Chapter 19
The Pre–i²Flex Model as Applied in Upper Elementary

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is about setting the stage in upper elementary for i²Flex. The two perspectives will be presented as they are implemented in the fourth and fifth grades. The first part of the chapter will be a showcase of different instructional strategies used in both grade levels while implementing the i²Flex model. In the second part, the authors share specific examples of their practices supporting their students with the foundational skills needed to transition smoothly into the i²Flex model, while meeting curriculum demands and the needs of the 21st century learner. Students at ACS Athens are introduced to Moodle® from the 4th grade and continue to effectively use this platform in 5th grade. It is used as an integrated system in creating personalized learning environments which aim to foster student engagement, to familiarize students with technology, to build research and typing skills, to learn foundational computer skills, and lastly, these personalized learning environments serve as alternatives to traditional homework and preparation for lessons.

INTRODUCTION

Technology has been advancing at a rapid pace, making it challenging to follow. Many schools teach outdated models, and curriculum still focuses on the needs of the past, no longer benefiting the minds of the students and not evolving to meet the needs of the 21st century. As technology plays an immense role in our lives today, education also needs to be on par with this change by incorporating technology into the classroom. As educators, we constantly need to find ways to adapt to the technology and take advantage of the possibilities offered by new technologies to build a better education model, in our case by using the pre-i²Flex model to teach at the upper elementary level. Pre-i²Flex is an inquiry model in-

troduced at the elementary level. Students are guided to develop their critical thinking, effectively, and responsibly using digital information and social media platforms while implementing digital citizenship. The pre-i[2]Flex model uses an age-appropriate accommodated version of the i[2]Flex methodology for upper elementary student engagement and development of 21st Century skills.

"The i[2]Flex 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" (Avgerinou, Gialamas & Tsoukia, 2014, p. 144).

The inquiry-based teaching model enhances student engagement in their own learning as they adopt different roles in the instructional process. Learners ask questions and investigate various concepts through an interdisciplinary approach that allows them to observe and apply their critical thinking skills into everyday scientific experiences (Borovay et al., 2019, Irwanto et al., 2019). Research has shown that students prefer inquiry-based techniques that prove to be the most effective educational approach for STEM education (Lai, 2018). The i[2]Flex incorporates elements from both the Flex and Rotation models and can be implemented in ways the educators find best-fit, to meet their classroom needs. The i[2]Flex model differentiates from other blended learning approaches because there is a specific requirement for student independent learning that is also inquiry-based (Avgerinou et al., 2016).

This chapter is a collaboration between Eleftheria Maratos a veteran teacher, who has taught fifth grade and now is teaching sixth grade, and Evangelia Evloyias who is teaching fourth grade. Having extensive experience with the pre-i[2]Flex model in upper elementary, our focus while writing this chapter is to introduce how the pre-i[2]Flex model is effectively implemented in our classrooms to successfully lead our students to independent learning.

BACKGROUND

The American Community Schools (ACS) of Athens is a JK-12 International school embracing an American educational philosophy, values, beliefs, and principles located in Athens, Greece. ACS Athens is committed to inspiring students to realize and reach their unique potential.

In this chapter, the focus is on the upper elementary (fourth and fifth grade) where there are no more than 20 students per class. ACS Athens is a diverse multicultural community and the classes are heterogeneous with students ages 9-11. Our school embraces an American curriculum and uses a plethora of pedagogic methods of teaching to best meet our students' needs.

Why Do We Implement Pre-i²Flex Methodology In Upper Elementary?

As educators, one of our goals is to, "adapt teaching according to the ever-evolving trends as set by information and communication technologies in a systematic, unceasing pursuit of the optimal learning conditions for each individual student" (Avgerinou & Gialamas, 2016, page 145). Within i[2]Flex blendedness, Avgerinou & Gialamas (2016) argue that this should be perceived as a continuum of blends and instructional methodologies where the focus is on striving to optimize student learning by providing personalized learning opportunities within the classroom facilitated by technology. The aim of using

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