

THE KINDERGARTEN STARTERS - DUBAI

KGS / C/127-19

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THE KINDERGARTEN STARTERS

25
years

Dear Parents,

Open Doors is a cultural change we effected at The Kindergarten Starters to embrace the wider community and allow learning to flow in and out of our classrooms during the last three years. Since then, 3000 parents have come in each year to sit in on lessons and give us their feedback about the teaching learning process at our school.

To all those families who are new to KGS, it is our attempt to bring our parents closer to us and give them a real understanding of how students learn in the class and beyond. Thousands of parents have had an opportunity to visit the school and observe a lesson and feed back to the school regarding their experience. Once you are immersed in an experience, you come out altered in new ways and enriched with new learning. As we begin a closer interaction with our parents, their feedback leaves us with new thoughts and ideas and new ways of looking at our learning.

Here is an excerpt from the case study of the Open Doors program undertaken by the Creating Communities of Innovation - Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

However, the key catalyst for change involved providing the opportunity for parents to experience KGS classrooms through the school's Open Doors initiative. The Open Doors initiative served as a way for KGS to introduce their new teaching and learning approach to parents in ways that a presentation or a letter sent home could never fully convey.

Teachers noted that before Open Doors, when they asked parents for help or support in implementing new teaching and learning strategies at home, the parents did not understand how these requests fit into their children's learning. Many teachers felt a "resistance to change" coming from the parents. But once parents began visiting the school as part of the Open Doors initiative, the tenor of parent-teacher relationships began to shift. "Parents are with us now," reflected one kindergarten teacher at the school. "They know that this kind of approach is helping to build up the skills in the children. So they are more focused, they know why we are doing what we are doing."

The Open Doors initiative not only provided peace of mind for parents—teachers and school leaders also benefited from having someone with another point of view give them feedback on what they observed in their classrooms. Ultimately, the parent presence helped the KGS teachers to grow as practitioners. Following a classroom visit, parents would offer the teachers feedback, sometimes making important suggestions that the teachers listened and responded to. This generative and often positive feedback and support for what the teachers were doing served as external validation for the new approaches the teachers were incorporating into their practice.

Ultimately, innovation at Kindergarten Starters was driven by a reconceptualization of the role of teachers as agents of pedagogical change who felt a responsibility to experiment in their classrooms, along with a responsibility to listen and respond to their students—and their parent community. As with the case study summaries presented earlier, the GEMS Kindergarten Starters School is a very unique teaching and learning environment. Nonetheless, it is our hope that educators and administrators working within other schools may see resonance between the KGS story and their own. In particular, we feel that the reconceptualization of the roles of teachers, the emphasis on engaging a broader community in the change process, and the overarching role of listening when pursuing an inquiry-driven innovation are salient lessons to be learned.

Three years on and we have seen a culture of trust grow at our school because of the faith our parents have reposed in us. If you have not begun visiting lessons, I would encourage you to book a lesson with your child's teacher and have an opportunity to see how learning occurs in the class room.

All that is open continues to flow and grow while closed pools tend to stagnate.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Asha', with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Asha Alexander
Principal
