Chapter 34

The i²Flex Transformation of a Commemorative Event to a Service–Learning Experience

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ABSTRACT

The American Community Schools (ACS) Athens Middle School was able to transform a one-day commemorative event known as United Nations Day into long-term service-learning using i²Flex principles and methodologies. The i²Flex blended learning component enabled teachers and students to overcome time limitations and empowered students to take ownership of their service. Utilizing i²Flex strategies can prove meaningful for long term student character development, innovation, and critical thinking skills required in the 21st century. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs or Global Goals) guided the development of the Moodle course shell and a lasting service-learning experience for middle school students. The authors also discuss how the transformation of United Nations Day into authentic service-learning shaped an advisory program in the middle school and what implications it can further have in a school setting.

INTRODUCTION

At the core foundation of all teaching at ACS Athens is the deep belief that education is to challenge students to grow not only academically but "socially and ethically - to thrive as responsible global citizens." One of the belief statements of ACS Athens is that "possessing a strong sense of civic responsibility and an ethic of service is fundamental to effective global citizenship". These beliefs are a driving force for the service-learning opportunities that our students experience throughout their years at ACS Athens

and aim to "to empower individuals to transform the world as architects of their own learning", as per the vision of the school.

For over a decade in the middle school, there has been a strong tradition to celebrate United Nations Day as a commemorative event. On UN Day, which is globally celebrated on or around October 24th, students have long since been engaged with meaningful, collaborative activities which help them recognize the important work of the United Nations. A theme is identified each year, and students delve into learning about it on a deeper level as normal curricular activities are suspended on that specific day.

A shared passion for service-learning among colleagues during a time of tumultuous historical events was the catalyst that naturally transformed this one-day celebration into a long term service-learning experience. Since then, this ACS Athens Middle School program provides many opportunities for enrichment and the extension of abstract learning in the classroom to real, hands-on service experiences in our local and broader communities. The middle school advisory program provided the time and venue to build a continuum of learning throughout the whole school year.

In 2017, United Nations Day was transformed from a commemorative one-day event to an integrated service-learning component of the ACS Athens Middle School curriculum through the blended learning model, using the Moodle platform as the Learning Management System (LMS). Inquiry and reflection, as the basis of the social constructivist i^{2}Flex model of learning, were strongly infused into this venture. (Avgerinou & Gialamas, 2016). Freed from the time restraints of the physical classroom, we were able to devote more time to activities engaging higher level thinking through critical thought, project-based learning, and writing. Furthermore, i^{2}Flex provided great flexibility for the advisory teacher to use his or her own creativity to implement the blended curriculum in a way that best suits the students, while being mindful of student readiness, complexity and nature of the content, as well as the best strategies for incorporating inquiry-based learning and triggering student centered service initiatives. This transformation laid the foundation of UN Day year-round service-learning which continues to this day at the ACS Athens Middle School.

The i^{2}Flex blended model of learning provides the tools to overcome obstacles, enables teachers to facilitate the service-learning process, and empowers students to become architects of their own service. The Moodle platform facilitates guided, scaffolded learning through carefully selected educational resources. These resources ignite inquiry and lead to structured, independent research, contact with non-profit organizations, project development, as well as continuous feedback and communication with the advisory teacher who acts as a mentor through the process.

Therefore, the new service-learning vision of UN Day has bloomed and overcome the restricted time constraints of daily school curriculum and limited face-to-face time. It has turned into an inquiry-based learning experience centered on these questions: What do you see around you regarding this issue? What have you heard about this issue? What questions do you have? How can you contribute to the advancement of your specific goal in a meaningful way?

This chapter aims to present the organic development of a service-learning model based on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Global Goals), as well as the teacher collaboration and inspiration to bring such a project to fruition. This endeavour is based on the i^{2}Flex methodology, constructivist teaching theories and service-learning research. The Moodle platform was the learning system that enabled to address the components of the i^{2}Flex methodology. The ultimate goal of this endeavour is for students, acting as *architects of their own service*, to cultivate problem solving and critical thinking skills as related to societal and environmental issues in their local and global communities while developing

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