



ACS Tunis Is Out From Behind School Walls at Last

By Matt Piercy

The country of Tunisia is no stranger to change. Successive civilizations—the ancient Phoenicians, Romans, Ottomans, and most recently the French—all left abundant remains. Its cultural roots are a tangle of both Berber and Arabic influences. Here, change is truly a constant, witnessed throughout the ages.

For the past six decades, The American Cooperative School of Tunis (ACST) has embraced this inevitable change. Recently, this manifested in the reinstatement for the 2018–19 academic year of the previously discontinued Tunisian Studies trips, or Week Without Walls Program.



Grade 8 students from the American Cooperative School of Tunis take a break on the stairs at El Djem Amphitheater, which dates back to the third century and is a cherished UNESCO World Heritage Site (photo: ACST).

A “return” to learning outside the classroom? What happened, you may wonder?

January will mark the eight-year anniversary of Tunisia’s transition

from dictatorship to democracy. Commonly known as the Jasmine Revolution, this pivotal event is seen by many as having served as a catalyst for the Middle Eastern

region’s tumultuous Arab Spring. When protests escalated at the American Embassy, just across the street from ACST, the school was ... continued on p. 6

Wellbeing Ranks High Among International School Staff & Students

By Anne Keeling

Over 1,000 international school teachers and leaders have participated in the first-ever research on student and teacher wellbeing. The study asked respondents about their own wellbeing as professionals working in an international school, as well as about the wellbeing of their students.

The research was conducted by International Educational Psychology Services (IEPS) and Cardiff University School of Psychology, supported by ISC Research. It engaged teachers and leaders from international schools in 70 countries, representing every region of the world.



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EARCOS Fetes its Fiftieth

From 25–27 October, 2018, over 1,000 international educators gathered at the Shangri-La hotel in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia to attend the 50th-annual EARCOS Leadership Conference 2018, hosted by the East Asia Regional Council of Schools.

Under the theme “Celebrating Our Legacy, Inspiring Our Future,” attendees gathered to hear powerful keynote speakers—including Sir John Jones, Pasi Sahlberg, and Kim Phuc Phan Thi—along with countless committed workshop presenters and speakers.

TIE Editor Meadow Hilley spoke with outgoing EARCOS Executive Director Dick Krajczar as he visited family in Pennsylvania.



Meadow Hilley: You’ve just celebrated a major milestone at the 50th annual Leadership Conference of the East Asia Regional Council of Schools (EARCOS). What was the experience like for you?

Dick Krajczar: Thinking about where we were 50 years ago in East Asia as compared to where we are today, it’s pretty amazing. There’s been an explosion of international schools in our region.

When I first started doing this job, we probably had between ... continued on p. 4

Celebrating EARCOS’s 50th anniversary are Executive Director Dick Krajczar and his wife, Sherry, bookended by long-time EARCOS board member and President Harlan Lyso and his wife, Mary.

Studies Reveal High Levels of Formative Assessment Use by International School Teachers

By Anton Pav

Teachers in international schools use formative assessment teaching strategies more often than do their counterparts in national schools in the United States, according to a recent study that included institutions in West Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and South America. International educators should be proud of this news because formative classroom assessment strategies have been shown to dramatically raise student achievement (Hudesman et al. 2015).

Using the formative assessment strategies articulated by Jan Chapuis in her 2015 book *Seven Strategies of Assessment for Learning*, I surveyed teachers in numerous international schools to determine how frequently they used formative assessment strategies, such as setting clear learning targets in student-friendly language, sharing

models of strong and weak work, providing descriptive feedback, or providing students with opportunities to revise work before a final version is graded. Applying statistical analysis, I compared levels of use among teachers at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, but also among subject area teachers, and among male and female teachers. Further, levels of formative assessment use among international school teachers were compared to those of teachers in national systems in the U.S.

As a whole, results indicate that international school teachers use research-tested best practices quite frequently. Seventy-five percent of international school teachers use these strategies more than 70 percent of the time (Pav 2018).

This result is especially noteworthy when compared to other groups of teachers, such as those ... continued on p. 4

Standards Are Not Just for Kids

By Bambi Betts

International school leaders are ever earnestly in search of tools and processes that will keep the school focused on student learning. This is a tough assignment when traditional tools—from recruitment to teacher evaluation to student assessment—perpetually compete for our attention. So where do we look, and how will we know which of those resources will make the most difference to learning?

A promising place to start

Educational research across the board points to quality of teaching as the number one school-based factor contributing to learning. When school leaders set high standards for teachers then monitor progress toward achieving them, more and better learning happens. In so doing, they reaffirm that teaching is a profession. Because that’s what professions do, after all—they set standards, raise them ... continued on p. 10

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Wellbeing in International Schools

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Over half of the respondents (51 percent) were classroom teachers, 22 percent of whom had management responsibility. Twenty-one percent were in a leadership role, 11 percent were specialist teachers, and 5 percent were teaching assistants.

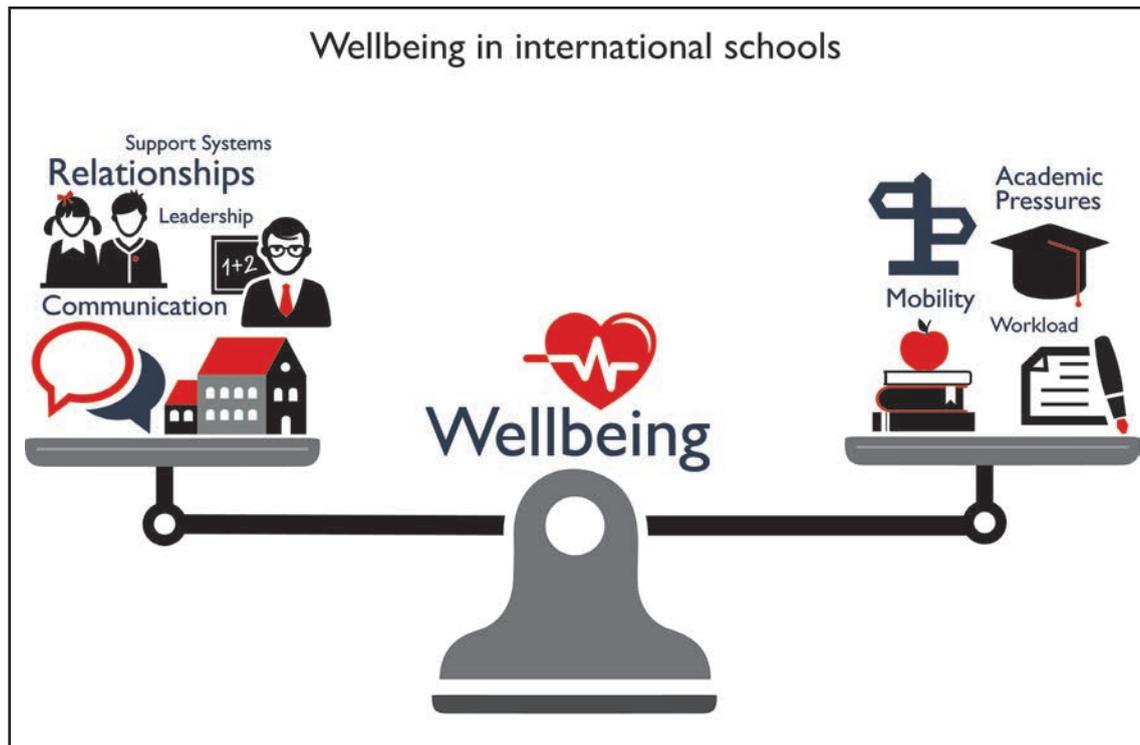
The international experience of the respondents was extensive; 40 percent had between 4 and 11 years' experience teaching or leading in international schools, and 35 percent had over 12 years. The size of schools varied significantly: 46 percent of the schools represented in the study had over 1,000 students enrolled, while 24 percent had less than 400.

The balance of challenges and resources

The definition of "wellbeing" remains a subject of debate. For the purposes of this study, researchers followed the definition proposed by Dodge, Daly, Huyton, and Sanders, which appeared in the International Journal of Wellbeing in 2012: "Stable wellbeing is when individuals have the psychological, social, and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social, and/or physical challenge. When individuals have more challenges than resources, the see-saw dips, along with their wellbeing, and vice-versa."

Supportive relationships, robust communication, effective support systems, and clear, strong leadership were identified as key factors for the establishment and maintenance of staff and student wellbeing in international schools. The research suggests that these factors appear to be very powerful in counter-balancing the impact of more negative aspects of international school life, which include workload demands and pressure for results among teachers, and mobility between schools and academic pressures among students.

The balance of challenges faced within international schools and the resources that many teachers and students have at their disposal



appeared positive. "Although we were very aware that international schools have significant challenges, some of which are reflected in the wider education sector (for example, academic pressure), the biggest surprise was how positive many people were, how their wellbeing was high, and how they were therefore able to take a positive view on challenging areas and recognize what was working well for them," reported study authors Angie Wigford of IEPS and Andrea Higgins of Cardiff University School of Psychology.

Relationships matter

The survey, which included quantitative and qualitative questions in addition to a number of interviews, produced some other unexpected results. It identified that a school's environment, facilities, resources, and class sizes do not guarantee that staff or students will be happy or work to the best of their ability. Rather, it is relationships that have the greatest impact on student and staff wellbeing.

"Positive relationships in education are really important for resilience and mental health, however, we were struck by just how fundamentally important they were for the people in the international school sector," said the authors. "We felt that, in part, this was because people were often moving away from their families and es-

tablished relationships, and that transitioning between schools can be traumatic for anyone."

The research suggested that teachers and counsellors play an active part in the wellbeing of their colleagues and students.

"What they do can make a huge difference," said the authors. "Attitude, positivity and respect are important. A sense of belonging is a basic human psychological need, and leaders and teachers need to be aware of the importance of this for both student and staff wellbeing."

It became apparent from the research that some international schools have an ethos and practice that actively promotes and supports staff in their potentially challenging aspects of school life, but other schools do not seem to acknowledge it. The research identified that a lack of acknowledgement by the school caused difficulties for staff and presented barriers to the development of a sense of belonging.

Strategic support of wellbeing

Several clear objectives for international school senior leadership teams came out of the results of the wellbeing study. One of these was recognizing the value of positive relationships, which do not happen automatically but need to be enabled in strategic ways. Many respondents expressed that when positive relationships are encour-

aged in a range of contexts (staff to student, staff to staff, student to student, staff to parent, and so on), this impacts positively on the whole school.

"Simple steps can make a big difference," said the authors. "Ethos is important. Interventions do not work well without also having a whole school ethos encouraging positive relationships."

Frequent and unexplained change causes significant challenges to wellbeing, while clear communication in preparation for change is beneficial.

Teachers value autonomy highly, feeling respected when they are trusted to do their work independently. Micro-management and unexplained top-down decisions impact negatively on staff.

Staff responsibility for wellbeing

Teachers and counsellors play a central role in the wellbeing of students and their colleagues. "What they do can make a huge difference," said the authors.

The manner and attitude with which teachers and counsellors work with parents and students is significant; positivity and respect are very important. Vulnerable students are a minority, but the research identified that most people have some concerns that could impact their wellbeing and teachers need to think more about how these can be addressed and supported.

It is important for teachers and counsellors to understand the balance model of wellbeing, said the authors. "Anyone can become vulnerable when their challenges exceed their resources (their ability to cope)," they said. "Teachers need to understand and develop their own personal coping strategies in order to develop emotional resilience and be able to support their students effectively."

International schools may face many challenges that staff and students have to manage, but it is concluded that where they have strong, supportive relationships, people are more able to cope. ●



The full wellbeing report, which includes analysis of both the qualitative and quantitative research, is available free from enquiries@iscresearch.com at ISC Research.



The International Educator (TIE) is published by the Overseas Schools Assistance Corporation, a private, non-profit corporation chartered in Massachusetts, USA. Four issues are published annually in October, December, February, and April, as well as a jobs-only supplement in June.

TIE is committed to environmental practices in its printing process.

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