

On "Senior Transition"

Beijing school works to give its seniors a leg up

By *Ettie Zilber*

We transition new students and staff into our schools with special orientation programs; we transition kindergarteners to Grade 1, and 5th graders into Grade 6, in an effort to ensure future success and well-being. We work relentlessly with our juniors and seniors in preparation for the arduous university application process. But how do we prepare our seniors for the most challenging of transitions—away from their parents, and away from the sheltered environment of the international school?

At Beijing BISS International School we implemented a Senior Transition Program. Immediately after the celebratory roar of the last IBDP and final exams (and a few days before the graduation ceremony), we invited our seniors to a luncheon-cum-workshop session.

The workshop was divided into three sections:

- Screening of the movie "Neither Here Nor There" by Ema Ryan Yamazaki, followed by student's written reactions to this film about Third Culture Kid (TCK)/Cross Culture Kid identity, belonging, and relationships.

- Responding to the prompt, "What are the issues of greatest concern for you after leaving BISS and your family?"
- Analyzing, discussing, responding ... and some advising.

Using Post-it notes, our seniors responded in short, anonymous writing bursts to the film and the prompts and then posted their notes randomly on a designated wall. As some student volunteers helped collate and categorize the little yellow messages, it became obvious that there were many common concerns, as indicated by the repetitious Post-its.

Some of the visceral responses to the film could be divided into the following categories:

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Hannover's "Rent: School Edition"



The cast of ISHR's *Rent: School Edition*, singing their hearts out (photo: ISHR/M. Jensen).

By *Michael Jensen*

The International School Hannover Region (ISHR), Germany recently performed the musical *Rent: School Edition*. The musical has earned the Pulitzer Prize as well as many Tony Awards for the difficult yet poignant themes presented. The musical, a modern rock-opera based on Puccini's *La*

Bohème, follows the lives of struggling young artists in New York's East Village over the course of one year. The characters struggle with AIDS, love, loss, and acceptance.

The talented ISHR cast, directed by me with musical direction by Andrea Johnson, performed their hearts out to a rousing standing ovation every night.

And the production really has made an impact at ISHR! "After the show, I had students coming to me saying how much they have been touched," said Mr. Jensen. "I also received letters from students who said how they have grown in confidence as a result of performing in the show, and how proud their family is of them for being part of such a production."

As it happened, a *Rent: School Edition* rehearsal was held on Nelson Mandela's World AIDS Day. The students came to me at the beginning of rehearsal and proposed that we donate any proceeds from the show to the Nelson Mandela Foundation. This was entirely their own initiative!

Perhaps most importantly, the production illustrated for ISHR the core values that are present

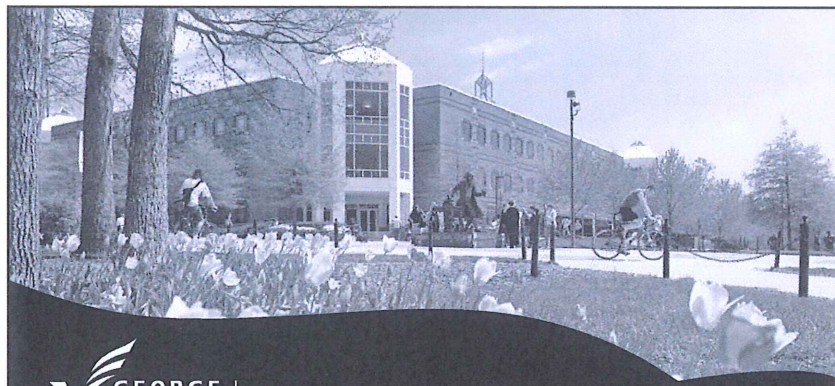
in the International Baccalaureate program. It is not easy to demonstrate to your peers how to be open-minded, caring, principled, or a (reasonable) risk-taker.

Regarding risks, I had told the cast at the beginning of the show that they might conceivably be the target of bullying or the subject of ridicule from their peers because of their participation in this production.

I also told them that every time a show like this is performed, there is just a little more tolerance in the world, a little more understanding of the uniqueness of human beings, some of whom struggle with homosexuality, AIDS, or drug use. They bravely jumped head-first into their roles, and the result was more than expected.

ISHR raised over 700 euros for the Nelson Mandela Children AIDS Fund in just three performances. We are proud of the sum raised, but also of the fact that the performances marked the German premiere of the musical! ●

Mr. Jensen is Learning Enrichment Specialist at the International School Hannover Region.



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Allow me to conclude by presenting fellow counselors with a "nightmare scenario." Specifically, suppose all of your 'academic stars' decide to apply to the same university. Clearly this could be a problem that impacts results. While admissions offices never attach quotas to a particular secondary school, there is no doubt that applicants are read and evaluated

in the context of their peers in the pool.

Therefore, it can take as little as one or two "stars" to severely weaken the chances of other, slightly weaker, students from your school. While I do not place limits on the number of students applying to an early program, I do try to let students in my community know if a particular early option is looking rather "deep and crowded."

If the student still decides to apply, then I feel they are entering the pool aware that it might be infested with more than one shark!

What is the bottom line? Juniors returning from their spring college visits and preparing to break for the summer need help understanding the early options available—and the potential costs attached to each decision. ●



Robert Rinaldo has been appointed Director General of the Lincoln School in San José, Costa Rica. Mr. Rinaldo is currently Superintendent of Del Campo International School in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.



Mary Russman is the new Director of the International School of Latvia (ISL). Ms. Russman is currently Middle School Principal at the American School of The Hague (ASH), Netherlands.



Jeff Smith is now secondary Principal at the International School of Tanganyika, Tanzania starting summer 2013. Mr. Smith is currently working at Shanghai Community International School (Hongqiao Campus).



Jeannie Sung has been appointed Elementary Principal of Shekou International School (SIS). Ms. Sung's career in education spans 20 years (USA, Indonesia, Korea), including the last eight as a principal.



Jane Thompson is now Head of Istanbul International Community School (IICS), starting 2013-2014. Ms. Thompson is currently Head of The British International School, Budapest (Hungary).



Oli Tooher-Hancock has been appointed Principal and Head of the International School of Hyderabad, India. She was most recently Assistant Superintendent of Colegio FDR, The American School of Lima, Peru.



O. Tracey Williams has been appointed Head of Secondary at Al Mizhar American Academy in Dubai, UAE. Ms. Williams is currently Associate Principal at Verona Area High School in Wisconsin, USA.



April Yetsko is the new Headmaster of the International School of Monagas (ISM) in Maturín, Venezuela. Dr. Yetsko is currently the CEO and Director of Vida Charter School in Pennsylvania, USA.



Kevin Yoshihara has been appointed Elementary School Principal at K. International School Tokyo in Japan. Previously Mr. Yoshihara has taught in schools in Kuwait, Shanghai and elsewhere in Japan.

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- Emotional and social issues, such as: nothing lasts forever, inability to maintain long relationships, contacts around the world, trying to please everyone, etc.

- TCK identity and belonging issues such as lost identity and alienation, "Who am I?", planning one's own identity, relocations, etc. We suggested that students prepare and adopt a mantra to use when asked, "Where are you from?"

- Cultural issues: cultural difference, culture shock, and ignorance.

And how did they respond about concerns and fears for the next stage in their lives, you wonder? Profusely! From the sheer number of Post-its, it was clear that this workshop was important and necessary. While their responses had many common themes and overlaps, the following seven categories emerged clearly:

1. Social issues, such as adjusting, fitting in, making new friends, being excluded or accepted, integrating with locals, and trusting people.

2. Emotional issues, including being alone and far from family. The responses in this category

were understandably numerous; the thought of leaving home for the first time was daunting.

3. University issues. A major concern was whether they had chosen the right university or the correct area of study. Our seniors come from a small international school where all staff members know their name, and while almost all were graduating with an IBDP diploma, they were still concerned about academic workloads and expectations.

4. Discrimination and cross-cultural issues. Many of our students return to their "passport country" for university, and were concerned that they would not be accepted or fit in, or be mistaken for immigrants.

5. Activities of daily living. The participants foresaw that they were poorly prepared for healthy cooking and eating, dishes, laundry, ironing, and making beds. Another concern was time management and keeping to schedules as they realized they would be increasingly responsible for themselves, including financially.

6. Mother tongue issues, to do with students' native language levels. They were convinced that their language level was below par relative to their compatriot peers.

7. Health, safety, and security issues. Our students feared the pressure or prospect of trying

drugs, drinking alcohol, having sex, and "getting caught." Some feared gaining or losing weight, getting sick, getting lost, violence, and theft.

The responses generated healthy discussion and debate about how to deal with each of these perceived realities. Both adults and students shared advice. All agreed that it was helpful to have this time to articulate and discuss these issues openly.

Knowing that it would be impossible to address all the issues in one "Brunch and Hunch" session, we introduced the students to a book, *The Global Nomad's Guide to University Transition* by Tina Quick. It is a great resource for those just-in-time moments that will definitely arise when our alumni are out there on their own.

The fears, issues, and concerns mentioned by our students are very real and relevant to them. We hope that as a result of this workshop our students felt more comfortable knowing what to expect, and what to do about some of the decisions they may face in the future.

We hugged them all, and wished them *bonne chance* and *bon voyage*. ●

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