



December 2009, Volume 10 Issue 1  
*LEARN WITH US!*

# MAIS-R Mawade'ah Topics

## CHANGE @ AIS-R



## *AIS-R's MISSION*

As a school committed to excellence, we will educate and inspire our students to be responsible, productive and ethical world citizens with the skills and passion to think creatively, reason critically, communicate effectively and learn continuously. We will accomplish this in an American educational environment characterized by high measurable standards and a clearly defined, appropriately interrelated college preparatory curriculum, implemented by a superior staff in partnership with parents and the community.

*Mawade'ah* means "topics" in Arabic. In this case, the name conveys the idea of topics that form an ongoing conversation about our school.

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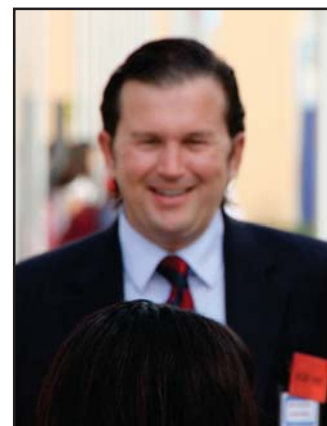
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## IN THIS ISSUE ...

Dear Friends of AIS-R,

AIS-R's *Mawade'ah Magazine*—celebrating its tenth year of publication—is one of our preeminent means of communication designed to highlight themes and issues emerging in our learning community. Thus, with its signature Arabic name meaning “topics,” we generated several ideas for this first issue and quickly agreed that a prevailing theme thus far (this year) certainly appears to be one of change. From the onset of this academic year, we set out to analyze and rethink some of our practices as a means to understand better our learners and their future. With this in mind, we are experiencing and celebrating initial change—change in programs, facilities, staffing, technology, website, and new ways of thinking about learners and learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; yes, numerous and transformative ideas are unfolding as the year progresses.



As presented in the wonderfully written articles throughout this publication, the dialogue of change is manifesting its way through the many *ed-ventures* we are undertaking here at AIS-R. The cover, for example, celebrates a symbolic change—the grand opening of The Avenue of Nations on October 28<sup>th</sup>, which is an inspirational axis point on campus, emblematic of our 50 student nationalities learning side-by-side. In the photo, you see over 1100 *AIS-Rians standing proudly, together*, during this year's UN Week. Here, we are commemorating community, diversity and learning. On the cover, too, we also welcome the change in leadership at the US Embassy, with American Ambassador, Honorable James B. Smith, who stands with us in celebration.

As you enjoy the rousing commentary within, you will note that the opening article takes the author—and some of us—back to the days of youth through a provoking sentiment as best captured in the Bob Dylan tune, *The Times They Are A-Changin.* With Dylan gently strumming in the background, Jerri Myers, Middle School Principal, is at the forefront generating ideas about 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning and learners and the changes we are developing in the curriculum to ensure that our students are prepared for the world ahead. Yes, the times they are *a-changing* here at AIS-R!

Following the poetry of Dylan (and *Myers* herself), Rukhsana Ghani explores beautifully—with the metaphor of shifting sand dunes—the notion of “best practice” and how change for educators is an inherent part of the professional learning process. Her historical trek at AIS-R—that spans several decades—is a unique and astute contribution to this collection; a celebration of change.

The encouragement of shifting sands resonates throughout the entire publication as you read ideas from a number of teachers, students and parents. We hear from Tony Anderson regarding improvements in athletics; Susan Stronach challenges us to think differently about thinking; Laurie Dukes reminds us of our mission-driven commitment to save room for *PIE*; Francois Bourcier brings *Francophonie* culture to AIS-R; Rosemary Hurley shares changes within the HS Counseling Center, especially in terms of building student relationships over time; Bob Jonas ignites us with the mission of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century library; Middle School students explore ideas about changes at the school, and so does a parent, Mr. Turani, who writes about his family's experience with *e-learning*; Trevor Cunningham connects us with Econ 2.0 and the concept of “blended learning”; Faie Frederickson and Eman Zenhom take a “Second Step” to assist children and parents; and finally, Roma Soni influences our thinking about art and social change. What a collection of ideas; the times they are *a-changing*!

Each of these rich and thoughtful articles brings together some of the initial changes, ideas and actions we are creating in an effort to be responsive to educational research and best practice. Being the new AIS-R Superintendent this year—yes, a change too—I am proud of the thinking, dialoguing and undertakings by our community of learners as we strive to ensure that the best learning opportunities are available for our students.

As a mission-driven, 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning organization, change is what we do!

*Learn with us!*

Dr. Brian Matthews  
Superintendent

*You must be the change  
you wish to see in the  
world.*

**Mahatma Gandhi**

*Change is the law of  
life. And those who  
look only to the past  
or present are certain  
to miss the future.*

**John F. Kennedy**

*When you're finished  
changing, you're  
finished.*

**Benjamin Franklin**

*Education is the  
most powerful  
weapon which you  
can use to change  
the world.*

**Nelson Mandela**

# THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN’

BY JERRI MYERS  
DIRECTOR OF LEARNING

Come gather ‘round people  
Wherever you roam  
And admit that the waters  
Around you have grown  
And accept it that soon  
You’ll be drenched to the bone.  
If your time to you  
Is worth savin’  
Then you better start Swimmin’  
Or you’ll sink like a stone  
For the times they are a-changin’

(Bob Dylan)

**WE** hear a lot these days about education in the 21st century. There is no doubt that the challenges schools face in the 21st century are vast, but there is one thing that is clear. “The times they are a-changin,” and we’d better get on board.

Alice, from Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland said, “One can’t believe impossible things.” However, if our grandparents were to walk into an AIS-R classroom today, they would see what they might consider “impossible things”: students using laptops that give them access to the world, interactive SMART boards that project anything that is on a computer, and cell phones from which you can twitter or twitch or tweet or whatever it is you do. We are keeping up with technology, so what more can we do to adapt to 21st century learning? Well, the answer to that question is not an easy one, but it has a lot to do with teaching students what to do with the knowledge we give them.

I recently read an article from the website 21st Century Schools, “Education in the 21st Century,” that addressed some of the changes that will be essential if schools are going to be successful in this new century.

From	To
Time-based	Outcome-based
Focus: memorization of discrete facts	Focus: what students know, can do and are like after all the details are forgotten
Textbook- driven	Research-driven
Passive Learning	Active Learning
Learners work in isolation- classroom within 4 walls	Learners work collaboratively with classmates and others around the world-the global classroom
Fragmented curriculum	Integrated and Interdisciplinary curriculum
Grades averaged	Grades based on what was learned

One of the things I find interesting about this article is that these sentiments are echoed in almost everything I read and hear about school change. In fact, one of the focuses of the Leadership Institute I just attended was education in the 21st century, and the same ideas were shared. So the question becomes, how do we get from “here to there”?

In my opinion, one of our first tasks is to determine what skills our students must have to be successful in this new century and then build our curriculum around them. At the Leadership Conference, both Patrick Bassett and Grant Wiggins, keynote speakers, talked about those skills. Bassett based his list on studies done with educators, universities and businesses and came up with seven skills students need to be successful in the 21st century:

- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Ability to work in teams/collaboration
- Flexibility
- Initiative/self-motivation
- Good oral and written communication
- Accessing and analyzing information
- Creativity and curiosity

Worthy of note, I think, is that before Mr. Bassett shared this list, he asked us what skills we thought were needed, and we came up with the same skill sets, and no doubt, so would you. Most of these are skills that we know, as adults, are critical if you are to be successful in the business world and in life.

Therefore, getting from here to there will require a change in curriculum. According to “Twenty-first century curriculum has certain critical attributes. It is interdisciplinary, project-based, and research driven. It is connected to the community-local, state, national and global. Sometimes students are collaborating with people around the world in various projects. The curriculum incorporates higher order thinking skills, multiple intelligences, technology, multimedia, the multiple literacies of the 21st century, and authentic assessments. Service learning is an important component.” (21stcenturyschools.com)

With that in mind, where is AIS-R when it comes to preparing our students for the 21st century? We are definitely “on board.” We have begun the transformation and will continue to work toward getting from “here to there.” It is possible, and it is happening. Many things are already in place, and we are constantly finding ways to make them better; we are learning about assessment, finding ways to improve technology, rewriting curricula, and making what we teach more transferable. As our mission statement so aptly puts it, “...we will educate and inspire our students to be responsible, productive and ethical world citizens with the skills and passion to think creatively, reason critically, communicate effectively and learn continuously” so that they will be ready for life in the 21st century.

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# THE SHIFTING SAND DUNES OF READING PRACTICES

BY RUKHSANA GHANI  
GRADE 2 TEACHER

**A**T the end of October, about 40 members of AIS-R staff attended the NESFA Fall Training Institute in Bahrain. It was an exciting trip and a worthwhile experience. The focus of the conference was to inspire educators to look at “Best Practices”, become continuous learners, and to think collaboratively in teams for the joint purpose of preparing a future generation that’s ready to face the challenges of the 21st century.

As we drove back from Bahrain through the vast desert, the sun was setting behind us, leaving shadows of its golden rays on the orange and red sand dunes. The cool November breeze would perhaps, shift these mounds of sand sooner or later to another place in the desert so they could add beauty to another barren land. As the sand dunes flashed by the window, my mind began to connect my experiences in teaching with these moving sands to the various shifts in philosophies and teaching practices, which have shaped the quality of education that continuously benefits our students’ lives.



As I began to reflect over the two and half decades of my time as an educator at AIS-R, I started to think of all the teaching practices that have been applied by the school over the past years and recognized how fortunate I have been to be a part of this extraordinary school’s faculty. Because AIS-R has always tried to incorporate new research based educational trends into its teaching practices, I have personally had the opportunity to experience the numerous transformations that the educational system has gone through.

One area I feel that has taken the greatest strides and shifted from one end of the spectrum to the other is the practice of teaching literacy skills. Reading at AIS-R was and continues to be considered the backbone or the key to learning, as able



readers who comprehend content can more easily understand all other subjects, such as Science and Social Studies. As I look back at the Reading practices at AIS-R then and now, several images of my classroom and my students appear in my mind’s eye.

I still don’t recall how I was taught to read in my school days, but I vividly remember my first year at AIS-R when I began teaching Reading to my Kindergarten class. Teaching of phonics in isolation (meaning the letters and sounds) was the most important component of Reading then. I remember there was a list of sight words that students had to practice in isolation and were drilled on. This list was sent home and children had to memorize these words. During that time, I had to plan my day’s lesson around the “Letter of the Week”. Everything I planned was around the “Letter of the Week”. Throughout the week, all day long my students and I kept curving or twisting our mouths to sound out that letter, while we were writing, singing, cooking, cutting or pasting, drawing, painting or working on art projects. There were even books with illustrations that correlated the sound to its associated letter. All the activities teachers planned then were centered around that ONE letter for the whole week. Although teaching phonics is still and will always be an important component, the practices shifted over time.

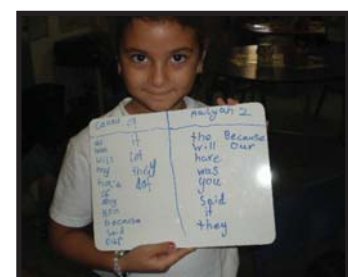


A few years later the “Whole Language” approach to teaching Reading became widely accepted and was introduced at AIS-R. Thankfully, this meant that the teaching of phonics and the drill and practice of sight words in isolation faded away. The shift was now towards teaching letters and sounds through the recognition of sight words in meaningful contexts through story books and pattern books. I clearly remember how excited I was to try this new approach. We were given a lot of support and training and a whole lot of big books and student books were ordered. The Enrichment Center then, was filled with colorfully illustrated big books, focusing on letters and sounds, that the teacher could read aloud. Students enjoyed holding small books that were a replica of the big book during small group instruction.

Shared reading, small group instruction, using the Morning Message to teach phonics and sight words in meaningful contexts became the norm for teaching Reading. Although new practices have emerged since, the philosophy of Whole Language and its’ components continues to hold a strong position in the teaching of Reading even now.

The latest era of “Balanced Literacy” has emerged and once again AIS-R has shifted toward this research-based “Developmentally Appropriate Best Practice”.

Bound to enhance the teaching of reading and writing, Balanced Literacy equips students to actually use strategies or tools to master the ways to not only read and comprehend but to improve higher level thinking as well.



This year I am again looking forward to more new learning experiences with teaching Reading and am implementing the Daily Six concept, which is designed to help children become independent readers and writers. In conjunction with this, I’m using the CAFÉ menu (an acronym that helps students to understand the important components of reading and comprehension strategies). Another important forum that’s very popular in my class are the “Interactive Read-Alouds”. Carefully chosen Read-Aloud books contribute to enriching the language development of my students, by allowing them to deliberate on their thinking through interactive conversations.

I feel blessed to have had these learning opportunities that have nurtured my professional growth over time and given me a clear understanding of my special craft as an educator. I still remember my first year at AIS-R, when I was introduced to my new Kindergarten classroom. I was simply awe struck when I saw the room — it was so different from the



classrooms I had experienced both as a student and a teacher working in India. The approach to teaching, the student teacher ratio, and the resources available at AIS-R in comparison to

classrooms of even elite schools in India was so superbly different.

I remember being captivated by the variety of learning opportunities provided at AIS-R in contrast to the monotonous style of teaching in many other schools. Back then, I eagerly availed every learning opportunity that was provided by the school and enthusiastically attended the on-campus graduate level courses, the NESAC conferences and the in-service programs through “Teachers Teach Teachers” workshops so I could grow professionally and learn about the new educational system that I had chosen to teach in.

From then on I have been on a learning trek not just a teaching journey. Throughout my tenure at AIS-R my own teaching philosophy, my beliefs and practices have shifted several times in order to ensure my students are offered the best opportunities to nurture their learning and allow their young minds to bloom into confident and creative learners; much like the shifting sand dunes that glide from one place to another to enhance the beauty of the desert. We have now entered the 21st century and we educators at AIS-R continue to strive and equip ourselves with the knowledge and skills required to assist our students to become life-long learners.

## FROM THE HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETIC DIRECTOR'S DESK...

BY TONY ANDERSON  
HS ATHLETICS/ACTIVITIES DIRECTOR



**I**T is said that change is the key to life and if that is so, the AIS-R Eagles are alive and well! Many changes have happened in the Athletic Department for the 2009-2010 school year. The first big change has been the grand opening of the new fitness center which is the driving force behind our

latest focus of fitness in our high school physical education classes. This new focus will help students become healthier and maintain good health as well as give everyone a fair chance at becoming fit enough to try out for our AIS-R athletic teams.

As AIS-R continues to grow, so does our presence at various athletic events. There is a buzz in the air and that buzz is a program coming to life through change. The athletes are excited, the coaches are energized, and the potential for our Eagles is endless. Eagles Pride is Alive!!! Since our philosophy is to help students develop in all aspects of their lives and to give everyone a chance to ‘be what they want to be’, we feel it is important to give student-athletes the opportunity to develop their skills to their full potential while maintaining their performance in class. Our student-athletes are expected to be just that – students first, athletes second. We are here to educate students and that is what must come first. This does not mean that we can’t assist their development in the activity of their choosing. Student-athletes are expected to fully commit to their teams by signing the student athletic/activity code of conduct portion of the Eagles Athletics Information Packet. This signature is a student-athlete’s promise to meet all expectations set by the Athletic Department and AIS-R. Parents, or guardians, also sign this document as an indication that they will support their child in their endeavor to develop their athletic skills to their full potential while putting their education first. Some of the new expectations for this year include mandatory attendance to all practices regardless of the time (3-4:15p.m. or 4:15-5:30p.m.) and including Thursday morning practice; this will enable coaches to meet with their teams at least 3 times a week for a long enough period to allow more opportunities for growth for players. Since

we understand that some things cannot be avoided, we accept that students may have to miss practice sometimes. These circumstances must be limited to a maximum of 3 times during the season, and the player must let the coach know in advance if they will be absent from practice; this is a way to teach students responsibility and to allow for proper planning of practice in order to continue the team’s growth regardless of the absences.

The AIS-R Athletic Department is excited to develop student-athletes and to give them the opportunity to continue with their passion as student-athletes in colleges or universities around the world. We feel that the above-mentioned changes were necessary to allow our students to be ready to face the challenges of being student-athletes at the college or university of their choice.

*It's up to you now Eagles...  
follow your dreams!*



# SAVE ROOM FOR PIE— PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

BY LAURIE DUKES  
ES LIBRARY, PTSO TREASURER

**THERE** are some moments in our lives that are permanently engraved in our memories. For me, one of those moments occurred on my son's very first day of school. We stood outside the kindergarten building to take his picture just before he went inside. There he was—my little red-headed boy, squinting in the sunlight, proudly carrying his new lunchbox and backpack—his whole future shining brightly ahead of him. It suddenly hit me that once he walked through that kindergarten door, there was no turning back. From that moment on, I would not be with him every minute of the day to guide him through all his experiences; I would have to trust his teachers to nurture him and help him along his educational journey.

It is a tremendous trust that we place in the school. As our children enter their classroom doors each day, we want to know that they are having positive experiences that will motivate them to keep working, keep learning, and continue on the path to their highest potential. But does trusting the school mean that we should stay away entirely and just leave teachers to do all the work of educating our children? To what extent should parents be part of the educational process?

There is ample research to show that Parent Involvement in Education, often referred to as PIE, is a necessary and powerful part of student achievement. If our goal is to bring about positive changes in our children's education, then many of those changes begin with us. When parents are actively involved, students have better school attendance, higher grades and test scores, increased motivation, greater self-esteem, and fewer behavior issues. In other words, when we make our children a priority, the rewards are well worth the effort. There is simply no replacement for the presence of a caring, involved parent in the life of a child.



## PIE at HOME

Parent Involvement in Education does not necessarily mean you have to spend all day volunteering at the school. PIE really begins at home. According to Parent-Involvement research compiled by the Michigan Department of Education, families whose children are doing well in school exhibit the following characteristics:

1. They have an established daily routine that includes a quiet time and place to

study, responsibility for household chores, dinner together, and a firm bedtime.

2. They monitor out-of-school activities such as TV watching, after-school activities, and supervised care.
3. They model the value of learning, self-discipline, and hard work.
4. They express high but realistic expectations for achievement by helping children set goals, encouraging their special talents, and celebrating successes.
5. They encourage children's development in school by maintaining a warm and supportive home, showing interest in children's progress, helping with homework, discussing the value of a good education, and staying in touch with teachers and school staff.
6. They encourage reading, writing, and discussions among family members.

It is never too late to make room for PIE at home, but the earlier parent involvement begins, the more powerful the effects.



## PIE at SCHOOL

There is a common misconception among parents that they can't be involved in the school because it requires too much time. The truth is, any amount of time you spend at the school will benefit your children. Whether it is simply attending a back-to-school night, parent-teacher conference, PTSO coffee morning, or an annual parade, your presence on campus sends a message to your child that school is important. Parent participation at school tends to be high during the elementary years, but drops dramatically once students reach middle school. Yet parent involvement at school is just as important in the teen years as it is in the early years.

So how can you be involved at school? Here are just a few ideas:

1. Attend special school events such as concerts, plays, parades, exhibits, and festivals.
2. Visit with teachers on Back-to-School Night and parent-teacher conference days.
3. Stay in constant communication with teachers via emails, notes, calls and visits as needed.
4. Volunteer to help out in the classroom or teacher workrooms when you have time.
5. Serve on a PTSO board or committee.
6. Visit the school library with your children

to help them select books.

7. Assist with special classroom events, programs, or field trips.
8. Volunteer to help out at a school-wide event, such as the International Festival or Family Fun Day.
9. Offer to share your talents as a guest speaker, an assistant coach, in the theatre, as a writer for the school newsletter, as a storyteller, or wherever you feel you could be of help.
10. Attend parent-association meetings to keep yourself aware of what is happening on campus, to advocate for your children, and make your voice heard.
11. If you aren't sure how you can be involved, just ask! There is always room for PIE at school, especially at AIS-R, where parents are valued as a vital part of the school community.

We all want our children to excel academically and fulfill their potential as life-long learners and world citizens. Fortunately, our children have the opportunity to be educated by dedicated professionals whose mission is to prepare them for that bright future. But we cannot leave the job entirely to them. We need to save room for PIE! As is the case with any good pie, the rewards will be very sweet and truly satisfying.

### Parent Involvement Resources Online:

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education: [www.ncpie.org](http://www.ncpie.org)

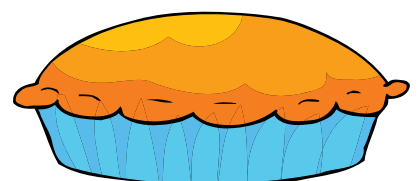
National PTA Website: [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org)

Michigan Department of Education: [www.michigan.gov](http://www.michigan.gov)

Parent Involvement Matters: [www.parentinvolvementmatters.org](http://www.parentinvolvementmatters.org)

John Hopkins University Center on School, Family, and Community Partnership: [www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000/center.htm](http://www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000/center.htm)

National Education Association: [www.nea.org/tools/17360.htm](http://www.nea.org/tools/17360.htm)



# CHANGES IN RESEARCH PROCESSES @AIS-R

BY SUSAN STRONACH  
TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION SPECIALIST

**DID** you know that we now have access to over a trillion websites? In addition, at AIS-R we also have access to 14 different online databases, containing millions of articles from magazines, newspapers and reference sources. Add to that our existing school library collection of over 50,000 volumes and more than 50 current magazine subscriptions. We are truly living in an Information Age. Information is everywhere but as Albert Einstein once said, "Information is not knowledge." How do we make sense of all of this information? How do we manage? In order to deal with this bombardment of ideas and messages, today's student needs to develop a very different set of research skills.

In order for our students to be able to mine this field of information, we need to teach them not only how to find the information, but to discern which information is relevant to their task, and then how to best use that information to support their own ideas and opinions about their topic. We want to challenge our students to make comparisons and dissect concepts. We want them to imagine and hypothesize new ideas and find factual information to back up their proposals. We also want our kids to present their own opinions and find support for them from other sources. This is risk-taking behavior and it inspires creativity.

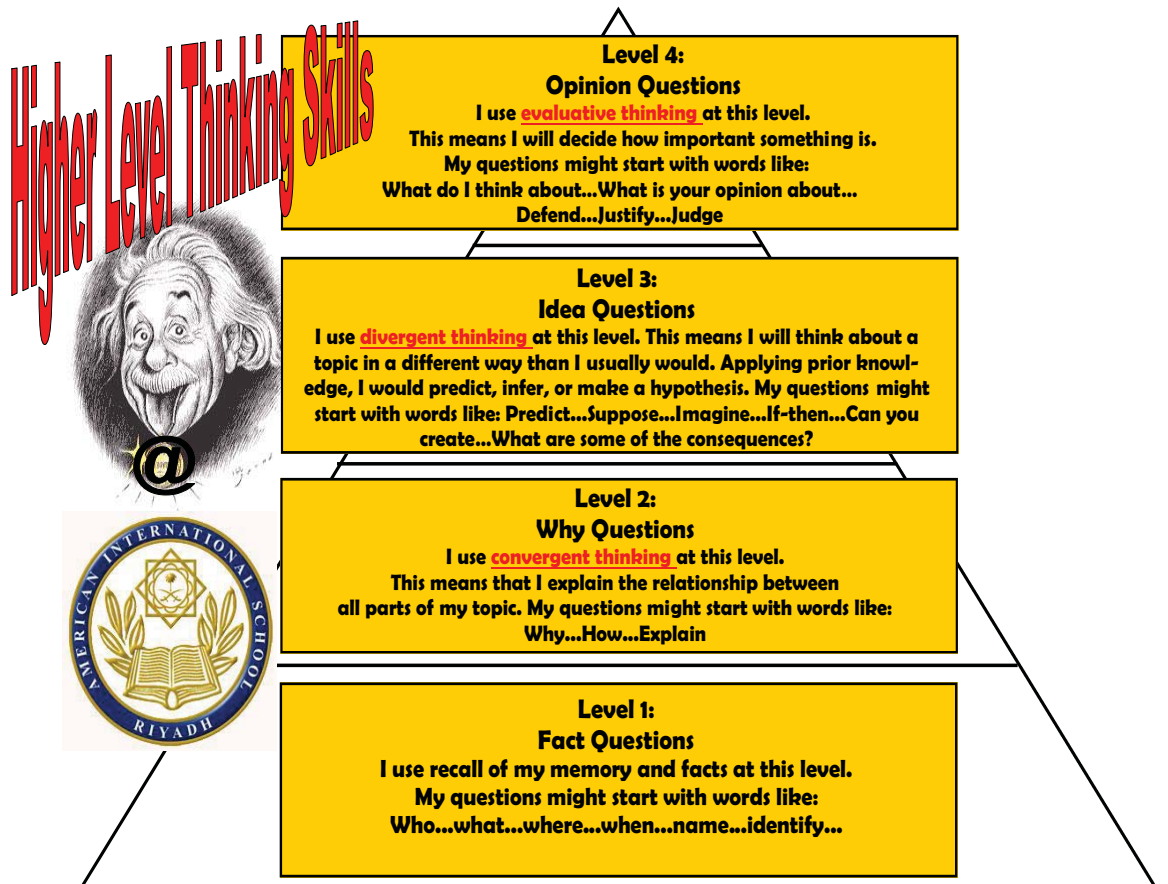
Traditionally, research projects focus on fact-finding. This suggests that there is a fixed amount of information on a topic and the goal of the research is finding those facts and giving them to the teacher. We have been short-changing our students by focusing on topical research. Students spend hours finding factual information, organize these facts into a report and present them to a teacher. This type of assignment is prone to widespread plagiarism and if not taken any further, doesn't teach any higher level thinking skills. We want our students to build on those fact-finding skills, to look into causes and effects, to think more deeply about their topics, and present their own ideas and opinions. Good research questions are questions that force students to go beyond the fact-finding

missions of yesterday. Using a pyramid to illustrate different levels of questions, we are able to design assignments that contain these higher level thinking questions and to teach our students to formulate them as well, so they can deepen their own learning experiences. We are teaching the kids to expand and compress their searches so they can find the information they need. We are also teaching them to evaluate their sources, interpret and organize the information they find so they can synthesize and use it effectively.

One of the tools we are using with our kids to help them organize information is NoodleBib's electronic note-cards. This is not only a referencing tool that allows users to keep track of their sources online, but it also challenges them to select direct quotations from sources, paraphrase the selection and then write about how they will use the information to support their ideas. Students can reflect on their process with each note-card. They can then share their note-cards online with their teachers as evidence of their thinking and learning. Teachers can also write comments back to the students online, offering direct and constructive feedback on their learning.

Another tool we are utilizing at AIS-R is TurnItIn.com. Some High School and Middle School teachers have been using this program with their students for a few years. We hope to bring even more teachers on board and to utilize this tool to its full potential by allowing students to submit their own work to be assessed for originality at all stages in the writing and research process. This provides an authentic learning experience in what plagiarism is and how they can avoid it. TurnItIn.com also has an online peer review component which allows students to comment on each other's writing and provide feedback.

The focus of our technology integration this year is to work cooperatively with teachers to implement tools like these into the classrooms and curriculum. We are working to train our students at AIS-R to use these and other tools to improve their researching skills. Co-teaching sessions are happening now and continue to occur where and when they can authentically expand learning for our students. We are working to empower your child with the life skills they need to succeed in this information climate that extends far beyond our school walls.



# CHANGES TO THE HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELING CENTER AT AIS-R

BY ROSEMARY HURLEY  
HS COUNSELOR



**ALONGSIDE** the many great traditions of the High School Counseling Center, this year we have introduced several new changes, which are based on research and best practice in this educational area. We believe these changes enhance opportunities for students to make the best possible choices for successful transitioning from one grade-level to the next, and ultimately, to universities and colleges.

## **New Distribution of High School Students by Last Name**

In order to better serve the needs of our learners, this year we have assigned all high school students a counselor by last name. Currently, students with last names beginning with the letters A to J have been assigned to Ms. Rosemary Hurley. The remaining students with the last names K to Z have been assigned to Ms. Pat Fitzmaurice. Not only does this change allow the counselors to know students at every grade level, but also, it gives us the opportunity to improve our guidance curriculum program at each level, within the high school. Our goal is to ensure that we provide support to all students as they plan their programs for the successful completion of their high school diploma and entry for post secondary institutions around the world.

## **New, Updated Information & Physical Arrangement in the HS Counseling Center**

There are new university course catalogues, posters and books available, alongside a new physical arrangement in the counseling center. We will use this area for students to meet both as grade-level groups or to work individually on a variety of school-related projects. We

have rearranged the physical environment in order to use the counseling center as a teaching classroom area. Here we will work with students to plan high school course selections, to review IB preparation and requirements, to search/apply for university, and much more. We have computers available for students who wish to work in the counseling center particularly on their university applications. Students can search and apply to universities directly online here – and counselors are available to answer questions that may arise. We are open every day from 7:20 until 3:45 and encourage students to drop in when they need to talk to their counselor.

## **New Emphasis on the Importance of Standardized Testing in all Grade Levels**

In order to help students understand and prepare more effectively for standardized tests, Mr. Gordon and the counselors are spending more time with students explaining the following: the SAT I, SAT II, ACT, PSATs, and the Stanford Achievement Test. The PSAT in particular, is a great opportunity for students in grade 10 and 11 to practice the types of questions found on the SAT I. It gives students the identical testing instructions, similar test questions, and an opportunity to learn how to sit for a lengthy standardized test. We reviewed with all juniors this year, the importance of using the PSAT Student Guide to understand testing instructions, critical reading and mathematics content, and avoiding common misgridding errors. In addition, we have added two testing dates to AIS-R to help juniors and seniors improve their SAT scores. We now offer the SAT 5-times a year in October, November, December, January and May. The most productive method of improving the SAT scores for students is to prepare and take the test several times.

## **New Opportunities for juniors to Attend University Representatives Visiting AIS-R**

We are also encouraging juniors to attend meetings with seniors in the Counseling Center for various university representatives who visit us. A very efficient way to learn about university programs is to attend information sessions offered on our campus. University representatives

discuss informational items such as: admission requirements; minimum SAT I & II scores; IB Predicted Scores; extracurricular opportunities; housing; fees, etc. The Counseling Center is an ideal place for students to introduce themselves to these representatives and to begin building a relationship with them for programs of interest. To date we have had the University of Western Ontario, Edu Nova of Nova Scotia, Jacobs University in Germany, Les Roches and Glion Hotel Management Universities of Switzerland, Menlo College, Business School in Silicon Valley and Kent University from the UK visit our campus. We will continue to offer information sessions at lunch hour in the Counseling Center and announce the dates in Skyward and the Daily Bulletin.



## **New Learning: What's Ahead in the Counseling Center**

So far, we have met in groups with students in grades 9, 10, 11 and 12. We will continue to meet in the Counseling Center to assist our students in building a repertoire of skills and understanding needed for successful study habits, exams, IB preparation and ultimately, for university program selection and applications. We look forward to the work and changes ahead from now until June. Remember, please drop-in to see us whenever questions arise as to how you can achieve to the best of your ability at any stage of learning in high school. We wish our students well for a happy, fun and productive 2009-2010 school year at AIS-R!



# THE “CLUB DE LA FRANCOPHONIE” BRINGS FRENCH CULTURE TO THE AIS-R COMMUNITY

BY FRANÇOIS BOURCIER  
HS FRENCH



**T**he French Club has been a tradition in the high school for a few years now. This year though, the club changed its name to “Club de la Francophonie”. One could wonder what this long and difficult word means, but more importantly, what change does this new name bring to the AIS-R community? “Francophonie” designates the international community of French speaking people. Our school is made of many people that speak French without necessarily being French. It therefore seems logical to incorporate this global factor as the first goal of the club, which is to promote the French language and culture. The Club de la Francophonie is not solely a celebration of France but a recognition of the different cultures of the French speaking world. Additionally, the Club is an informal way for high school students who do not take French as an academic subject to have some exposure to this language and its culture. The second goal of the club is to take part

in humanitarian actions in French speaking countries/regions. After making contact with several organizations, it has been decided to work in conjunction with an established non-profit organization called Humada, based in France & Madagascar. Despite great natural resources, Madagascar is one of the 10 poorest countries in the world. The violent cyclones that hit the island every year contribute to the country’s underdevelopment. Since its independence from colonial France in 1960, Madagascar keeps strong links with the French culture, especially in economics and politics. Humada has recently started a new project aimed at building three classrooms in a village called Andranamavo. The Club de la Francophonie’s aim is to help this organization reach its goal. In line with the Habitat Club work in the Philippines, the Club’s main goal is to travel during the 2010/2011 school year to Madagascar in order to help with the building work. This initiative goes along with the International Baccalaureate Organization’s philosophy to “educate the whole person” and “help students gain a positive outlook on themselves and the community at large”.

Students in Madagascar also lack basic supplies such as pencils and notebooks. The club is therefore planning a school supply collection in order to help without requesting monetary donations.

It is the club’s intention to be an active member of the AIS-R community by organizing events on a regular basis to promote the French language and culture or raise funds.

The club has around 25 members and its official officers are:

President: Tamara Kalo (grade 10)  
Vice-president: Salma Hafez (grade 11)  
Treasurer: Caroline Gracias (grade 10)  
Secretary: Omar Turani (grade 10)  
Club advisers : Charlotte Xhaufclair & François Bourcier

References:

The International Baccalaureate Organization: [www.ibo.org](http://www.ibo.org)  
Humada (non-profit humanitarian organization): [www.humada.org](http://www.humada.org)

## VIRTUAL EDUCATION AT AIS-R

BY MOHAMAD TURANI  
AIS-R PARENT



Living in the “Knowledge Age” where computers have become an integral part of our lives is quite exciting. Computers have become ubiquitous, and the internet has grown beyond expectations, which has changed every aspect of human lives, and this is especially true for education. We live today in the “Knowledge Age.” Schools and education systems have been in a transition to accommodate and adapt to the “Knowledge Age” dynamics.

AIS-R’s forward thinking and planning put AIS-R on the right path toward becoming truly virtual, providing computer and internet connectivity and school/home interaction. This has enabled teachers, administrators, students, and parents to access relevant information anytime, and anywhere. In the process, AIS-R is transforming itself and adapting to the “Knowledge Age.”

During the school closure, right after Eid, the technical infrastructure and applications

at AIS-R were invaluable resources. AIS-R’s readiness in using computers, internet and relevant applications was put to the test, as the school was able to conduct virtual classes. Teachers posted assignments, students carried out their school work and sent assignments back to school. We can comfortably and fairly conclude that although the virtual classes experience was not perfect, it was a welcomed excursion into virtual schooling and provided an opportunity for self-assessment. Virtual learning is definitely the wave of the future and taking the following steps will increase AIS-R’s excellence into the realm of virtual classes:

1. Enhancing the technical infrastructure and applications, so it can provide true collaborative experience; virtual classrooms that allow teachers to interact on line with 20 or more students. This includes rich media solutions that enables voice, video and web conferencing.
2. Enabling the teacher and parent to master the use of computer connectivity application, and then to assimilate them

into classroom and home environment. This includes training for teachers and parents.

3. Identifying and implementing best practice as it relates to collaborative education, on-line education and virtual classes.
4. The support and engagement of the local community is vital to the success of this program.

Once those key steps are addressed, AIS-R will be able to deliver exceptional on-line education and virtual classes, which include rich media, voice conferencing and video conferencing. More importantly, this will establish a foundation upon which education extends far beyond the school years for AIS-R students, empowering them to continue to leverage technology and thrive in the highly demanding and competitive “Knowledge Age.”

Mohamad Turani  
Computer and Electronics Engineer,  
Father of three children, 4th, 8th and 10th grade.

# Econ 2.0

Making Connections in Economics

BY TREVOR CUNNINGHAM  
HS ECONOMICS

**AS** a new member of staff, I would first like to extend my appreciation for having the opportunity to work in such a dynamic educational community. The AIS-R community has greeted my family warmly and promises to be one of the richest professional experiences in over a decade of teaching. I could not think of a better place to introduce Econ 2.0, a blended learning environment using a course management system (CMS) called Moodle.

The objective of Econ 2.0 is to provide these students with a resource that is easy to operate and useful; encourages the use of Web 2.0 “social software” (Alexander, 2006); incorporates higher order thinking skills and differentiated learning; and provides the additional criteria of:

**Opening the classroom:** The reality is that learning and collaboration are not limited to the classroom. Access to communications technology is revolutionizing how and where learning takes place. Econ 2.0 gives students access to content, resources, and class discussions from their homes, or wherever and whenever they choose to engage in course activities.

**Serving as a store of digital resources:** In an environmentally conscious effort to minimize the use of paper, it is important that students have access to documents, articles, and other text resources as they relate to curricular content. In a cloud computing fashion, tools used for Econ 2.0 allow users to upload files and share them with their peers for collaborative development or peer review and interaction, a critical component of our IB Internal Assessment process.

**Providing a secure online learning environment:** An important consideration of using this type of technology is a potential for unwelcome distraction or interaction. Current educational technology standards are calling on schools to incorporate ethical practices and digital citizenship as a learning objective of their curricula. (ISTE, 2007). As students become increasingly engaged in the Internet, it’s imperative that they learn how to use these resources to glean the greatest opportunity, and build responsibly productive learning networks, in as safe an environment as possible. As many of these tools possess

the ability to personally connect to unknown people on the Internet, making learning safe cannot be overstated. Econ 2.0 is configured to ensure that personal information is secure and that student interaction is private.

**Enabling digital natives to develop relevant Personal Learning Networks (PLNs) to help prepare for IB Economics internal and external assessments:** The IB Economics HL assessment process uses a 4-piece portfolio of article commentaries and a battery of three examinations at the conclusion of the two-year program. While there are strict policies governing the process by which each of these assessments are completed, The IBO leaves room for careful collaboration and encourages creativity on the part of both teachers and students to develop effective learning activities and practices. (International Baccalaureate, 2009). PLNs offer students the opportunity to develop and organize knowledge resources and productive interactions with identified peers through which to collaborate on a given subject. A considerable portion of Econ 2.0’s design is devoted to this more social aspect of Web 2.0. A developing learning theory, Connectivism, views knowledge as an ever-evolving series of connections between people and other sources of information. More important than the body of knowledge itself is the ability to continue its evolution by making more connections. (Siemens, 2004). This is the role of a PLN, and the present Internet communications revolution we’re experiencing stresses that this is how people are learning in the 21st Century.



The purpose of including the use of a CMS was to create a blended learning environment that de-centralizes the learning experience, which has been traditionally limited to the classroom or school campus. The reality is that diverse learning styles transcend these environments and consideration must be given to empower all students to realize their potential. Research on blended learning environments has demonstrated improved

learning, at the very least, in that it gives students, who might normally be unwilling to participate publicly, a voice by which to enrich a discussion and connect with their peers. (Stacey and Gerbic, 2007). Econ 2.0 works to capitalize on this voice through the collection of student connections as they contribute their discoveries and newly constructed knowledge. Students are learning to evaluate knowledge resources, through collaboration and online interaction, and become careful discriminators of what compliments their PLN. The classroom now serves as a starting line to initiate a path of discovery as well as a home base to collect and reflect on new knowledge and experiences. The student reception to Econ 2.0 has been very positive. Students are learning how to productively utilize resources whose subtlety has made their potential evasive. As higher education and the professional world moves to embrace these technologies at a more sophisticated level, it is important that K-12 education works to prepare children for this reality. AIS-R has been continuously supportive of Econ 2.0’s development, and for this I am proud to be a member of this community.

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# MIDDLE SCHOOL HAS CHANGED FROM THE INSIDE OUT AND WE LOVE IT!!!

BY MS STUDENTS



**SOME** people like changes and some people don't. This year, some positive changes that I liked were the new computers and the new technology room. The technology room is my favorite room because of the design. The LCD screen that hangs down from the roof is very creative. Also, the wide SMARTboard is a very creative way to show students work, because as you pass by, you can look through the glass and see the work that the students have made in class. Personally, my favorite change was the student center, because it is an air-conditioned place where students enjoy sitting down and talking, especially during Ramadan. Another change is the LCD screen in the student center where students work can be showed to the middle school.

I also liked the shaded area near the soccer field. There, students that like to play soccer can relax and take a break from the heat.

By Saeed Arafeh  
Grade 8

After an hour and a half of hard work, all middle school students need a place to rest and recuperate. Among the many additions to the school this year is the Student Center, which does the job perfectly. In the Student Center, I sit and talk with my friends, discussing everything from what we did in class to how our weekends have been.

The student center also allows announcements to be posted on the television. The television is very helpful to me as the NJHS President

because it allows me to post messages to the school describing our latest service project. Recently, I have put an announcement about the new recycling program going on in the middle school. The television is also a way for people to see pictures from recent events around the school.

The computers have been a huge reason why students come to the Student Center. Since the library is shared with the high school students, the computers are usually taken by the time I get there. Having computers in the Student Center solves that problem.

Another thing I enjoy in the Student Center is the window that allows me to look into the library. I enjoy seeing other students checking out books, researching, and doing projects with friends and classmates. The window also helps me see if any of the computers are open in the library.

As an 8th grader, I enjoy the Student Center because we can see the most recent news because it is posted on the bulletin board. I like seeing what is going on in the school, even if it does not involve me.

Overall, the student center is a wonderful new addition to our middle school and it helps many students move along day by day.

By Michelle McCraw  
Grade 8

Dr. Porter told us about several changes in the middle school this year, but the new Student Center was all I could remember. This is the best change I've seen this year, the Student Center. This area of the school has given

middle school kids a new place to socialize indoors where it's cool, so we don't have to fry like eggs.

Some other great changes are the new shaded areas, the new librarian and the technology stuff. This year, there are shaded areas all over the school where we can stay in the shade when we arrive at school in the morning. One good change for the library was hiring Mr. Jonas; he is a great help when trying to find the book you're looking for, and because of all the experience he's had reading books, he knows exactly which book is right for you. Also, the technology room this year amazed me! At first glance it was like something from a movie, all the new laptops, computers, chairs and that weird half T.V. half computer desktop floating in the middle of the room. The new tech office that they built is also very handy because instead of walking all the way to the high school building to get tech help, I can just walk a few steps out of Mr. Inghram's room. Overall, the changes were the best changes the middle school has ever seen, and thank you Dr. Porter.

By Nazih Kalo  
Grade 8

I was surprised to see all the improvements made this year in the middle school. There are many changes in the outdoors. The shades can allow students to go out and hang out without getting sun burnt. A lot of extra benches were added outside so we can sit. The shade in the track and field area allows us to stand there to watch the games.

There are also changes in the indoors. I like to sit in the Student Center with my friends. We can talk or watch the TV when there is something on it. The lab center has also been improved. I like it better now because the new computers are easier to handle and use. Also, the break time in the morning has been extended, which is a better change. If anyone skips their breakfast because they didn't have time to eat, they can buy something from the cafeteria. Plus, when you come to school in the morning, you can see that there are flags of countries in the middle of the school.

The school is much different than last year in the outdoors, the indoors and the schedules. To me, this year is better than last year because of all the improvements made in the middle school.

By Yasmine Ansari  
Grade 8

# THE MISSION OF THE AIS-R LIBRARY

BY BOB JONAS  
K-12 LIBRARIAN



**WE** have been preparing our kids so long for the 21st century, that before you know it, it will be the 22nd century. Did educators in the late 19th century try equally hard to live as far into an unknown future as we are today? I think it is extremely important to move beyond slogans and look at what we realistically want for our kids. The library at AIS-R plays a vital role helping define what this is.



The job of the 21st century librarian is similar in many ways to what it was 100 years ago. The role of promoting higher level thinking skills while turning our kids into independent, self reliant users of information has not changed. Teaching students to become informed citizens, entrusted to make intelligent decisions that will affect the world in which they live, remains paramount. The things that have changed are the means we now have to promote and enhance what we do. The rate with which things change -- especially when it comes to technology -- is at best unpredictable. The highest and best practice, the element of greatest importance is good teaching -- instructing students how to use their minds to think intelligently. More than anything else, when it comes to all the

tech tools we have, we must promote and integrate the tools that are most appropriate. The library at AIS-R is at the forefront of this recognition -- information alone is not knowledge. Although we are in the middle of what is constantly referred to as the information age, just imagine that time when Mr. Gutenberg invented the printing press, and how overnight, the world changed -- what

an information age that created.

To support the library's mission there are necessary prerequisites the AIS-R library, in collaboration with the administration and staff, are doing to insure that our students use appropriate technology to fulfill our mission. Of all the technology tools that have come our way in the past two decades, some of the most important and relevant are ones we rely on in the library; 1) our online search catalog, 2) online databases, 3) tools to guide and connect teachers and students like NoodleBib and Turnitin, 4) networked computers that are always available to do research, and are loaded with productivity software like Office, Photoshop, Inspiration and a variety of others.

Although we must remain current in the technology necessary for our students to be successful, the sacrosanct role of the library has always been and should remain the promotion of reading and the love of books. To that end the AIS-R library offers our students an excellent collection of print materials to inspire and guide them in becoming lifelong readers.

Access, availability, and an atmosphere conducive to study, whimsy, and scholarship are extremely important as well. If, from the earliest age, we are to attract and keep student's

interest, we must instill in them a love for the library -- a place that will endure for them as a place of importance the rest of their lives. To this end the AIS-R library provides multiple places for study and recreational reading. We open at 7:20 and close at 4pm and the library is open for students and classes all day. The library is constantly filled with small groups, and students relaxing with a book, studying, or using the computer to do research.

With the tremendous support of the AIS-R Board of Trustees and administration, the library will continue to be a focal point of the school -- the heart, the soul, and the living room of AIS-R. The library has forever been and remains one of the most respected institutions in the world. It is the gatekeeper for intellectual freedom, a place to promote lifelong reading habits, and a place to be inspired by a showcase for all human knowledge.



The expectations of our parents and staff for these students are enormous. To instill a love of learning, to foster the desire to be an educated citizen of the world, to be a lover of books and ideas -- these are the enduring legacies the library at AIS-R wishes to leave with our students.



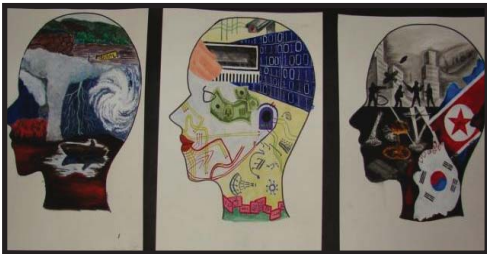
# HOW OUR STUDENTS' ARTWORK CAN BE A POWERFUL INFLUENCE ON HEIGHTENING COMMUNITY AWARENESS OF SOCIAL ISSUES AND BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE.

BY ROMA SONI  
MS ART

**STUDENTS** of our Middle School Visual Arts class, an interdisciplinary course, devised and created a number of individual and collective artistic investigations and creative cultural interventions, both within the classroom and the larger school community, which addressed and examined contemporary social issues. Art education was made more than just simply the production of artistic objects by developing social issue-themed projects and introducing students to socially engaged artists whose work is concerned with cultural examination and social transformation. Focusing the curriculum around the visual cultures of students' everyday lives, engaging them directly in the planning, teaching and evaluation processes, and connecting visual culture and artists to larger social and cultural issues are all critical components of producing a meaningful art education for students.

In class I present an activity to help students conceptualize the socio-political complexity of global warming, teenage issues and socio-political issues through an exploration of varied perspectives on the subject. They argue that social issues present important contexts for cross curricular learning and that the social and political dimensions of these issues must be featured along with the underlying objectives. The activity is structured as a jigsaw in which students explore multiple perspectives on the issues to develop their project.

Here are ten projects explained in the students own words.



Conditioning the Brain:

My social issues projects circles around 3 main topics, which are war, technology and natural disasters. For each, there are representations in a silhouette of a head – to show that each has a great impact on human life. For the head about war, I kept everything black and white except the nuclear bombing, twisted the map of Korea to emphasize the darkness of the

division of Korea and drew blood around the demilitarized zone to show the unbearable pain and separation, caused by the Korean War. The scene with technology mocks how technology has taken over our lives and the face looks surrounded by energy from these machines, and I tried to express it through drawing various lines on the face. The necklace with the symbols of technology companies was to show that technology affects us deeply as it seems like a restraint. For the last one, disaster, I put many different kinds of natural disasters that are very dangerous to us most of the time. On this one, I especially needed to focus on details. While working on this project, the problem I had was with my ability to use the paint. I had barely used acrylic paint before, so it was a bit difficult to work on the piece – I think that I've improved as an artist working on this. Yeon So Cho



Water in the desert: Khalid Al Sudairy



Let's go Global

Our project was about global warming. What we wanted to present was how every day human life destroys nature and rapidly increases global temperatures. Our foundation was a square box, on which we made two good sides and two evil sides, presenting a real life conflict which is on a global level. On the two good sides, we glued the happy theatre mask and a nature picture made of collage, while on

the bad sides we put the sad theatre mask and a city picture which was also made of collage. Abdullah and Stefan



Consumed by Teenage Issues

In this project, Ines and I showed some examples of all the social issues including: suicide, poverty, violence, injustice, human rights, crime and gun control etc. Here we used the hands to show the issues which are consuming the girl. The girl is trying to run away from the hands and escape these social issues pushing her towards suicide. At the bottom of the cliff you see her dead. The hands are like sharp claws to make the impression more effective. Cemre and Ines



Debt and Burden

In this artwork, we show the amount of burden and emotional weight a person may hold. This is not an expected social issue, because this happens to everyone. Guilt and Depression are two of the many examples of burden on a person. In our piece, the sculpture represents a human, and the bag represents the debt on the man's shoulders. The black he is mounted on is really the person himself sinking in his own debt. The reason why the artwork is flecked with red shows him in emotional pain. His hands are in front of his face because he is ashamed of himself, for not taking care of the crises that have caused such burden. Areeb Usmani and Mirna



Sorrow in Kashmir

Our social issues project is a canvas painting about the region of Kashmir and how fighting between two countries is destroying the beautiful landmarks and people of Kashmir. Autumn leaves are bleeding blood into the river, representing how the bloodshed and destruction are ruining the natural beauty. We really like our work, because it shows our views on this issue and it is calling out for the violence to stop. Akhil Kallur and Usman Khan



Worldly Fantasies:

Turning back the time, a teenager falls endlessly into memories back in childhood. While she's falling, five scenes of "the young" her appear as if it's not herself. Yearning for her beloved childhood and the childlike personality are expressed. Only if the Society would permit her to do so. Yeon So Cho



Pandora's Box

The project on social issues that Rishi and I did centers around power and corruption and their effects on the world. It is actually a big black box with representations of bad aspects of society on each side - for example, greed is shown on one side with the letters cut out from newspapers and printouts of notes: on another

side, war is depicted, with pictures of guns and tanks and so on. The other two sides show racism and poverty. On top of the box there is a dictator like figure, and he has a whip, so he is powerful and the people under him - who are pulling the box - are his slaves. This shows how too much power can lead to corruption and injustice. Rishi and Phillip



Hey Hey!

My project is about the social issues in the world. As you can see, this man is trying to cheat a woman for his own profit. His life is leading nowhere; from obesity to cancer caused by the cigarette that he is smoking and the junk food that he is eating. I drew this artwork with pencil, outlined it, and then colored it with pastels. Around the poster are pictures of the issues in the world. Greed leads to theft, which could also lead to killing. Fast food leads to obesity; which could lead to having a heart attack. Smoking leads to cancer in the lungs. I chose to make this artwork because it shows a man trying to get his way out of hard work. I am very proud of what I have accomplished and grateful to say that I have gotten more used to using oil pastels. Yaman Kherallah



Our Globe

My drawing shows how global warming is burning the earth and that we have to do something to stop it. I used pastel for all the

drawing which turned out to look very good. The earth had black at the core and then it eventually turned to blue. I feel very good about the project and I hope that it helps stop global warming.

My other drawing was about peace. It had a dove with a twig in its mouth with a blue and purple background which represents peace. Khalid Al Sudairy



Our Earth: Maher Turk



Helping Hands

We all need helping hands, but those who do not even get one, need it the most. That is why we, Nadya, Tala, and Lameesa, created this awesome project. We created this project because we feel strongly about poverty and hunger. The main concept was to make two hands which is our symbol for help. The reason why we put two colors on the hand was to represent ethnicity and races. Wake up people; we are not the only people on earth! The words on the background represent how those stricken by poverty need help but the rest of the world doesn't seem to mind or even care enough. Lameesa



# HANDS ON YOUR TUMMY, SAY “CALM DOWN”

BY FAIE FREDERICKSON  
AND EMAN ZENHOM

## PARENTS TAKE A FIRST STEP TO HELP CHILDREN IN SECOND STEP



**PARENTS** of students in Pre-K through Grade 5 were invited to an introductory program designed to teach parents the skills their children are learning in their classrooms through the Second Step Program. We met with parents on November 9th to introduce this program. The first session was planned on the same day as the ES Walkathon to make it more convenient for parents to attend. The meeting began at 9:30; however, an earlier time of 8:30 a.m. was suggested by a majority of parents for future sessions. With a record-breaking number of 25 parents, including mothers and fathers, we met in the library-annex for refreshments and group activities.

Our session began with each parent joining a table group that represented what position they held in their own family birth order. What we found as a group is that the characteristics for oldest, middle, youngest, and only children share typical traits for most families. Several parents commented that “it gave perspective on our own parenting” and that birth order “does affect a person’s character.” Another comment goes on to say, “Certain personality traits are developed in children because of their birth order. It was “eye opening.” Another parent states, “I think that birth order is not the only factor that affects how kids are raised; it also depends on different families and personalities, and we would like to include whether you are

a boy or a girl.” The overall message of this opening activity was to emphasize how we are all different and that it helps us to understand our children if we can see them from another perspective.

Following this discussion, the Second Step Family Video was shared as an introduction to the program. The content of the video includes interviews with teachers, parents, and students who have worked with the Second Step Program. Second Step is a Social Skills Curriculum that helps schools and families encourage children to get along well with others. The program teaches children to think about others’ feelings, solve problems cooperatively, and manage their anger in a positive way. The umbrella organization for this program, Committee for Children: Educating the Heart and Mind, is an independent nonprofit organization whose mission is to foster the social and emotional development, safety, and well-being of children through education and advocacy.

Briefly, parents were introduced to some of the teaching tools that help our students learn the skills in this program. A movie made with first graders by our ES Drama teacher, Mrs. Heidi, and ES technology teacher, Mrs. Sara, with the help of camerawoman Mrs. Aisha, demonstrating the “Calm Down” song with sign language, was shown. Parents loved

this, and one parent even said that it was her favorite part of the morning. We also introduced Impulsive Puppy, Be Calm Bunny, and Slow Down Snail, who are puppet friends who play an ongoing role in ECE social skills lessons. One parent commented that “The use of puppets for role play is a good idea to teach young kids.” So it looks like we will enjoy bringing the puppets back to the parenting session.

During the upcoming sessions, empathy, impulse control, problem-solving, and anger-management skills will be taught so adults can practice and reinforce them with their children.

- Research on the Second Step program provides evidence that teaching these three core competencies combined with teaching and practicing specific behavioral skills can prevent problematic behavior.
- Teachers are presenting lessons using role-play and group discussions and are encouraged to incorporate these techniques every day.

Our next Second Step session on December 1st will begin with a focus on empathy, which provides the foundation on which problem-solving and emotion-management skills are built.

- It is important for children to learn empathy skills.
- Empathy is related to their social competence and academic success.
- There is evidence that empathy contributes to one’s ability to learn.
- Young children who are better at labeling and describing emotions (or empathy skills) are better accepted by their peers and are motivated to respond in a caring way.
- Children are more likely to help and give emotional support if they can take another’s perspective.

For those parents that missed out and were not able to come to the first meeting, here are a few reasons parents mentioned that you might want to join us: “I am glad I came, and very happy to have participated.”; “I enjoyed the chance to share other parents’ experiences and the chance to speak up and share any trouble.”; “It gave me a chance to think as a child.” So, we are looking forward to seeing more parents at our future sessions.