


## Chapter 13

# The i<sup>2</sup>Flex Evolution: From Learning Methodology to School Culture Embracing the New Normal

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter presents the evolving definition, theoretical framework, and praxis of the i<sup>2</sup>Flex/blended methodology. The conditions for its success are shared, followed by a description of its implementation to date. Specific reference is made to perspectives, instruments, and processes that have served as pillars and guides for i<sup>2</sup>Flex, such as Boyer's scholarship of teaching, TPACK, the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, and the Quality Matters® course design standards and rubric. The chapter ends with reference to i<sup>2</sup>Flex implications for the teaching and learning in the elementary school during the COVID-19 pandemic, its impact to the school community, and its integration with the school culture.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The American Community Schools (ACS) Athens is a private, large JK-12 American International school located in Athens, Greece. The school is in strong support of the global vision for educational reform, having recognized that traditional educational approaches followed by K-12 academic institutions cannot serve their learners' diverse needs as effectively anymore. As an international school, ACS Athens is also affected by a rather idiosyncratic set of factors such as the lack of prescribed curriculum, the steadily multicultural environment, the mobility of the faculty and of the students (and the ensuing rolling admissions), all of which impact greatly the overall planning and modus operandi of the school. Further, the school philosophy and mission are grounded on recognizing the need for complete alignment among school learning outcomes, university and market needs (Avgerinou, 2014; Avgerinou & Gialamas, 2016).

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## ***The i2Flex Evolution***

As explained in Avgerinou and Gialamas (2016), given the general school profile, and in response to the need for global educational reform, ACS Athens has developed its own learner-centered, blended instructional methodology, called *i2Flex* (Gialamas & Avgerinou, 2015; Avgerinou & Gialamas 2016). The implementation of *i2Flex* in Grades 4-12 spans about a decade, while being systematically monitored and continually improved through a school-wide action research endeavor as part of the school's accreditation protocol. Recently, the *i2Flex* methodology has been extended to framing and guiding the design and delivery of virtual High School courses as well. The COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing quarantine measures since March 2020, severely disrupted educational continuity in institutions around the globe with most of them reverting to Emergency Remote Teaching solutions (ERT) (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Hodges et al., 2020). In sharp contrast, the impact on ACS Athens' teaching and learning daily routines and processes was less acute. When the virtual dimension of *i2Flex* was forcefully put to the test, especially regarding the Elementary School, it proved that *i2Flex* was more than an instructional methodology: over the years it had indeed become an integral part of the school culture.

## **DEFINING THE EVER-EVOLVING *i2Flex* METHODOLOGY**

The *i2Flex* (i squared Flex) methodology, defined as a non-traditional learning methodology, has been organically developed by the ACS Athens community of learners (Avgerinou, Gialamas, & Tsoukia, 2014; Avgerinou & Gialamas, 2016). The *i2Flex* methodology integrates student independent, inquiry-based learning that is guided and monitored by faculty with face-to-face, technology-supported learning. The main goal underlying the implementation of this learner-centered methodology in systematic, pedagogically sound ways, is the development of higher order cognitive skills as these have been specified in Bloom's revised Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), within a learning design framework that is flexible regarding time, pace, place, and/or mode.

Through linking high quality, social constructivist teaching (Vygotsky, 1978) and high quality courses with the collaborative, networked, information-rich environments that are the hallmark of the information age (Davis, et al., 2007), *i2Flex* draws firmly on the research and practice of blended learning (Clayton Christensen Institute, 2013; Hopper & Seaman, 2011), as this has been applied to K-12 across the US and internationally. Ultimately, *i2Flex* aims at cultivating and expanding students' 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills, while empowering them to function as *architects of their own learning* (ACS Athens' vision), and at the same time facilitating the successful preparation of the students for their higher education studies (where they are bound to take several courses via a blended and/or online learning), as well as their future roles both as professionals, and global citizens.

Although *i2Flex* incorporates elements from both the Flex and the Rotation models (Horn & Staker, 2011; Tucker, 2012), it can be implemented without following a centrally prescribed methodology, as it rests with the individual educator to decide how to best implement it in their classes. Nevertheless, what truly differentiates *i2Flex* from other types of blended learning is the specific requirement for student independent learning that is also inquiry-based. In an *i2Flex* context, such learning experiences are dependent on instructional design decisions that consider specific criteria (e.g. student degree of readiness, nature of content, learning goals, other class logistics), and are conducted under the close monitoring of faculty face-to-face, and/or online.

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