Chapter 11

A True Manifestation of gMp:
Dogs in Elementary School Learning

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents the basic concept and the components of the Dogs in Learning (DiL) program, as a true reflection of the gMp. The implementation of the program at ACS Athens has shown that curriculum subjects can be taught more effectively and in a playful and enjoyable manner when the learner is fully engaged with the help of dogs in the learning process. By following a Spiral Curriculum using instructional dogs, several basic issues related to human behavior are internalized by the students. In addition, the DiL program can successfully address the bullying phenomenon of our society; and, finally, the DiL program can inspire students to develop the wisdom to transform their educational experience.

INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions must inspire their students to develop the wisdom to transform their educational experience into social, economic, environmental, intellectual and ethical resources to improve their lives. As a result, academic institutions, now more than ever, have to provide new educational opportunities and experiences. ACS Athens by strongly believing in fulfilling that need, as well as by having a culture of developing and implementing innovative programs while adopting an authentic leadership approach to transform student’s lives, it has developed and implemented an educational approach called the Global Morfosis Paradigm (gMp), which has been described in detail earlier in the book (Preface).

Moreover, based on the ever-present desire of the ACS Athens’ leadership to utilize such an integrated Educational Paradigm in its program, a new educational approach has been developed and applied (K-5),

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that is called Dogs in Learning (DiL) (Birbil et al., 2015). This program which represents a noteworthy Manifestation of the Global Morfosis Paradigm is designed to use highly trained instructional dogs as an inspirational vehicle to help children understand and apply everyday issues to learning, and thus create a fresh and innovative approach to teaching and learning. This approach is based on the understanding that, like humans, dogs possess psychological and behavioral norms, and thus we can easily relate dogs’ actions to human behavior in correlation with the principles of gMp.

The program leaders are a certified dog educator (T. Koutsopoulos) and a first grade teacher (C. Birbil). It is important to note that the teacher’s daily class schedule involves her three-legged, rescued dog (Captain Chip).

MANIFESTING THE GLOBAL MORFOSIS PARADIGM: DOGS IN LEARNING (DiL)

As it was mentioned earlier the Global Morfosis Paradigm is a dynamic pedagogical approach consisting of three inseparable, interconnected, and interrelated components: the Morfosis Educational Philosophy, from the Greek word Μόρφωση (ethical, intellectual and social shaping of the human character); the i² Flex (isquareFlex), a non-traditional learning methodology; and the Aristeia, from the Greek word Αριστεία (pursuing excellence under the guidance of ethos). Therefore, any educational program within this framework, such as the Dogs in Learning, have to clearly manifest as well as fulfill the goals and objectives of these components.

The Morfosis Educational Philosophy in DiL

In general, the Morfosis Educational Philosophy is a Holistic approach focusing on successfully combining academic, emotional, physical, intellectual and ethical components of education in order to ensure a healthy and balanced individual. That is, students address all questions in a holistic approach not only intellectually but also emotionally. Whether it is in mathematics, social studies, or a reading question they are immersed in the learning process using all of their senses at the same time that their intellectual ability is challenged.

Based on this philosophy, in the Dogs in Learning program, students in answering a meaningful question related to amount of food a specific dog needs to survive or how much it will cost to keep a dog healthy, basically eliminate the usual questions asked by them such as “why it is important to learn a specific concept?” or “where I am going to use this mathematical concept”? At the same time, principles and values such as: is it ok to abuse a dog? What is our responsibility to helpless animals as ethical citizens students are tested, answered and reinforced.

The i²Flex Methodology

Drawing on the research and practice of blended learning, i²Flex integrates independent, inquiry-based student learning that is guided by a faculty mentor, and face-to-face learning that is flexible in terms of pace, time, place, and/or mode of delivery. Given this delivery methodology, much of the world of knowledge acquisition associated with the intellectual process of remembering, understanding, and application, can be accomplished through online learning activities, as well as independent, purposeful