

American Academy Bali

Where Children Discover the Hero Inside

We all want progress. But progress means getting nearer to the place where you want to be. And if you have taken a wrong turning, then to go forward does not get you any nearer. If you are on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; and in that case the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive man.

- C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

Tradition is not the adoration of ashes, but the preservation of fire.

Mōs maiōrum nōn est adōrātiō cinerum, sed ignis custōdia.

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American Academy Bali

Where Children Discover the Hero Inside

Mission

We discover and inspire heroes who engage deeply with knowledge, develop their interests, enrich their character and edify the world around them.

Vision

Our graduates have grit and perseverance to become leaders in their field of interest, illuminating the world with wisdom, integrity and transformative impact.

Influences:

Acton Model

The Acton model of school is a blend of classical learning methods, adaptive learning technologies with Montessori influence.

Please see the following video clips for a fuller understanding of the Acton Model:

- [Acton Disruptive Education](#)

Elon Musk's Astra Nova Model & Synthesis

The Astra Nova model is an experimental school that focuses completely on engineering, problem solving and teamwork collaboration training students to be “super collaborators.”

Please see the following webpage for a fuller understanding of the model:

- [Information on Astra Nova](#)

Every Child is a Hero

Imagine a school where parents and teachers tailor children's education to the individual needs, interests, and abilities of that student. Imagine that the school has as much flexibility as homeschooling and can be done at home, at the school building, outdoors, or even on the go.

Imagine that students lead discussions, think critically, and develop socratic reasoning. Imagine that students, working 2-3 hours on critical skills such as math and literacy, can leapfrog their peers academically, easily advancing two grade levels in a single school year. Imagine that students in mixed aged classes discuss math problems in Greco-Roman symposium style and read the most vibrant literature that the world has to offer, from the classic Roman stoics to modern giants such as Dumas and Twain. Imagine they are 8, 10, 12 years of age– reading, puzzling and discussing philosophical assertions that have stood the test of time.

At the American school, we combine best practices from Ad Astra, Khan Academy, Acton School learning model, expert tutoring and homeschooling in order to construct a world class education that students will love. Here, students are excited to come to school. Here, students develop character, collaborate with peers, and build consistency all while engaging in pursuits that suit them, at their pace.

This is a place where teachers are guides for the students and this is a place where students learn to take serious ownership of their education. When students take ownership, they have the responsibility to select their own path and the opportunity to excel in any area they choose at their own pace, yet consistently.

At American School Bali, we believe that just like the great heroes of old, students have a hero's journey. We believe that school is a place where students learn to struggle, overcome and build character that is fundamental to their own thriving and the edification of their communities.

We believe they are capable of carrying the responsibility of their own learning.

Join us as we embark on this journey to turn learning into a journey that develops students into strong leaders with the grit and perseverance to succeed in the modern world.

The International School Problem

Many residents are not fond of the available school options, yet begrudgingly must choose existing options. Parents prioritize three main concerns when selecting a school:

1. Parents want their children to enjoy their childhood and come home happy;
2. Parents wish for them to acquire modern tools and knowledge that equip them for the future, not the past;
3. Parents deem it essential for their kids to pursue personal interests and develop the soft skills relevant in 2023.

Current Options:

- Do not deliver results
- Require additional tutoring
- Increase arbitrary stress
- Provide teachers who are not dedicated to students, do not want to talk with parents
 - If school ends at 4:00, they are out at 3:59 to go surf and found later at the bar until 1 am.
 - It is difficult for students to get additional help
- Deliver Irrelevant curriculum
 - fails to account for the business marketplace of today and tomorrow
- Promote college as the only option

Smaller school opportunities: Current smaller options either follow the same model of rigidity or are too “hippie” where students are not able to be challenged or experience structure at all.

Ideal Education: Students should be able to build discipline, character and teamwork while still being in an environment that drives them forward socially, academically and according to their interests.

In August 2023, the current Bali international schools:

- a. Encourage and facilitate gender transition
- b. Normalizing use of pornography in 9th grade with the idea that “everybody does it” without parental consent
- c. Incur significant degradation in the quality of education

This all against the backdrop of ever-higher rates, discongruence with real life, and cultural decay. It is time for a new option.

Educational Goals

- Students have a foundation of traditional knowledge in reading, writing and arithmetic.
- Students set their own educational goals and advance their goals at their own pace.
- Students actively and consistently have one-on-one tutoring to develop a mentorship relationship and fill in all gaps in their learning.
- Students progress at a minimum of 1.5 academic grades in one calendar school year that can be confirmed by testing.
- Students have access to a variety of professionals that do visiting “professorships” in short term, project-based learning online and offline.
- Students achieve a balance between technology, physical learning, adventure and consistency.

Learning Concepts:

- No mandatory academic homework
- Partial Online for specific classes, guest series lecture
 - Synthesis
 - Guest Lectures
- Summer Opportunities for study abroad with partners
- Adventure and physical activities integrated
- Kids should be able to build quick and easy apps and simple websites
- Use software and AI tools effectively
- Learn how to communicate with teams, businesses, sales folks and collaborate with teams and different people (multicultural)
- Learn about design and colors
- Write proposals for businesses, investors

Future Goals:

- Students have the opportunity to pursue their exact interests to a high degree of competency and professionalism with experts in the field.
- Our program encourages all forms of post secondary opportunities:
 - [Praxis Modern Work Apprentices Program](#)
 - Traditional Apprenticeship
 - Entrepreneurship
 - Family Business
 - College bound diploma program

School Structure

First year, the goal is 10-18 students (9 upper elementary and 9 middle school or a tentative variation). Based on the following plan, a consistent roster of 10-18 students would be sufficient for a trial run.

At the American school, teachers facilitate discussions and guide learning overall. They will manage the classroom and ensure that the academy is running smoothly. Teachers are tutors and guides who need to help students ask good questions and pair students together to learn.

Curriculum

The core skills that students will develop at American school are: literature, mathematics, grammar, Latin and a language of their choice. We will cycle through classes like science, civics, history, in 8-10 week short courses using a strategy of interdisciplinary study. This means that we learn a writing concept in grammar class and then practice how to write through our science work. We will learn math because it reveals the beauty of nature. It's a great vehicle to drive deeper thinking, to teach students how advanced particle physicists think about additional dimensions and how to consider difficult problems as a group. We will read together and have a library of enriching books and materials for students to read independently and together— it's a beautiful sight to see a full group of students reading together (in enjoyment) or to hear that students are reading on their own at home!

We will use tried and tested methods of learning. Curriculum will be a mix of homeschool, self paced materials and online resources. We want students to move at their own pace and as such, a program like [Khan Academy](#) that teaches mastery and is self paced is a type. This is designed to eliminate busy work and homework, so students feel they can advance when they are prepared rather than rushing through a concept. The school day will be composed of daily discussions, three morning hours of core skills, followed by lunch, and an afternoon of interest pursuit, group projects and adventure activities.

For more information on the curriculum that we would use, please contact me for examples.

Testing

Each year, we will conduct the [classical learning test](#), an academic aptitude test designed for schools like ours. Here we can measure grade level and track their progress. We will take the test again at the end of the academic year so that parents can see the progress students have made towards their goals.

Tuition

The target for initial tuition is to meet a midrange international standard cost. The main reason is to reach targeted revenue without requiring additional outside funding. One of our goals is to exchange with parents who might have land and want to donate in exchange for tuition or something of that nature.

Furthermore, it is our goal to include in our fees all tutoring and additional help that students need. Moreover, to teach and develop in such a way that students need not spend exorbitant amounts of time outside of school doing homework.

Here is our tuition fee followed by a list of the varied competitors around Bali.

Target Tuition by Grade (IDR)		
	Annual	Class Size
Grade 1 - 3	145.000.000	8 - 10
Grade 4 - 6	167.000.000	8 - 10
Grade 7 - 9	190.000.000	8 - 10

Listed Rates of Premier Bali School

Competitor Cost by Grade (IDR)*				
	Green School	Canggu School	Pro-ed	Bali Island
Grades 1-3	223.000.000	145.000.000	128,000,000	177.000.000
Grades 4-6	239.000.000	160.000.000	167.000.000	184.000.000
Grades 7-9	267.000.000	191.000.000	197.000.000	210.000.000

*Additional yearly fees such as capital levy, registration fee, range from IDR 32 - 50 million in additional yearly school fees.

FAQ

When considering the opportunity to start a school, there are three primary non-financial questions required of one who would seek to embark on this journey.

These questions are:

1. Why are you the right people to run this school?
2. How does this model offer new school choices?
3. What are three major obstacles you will face?

Why are you the right person to run this school?

For me, the American learning model means that students actually learn what they are taught in school. The goal is to develop a systematic, explicit model of “school” that structures my own implicit education style and philosophy– what I know works from the experience of my own students. My students actually master skills and build their foundation of knowledge, where they connect disciplines together and develop a comprehensive body of knowledge.

This is to say that there are four specific challenges that I have encountered that drive me to confidently say, “I understand the principles, what is required and I am prepared to launch an independent school.”

In brief:

1. Homeschooling vs Broadcast Learning: Get Involved in Learning to Make it Awesome
2. I moved to Bali in 2013 and built an education network from scratch.
3. Now Speak English Online grows to over 350 students
4. Homeschooling: Responsibility for Students’ Education is a Serious Privilege

Below I explain each point in detail.

Homeschooling and Broadcast Learning: Get Involved in the Learning to Make it Awesome

I was homeschooled until 10th grade. I finished my high school diploma in a small town that had more cows than people before going to college to study physics then later chemistry and classical civilization. I learned first hand the contrasting systems that we seek to disrupt.

In homeschool, I learned how to learn. I learned at my own pace. In fact, I “failed” 8th grade pre-algebra and repeated the class with my dad, with daily tears to prove it and went on to have a colored math career.

When I went to school, I had extreme difficulty in math— but not for the reason you’d think. It was because I had taken that extra year, and my dad worked with me, that I had mastery in the foundations. I found geometry and algebra 2 to be a breeze. I would do the lecture based questions quickly in my notes, while my teachers scolded me to slow down and follow along. They would call me out to show that I hadn’t learned because I moved ahead. To make an example of me, they put harder questions to me which I completed quickly in defiance. I moved too fast for them and they were angry with me for it.

When I went away to college, I found most lectures incredibly boring. I was borderline failing many classes simply because I didn’t have the volition to go and sit through the lectures. Curiously enough, I would get the text book and read it voraciously— I wanted to know more. I would ask questions, look up more information, and challenge the narrative. Many times, I would pass a class simply for showing up to the final and getting a high score but have an F for attendance.

While in college, I had the fortunate experience to work in an organic chemistry research lab like a graduate fellow might. I loved it. I started a new research lab with a new professor and made great progress and learned an extreme amount... doing actual science. This is where I excelled. This is where real learning happened. It was so different from class: it was always new, extremely frustrating, delayed, and after a long time sometimes we made breakthroughs.

I also qualified to be a paid Teaching Assistant in the organic labs with freshman students. I would tutor them, explain to them by working on the experiment together, let them fail and determine their mistakes to do it better. I got to ask questions with my professor (who was my superior) so if there was a question I didn’t know, I could fill in the gaps in my knowledge.

As I reflect, assistant teaching in the lab and conducting my own research was a major turning point in my understanding. I knew that I loved homeschool, I knew that I loved the actual knowledge but the teachers and the lectures were so boring, it nearly snuffed out my love of learning. It wasn’t until I had the experience in the lab that the correct way to go about gaining knowledge began to be revealed to me.

I moved to Bali in 2013 and built an education network from scratch.

When I was 22, I was called to go to Bali. I didn't know where it was, I didn't know it was part of Indonesia, the world's most populated muslim country. I thought it was in India because it's a Hindu dominant island. The Indian city is "Bolly."

When I arrived, I had one friend and \$113 dollars in my pocket. That was over 10 years ago. When the job prospects I had lined up evaporated, I said yes to everything I could. I put 1000 CDs on a hard drive for an old man, I helped people with technical difficulties, I nannied people's children.

I did spend some time working in traditional school systems, but always encountered the problem that student's didn't love learning, that they were bored and just wanted to know what to do for the score.

I was eventually asked to tutor English, which eventually led me back to tutoring science. I prioritized integrity, classical learning methods, and consistency in each and every lesson. I kept trying to iterate and learn to teach better— which ended up learning how to have students take ownership of their education. The major challenge here is that many of these students do have scores they need to keep up... so how do I use what I know works in the long term while in the short term parents will probably not see results? The answer: open communication. Telling parents what to expect helped me earn their trust. They could see the learning happen as the process unfolded.

Many of my students did not see results in the first two to three months, but by the end of the year, math was their most loved, least stressful and most highly anticipated subject. Every single time. In fact, it's almost as if these methods, while slow in reaping first fruits, almost cannot fail if the student participates and when they begin to succeed, I have consistently seen positive feedback loops develop in their education.

I also think the style of learning contributes to my success. We put questions on the board and rationalize through them. What do we know? What are the rules? How do I think about it? What is my approach? Using these questions, the students and I work together on problem solving. I teach them how to think, I show them the methodology by acting it out for them which empowers them in the long term to acquire new skills in all subjects.

In tutoring over the past decade, I discovered what works. Parents will pay hundreds or thousands of dollars a month to see deep and genuine results that ripple through all other areas of school and life. That I moved to foreign land with no network and established a life, built a community and continue to thrive in my tutoring endeavors shows I have the volition, tenacity and integrity to succeed.

Now Speak English Online grows to 450 students

I am the founder and CEO of an online learning center that teaches English to Korean, Taiwanese and Indonesian students. This business grew out of my inability to take on more students and an increased demand for my teaching methods. From 2017 - 2020, I slowly pieced together what would become a successful online learning center (before COVID, before it was cool). Since then, I have grown this company from zero to 450 students, with over 50,000 lessons taught and a growing team of 30 professionals.

Most “tiger moms” in Asia want rote, strict discipline and exact lessons. They want textbooks, homework, rigidity and (most of all) results. As we know, this is not the best way to learn; it’s not even the best way to get results. At NSEO, we have infused our DNA of classical learning styles into our tutoring, refusing to compromise and giving in to what would be more lucrative in the short term. We know that if parents stick with us, they will see results. In the same way as tutoring, learning a language takes time— and if we are upfront with them, they come along on a journey with us. Our lessons are personalized, tailored to each student according to what their goals are and the goals that the parents have as well.

In Korea, the typical commitment to a learning center is about one semester. I’m proud to say that students at NSEO stay with us on average at least 14 months. Students show six months of international school level improvement (measured using IXL’s AI diagnostic tool) in just 32 hours with us.

This is not to boast— I want to show that I can take an idea and turn it into a thriving community whether with my tutoring students or online in places I have never been. I can effectively convince “tiger moms” to release some of their preconceived ideas of what it means to attain results (with the utmost respect that is due to a child’s parent.)

Homeschooling: Responsibility for Students’ Education is a Privilege

In 2019, I was entrusted with building a homeschooling curriculum for American expat students in Bali. Using the same methodology as I did in my tutoring and I would later incorporate into Now Speak English, I started to build a program. Homeschooling as a tutor and being completely responsible for a child’s educational journey is a heavy burden. It requires time, consideration. It requires a healthy fear of failure and it requires extensive communication with parents.

I have gone on to homeschool nine students over the past four years. If you are familiar with homeschooling, you know that nine students in the span of four years is actually quite a lot.

I’ll tell you a story that highlights my homeschool experience. My longest homeschooler was a 12 year old boy that I homeschooled until he was 16. He was a struggling student by traditional metrics. Poor grades, poor handwriting, hated to read, and sometimes refused to participate in class. He was also argumentative. (I say this with love; read on!) He had a good intuition when it

came to math and science, but not much else in terms of academics. I worked with the student and family to determine his strengths and figure out his plan.

In English, he was just a late bloomer. He could read stories that engaged him, like Hardy Boys or Choose Your Own Adventure. We read Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, along with countless other stories, and he loved them! His writing was a major struggle, but we only gave him what he could handle. By 9th grade, he could barely write two paragraphs. We learned that he could write much more technical pieces with ease, like explaining the force of buoyancy or parabolic motion of a car running off a cliff. We focused on that so he could write pieces that he was proud of. Suddenly, in 10th grade, he started to “get it” and did the 5th - 8th grade writing courses in the span of a few months, ending with two and three page essays with a central thesis.

Even with his eventual success in English, his greatest skill was math and programming. He was good at physics as well. In our homeschool, over the years of 12 - 16, he was able to complete all of standard middle and high school math. He did senior level physics in 9th grade. He wrote his own game in VR on the Oculus that people actually play, hundreds of people! He has a YouTube channel that makes money monthly and has over a million views.

With this student, and others, I have found a way to make it work. How do we find their interests and pair it with a work ethic? How do we build in them an intrinsic desire to pursue their interests? You give them ownership, you give them true genuine choices, you give them support. You hold them to a high standard and expect more of them. You get to know who they are and help them craft their interests. You're flexible when those interests change and balance interest with discipline and consistency. Most of all, you keep listening to their different ideas and working with them until you have a breakthrough. The breakthroughs look different for each student. The one above has a game and a YouTube channel, a different student is 17 and starting a business with his dad, another wants to be well read with no homework while he pursues his passion for riding horses and surfing.

Conclusion

In my life growing up and my educational journey, I learned the core tenets of what it means to love learning and how to learn. When I moved to Bali, I showed my true character: creative, tenacious and integral. I have been relentless in my pursuit of learning, for myself and for my students. I have made “terrible” students into math lovers, given tiger moms a fresh view on learning and opened a world of possibilities for my homeschoolers.

For years, I have been considering how to scale my homeschool model into a non-traditional school. Now, developing my own model— to cultivate the hero's journey of every student— I am convinced this is the way forward. I am ready to take on this challenge.

How does this model offer new options?

One-on-one Tutoring as Standard

As my primary background in all my educational experience is one-on-one, I want to schedule in structured one on one time with students. Whether this be for extra help, mentoring, relationship building or getting excited about new and crazy ideas, the one-on-one will be essential for every student at the American school.

Math Lab

Second, I think that students get excited about learning when teachers get excited about learning and do it with the student. I want students to love math for the sake of beauty—that seemingly random array of letters and numbers and symbols somehow can create graphs and lines and those lines describe motion— or financial markets! I have an idea about an experimental math lab where students come and work on questions together on a board in a traditional, Greco-Roman symposium style where one hard question is on the board and participants discuss how to solve it. In a way, this is an extension of the socratic discussion and applied to math. This will give younger students the opportunity to participate in larger, more challenging problems so they won't be intimidated later on. Older students can drive the question forward and teach younger learners. All students will think differently, more people will add more perspective and everyone will have a wholesome math experience and witness the magnificence.

Classical Learning Test

Finally, I would like to incorporate the Classical Learning Test at the beginning and end of each year so that parents have proof that even compared to external standards, their students are doing well. It will keep us as an organization honest. It will encourage students to read classic books that are in line with our standards. Students will be prepared for college if that is their choice without having to cram for the SAT or ACT with all the trick questions.

Interconnectedness (Camps, Visiting Professors)

With my online learning company, we have an “online to offline” English learning camp in Bali where Koreans come to Bali to learn English. This would be an amazing way to boost cultural awareness and sharing. I would have the Korean students join school during the day and our students can take them out to fun activities in Bali in the afternoon. It would be a good way to build relationships and lasting friendship while exporting our educational principles to a population that would otherwise be deaf to them.

One of the homeschooling parents has a successful set design business and he wants to intern some young professionals in his field. He came up with an idea that we have visiting interns come to the school and do a medium term (6 week) project with the students as a way to test out some of their creative ideas. I built on this idea by considering if we had “visiting professionals” come and conduct workshops and projects with the students in various fields

What are three obstacles you will face?

In Bali, education is a free market. Educators are free to open and try new things. Parents will come and choose a school they like. On the education front we see an open path forward. In terms of my experience working in Bali and understanding the educational landscape, I am confident that I do have a deep understanding. However, there are some technical challenges.

Student Acquisition

The primary goal of any school is to have students. My strength lies in developing ideas, working with students and communicating with parents. Once I am introduced to parents, I do a good job listening to their concerns and implementing their vision for their students. However, it's outside of my area of expertise to acquire new students, whether through marketing or advertising and while there are many students that would thrive in this environment, I do not have a clear vision on how to acquire students into the school for the first cohort.

Physical Challenges: Bureaucracy & Land Costs

First, the bureaucracy can be challenging to deal with. I mentioned the free market above— and this is true, but the initial permitting to start a business/ learning center/ school/ academy we expect to take longer than we expect as we try to cut through red tape. Once you accomplish the initial process of what type of paperwork you need, it's smooth sailing but getting through the initial barriers will be a challenge.

Second, land costs are very high and it's expensive to get a long term lease. Payment for the entire lease is due upfront. This is overcome by savings and investment. We have some money saved and we will use the tuition from the first families to cover the rent. Furthermore, some of the founding families want to invest in the idea financially and these are families of means, so we hope to be able to cover that.

Teacher Scarcity

Third, the type of guide that is needed to run an effective academy is rare, indeed. Convincing an already rare type of teacher to come to Bali to and start an alternative, disruptive unschooling school, I foresee as a challenge. I have contact with some teacher recruitment platforms, but many normal teachers find it extremely hard to shed their training and re-envision how education could be. In order to overcome this, I have some very talented NSEO teachers that I would tap to see if they are interested in an adventure.

Conclusion

Starting a school is going to be a tremendous undertaking. It's going to be one of the hardest things I have ever worked on. It's going to require the building of a new team. It's going to require capital. It's going to be a big risk— parents that think it's a good idea and homeschool now, may be reluctant in the final analysis.

In truth— we don't know what we don't know. Whenever a new business endeavor is started, there are problems that come out of left field. If we approach it with determination and skill, with excitement and passion, we will go a long way. I've learned that if you always ask yourself, "what is right" whenever you have a problem and then do that— you'll be fine in our own conscience, whatever the looming problems may be. In time, doing what is right will bear fruit and the problems will be resolved, and there is great learning to be had, wisdom to be received!