

DIRection

Research Game Plan

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A Pivot at the ISP Library

When Assil Charara started working at ISP's Primary School library in 2013, a parent volunteer program was already in place. Parent volunteers worked in one corner of the library, using a computer to help children check out books, or to register returned books and shelve them.

Assil worked in a different corner and used a second computer to help students with their research or to prepare lessons. Often it was only American and British mothers who came to help with library tasks.

Assil, who thought the second computer was taking up too much space in the library, asked to have it removed. At the time she had no idea that making such a small change in her environment would have an impact on the volunteer program.

She now realises that removing the second computer was the catalyst that sparked the program's organic development: it allowed her to have more interactions with parents and to develop friendships with them.

Before the COVID-19 crisis, the volunteer pool was large and greatly diversified. Mothers and fathers from multiple countries and cultures (India, Mexico, England, Turkey, US, Lebanon, Denmark, Belarus, Japan, Vietnam, Singapore, Finland and Israel) met every day to make the library a dynamic learning environment. Checking in books and shelving was not enough anymore.

Co-teaching students and co-caring for the library was their objective. They repaired, classified, organised and suggested books. They donated books to enrich the selection for students. They read to students in their own mother tongue. They shared their expertise with students, through presentations related to class work.

Parents didn't just give to the school and students, they gave to each other as well. They helped each other better understand the Primary Years Programme curriculum, they shared recipes and parenting advice and they celebrated special occasions together. Assil's favorite part of leading the volunteers was parents' commitment to giving, both inside and outside of the school.

Bravo to Assil, who paid attention to her learning environment and dared to change it! What an amazing pivot!