

ISG Educators Are Virtually Irreplaceable

By Courtney Carreon, English Teacher ISG, Dhahran High School



English and Science departments learn how to use digital dropbox

In September of 2009, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, in response to the threat of a possible H1N1-flu virus outbreak; closed all schools and left teachers scrambling to create meaningful learning experiences in a way that wouldn't leave the curriculum in the dust. The result was a paradigm shift – a change in the fundamental model of education -- requiring teachers to deliver content without students physically being present.

For the International Schools Group (ISG), "virtual education" through the use of Blackboard gave schools reason to consider virtual education as a viable substitute for traditional classroom teachers; the first implementation was a success with 80 percent of parents reporting satisfaction with ISG's preparation for virtual school in response to the crisis.

In addition to high marks from parents, ISG employees realized the benefits they can receive from each other. ISG educators were undaunted by the challenge of 2-3 weeks of online instruction and rose to meet demands with grace and expedience. The rate of professional development was remarkable. In two days, teachers went from zero experience with Blackboard to efficiency, without specialized instruction or training. What teachers did use was the most valuable resource any school has: each other. This approach helped ISG employees feel like a team, the word collaboration was a real life actuality.

Surveys indicated that over 70 percent of parents, teachers and students felt current with normal classroom curriculum. Additionally, 91 percent of teachers reported they will continue to use Blackboard in their classroom. This type of success was not only beneficial to the students but also to the staff as all learned the valuable asset the Blackboard software is to extend the learning experience outside of school.

Though teachers and administrators are pleased with this reported success, there was something missing -- while more subtle, no less valuable. The transition to online instruction reaffirmed the importance of the "hidden curriculum", and the invaluable bond formed through the constant interaction. The term 'hidden curriculum' was coined by Philip Jackson in 1968, but the concept and its import are timeless. The "hidden curriculum" is an attitude towards living and learning that the students acquire, not from one teacher, but developed and fostered through the school experience.

It was remarkably evident, once virtual education had become more than just a quick fix that fostering emotional relationships, motivating students, and providing substantive formative feedback can be missing in the virtual scenario. Any professional educator knows the unique identities and characteristics of teachers and students create an important synergy in the classroom. ISG educators didn't let CYBER space get in the way of the hidden curriculum.

By attempting to preserve relationships in online instruction during ISG virtual experience, teachers were able to meet their students on a more personal, individual level and capture the humanity of teaching in an online setting. ISG teachers tried very hard to simulate true classroom experiences into the virtual curriculum and were successful. With a unified front, teachers presented their lessons and timelines with the same clarity and efficiency they would have in a physical space. These techniques worked with 97 percent of teachers reporting their students were actively engaged in their lessons.



Liz Valtejo conducts a podcasting lesson

Virtual school has yet been proven a viable replacement for the interaction provided in the physical place. However, virtual education is still in its infancy, and there is a real need to discover increasingly effective methods to transfer the hidden curriculum into virtual environments. The teachers at ISG serve as a good example that the humanity of teaching can be preserved in online environments but the role of the classroom teacher is virtually irreplaceable.

ACS Athens Receives Nikolai N. Khaladjan International Award

By Dr Stefanos Gialmas, President, American Community Schools of Athens

ACS Athens celebrated its most recent accomplishment as the recipient of the prestigious Nikolai N. Khaladjan International Award for innovation in higher education. This award recognizes innovation and achievement in higher education worldwide by the American Association of University Administrators. ACS Athens is the first ever K-12 academic institution receiving such an award. We are proud and honored to be the recipients of such a distinction.

ACS Athens was awarded for the ICCT (Institute of Critical and Creative Thinking) Summer Leadership Institute that took place during the summer of 2009. Thirteen ACS Athens 9th and 10th grade students participated in this program in collaboration with the Jepson School of Leadership Studies at the University of Richmond.

This award was given on November 6, 2009 at a celebratory luncheon in Washington, D.C. during the 38th Annual Conference of the American Association of University Administrators.



Jerome Neuner, Sandra Peart, Stefanos Gialmas, Uliana Gabara, Anour Cherif