time, and the group of children played happily together, inventing the rules, developing the story, creating their own entertainment while engrossed in the world they had created.

Learning beyond the classroom

Experiential education emphasizes the significance of creativity as a learning priority. As educators, we believe that developing creative thinking equips young people with a skill set to think outside of the box, to understand complex issues and to take control of their futures. Natural open spaces fill us with inspiration; they restore us and allow our minds to relax and calm down, which builds the capacity for creative thinking.

Researcher David Strayer comments that, “Being in nature restores depleted attention circuits, which can then help us be more open to creativity and problem-solving.” In 2012, he carried out research that suggested that hikers on a four-day backpacking trip could solve significantly more puzzles requiring creativity when compared to a control group of people who had yet to take the same hike. Exposure to the natural world and a decreased use of technological gadgets together contributed to the ways in which his experimental group’s subjects’ brains worked.

However, it is not just for our personal wellbeing that creativity is important. It has been identified as one of the key twenty-first-century skills that future employers will be seeking. It is essential for us to provide opportunities for creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration to prepare our students for the future.

The science of creativity

Sometimes opportunities for creativity are incidental, as with the bus stick; however, others may be planned, such as the natural weaving activity that took place with a group of young pre-school students. The children experienced creating shapes and blocks of colour with a range of natural materials. First, a variety of found natural materials were sorted into piles by colour. Then the group set to work, weaving these natural treasures onto the weaving frame. For some students, the task was purely mechanical—in and out, over and under. But for others the leaves and seedpods, sticks and flowers became colourful birds and rainbows, a princess dress and a cat. Listening to the torrent of ideas, I was reminded of this quote from Joseph Chilton Pearce:
To live a creative life we must lose our fear of being wrong.

For those four- and five-year olds, there was no doubt that the sticks and leaves had become the things of their imagination.

Torrance, a researcher in the field of creativity, identified five principles that we should follow to develop creativity in children:

- Treat children’s questions and ideas with respect.
- Treat unusual ideas with respect.
- Show children their ideas have value.
- Provide opportunities for self-initiated learning.
- Provide periods of non-evaluated practice.

As parents and teachers, we must resist the temptation to impose our interpretations of our children’s creations, and instead encourage the creators to take full ownership, allowing them the space and excitement to describe and explain their work.

Learning in the out of doors is not restricted to young children alone. With older students, we start to realize how their creative thinking may one day be the key to addressing the challenges we face in the world.

I observed older students participating in the well-known spiders web challenge, a game where members of the team have to pass through varying shaped holes in a rope net. Typically the group plots which spaces they will allocate for each person and then works together to execute the plan. But the game can be much more than a leadership tool. What if it is a metaphor for our energy using habits? What if each hole in the net was to represent a different type of energy, renewable or fossil fuel, that might be employed to solve our future energy shortage problems? While society might continue to look for the easy, convenient option, the student accustomed to thinking creatively could develop innovative and sustainable solutions to this problem.

I am fascinated by the idea of biomimicry, which is centered around the question, “How would nature solve this?” Scientists have watched the behaviors of all different types of species, from bugs and snails, to sea creatures and even tree leaves, and have recreated them synthetically to solve the problems the modern world has created. In hospitals, surface coating similar to that of a shark’s skin has helped prevent the spread of superbugs, while the auto manufacturer Mercedes-Benz has designed cars that resemble the aerodynamic qualities of box fish.

If we are going to continue to find solutions to our modern world problems, our students need to be comfortable in the out of doors; they need to have time to invent and imagine and understand how things work; and they need the chance to dream. Perhaps this does not need to be limited to students alone ... we could all learn from taking time to notice the patterns of nature. Go outside and look up at the sky today, we are never too old to wonder at the shapes of the clouds.

Lynda Rolph

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

1. http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_nature_makes_you_kinder_happier_more_creative


Additional Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons and Hagerty Ryan
Holy Smokes!

Holy smokes! That is what we are not trying to create. As we all know, the inhospitable smoky season is an annual event, the worst of which lasts from March to April. The health risks associated with burning crops and waste are dangerously high, yet few punishments or preventative measures have been put in place to deter such acts. Though plenty of advocacy groups and public notices denounce the burning, a discussion needs to be had on how to properly dispose of waste without harming the environment in the process. If such a method could be developed, we could all contribute to reducing the worst effects of burning.

At Traidhos Farm, we produce our own charcoal, creating an abundance of smoke in the process. I recently learned a new method from the workers at Pun Pun farm for building a charcoal burner maker that produces next to no smoke at all. Equipment included two 200-liter barrels, one to put the wood in and the other to make a chimney top. First, I cut the top of one of the barrels and drilled as many holes as possible at the bottom. This allowed air to flow in to help with the burning process. I discovered that placing a row of bricks at the bottom of the chimney provided additional space to allow as much air as possible to flow up into it. I then cut the other barrel about one foot (30 cm) from the top and drilled a 6-inch (15 cm) hole in the middle to make a chimney. I made sure to cut triangular shaped holes on the opposite side as well (see photos).

When it was ready to use, I made sure to pack the barrel with wood as tight as possible before lighting the fire. Paper and small scraps of wood were used as kindling and were placed on top. During this burning process, known as gasification, the object is burned from the top down to the bottom. Once the fire got going, I placed the chimney on top and waited for the fire to burn everything out. This method cuts down the charcoal making, or trash burning, process by 50%-70%. This controlled burning occurs at higher temperatures, around 800-900 degrees Celsius, than the normal 400-600 degrees Celsius. Oxygen entering from the bottom and the side of the barrel mixes with the smoke and helps to burn it out completely. The heat energy then exits out of the chimney with little or no smoke at all.

“This thing works real well, I can burn the leaves and grass and I don’t have to worry that the fire will spread. Plus, it doesn’t take very long to burn everything.”

-Loong Moo Traidhos farmer.

The farmers also use this barrel to burn trash and debris that come from the farm. As the burner is not heavy, a single person can move it around, making it an indispensible tool for the farmers. Once the fire is lit, the farmers can go about their daily activities elsewhere free from worry, because the burner is built from inflammable material.

Here at Traidhos, we aim to be sustainable and environmentally conscious. We aim to share our new ideas and techniques as far and wide as possible in the hopes that our planet can become a better place. In Thailand and many other Southeast Asian countries, people continue to cook their meals over traditional charcoal burners and burn their waste using dried kindling from their surroundings. These older methods have started to take a serious toll on the environment, putting our personal wellbeing at stake. But it doesn’t have to be this way. Through thinking critically and creatively, we can develop new methods and devices like the charcoal burner to do away with these unholy smokes.

Robert Riki-oh Awiwong

Robert Riki-oh Awiwong is a Senior Staff member at Traidhos’ Visiting Schools Program. A native of Northern Thailand, he spent much of his educational years in the United States and holds a B.A. from California State University, Fullerton. He is a certified lead climber and is qualified to operate an ambulance.

Photos provide by the author
Caption: “Untitled #1”, Charcoal and chalk on drawing paper. Kailash Mani (English teacher Teacher at Prem School)
Life Burns

Prem School counselor Amandine Lecense relives a traumatic experience in order to broaden her awareness of how to console victims of grief.

It’s early Saturday morning, and I’m dreaming. I’m tugged awake by the sound of Lee, my partner, expelling a brief moan out in the garden. It’s not a panicked or a strident moan, but it’s unusual. And so I get out of bed—in part to check on Lee, and in part to make sure the new dog we adopted a few days ago hasn’t gotten herself into some trouble. I can’t possibly foresee the events that have already begun to unfold.

I go outside and see Lee on the ground. I suspect he’s hit his head and is lying down because of the pain. I can’t yet see his face or hands, so I get closer and ask him if he’s all right.

He fails to answer. I’m not yet panicking.

I touch him on the leg and receive a big enough jolt to immediately realize that Lee is being electrocuted. His eyes look dead, his body is convulsing from the electrocution, and he’s completely unresponsive. I collapse to my knees and scream. I don’t know if he’s dead or dying, but the ache I feel in my entire body tells me that this could be the end.

In that moment, the future splits into two parallel realities. In one, Lee dies on that day; the phone call to his mom revolves around plans for the flight she’ll book for the funeral; the dream house that we had just bought becomes a mausoleum; images of flowers fill up a funeral home; tearful goodbyes are never heard; and I become, against my will, a grieving widow. The other parallel reality is the one in which he somehow survives, in which the phone call to his mom that evening is to share fears of having come so close to tragedy, where the dream house will not be forever haunted, and where flowers fill a hospital room in hopes for a speedy recovery.

At no point do I turn off the electricity, at no point do I see the wire loosen out of his hand and at no point does the fuse short-circuit. When I get to Lee, I assume he’s received a huge electrical shock and that his body is dying from it. I don’t understand that he’s still holding onto the electricity. In my frantic desperation, I never realize how close I am to getting locked in the electrical circuit when I put my hands and my ear to his chest to listen for his heart beat…

I need an ambulance. I need the paddles to help resuscitate his heart. I need to stop screaming and to start getting assistance. Instead, I get a miracle.

From Lee’s perspective, the events are similarly terrifying. He has just hung up some laundry and passed by the fairy lights in one of our trees out in the garden—the ones which haven’t worked for months. He thinks they’ve been unplugged a while back, and he starts to work on trying to bring them down from the tree to replace them. As he unscrews one of the extension plugs, the shock to his hand is so great that all of his fingers immediately contract and his hand unwillingly clenches the live wire. He says the pain of the electrocution is agony, but even worse still is the realization that he can’t pull away or scream out because all his muscles, including those in his jaw, have locked up. He sees smoke coming from his hand and then loses consciousness. As he fades, Lee knows that he is alone and that he is dying.

He awakes to a stranger coming to his side, thinking he’s actually in a dream, unable to tell why they are shrieking. He doesn’t recognize me initially and can’t remember what’s happened. Through wet sobs, I tell him he almost died.

That’s when we glance down and realize two of his fingers have melted to the bone, sending a shock of pain through his hand.

After a quick phone call, the neighbours rush with their car to take us to the nearest hospital. Lee keeps whispering, “I want to go to sleep… I want to go to sleep.” We are both acutely aware that his fingers are not the main concern at that moment—it’s his heart. With the voltage his heart has sustained, we’re alarmed that it could stop at any moment. Lee can feel it beating erratically through his chest wall and, for the first few hours, feels ever so close to fainting.

Phantom limbs.

After two weeks in the hospital and three surgeries to try and save his hand, Lee’s fingers turn a dark black and the doctors inform us that Lee’s fingertips need to be amputated. This is a second trauma. Had the doctors amputated his fingers the day of the accident, it would have been in the context of almost having died, and it would have strangely
felt more bearable. After two weeks of surgeries and postponing amputation, our hope that his fingers might survive the burns had grown, and when the doctors finally pronounce that they need to saw off his fingertips, we are hit with the realization that they will not only be cutting off tissue and bones, they will also be cutting us off from a full recovery from the incident. It is another loss with its own collateral damage.

And then, beyond the physical pain, there have been the flashbacks. I am haunted by the memory of looking down into Lee's eyes and thinking that he was dead. It doesn't linger or consume me, instead, it's like a panther that pounces from the dark when I don't remember it's there preying. When I open Lee's wardrobe and am hit by the smell of his cologne, the panther pounces. When I'm waiting for the light to change to green, the panther pounces. When the fan on our patio gets stuck in its turn and goes click-click-click-click—eerily, like the sound of the electricity coursing through Lee's body—the panther pounces.

I've had quite a lot of intrusive visits of different sorts too; Sorrow sometimes knocks on my door, or Worry, or even Anger. When they do, I invite them in and we just sit together. I see them, recognize them, and acknowledge that they belong here. There have been times in my life when I would have shoed them away, tried to replace them, or would have even denied their existence. Today, those visitors come, stay for a bit, but then...they go. I realize that everything is temporary. The good as well as the bad. It all goes at some point.

Now that we have had a chance to look back, we can't explain why the current stopped coursing through Lee’s body. We suspect that I grounded the electricity when I touched him and, in so doing, his grip around the wire loosened and the live wire slipped away. But we don't know for sure. We’re both still figuring out our path moving forward. It’s been a series of horrifying and miraculous events. I know that Lee and I both struggle with flashbacks of that day and, in a moment, can get flooded by sadness for how close we were to a tragedy. Both of us are wary of plugging in electrical devices. I find myself driving down the road and realizing that many people will die or suffer trauma today, and most don’t even know it yet. This truth has felt like a new burden—an unwanted awareness. Both of us have a certain level of denial, thinking that these are regenerative fingers and that they’ll grow back, like a lizard’s tail that gets severed. We both know that’s not logical, but it’s a feeling we have; this is temporary, and one day, we’ll look down and it will all be back to normal...

A new way of understanding trauma.

I’ve had friends and acquaintances go through difficult times, and I have always felt lost trying to figure out what’s the most helpful in light of the grief and trauma. In looking back, I recognize I’ve made some serious blunders. I would often try hard to help others find the silver lining in their situation (I thought gratitude was key to healing!), or give people space and opt not to visit in hospital, thinking that I was showing respect by not imposing myself. Only two weeks before Lee’s accident, I’d written an email to someone who lost her husband and said, “If there's anything I can do to help, please let me know.” I meant well, I was being honest, and I would have done anything she would have asked, but I now realize those words are hollow when you’re going through turmoil and offer little in terms of comfort.

What did offer comfort was surprising and sometimes counterintuitive to what I thought I once knew. People bringing food to the hospital helped, because I was forgetting to eat. People acknowledging that this situation was horrible, without trying to put a positive spin on it, helped. People sharing with us their own stories of electrocution or amputation, helped. Friends who raised a few funds to help out with the bills, helped.

Amandine Lecense 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 provided by the author and taken by Nick Reale
The Education of Creativity

Please recap for the reader some of the most recent changes occurring at Arts Residency Thailand.

Having been piloted three years ago, Artist Residency Thailand has worked hard to build a unique model for educational, creative engagement and international artist training and development. In this short time, we have been amazed at the quality and breadth of practitioners who have participated in the programme. Moreover, we have been humbled by the feedback that we have had from participants and the wider international arts and education sector. We were delighted to have the programme commended by ARTSWORK, the Youth Arts development organisation founded by Sir Ken Robinson. CEO Jane Bryant described ART as:

"An extraordinary international programme, that shines as an international model – uniquely drawing from the inspirational inter-relationships between innovative creative practice, education and community development."

Moving forward, we are now expanding the programme in order to include a dedicated Community Arts Officer. This role will be managed by Traidhos and will ensure that our participants and practitioners will also have the opportunity to engage with the wider community, including hard to reach demographics, such as hill tribe communities and local orphanages.

How does Artist Residency Thailand plan to continue to define itself as a programme, both within the arts community of Chiang Mai, but also internationally?

There are hundreds of artist residency programmes all around the world, all of which provide creative spaces and environments for residency participants. Many programmes include components of community and/or educational engagement, providing space and time for artists and practitioners to produce and reflect upon their work. As it stands, ART is internationally unique in its approach. Currently, it is the only residency programme that provides both the resources and space for artists to produce their work as well as the necessary mentoring to support artists as they develop their workshop, educational, leadership and collaborative skills. ART also distinguishes itself by waiving all residency charges, requiring instead that artists dedicate up to forty percent of their weekday time to workshop delivery and instruction, where they assume the role of both instructor and student while learning about the craft of creative education and collaboration.

With three levels of programme in place, we also adjust the structure and content of the residencies to reflect the background, needs and experience of the participants. Lastly, we remain proud to be the only residency programme in the world offering its participants mentoring opportunities, aimed at developing their understanding of the International Baccalaureate and its educational philosophy.

How does Arts Residency Thailand help to promote creativity not just within its own programme, but in other departments across Prem School that might not be traditionally associated with creative processes?

One of the primary benefits of having artists engage with young people in schools, is that the interaction helps to create ‘agency’. Agency in this case, is the sense of students’ taking ownership of their own learning, something that is essential for both a successful school career and as a skill that fosters lifelong learning. The programme makes links across age ranges and subject areas and creates unique collaborations between students, educators and creatives. This is done via linking the skills and experience of any given artist with the needs of the students and the desired learning outcomes of the class or department. Be it Shakespearian actors in an English classroom, or ceramicists in the chemistry laboratory, these connections and interactions often see unique collaborations taking place and often in areas of the school not traditionally associated with creative engagement.

Who are some creative practitioners you are looking to bring for this upcoming term, and how do they reflect ART’s spirit of engagement in their own unique ways?

By reinvesting funds generated by our international partnerships, we are now able to expand the number of ‘Lotus’ residencies we offer. Lotus residencies allow us to work in partnership with critically acclaimed artists and practitioners and often in ways that are beneficial to their own professional development.

In the coming months, I am looking forward to our now annual partnership event with ISTA (International Schools Theatre Association); the return of both Game of Thrones actor Miltos Yerolemou and the musician Chris TT; as well as Fleur Darkin, the Artistic Director of Scottish National Theatre. All of these artists will bring something unique and meaningful to the Prem community during their stay.
With so much emphasis placed on STEM curricula, particularly in highly competitive schools and in entry-level jobs in the marketplace, what role does "creativity" play in the professional lives of those who do not wish to pursue a career that directly relates to creativity?

There are very few career paths that aren’t either reliant on creative thinking as a core skill, or where creativity and the skills associated with it aren’t needed to climb the ladder and take you to the next level. To make a relevant point, less than five years ago, the top fifty CEOs of international businesses were asked to name nine crucial skill sets in order of importance. These attributes included leadership, dedication, fairness, as well as creativity and influence; needless to say that ‘creativity’ was at the top of the list. The fact of the matter is that moving forward, creativity is going to become ever increasingly important in the global marketplace; competitive and successful education systems will be the ones that realise, address and reflect that.

To that end, what are some methods that can be implemented to ensure that creativity remains a valued component of everyone’s education? Are there any examples from other programs you have found inspiring?

I greatly admire the work of ‘Creative Partnerships’ in the U.K. and the work that they do cultivating ‘best practice’ approaches while engaging schools with artists and creatives. I also hugely admire ARTSWORK; the work that they do to educate and advocate for young person’s arts engagement in unparalleled, especially in a world where the benefit and necessity of ‘education for creativity’ is so grossly misunderstood.

In what ways are educational institutions at risk of losing their creative environments, and how can these issues be curbed?

Fundamentally, creativity starts by looking at yourself and asking questions. If an organisation or an individual teacher can’t objectively step back, look at themselves and question their own approaches and methodology, then it’s very easy to become complacent. Complacency is the fundamental killer of creativity, so personal and institutional dialogue are vital. Additionally, schools often have multiple stakeholders whose views of education rely heavily on either their own experiences or of the facts and evidence that are presented to them. People like facts, and providing evidence associated with the benefits of ‘arts engagement’ can be problematic, as the results often take time to bear fruit. Listening to young people and engaging them as often as possible on their terms, rather than ours, is key to both retaining and evolving a meaningful creative environment. After all, they remain the greatest stakeholder in any educational organisation.

Alex Soulsby
Alex has over fifteen years of international arts education and strategic arts management experience. He was a regional producer for the UK’s Royal National Theatre, a project leader and chairman for the English National Youth Arts Network, and Creative Projects Manager for the Royal & Derngate theatres and arts centre. He holds a bachelor’s degree with honours in fine art (Coventry University) and a Cambridge University diploma in art and design.

Photos provided by Prem School
24-Hours Children Clinic

At Bangkok Hospital Chiangmai, We provide a complete range of health care services for infants, children and adolescents. We has a specially trained multidisciplinary team for pediatrics, including fully advanced equipment and medical devices. Children and their families will receive high quality international medical service at our clinic.

For more information :
Pediatric Clinic
Bangkok Hospital Chiang Mai
Tel: 052-089-765 E-mail : info@bangkokhospital-chiangmai.com
An excerpt from Traidhos Quarterly editor Nick Reale’s profile on Chiang Mai artist Vichian Boonmeemak and his creative process.

Vichian Boonmeemak, angular and slender with the build of a crane, wraps a scarf around his winter parka and straddles his long legs around his Honda motorcycle. He tells me that his studio is not far. That we will be going the back way. That I should just follow him, no problem. It’s a damp and chilly evening, with a drizzling rain sobbing gently across greater Chiang Mai. I know the weather is abnormal for January, but having been here only four days, I have no prior lived experience here to compare it to.

Following anyone on a motorcycle by push bike is fool’s play as is, but Vichian (or “V” as I will come to know him) takes the challenge to another level, darting down sois and improvising new paths through adjacent troks that arguably shouldn’t fit a motorbike of his size. But of course he knows this place unconsciously, deftly maneuvering through the backend of the beating heart of the Chang Moi neighbourhood. I had already gotten the sense that he’s the sort that, if I lost track of him, I might never see him again. And so I pedal at a breakneck pace.

Art and place.

In a flash, we reach the modest entrance of a guesthouse named The Living Place 2, located within the last audible reaches of a prerecorded announcement promoting “Muuuuuuuuay Thaaai BOXING!” down a narrow soi from the Night Bazaar. V unlocks the door and chats casually with one of the guests relaxing on the couch before gesturing to me to follow him upstairs.

On the rooftop, shielded by a tin awning and draped on all sides by racks full of clutter that make the place look like a cross between a hardware store and a laundromat, V subtly—though with a tinge of pride—introduces me to his studio.

“This is where you work?” I ask.

“I run the guesthouse downstairs and do the painting here,” he puts it, plainly.

“Where do you live?”

“In there,” he points to the adjacent room we had just walked through to access the roof, itself full of canvases—both half finished and not—and a lonely looking mattress, stacked high and sagging at the side.

He sits down on a box-turned-stool and begins cracking open and eating nuts, tossing their shells with conviction, though indiscriminately, around the room. They make a faint thwack in the distance.

It takes a few minutes for us to sync up, for us to bridge the synapse of differing perspectives; but, once we find a common ground, he becomes an open book.

“...the way I work, uh, I don’t try to make it [look] like something. I pretty much do experiments. If my mind tells me to do something and I follow it, I often end up stopping that. Stiff. Toooo.....become very stiff. You get it?”

Both yes and no, all at once, V.

“What are some conditions that are good for you in order to accomplish that? Is there a type of setting or a frame of mind you need to be in?” I ask him.

“Everyday you have something to do, you know? You know you should come and work [on the painting], but then again you have to be downstairs [in the guesthouse], to work to take care of other things. But after you finish everything, you come up, it’s getting late, and [it’s] time to take a rest, and come to look at the work and then...

‘No, I want to work a little bit.’

And then...

‘Oh, I’m too tired.’

And then...

‘Ah, just a little bit.’

And then you go on, and then you’re tired but...

‘Ah, why not, you know?’

One step at a time.”

Art and balance.

This continuous dance between external obligation and artistic exploration I will come to witness as V’s own self-styled modus operandi. Day in and out, his schedule is set around juggling the commitments he has as a guest house owner, a companion (his partner, Aree, is the owner of the first Living Place, the successes of which have spawned V’s hostel and a third one of the same name), a father, and of course, an artist. As such, his painting routine is defined by the sporadic pockets of time he can afford to set aside to focus on it, which appears to happen with no form of regularity. During the two-month period I spend living informally at V’s guesthouse, I come to witness this firsthand. On a few of the mornings I can hear him hammering away in the rooftop studio and assume that he regularly wakes up early to get in at least a few hours of painting before guests begin moaning about zipline tours or where to accomplish the impossible task of exchanging Lao kip for Thai baht (hint: it’s non-convertible). But on other days, while doing my own morning workouts, I see him emerging from his bedroom as late as 10:00 AM, his eyes only half-cracked open and still full of “sleep” from the night before.
It is no surprise then that his art itself is defined by its fluidity; a boisterous, crude style composed mostly of saturated colors rendered at their truest hue, the brushstrokes themselves conspicuously present as they leap in all directions across the canvas. There is something tribal about his art, and no doubt his work is the sort that has faced criticisms for appearing, “as though a child could have done it.” In my time with V, I have heard him describe some of his works, mostly in passing, as figurative. Though, by and large, what gets him to speak candidly about his art are his ideas about artistic process. He is not attached to any one school of thought, nor will he evangelize particular tools or methods. He is a man of philosophy, but even more so a man of action and presence, and believes that the moments when hand, brush, paint, canvas, and spirit become one are transcendental, unbound by the conventional forces that govern our daily lives.

Art and habit.

“You see art as a way to break a habit?” I ask him, as flips through an old photo album of him working on the Clarion Alley art project in San Francisco.

“Exactly...it is the way to break out of the habit and find your own truth, to come out of your own shape and form the mystery you’ll find beyond it.”

“Do you believe in one truth or many truths?”

“I would say a universal truth. Truth in general. For instance: impermanence. We all know about impermanence, even [if we] don’t realize it. My work represents impermanence... The unstable... The unchangeable...”

He breaks for a moment. “This has to come spontaneously, and not with the design. I would follow my thinking in this way, but since [this is] spontaneous, it means I do the work without thinking. It just flows out. And I like that process. It makes me be one with that truth.”

I ask him if he practices meditation or yoga.

“I do meditation. A little bit of this and that. I do deep breathing. You know exercises like the deep breathing?” he gives me a look that cuts right through me.

“Breathing is important, Nick. Breathe in...
I count to two.
I hold the breath...
Count to four...
And I let it out.
Six.”

A pause.

“I do that at least thirty times a day. It depends.”

“Do you mind if we do a round together right now?” I ask.

“Yeah!” he huffs, betraying a sense of sincere urgency. “In you breathe,” he instructs me, motioning to his sternum for measure. Inhaling, he continues through a pinched voice, “Only in the stomach...count to six...and when you breathe out you take all the air out, so longer,” he exhales, a hearty motion with the gusto of a truck tyre deflating, adding, “until nothing left, basically. This could be a good exercise for the lung and the oxygen could stimulate your heart, your mind...”

Art returns.

Our meeting on that chilly January evening ended up becoming an isolated event, cast apart from the meat of our relationship by nearly three months. A bond was formed between us on that occasion, though, and the next time I walk through his front door I come travel-worn and in need of a place to stay, having just returned from trips to Phayao province and Myanmar. My sense of purpose for staying in Chiang Mai during this time of year, when the rains have long evaporated and the region is beset by the worst effects of the smoke-filled dry season, is tenuous at best. But a feeling persists inside of me, guiding me back to familiar places because I know, for some reason, that I have to reconnect with Vichian. I don’t even make a booking in advance; I simply walk right in.

This story has been presented as an excerpt from a profile and essay of the same name and has been formatted for this publication.

Nick Reale

Nick is the editor of Traidhos Quarterly magazine, as well as a practicing artist. He was born on a busy archipelago off the coast of mainland America.

Photos provided by the author and Vichian Boonmeemak
The Drama of Three-Dimensional Creativity

Drama and Theatre teacher Borys Maciburko examines how the critical thinking and creative skills developed in drama programmes are critical in the professional world.

There is no doubt that we are living in a world that is changing at an incredible pace. In fact, the World Economic Forum has indicated that we are in the midst of what is now being referred to as the "Fourth Industrial Revolution". This revolution is poised to change the way we live, work and interact with each other in ways that are unprecedented in human history. In turn, these changes will affect the skill set that graduates will require as they enter the workforce over the next five years.

In 2015, at the annual World Economic Forum (WEF) meeting in Davos, Switzerland industry leaders identified the top ten skills employees will need by the year 2020 in order to be competitive in the workforce. As recently as five years ago, many of the skills that are now considered essential for future professional development were discussed only on the fringes of business management and educational philosophy. And so, the list has a new few surprises (in bold):

1. Complex Problem Solving
2. Critical Thinking
3. Creativity
4. People Management
5. Coordinating with Others
6. Emotional Intelligence
7. Judgment and Decision Making
8. Service Orientation
9. Negotiation
10. Cognitive Flexibility

Number three on the list is creativity, and this article will aim to elucidate how the Drama and Theatre programme at Prem facilitates the development of this skill, along with several others, in recognition of the WEF's prediction that it will be an essential part of the workplace in 2020 and beyond.

In 2012, Prem had the privilege of hosting a three-day seminar on "Innovation", presented by education expert and Harvard academic Tony Wagner. His workshop focused on how education needs to evolve in order to keep pace with the changes found elsewhere in the world. As an example, Wagner presented an article from the Sydney Morning Herald, which highlighted that East Asian educators were unhappy with what they were achieving. In fact, they were concerned with what they were not achieving. Specifically, the educators emphasized their students' lack of confidence, creativity, entrepreneurial spirit and imagination.

Wagner, highlighting this lack of creativity and imagination in his seminar, presented two contrasting models of education: 'schooling' versus 'innovation'. In the traditional 'schooling' model, the following attributes had previously been perceived as being of high importance:

- Individual achievement
- Specialization
- Risk avoidance
- Consuming
- Extrinsic motivation

By contrast, in Wagner's 'innovation' model, the following skills and learning dynamics were of premium importance:

- Collaboration
- Problem based learning
- Trial and error
- Creating
- Intrinsic motivation
- Play, passion and purpose

It is significant to note that collaboration, creativity and problem-based learning are key attributes on Wagner's list. This brings us back to the importance of creativity on the WEF list and its connection to the Drama and Theatre programme at Prem.

Fundamentally, the creation of a dramatic scene or a work of theatre involves creating a three-dimensional, dynamic, sensory, emotional product that communicates a story or a message from the stage to the audience. There is no one fixed way of creating such a product! The creation of a work of drama/theatre involves not only creativity and imagination but also collaboration and problem-based learning.

In addition to the obvious skill of creativity that is developed, the Drama and Theatre programme develops other skills in the WEF top ten list including:

**Critical Thinking**

One of the cornerstones of the Drama programme throughout the high school curriculum is the conscious, formative development of three-dimensional visual acuity. As directors,
the students shape and mold their collaborative creations visually, physically, audibly and emotionally in an interactive, three-dimensional space and are expected to critically analyze their own and their peers’ work. All classroom rehearsals and presentations are reviewed in a plenary critique session, and student audience members are asked to put forward both positive comments as well as tangible constructive criticism both verbally in class and lexically in their project reports for all presentations and works-in-progress. This constant analysis of three-dimensional form increases their visual acuity and raises their ability to create and communicate stage pictures of clarity, intensity and emotional power.

This skill is comparable to analyzing a commercial product in the business marketplace that is not performing well. Business analysts need to identify the product’s strengths, its weaknesses and potential methods for improving upon its shortfalls. They then need to articulate and communicate their proposals for improving the product to their clients.

People Management

Directing theatre or even a simple dramatic scene in the classroom involves managing a team of actors in order to bring out their best performance.

Coordinating with Others

Directors assume many of the same roles as project managers by coordinating a multitude of production components—the acting and scene construction, but also the budgeting, scheduling and fundraising—in order to bring a work of drama/theatre to completion.

Emotional Intelligence

Theatre utilizes and communicates emotions in dynamic ways. A director needs to have emotional intelligence to be able to firstly, identify the emotions in the script or scene, and then to synthesize them for communicative power. In addition a director needs to use emotional intelligence to be able to bring out the best in his/her team of actors.

Judgment and Decision Making

“The show must go on.” If the performance deadline is approaching and problems persist, the director must make executive decisions that will ensure timely solutions.

Conclusion

The above mentioned skills are comparable to the skills needed by a CEO of any corporation. Many students and their parents assume that the study of drama and theatre is only beneficial for students who wish to become professional actors and directors. However, this is far from the truth. The reality is that the skills taught in the Drama and Theatre programme at Prem are directly transferrable to countless professions, from the arts to the business world and everything in between. As Tony Wagner has pointed out, creativity and innovation are poised to become tomorrow’s most essential professional skills.

Prem Tinsulanonda International School aims to educate global citizens who strive for excellence and lead responsibly. This implies the ability to think critically (and to do so before acting), to solve problems and to act with empathy and humility. The Drama and Theatre programme at Prem creates fresh opportunities in thinking and problem solving, exposing students to scenarios that warrant the true innovative skills that companies and institutions are thirsting for now more than ever. One of the best ways to prepare a student for a work environment that has not yet been fully determined is to start thinking generally and to hone their sense of situational awareness, to be adaptable at all times. And, as far as emotional intelligence and empathy is concerned, perhaps we all need to engage in activities that bring us emotionally closer together, where technology plays only a secondary role. What better place to achieve that than within the cozy confines of a theatrical performance?

Borys Maciburko

Borys is a Drama, Theatre, and mindfulness teacher. He has a Degree in Educational Theatre from the University of Adelaide, Australia. In addition to many highly successful school productions, he has also been producer and director of professional theatre productions in Australia.

Citations


Photos provided by the author and Parinya (Mee) Panyana
A House Built on Love

VSP staff member Lauren Ludwig recounts her unforgettable experience building a home for those in need of a secure roof over their head.

Maya Angelou once said, “If you find it in your heart to care for somebody else, you will have succeeded.” This is easier said than done, because to care is to have the attitude of loving someone. If we love someone then we are concerned with their wellbeing because they are precious to us. Thus we take action to protect, support and nurture them in any way possible. Caring is an essential and beautiful part of human life and to meet people who tangibly demonstrate their care for others is a wonderful experience.

Two months ago, I had the opportunity to be a part of a house building project during which I served alongside a group of people that genuinely desire to perform acts of love through community service. The VSP (Visiting School Program) staff; Travel for Teens, an organization that focuses on culturally educational and community service oriented projects; and the founder of Mae Wang’s Love Your Neighbor Home worked together to build a house for young girls who needed a home; a place of love and comfort that always welcomes you with open arms.

During the project, I had the pleasure of getting to know and working closely with Khun Burin, a delightful young man with a smile that will instantly make you feel warm and at ease. While taking a break from building, I noticed him reading his Bible out loud to himself, sweetly and unashamedly, as though the words on the page were his most valued treasure. It was clear to me that he truly acts upon the values he holds dear to his heart. He loves his neighbour as he does himself, evidenced in the care he bestows upon all the children he has welcomed into his home and to all of us foreigners serving his foundation. From an open-minded perspective of this man’s life, I can positively say that he truly does love God and people well.

His entire face lit up and he smiled brightly, “When the kids found out that the foreigners were coming to help build them a home, they were very, very excited!” he exclaimed. “This is the first time foreigners came and helped at the foundation.”

After speaking with Kuhn Burin, I took a moment to reflect on our conversation. His work takes passion, empathy and commitment. As the epitome of compassionate creativity, he has seen a need in his own village and addressed it with a highly ingenuitive solution for the good of the kids. He brought about new life for them, sharing along the way his contagious sense of creativity.

Lauren Ludwig

Lauren is a VSP staff member and photographer, currently developing her practice through capturing festivals, portraits, adventures trips, and candid moments of life. She is passionate about documenting the lives of others.

All photos provided by the author (@laurenashelyludwig)
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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For more information: http://tinyurl.com.chk-health or scan the code below.
Dear Chiang Mai,

The doors on the first Jai Thep Festival, held at Grand Canyon Chiang Mai, have closed, but they will open again in the near future. In the meantime, we would like to take you behind the scenes of our production process to talk a little bit about what it takes to throw such a wonderful event!

Our team comprised of nearly one hundred individuals, from designers to musicians to cooks and builders, with every last person volunteering their time and effort in the name of communal spirit and without the thought of any monetary gain. Among those at the center of this ring of dedicated and talented people were three people: Jannis Kuppel, Tom Clark and Emily Sams.

Jannis hails from Germany and has had an extensive career as an event and festival planner. Have you ever heard of Fjord Fest Festival? In its three editions, Jannis successfully oversaw the creation of this event of love, expression, and celebration in a similar manner to Jai Thep. After its third iteration, the festival now produces its own Soundcloud Podcast, ensuring that it will continue to live on. The inspiration for hosting a similar festival in Chiang Mai, Thailand came from Jannis’ recognition of the dynamic creative energy that the city has to offer. Hoping to provide a space to liberate that energy, Jannis went to his good friend and collaborator, Tom Clark, owner of the London Tea Room shop and guesthouse in the Nimman District, with the initial idea for Jai Thep. Plus, with a love of music and the great outdoors, who wouldn’t want to have such an event near to where they live?

After hopping on board with the idea, Tom, who has had an equally prolific track record helping to coordinate festivals in the UK as well as performing as a DJ for hundreds of people, immediately set to work coordinating with various parties, from hiring department heads to establishing deals with sponsors to ordering sound equipment and more. Though the details of such work can be mind-boggling, they were absolutely crucial for ensuring that the festival was held on time and that it reached its full potential. Along the way, Tom had the invaluable help of his partner Namwhan Imwuang and good friend Kullanard Napapong, natives of Northern Thailand, whose personable nature, organizational talents, and Thai language fluency turned all that was impossible into a reality.

Intending to host more than a music party, Jannis worked closely with Emily Sams, who has an impressive portfolio of illustration and collage work, to develop the artistic components of the festival. Handling everything from the poster design to the face paint/glitter booth to the collaborative art wall, Emily transformed the project that would become Jai Thep; before her there was concept, after her was artifact. She helped to procure a team of individuals, among them Joelle Robertson, Arrow Bow, Mae Axia, and countless others. This group of talented individuals selflessly gave up days of sleep leading up to the festival in order to ensure its success, seamlessly avoiding any ego clashes along the way.

The aim of Jai Thep was to create an event that mixed the best of several worlds; whether you were a free spirit looking for a communal gathering of impassioned souls, an enthusiastic dancer looking to get your boogie on, or a family hoping for a sportive day at the lake, Jai Thep supplied all of those characteristics and more. We tried hard to embrace as diverse array of artistic styles and influences as possible, to the point where the festival embodied so many backgrounds as to transcend its eclectic appeal in the name of unconditional openness. Its singularity was its diversity; one vibe for all.

We hope to improve upon our initial successes for the future. At the next Jai Thep Festival, we’re looking to expand the event grounds so we can accommodate more people, add an additional stage and hire more artists native to Chiang Mai and other parts of Thailand. And who knows? If we play our cards right, we might even have enough in the tank to build a pirate ship and a giant (vegan) castle. We feel that, as members of a unique creative community in a city rich with culture and history, it is important for us to give back to our home with as much glitter, art, and music of all kinds as we can provide.

We would like to honor everyone who dedicated themselves to this project, but special thanks goes to: Namwhan Imwuang, for management; Milx Mirkuchan, for site construction; Kullanard Napapong, for management; Jimmy Thomas, for music and logistics; Joelle Robertson, for art direction; Mae Axia, for marketing; Josh Carter, for music; Ray Matthews, for music; Jess Dominguez, for support; Gemma Lewis, for support; Lauren Ludwig, for art support; Nick Reale, for art support (and his map thing); and Kayla Richards, for media.

Sincerely,

The Creators of Jai Thep Festival

Jai Thep is Chiang Mai’s first all-day music and arts festival. It derives its name from the Thai word “Jai” (เจ้า), meaning spirit, and the Sanskrit-derived word “Thep” (เทพ), which refers to the supernatural beings that appear in nature. After its initial success, the creators plan to host the event regularly, with the next scheduled for February 2017.
Construction of the festival grounds’ beach area.

Building the mainstage the night before the festival.

Construction of the graffiti wall.

The Map of Jai Thep Festival, ink on matte fine art paper, Nick Reale

The construction team was headed by Milx Mirkuchan (top left).

Jai Thep Festival poster, ink on paper, Emily Sams

Photos provided by Kayla Richards
Art or Vandalism?: A Spotlight on Prem School Grade 9 Students’ Graffiti

The below collection of artworks were produced in two sections of Year 9 Language and Literature, taught by Kailash Mani and Madeline Hay.

At the beginning of this academic year, Grade 9 Language and Literature students completed a short unit of study on graffiti.

First, the students viewed and read about the history of graffiti and how graffiti is used for different purposes, from marking territories to making political statements. They then undertook research to prove whether graffiti is in fact art or if it is merely vandalism. The information garnered from this research was used during in-class debates. A compelling argument in favor of graffiti pointed out that it helps to increase revenue for cities by promoting tourism, while detractors noted that spray paint can contain carcinogens.

Finally, students examined different styles of graffiti and created their own original work, accompanied by a rationale. They stated the messages in their graffiti, including any symbolism used, as well what effects they hoped to achieve on their audiences. Students shared their works and rationales with their peers.

This unit allowed students to use both creative and analytical skills, and there were opportunities for cooperative work, independent research, and oral presentation.

Here are a few students’ artworks, along with the core points from their rationale.

“I See Humans But No Humanity”
By Aimee
Pencil and ink on A4 paper

“The periscope represents the people looking to the surface only to find hostility and cruelty.”

“Choose Your Future”
By Ploiwarin
Pen and marker on A4 paper

“The map represents the path of [people’s] futures (the process of achieving their dreams).”

“I don’t know how to describe myself in detail. It’s like trying to shape a cloud.”

“Enigma”
By Om
Digital paint

“My graffiti work is a subversive epigram in a stencil style...[it] represents the migrant crisis current in Western Asia.”

“Censored”
By Yasmin
Digital stencil

“I used black and white art for my piece and red font to show contrast between the two.”

“Harambe: 1999-2016”
By Lan-na
Digital stencil
“Untitled #2”, charcoal and chalk drawing, Kailash Mani (English teacher at Prem School)
Creativity - Communication - Collaboration

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Educating global citizens who strive for excellence, live sustainably, lead responsibly, celebrate diversity, and whose integrity champions a just and more peaceful world