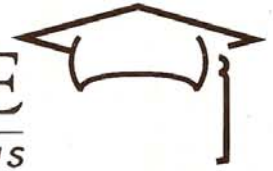


INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION IN GREECE

VIEWS FROM THE INSTITUTIONS



American Community Schools of Athens

Building bridges across the spectrum K-12 through college education

A Holistic, Meaningful and Harmonious Approach (HMH)

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Educating the individual as a whole is a challenging feat for many universities, but one that the American philosophy of education endorses and has abided by for decades. Recently similar trends have been noted in the K-12 educational environment, where students receive and participate in learning in a variety of academic areas, as well as participating in athletics, community service and civic responsibility. This "Holistic, Meaningful and Harmonious (HMH)" approach to education may lay the foundation for success in higher education and more importantly, for life itself.

Questions that arise regarding the continuation of success in a student's later years concern such issues as: How many of the skills learned in primary and secondary education really do transfer to ensure student success? Are students able to apply what they have learned from one situation to another? From one culture to another? How well do we indeed understand learning styles? And how difficult is it for institutions to provide bridging skills for young people during their time of transition?

Indeed for primary and secondary educators and administrators, the focus is an understanding of their school in order to provide the best possible education, which will also be a ticket to higher educational institutions. Similarly, faculty and administrators of higher education institutions focus on analogous goals for their institutions, and rightly so.

If we are, however, to take education to the next

level, to unite the best of both worlds, it is time to pay attention to the gap in between. It is time to build a bridge between the past, the present and the future. As we cannot separate who we are (the learner) from the knowledge we acquire (the learning), we also cannot assume that students will know how to apply the skills acquired during K-12 in higher education. Similarly, we cannot assume that the best of professors and teaching methods will ensure student success.

What makes a happy student? It is making sure that there is a match made in heaven - a perfect fit. This involves two prerequisites: 1) To know the student and 2) to know the higher education institution. **Knowing the student goes beyond academics.** It means collecting information and putting pieces of the puzzle together that will create a picture of who the student really is, what her personal strengths and weaknesses are, what life experiences have influenced the student's thinking, how she copes with challenging, unforeseen and even successful circumstances, what interests she has outside of academics, what values she upholds and what her limitations are.

This approach is what we refer to as the **holistic** approach and it considers all aspects of emotional intelligence. It means understanding and successfully cultivating the academic, emotional, physical, intellectual and ethical elements to ensure a healthy, balanced individual - an individual who will successfully cope with the changes involved when entering higher education, as well as the changes that life brings. Indeed if there is one thing that the American philosophy encourages, it is **understanding the "whole" person.** Moreover, if there is one thing that the American educational



system provides, it is **education diverse enough** to ensure that all interests and abilities are covered.

Meaningful refers to being in line with one's **principles and values**, with one's **personal and professional goals**, as well with the **institution** one leads. The educational experience must be meaningful for the learner. The learner should see it as part of his/her life and not in isolation of

knowledge. In addition, it must be meaningful in relation to his/her dreams, strengths, desires and talents. Discovering the feeling of being "**in love with life and learning**" gives life meaning and thus there is a personal interest in making "living" desirable.

Harmonious refers to the idea that **all dimensions** must be in harmony. Similar to an orchestra, working in harmony with the conductor is essential. The leader is the conductor, the one who helps all parts stay in harmony. He, in turn, is the decision maker and the decision maker is the analytical thinker, reflector, mentor, teacher and servant. There are times when it is necessary for **academics** to be the center of attention while at other times it is **athletics or student services** etc.

Finally, education must be sustainable: It cannot only be based on acquiring skills and learning a trade, but must be based on critical thinking, being creative and sharpening decision-making skills. Most importantly, all of the above must rely on one's defined principles and values in order to enhance the concept of living a full life and sustaining **ethos**, as defined by the ancient Greeks.

Beginning as early as freshmen at premier international schools such as ACS Athens, students are taught to begin thinking about putting together a **Portfolio: All About Me (PAAM)**. The portfolio includes a variety of pieces which will eventually

come together to form the puzzle of each student. It is the x-ray screen of the student's personality and character. The process of acquiring the information inspires the students to understand themselves better by seeing the "whole" picture of who they are. Thus, learning and the learner become one.

The second prerequisite for ensuring the right fit is knowing the higher educational institutions. This means investing time and energy, not only to research schools, to understanding programs and highlighting admissions criteria, but it also means getting to know the institution by getting to know its people. Thus, developing a **truthful** and **meaningful** relationship with its representatives is a vital step.

While it is important to collect information via websites, publications and alumni, nothing can replace the personal understanding of the environment within the institution. This then can only be achieved through a visit to the institution itself. No amount of information received will replace the feel one gets by being on the grounds, talking with students and faculty, seeing the facilities and experiencing the approach with which they are received.

The last piece to the puzzle involves the bridging of all the above. It is the piece that ensures continuation in the educational process and also ensures that the student transfers the skills and knowledge obtained in the K-12 environment to the higher education institution. The formation of an institute within the secondary institution will provide the forum through which the bridging will take place. During the process of establishing relationships with higher educational institutions, the secondary school administrators have the



opportunity to identify and selectively choose institutions according to size, location, focus (Business, Art, or Liberal Arts schools) and depending on student trends. Faculty from these higher education institutions are invited to teach college-level courses on the high school campus during a two- or three-week intensive period. No grades are assigned to students and thus teaching methods are flexible, as long as an atmosphere of college-level seriousness and rigor is promoted.

In conclusion, education is a two-way street between primary-secondary and higher-level education. Creating a continuum that will smooth transitions between levels is vitally important if we are to ensure the student's better success and well-being. Continuum requires that K-12 leaders at all levels are open-minded, innovative in their teaching, creative in their approach and seek continuous and open communication with colleagues in higher education.

Higher education leaders, on the other hand, make it a point to understand K-12 leaders. They become available to exchange ideas and to inspire them in order to best prepare students not only to succeed in higher education but to become productive and influential members of society.

As travelers between the two worlds - K-12 and university education - we find it refreshing and inspiring to work with colleagues; leading educators at both ends of the spectrum who have the same goals; to teach, inspire and guide students to be the best that they can be. It is only natural then that we would want to see these two worlds unite in an effort to take education to another level. The bridging between the two worlds, we are convinced, will not only produce better learners but better teachers as well.