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Aligning UN goals and learning goals

Students at UNIS Hanoi are committed to sharing learning experiences. Emma Silva reports...

Shared values between the United Nations (UN) and the International Baccalaureate (IB) have provided an ideal framework for learning at the United Nations International School Hanoi. And as the school celebrates '30 Years of Learning to Inspire', the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been brought even more sharply into focus as a key driver in curriculum development. Since the launch of the SDGs in 2015, UNIS Hanoi has made intentional efforts to integrate them with the IB units of inquiry. Recognising its unique opportunity – as one of only two United Nations international schools – to make a global impact, work started immediately the SDGs were launched, with UNIS Hanoi students from Discovery (age 3) through to Grade 10 actively exploring and reflecting upon the aspirational goals as part of their science, maths, languages, humanities, arts and sports lessons.

Devised to tackle global concerns such as gender equality,

climate action, clean water and sanitation, peace and justice, and education, the SDGs aim to make the world a better, safer place for all. Furthermore, the United Nations has challenged itself to achieve firm targets by 2030, the same year in which our five and six year olds will graduate from school. The 15 year duration of the SDGs proves beneficial for whole-school learning, and means that students will receive multiple chances over the years to know more not only about the Goals, but also about the UN and its overall mission.

The architects behind the integrated curriculum at UNIS Hanoi are Primary Years Programme (PYP) Coordinator, Angela Meikle and Middle Years Programme (MYP) Coordinator, Cindy Barnsley. The duo mapped out the links between SDGs and the school's programme of inquiry, ensuring all opportunities to explore a Goal are taken. And what seemed a difficult task at first, revealed Cindy, was quickly achievable because the SDGs naturally connect to the IB curriculum's

focus on action and service. Angela further observed that “The values of what the IB wants in an internationally minded student, and what the United Nations wants, are closely aligned”, while Cindy continued: “Integrating the SDGs with our curriculum helps us live the mission statements of both UNIS Hanoi and the United Nations, and helps us really see how we connect together.”

In the Early Childhood Centre and Elementary School, all Sustainable Development Goals are taught in age-appropriate ways. Despite some potentially daunting topics, such as SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), children are effortlessly grasping the issues. In Grade 2, for example, as part of their unit of inquiry integrating humanities, students were tasked to select SDGs and redesign them to reflect what they mean (See Figure below); while Grade 1 students convey their understanding through poetry. In the Middle School years up to Grade 10, students delve into these global concerns in much greater depth, often required to debate, research and write compelling assignments, or even dramatize some of the scenarios around the SDGs.

Both Coordinators stress that it’s not only the themes that make the integrated approach successful; it’s also the calls to action they garner – a key component of the IB. As Cindy explained: “One of the things that differentiates us as an IB community is the focus on action.” Angela added that “We want students taking action – in the local community and global community. As students move through our programme, their knowledge and understanding of these goals will continue to deepen, combined with how they would take action to make a difference. I think it’s exciting to keep putting the question back to the students to say ‘What will you do?, because it’s your world.’”

As a result of this commitment to action, UNIS Hanoi has dedicated considerable resources and precious time within

the schedule to embed service learning into the Middle and High School curriculums, embracing the opportunity provided by the three IB programmes offered to make responding to authentic community needs a part of each student’s learning every year they attend our school. UNIS Hanoi has connected each of its 35 service projects to Sustainable Development Goals with the intent that every project will make a real long-lasting impact, while guided by specific Goals such as no poverty, gender equality, good health and well-being or quality education, to name but a few.

The brainchild behind the initiative is UNIS Hanoi’s Middle and High School Service Learning Coordinator, Colin Campbell, who says he hopes the SDGs will become a ‘vocabulary’ for the school to use in order to assess the effectiveness of its programmes. He continues, “We make service a core part of the Middle and High School experience. There isn’t an opt-out. But it’s not enough to have kids in clubs or groups; we want to make sure that the programmes they are involved in are making a difference in Vietnam – and the right kind of difference. As a UN-connected school, it was organic to link our service initiatives with the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals. They are an excellent set of targets to motivate the students with.”

At the beginning of the school year, students in Grades 6 to 12 received a handbook detailing each service learning programme and the specific SDGs they relate to. For example, the Swim for Life programme links to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 4 (Quality Education). New for this year is the *A Slice of Hanoi* cooking group that is addressing SDG 2 (to End Hunger, Achieve Food Security and Improved Nutrition, and Promote Sustainable Agriculture). Also new this year, the whole Grade 7 class are focused on SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) through their work in the UNIS community gardens and connected projects.



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



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– Colin Campbell**

With these strong links made at the very start, students and their teachers will be able to better gauge the true impact of their activities over the year. “We want students to question whether they actually reduced poverty, promoted quality education or gender equality, or good health and well-being – which are just some of the Goals for a number of the projects” said Mr Campbell. “What we are doing is setting ourselves up to a higher standard.” And there is no higher standard than impacting the UN’s 2030 goals. At the launch of this curriculum endeavour, UN-appointed Board member, Ms Claire Montgomery, called on all faculty to commit to sharing learning experiences that exemplify the work of the UN, and in particular the drive towards achieving the SDGs by 2030. She said, “As our students progress through the school, the Sustainable Development agenda can serve as a reminder of the highest ambitions of international cooperation. We look forward to a more peaceful, equitable and just world by 2030, and we hope our students feel equipped to contribute to this ambitious agenda.”

This commitment to action and development, and the impact that it has had on Vietnam’s development, is recognised and appreciated by our host country government. At the School’s 30th UN Day celebrations this month, Foreign Affairs Vice Minister Le Hoai Trung, who was until last year Vietnam’s ambassador to the UN, paid tribute, saying that “UNIS Hanoi is the symbol of the commitment of the UN to Vietnam. UNIS Hanoi is also a symbol of the expansion of the cooperation, and you see in the growth of UNIS also the achievements of Vietnam. I very much wish that UNIS will continue to be the symbol of the UN.”

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If you are interested in writing an article for International School magazine, we would like to hear from you!

The editors of *International School*, Prof Mary Hayden and Prof Jeff Thompson, would like to encourage teachers and leaders/managers/administrators to consider what they could offer to this magazine. We would love to hear from you with your article ideas.

Articles have as their focus the sharing of ideas and good practice which may be of relevance to others with an interest in international education in schools – whether international schools, or national schools and other organisations encouraging an international dimension to education.

We will be pleased to receive articles relating to international education including:

- good news stories
- articles about good practice
- articles about interesting initiatives
- provocative articles that will stimulate discussion and debate

Please get in touch with us at editor@is-mag.com. We look forward to hearing from you.

Articles should be submitted as Word files, ideally accompanied by a good quality photograph, to editor@is-mag.com [Please note that a photograph relevant to the theme of the article is preferable to a photograph of the author(s)] A one-sentence biographical note about the author(s) should also be provided, as well as email address(es), which will be included if the article is accepted for publication.

Please also include a postal address so that, if the article is published, a copy of the relevant issue of *International School* can be posted to you.

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