



# It's so easy being Green

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As a parent of two children at an independent secondary school, the decision to send a child on a non-compulsory overseas camp is not taken lightly. But when my daughter brought home details of an optional school trip to Green Camp at Green School in Bali, I was intrigued by the concept. Awarded as the 2012 Greenest School on Earth by the United States Green Building Council, Green School's vision is "of a natural, holistic, student-centered learning environment that empowers and inspires our students to be creative, innovative, green leaders" (Green School, 2013). The planets aligned for my Year 9 daughter when I discovered that Green School's Primary Art Teacher was going to be at the Adobe Education Leadership Forum in Thailand that I was also attending. It seemed like the perfect opportunity to explore this unique educational setting from two very different perspectives.

It was the Green School philosophy that attracted Stacey Allen to join its teaching staff. "The school's mission statement is strong and potent," she explains. "It's hands-on to motivate kids about their environment." As an Australian with a residence in Bali, Allen has been impressed by the community and traditions in the region, but mostly by how the culture has withstood the forces of tourism and westernisation. "The people have a lovely attitude, being welcoming, while maintaining what they believe."

Prior to her engagement at Green School, Allen worked across primary, secondary and

tertiary sectors at home and in the UK, and was most recently with the NSW Department of Education and Communities' Curriculum and Learning Innovation Centre. The focus of her role there was on creating online visual arts resources, and managing WeCreate, a series of digital challenges that encourage students to design and create digital works using innovation and imagination.

While the underlying pedagogical thrust of her work at the Department of Education and Green School are not dissimilar – both emphasise a student-centred approach that draws on creativity – the physical environment at Green School is a far cry from an Australian city. Conceived and constructed by international design-build team Ibuku, Green School is made from bamboo and features open walls and doors surrounded by lush vegetation, or as Allen puts it, "things that can be used."

The boundaries between the school and the environment are blurred, a metaphor, Allen explains, for the approach to learning at Green School. The methodology is summed up well by the curriculum statement on Green School's website: "The difference at Green School is that academics come wrapped in rich layers of experiential, environmental, and entrepreneurial learning and the creative arts. In the process we hope to create more authentic motivations for learning, and at the same time expand our students' sense of global citizenship and environmental responsibility while exposing them to different possibilities for

how we live and grow as a fragile planet" (Green School, 2013).

The clientele of Green School is an interesting mix. Allen notes that the student population has a certain level of transience. Around 20 per cent of enrolments are from local Balinese families, while the rest of the students come from all around the world, making it a truly international institution. Teachers are careful to focus on each lesson and what students get out of it to maximise the learning experiences of students as they come and go.

At a time when many are questioning traditional notions of schooling, Green School is putting into practice the ideals of its founders, husband and wife team John and Cynthia Hardy. It's a context, Allen says, that allows for students to "do and create in an effective way". Primary classes, for example, often have themes that Allen then integrates into her art lessons. She also works with classes when needed outside their designated art times to support projects such as a recently completed Year 1 Magic Code Machine. Allen neatly juxtaposes this perspective with her experiences of the NSW education system where for many Year 6 students, for instance, the emphasis is on preparation for selective school entrance examinations. Parents of Green School students are generally more concerned with the growth and development of their children.

The school is also a member of Round Square, a world-wide association with, "a strong commitment, beyond academic excellence,





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to personal development and responsibility” (Round Square, 2012). Round Square schools subscribe to six IDEALS of learning: Internationalism, Democracy, Environment, Adventure, Leadership and Service, qualities with which my daughter Lelaina (Laney for short) is familiar through her own school, the Plenty campus of Ivanhoe Grammar in Melbourne’s outer northeast.

During her seven-day stay at Green Camp, a separate but affiliated part of the Green School site, Laney believes the 14 Year 9 and 10 students she travelled with were given a taste of all the Round Square IDEALS in action, particularly that of Environment. As the name

implies, Green Camp has a strong emphasis on developing environmental responsibility. According to the guide for schools, “Our objective is not simply to teach students about the environment, but to transform their point of view so they start thinking of themselves as a part of the environment. In a world where young people have increasingly limited opportunities to truly engage with nature, these experiences can have a lasting impact on students’ attitudes and behaviours” (Green Camp, 2013).

In order to facilitate this, the packing handbook given to students includes a strict “What Not to Bring (and why!)” section that explains, “Green Camp believes that everyone

needs to unplug once in a while. Leaving the outside world where it belongs (outside) and tuning into our natural surroundings and each other is what we’re about. Join us and you’ll know what we’re talking about!” Laney says that this rule was harder for some than for others. “I was personally OK with it. Those who are so used to talking on Facebook all the time got very excited whenever we saw a free Wi-Fi sign.” What she did find challenging was not being able to Google things, especially when it came to communicating with the locals. This forced the travellers to use their initiative, relying heavily on hand gestures to get their point across.

The notions of Leadership, Service and





Internationalism were evident in the time the group spent with children from a local school. The Australian students built cultural awareness and understanding as they interacted with their Balinese counterparts, while the Indonesian students were given an opportunity to practise their English with native speakers. They even learned a few Australian colloquialisms!

Together, the students broke into small groups and worked on an assignment to build a hut that was sturdy, waterproof, comfortable and looked good, out of materials such as bamboo, leaves and rubber tyres. Each group also had to make a presentation about their construction. The local students, Laney observed, were very business-like in their approach and keen to get straight into the task, while the Ivanhoe students wanted to take time to consider their design before starting. It was an excellent lesson in teamwork as well as promoting cultural understanding.

The students were involved in several other hands-on activities to develop their appreciation of the importance of sustainability. One such challenge, Coconut Conversations, entailed making a holder for an egg that would protect

it during a four-metre drop. Natural materials found in the area surrounding Green School such as coconut husks were used to achieve this. Students also had a lesson from a local who creates artworks out of recycled items including plastic bottles, and were involved in the maintenance of the organic campus garden. These experiences, Laney explains, made her a lot more environmentally conscious. "I can see that re-using items such as plastic bottles is important so that in the future we don't run out of resources. I would also consider doing more for the environment like planting our own vegetable garden."

Any trip overseas is an adventure in itself, but Green Camp certainly ensured that the Ivanhoe students thoroughly engaged with the Adventure element of the Round Square IDEALS. Activities included bike riding through rice paddies, snorkelling and surfing, and even a session with the camp's Laughter Yoga guru. Students were also treated to time in Green School's famed mud pit.

From a cultural perspective, the groups visited a number of temples and other significant sites. Many decided to participate in giving

offerings and bathed in the holy waters at Pura Tirta Empul, the water temple, and *everyone* was enthusiastically involved in activities at the organic chocolate farm.

The students also viewed and learned about the subaks that irrigate the local rice paddies, an innovation dating back more than 1000 years that Laney was particularly struck by. "The river was used really effectively. They minimised their workloads but also kept the system natural without having to use machinery."

While technology is playing an increasingly central role in schools around the world, Green School and Green Camp offer an alternative that manages to be both contemporary and meaningful to young people, without all the bells and whistles that we often assume students have come to expect. This is perhaps assisted by the amazing location and the attention given to creating a physical space that inspires students to learn, but the core values of global citizenship and environmental responsibility are undoubtedly universal, and it has certainly been a pleasure to see them developed in my daughter.

#### Further reading

Green Camp (2013) Green Camp website. Available at: <http://www.greencampbali.com>. Accessed July 11, 2013.

Green School (2013) Green School website. Available at: <http://www.greenschool.org/general/vision-mission-and-values/>. Accessed July 9, 2013.

Round Square (2012) Round Square website. Available at: <http://www.roundsquare.org>. Accessed July 9, 2013.

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