CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT, DOCUMENTATION AND DELIVERY AT IST: A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Within aim five of IST’s 2013-2016 Strategic Plan, we set the goal of ensuring consistency of curriculum delivery within grades and between subjects as one action we will take to achieve the overall aim of developing a strong collaboration between school community members to support student learning. To this end, IST has embarked upon a journey to document curriculum scope and sequence and to establish best practices in assessment development and delivery.

This work began in earnest on the Elementary Campus a few years ago and continues on the Secondary Campus. Secondary parents will understand that the recent changes to the MYP are one of the driving factors to the continual focus on curriculum documentation.

As explained by IST’s Secondary Principle, Jeff Smith, “Consistency of curriculum is always the expectation. The challenge was to confirm this is happening.” In the past, there was not one central place where curriculum documentation occurred that all faculty could access. This challenge was the impetus for establishing a centralized system of documenting curriculum in a way that all faculty can see what is happening across grade levels and from year to year within departments. ManageBac, an information system specifically designed for IB curriculum delivery and assessment, has been in use on the Secondary Campus since March 2014 and has provided us with a collaborative tool where we can centralize our curriculum and assessment documentation. Within its structure, teachers working on the same course or grade level can develop detailed units together in real time adding resources, learning targets, learning experiences, and common assessments that will ensure consistency of the skills and expectations for each course no matter who is delivering the lessons. Once documented in this central database, all teachers can use the information to understand where students have been, where they are going and how they will get there. As Mr. Smith further explains, “ManageBac is the first step and makes the curriculum a lot more transparent.”

Last year, MYP instructors, working as collaborative teaching teams, began by discussing and creating the key concepts, global contexts, related concepts, statements of inquiry, inquiry questions, and common assessments for each unit. As one teacher stated, “though it takes a lot of time, the opportunity to deeply discuss the themes of the units and how to take the students there with collaborating colleagues helped to generate many new ideas for units”. This school year, the MYP curriculum documentation process continues with the detailed work on specifying learning targets, student experiences, teaching resources, and tasks being debated and finalized by collaborative teams.

DP teachers will embark on the first stage of the documentation process this school year.

ManageBac is constructed mostly on the MYP unit model. Therefore, one Elementary grade level is piloting the use of ManageBac to construct curriculum in order to test how the system might be used with PYP models. Currently, teachers on the Elementary
Campus rely on the features of Google Apps (including Google Docs) to work collaboratively on curriculum documentation.

Once completed, ManageBac documentation will also make identifying interdisciplinary teaching opportunities easier. As James Elder, Head of Department of Individuals and Societies commented, “Documentation in ManageBac will allow teachers to be able to see where skills and content may complement each other across subjects so that we may be able to identify natural areas of alignment to be used for interdisciplinary approaches to learning.”

Understanding interdisciplinary connections between subjects allows teaching professionals to identify potential areas for skill and concept transference, where a student can see how to take the skill or ideas learnt in one subject and apply them appropriately to a different situation in another subject. According to the Consortium for Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning’s 1995 position statement, the benefit of interdisciplinary teaching is that it can eliminate “artificial barriers among subject areas” resulting in students creating a “broader context for solving real-life problems”. Once we identify these natural alignments we can capitalize on those interdisciplinary teachable moments and extend students’ problem solving and evaluation skills.

In addition to the curriculum documentation now taking place, there is also an effort for the school to streamline best practices for assessment. As an international faculty, teachers come from a broad array of experiences including various methods of assessment. In this group, we have the opportunity to discuss different approaches to assessment and marking in order to create essential agreements that take in the best practices from those varied experiences. As a new group, the essential agreements are a work in progress. What is clear however is that the dialogue has sparked conversations between teachers and within departments on how to best assess our students on skills and content and what the final grade should represent about their learning. Teachers draw upon their own experiences and also the models created by other teaching groups to generate ideas and come to agreements on what we feel is best for IST students.

Beyond the creation of essential agreements on assessment, the committee hopes to examine each agreement and discuss practical ways in which the idea might be implemented in various classrooms and across subjects.

Martin Hall, Director, notes, “Consistency is important but uniformity is not our goal. Each classroom will be different because all students are different and have different interests. Lessons and discussions can take a turn and I want teachers to be able to follow that turn if warranted. I don’t see that as contradictory with ensuring that we have consistent learning standards and outcomes.”

The work done so far to meet our strategic plan goal, both on documentation and assessment, represents the building blocks needed to establish a solid curricular foundation. Once each programme in the primary and secondary schools achieves that academic foundation, bridges between the programmes can be carefully designed and implemented. Many extra hours are being given by faculty to the process of gathering, redesigning and documenting years of work in curriculum development. The process takes time to do it right, but the rewards will be great and the results can position IST as a global leader in international education.

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**CASE STUDY OF COLLABORATION IN CURRICULUM DELIVERY**

**Grade 7 Water Study**

- students develop a mathematical sponsorship plan to support the purchase of a water tank for Mji Mkuu Primary School in Morogoro
- work is based on algebraic formulas and investigating how much water differently shaped tanks can hold
- includes writing letters seeking sponsors and studying the politics of water in their humanities classes
- the final experience of this unit involves walking 6km (the average distance women and children in the developing world walk to collect water) carrying from 4 to 10 kg of water

“Please know the entire spectrum of experiences, from calculating volumes of containers, to helping purchase a water tank for a primary school, to experiencing the length many people must travel to collect water, sounds fantastic. This is another of many remarkable examples of holistic education students receive at IST.”

- Grade 7 Parent commenting on the Grade 7 Water Study

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The poet William Blake once wrote, “As the true method of knowledge is experiment, the true faculty of knowing must be the faculty which experiences.” It is in this spirit that we as teaching practitioners seek to know, adapt, adjust and grow in order to serve our students in the best possible way.

We want to know what is best and to find that we must be open to new methods, practices, technologies, and resources and be able to experiment with them. This is the purpose of the establishment of the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) at IST.

In some models the PLC is a professional group that meets to discuss and problem solve together on issues of institutional change, or in committees to focus on a particular aspect of student learning or progress. Within the IST structure a small group of teaching professionals form groups centered on various themes that members have expressed an interest in, rather than a wider and school dictated topic.

In IST, the teachers submitted their topics of interests through their department heads. The ideas were then examined and grouped into common themes. Teachers advocating for topics under those themes were then grouped together. This year, three major themes emerged: electronic platforms for assessment, differentiation, and formative assessments. As Jeff Smith, Secondary Principal and architect of the IST version of the PLC explained, “Last year we had a set topic but this year wanted to allow for teacher choice. There are broad themes but the path within the theme could go many directions according interest. This allows more flexibility to chose from their [teachers] interest and choice.”

Specific topics to be discussed within each group must fit the theme but will truly find their genesis in a teacher’s individual practice.

Once groups are formed and a group facilitator is chosen, the Critical Friends function comes to the forefront. Kevin Fahey and Jacy Ippiliito of the School Reform Initiative in their February 2014 research entitled Toward a General Theory of Critical Friends Groups defines Critical Friends as “highly-articulated professional learning communities in which educators learn the skills of reflecting, collaborating, deprivatizing practice, and exposing and exploring fundamental assumptions related to teaching and learning.” In the role of a critical friend, one is to examine and analyze an idea for best practice of another professional and provide ideas, insight, and constructive criticism that can lead to transforming the teaching practice and improve its reach beyond one teacher’s opinions and experiences. Essential to the critical friend structure is that the critical friend should not be a person of “authority” over the participant. The idea is a collegial relationship were the partners are peers and can respond honestly, without the shadow of judgment present, to create a genuine and forthright dialogue. In the IST model, whole groups can act as critical friends as the PLC groupings are fairly small, or smaller groups of three or four teachers may form within a group according to aligned interests and expertise.

Within the structure, teachers take several approaches. A teacher may bring in a project that has not worked as well as he or she would have liked and ask for guidance on how to change and improve it for students. Critical friends evaluate and give feedback to the teacher on the existing project and may suggest new ideas that could be used for improvement. In another instance, a teacher may bring a new teaching methodology with which he or she would like to experiment and ask...
critical friends to assist in developing the idea or adding new tools and resources to the plans. After the development phase, teachers have the opportunity to experiment with their newly cultivated ideas within the classroom, bringing these new teaching practices into action. In PLC sessions after the action, results will be presented and critical friends can assist the teacher in reflecting on the method’s effectiveness. Here, further suggestions for improvement can be made through constructive and non-judgmental dialogue.

Daniel Flynn, a PLC Facilitator for one of the three electronic platforms PLCs, explains why many teachers may have gravitated towards technology. He states, “Given the challenges of our environment in Tanzania in regards to software availability and, sometimes, intermittent internet connection, teachers are often seeking ways to deepen their knowledge and find alternatives for the technology we have.” He further describes the groups and the nature of their work as a sort of “innovation laboratory” and that within this laboratory, “Some ideas will work and others won’t, but all will generate new ideas that we would not have discovered otherwise.”

The benefits also go beyond the IST walls. As Mr. Smith explains, “Several teachers are now presenting at international conferences and workshops partly due to work done within PLC initiatives and research.” As Stacy Giandalia, the MYP art teacher who presented her work from the PLC at the ECIS Professional Development Conference in France stated, “The PLC helped me to better understand the theory and practice of different types of assessment (Diagnostic, Formative and Summative).” She developed a system for visual, written, and oral feedback in art to add value to the use of tools for formative assessment aimed to “aid in student growth and artistic success.” She notes that within the PLC, “We were able to offer one another feedback as we began to individually compile a toolbox of ‘go to’ formative assessment activities and put them into play within our classroom.” This process she credits as being most valuable to the techniques she will present in the conference to assist other international educators in the visual arts.

The PLC and Critical Friend structure can have a transformative “ripple effect”. As new practices are share between teachers from various backgrounds and disciplines we learn from each other new techniques and theories that can be transferred from one classroom to another. Jeff Smith describes the work he has seen in the system as “reaffirming” and commented on the sheer volume and quality of the new ideas generated from this practice.

IST TEACHERS IN THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY

David Pallas recently completed training to become an MYP workshop leader.

Courtney Park was chosen to give two presentations at the recent ECIS librarians’ conference.

Stacy Giandalia gave a presentation at the ECIS conference on formative assessment in Art which was featured in the ECIS Art Committee newsletter (shown at right).

Aimee Hill gave a presentation at the ECIS conference on the use of current events in developing writing skills in language acquisition.

Martin Hall took part in a CIS/NEASC accreditation team visit to a school in Italy.

Tom Triller has co-authored a textbook that has just been published by the IB on MYP Individuals & Societies (shown at right).

Sam Cook was selected to take part in a PYP think tank, in October in the Netherlands, as part of the IB’s current review of the PYP.
parents play an integral role in IST’s school learning community and they have the chance to contribute positively to enhancing our learning community through a number of ways including

- Homeroom and Grade Parents
- Assisting with events such as the Elementary Campus’ Environment Week and hosting visiting athletes from other schools during competitions
- Serving on the school Board to help provide strategic direction for the school
- Celebrating IST’s diversity through International Day on the Elementary Campus
- Welcoming new families
- Attending Elementary and Secondary Parent Network (EPN and SPN) meetings
- Helping to provide students with a varied range of positive learning experiences such as IST’s Got Talent or through ongoing community engagement initiatives
- Promoting a sense of fun and well being through events such as the EC/KG Fun Day and the Elementary Friendship Duka
- Showing appreciation to teachers as well as staff for their significant work.

Recently, the SPN began working on a new initiative to bring speakers on campus to motivate students and the community in general. The SPN are inviting inspiring personalities, leaders, scholars, professionals, artists and people who have made a difference to participate in this speaker series. Parents will be encouraged to attend these events with their children. Check the Weekly Bulletin for more information as the programme takes off. For now, parents can mark their calendar for the first event featuring:

Andrew Perkin, Conservationist

Mathew Hadden, Recycling in Dar es Salaam

Wednesday, 21st January

7 - 8pm

Secondary Library

These opportunities facilitated by parents make a genuine difference to the learning experiences of our students. They also say something powerful to our children about how much parents value our school.

To learn more about how you can get involved, plan on attending the Elementary and/or Secondary Parent Network meetings which are posted on the calendar. You can also keep in touch with the EPN or SPN via email or Facebook:

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<th>EPN</th>
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<td>email</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>IST Elementary Parent Network Group</td>
<td>IST Secondary Parent Network Group</td>
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Finally, parents who are interested in serving on the Board should plan on attending the informational luncheon scheduled for Wednesday, April 15th from 12-1pm. More information will follow as the date approaches.
COLLABORATING FOR A GREENER COMMUNITY

One of IST’s Strategic Aims is to reduce the school’s environmental impact. Achieving this aim requires each of us to be willing to change our practices and work collaboratively as a community striving to make improvements in how we handle limited resources.

IST has taken several steps to facilitate the reduction of the adverse affect of our impact on the environment. The most recent initiatives are summarized in the table below.

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<th>INITIATIVE</th>
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<tr>
<td>Recycling scheme</td>
<td>IST is working with a local firm, The Recycler, to collect and recycle Clear glass bottles Green glass bottles Brown glass bottles Cardboard White paper Cans and Tins Plastic bottles</td>
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<td>Bus service</td>
<td>Parents can take advantage of the bus service that began in September. The service includes •Morning pickup of students in Grades 3-5 at the Secondary Campus to reach the Elementary Campus before 7am. An optional after school return trip takes the students back to the Secondary Campus. •Morning pickup of students in Grades 6-12 at the Elementary Campus at 7am to reach Secondary before school starts. An optional after school return trip takes the students back to the Elementary Campus after activities. Contact the Bus Service Coordinator, Maureen Gideon, on <a href="mailto:busservice@istafrica.com">busservice@istafrica.com</a> for more information.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solar panels</td>
<td>The school has purchased solar panels for installation on each campus. Installation of trial solar panels on the Secondary Campus should be completed soon.</td>
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<td>Connection to the curriculum</td>
<td>There are numerous instances where awareness about environmental issues is connected to work in the classroom, from EC to Grade 12 as well as after school activities and field trips. For example, in Grade 1, an investigation on how materials change over time included a comparison of biodegradable and non-biodegradable materials. In Grade 7, the topic of water receives well-deserved attention from several points of view including calculating volumes, people’s access to water, water usage and recycling.</td>
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<td>Role of Students</td>
<td>The Elementary Student Action Council has been visiting Elementary classrooms to let students know about the on-campus recycling initiative. Students are encouraged to sort school waste appropriately and families have been participating by bringing in their sorted recyclables from home. Since the programme’s inception in mid-October, IST Elementary has recycled • 12 kilograms of plastic bottles • 40 kilograms of cardboard • 10 kilograms of white paper All cardboard and white paper went to a local manufacturer, which converts it into toilet paper rolls and brown envelopes. Plastic bottles are given to local traders who process them into flakes and then export them to China. These are then used to make new plastic bottles, plastic chairs or even shirts or jackets. The recycling programme will be launched on the Secondary Campus shortly. The Design Technology Club have been making bulk bag frames and CAS groups are heavily involved in setting up the scheme including painting the signs and encouraging student participation.</td>
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The Secondary Campus Roots and Shoots club offered an IST water bottle as an alternative to plastic water bottles beginning in 2010. The reusable water bottle can be bought through the Tahera Sumar in the Counsellor’s Office (proceeds benefiting Roots and Shoots) for Tshs 10,000/=.

Role of Teachers and Staff

In addition to supporting student learning and student action in the recycling scheme, teachers continue to connect environmental issues with classroom projects to create authentic learning opportunities. Planning is underway for an Environment Week to take place on the Elementary Campus next semester as well. In another important but less noticeable way, teachers contribute to reducing the school’s environmental impact by first reusing and recycling teaching materials as a normal practice and second, opting for environmentally friendly and/or locally produced materials as much as possible.

Staff members have been trained on the recycling scheme and are participating in sorting recyclable materials on campus for collection by the local firm, The Recycler. In addition, the Kaizen Management System continues to be implemented at IST. At its core, Kaizen is about reducing inefficiencies in the workplace through the efforts of project teams who work to streamline processes and reduce waste.

Role of Parents

In addition to participating in the bus service described above, parents play a role in the greater community through considering the environmental impact when planning events such as the well loved International Day as well as the upcoming Friendship Duka Day on the Elementary Campus. IST parents are also active in several local initiatives to help cleanup our surroundings including:

- Nipe Fagio
- The Recycle / Freecycle Dar es Salaam Group on Facebook

THE IST ALUMNI NETWORK

IST Alumni are active in Dar es Salaam and around the world. Alumni and former students automatically become members of the Alumni Association. For more information about the Alumni network, contact the Alumni Association via email on alumni@istafrica.com.
In May 2013, the school adopted a Service Charter that outlines our approach to promoting professional standards of service. In order to help us build our skills in customer service, 40 IST staff members took part in a one day workshop led by an outside facilitator to help us improve our level of service and learn strategies for coping with difficult situations.

The staff members approached the workshop with enthusiasm and were eager participants. Topics covered included understanding the affect of body language, learning to be effective listeners and understanding customers’ needs and expectations. Although the training session was short, all participants found it extremely valuable and relevant to their roles in school.