



**Global Indian
International
School**
Learning beyond boundaries

GIIS VIRTUAL CLASSROOM: SCHOOLS OF THE FUTURE

HOW GIIS FOUGHT THE COVID CRISIS WITH A SHARP WEAPON CALLED VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

It won't be an exaggeration to say that Covid-19 hit the world like an invisible enemy. The world was going about its way, when suddenly a black cloud hovered on the horizon and unleashed its horror with such force that it sent a huge wave of shock across the globe. Needless to say, everyone struggled to regain balance and find a footing before taking a stance to fight the aftermath.

The Education sector was not spared, and Global Schools Foundation was caught in the whirlwind just like other institutions in the world. But, what stood in our favour during these trying times was the future-readiness and foresight our leadership had shown long before this crisis tried to pull us down. Our Virtual Schooling system was firmly in place, equipped with Virtual Classrooms and running Online systems, which was our rock-solid support against the tremors that were shaking most sectors.

Our robust planning to ensure continuity of education, our in-place facilities to get this plan off ground and our strength in a GIIS community which was well-equipped to take position to hold the fort, went a long way in keeping us standing as the storm ripped past us.

To explain what I am talking about, I will have to take you back four years when GSF embraced the idea of Schools of the Future.



Mr. Atul Temurnikar

Co-Founder and Chairman,
Global India International School, Singapore

Back then, we were already in the midst of the digital revolution. Technology had disrupted many sectors of the economy - banking was no longer a physical activity, take-away food was a click away, cinema tickets could be booked online, and app-making was a billion dollar industry. Unicorns were no longer imaginary animals, data analytics was the key to every door and start-ups were the sectors of the future.

As executive chairman of 21 schools in 7 countries, I was watching this new beginning with fascination. My IBM background had already armed me with the prowess of knowing the strength of technology, and what I was seeing now was the dawn of a new era where the old was going to be out and the new was being ushered in. My management board and I knew



teachers who only thought about benefits for the students. The foundation was strong, our heart was in the right place and our vision was firmly on the future.

For two years, we used our Smart facilities to expand classroom learning far beyond the four walls of the classroom, adding digital pedagogy in everyday studies for our students at the click of a button, imparting knowledge beyond books, and bringing access to experts from around the world. We did this after training our teachers in the methods of digital learning, equipping them with resources and knowledge to keep up with the times, and sometimes even ahead of the curve.

So when Circa 2020 brought with it another kind of disruption in the form of Covid-19, we may have stepped back a little with surprise, but quickly brushed ourselves off and took stance to face the challenge head on.

Our method was simple: All hands on board, all systems go and all machines running full throttle. The result: Virtual Schools running around 21 campuses in 7 countries in 5 days flat. The foresight we showed to have wifi, smart boards and Apple TVs in our classrooms stood us in good stead. We initiated the process of buying licences for a safe and secure online platform to accommodate 15,000 students, gave a quick user-demonstration to our teachers and generated a fool-proof system to get all our students to attend classes from the comfort of their homes.

This took care of the lock downs, circuit breakers and social distancing rules that were put in place by various governments. We paid millions from our pocket for licence to the safest platform to engage our students, in a way that no shady element could play truant when a class was in progress.

even then, that the time was right to jump on the digital bandwagon.

The idea of School of the Future took root and we started building the first SMART Campus in Singapore. We packed the facility with every new technical and technological idea that would benefit the education industry and enhance our students' learning - Digital Classrooms, Smartboards, state-of-the-art Audio-Visual systems, Wifi enabled campuses, gadgets like iPad, MacBooks and Apple TVs for students, Innovation rooms, Facial Recognition machines, studios for skills, Maker Spaces, Design and Technology in the pedagogy. We knew that the internet was an integral part for millennials and their children, Generation Alpha, who will be digital natives who will speak no other language but that of virtual realities and artificial intelligences.

When we launched the Smart Campus in 2018, it was a school like no other. It was built on the simple idea of providing NextGen Learning to make the new generation ready for the challenging future of the 21st century. Far ahead of its time, it was a technologically-savvy institution which was designed by international architects with inputs from



Teachers were given the full right to control who enters the online classroom, who can share audio or video and who can interact one-on-one or with the entire class at any given point of time. Parents were given unique password search day through their unique accounts on our intranet portal, to ensure that no one else has access to these important learning portals. Students, who were already equipped with iPads and Macbooks, were given the right to join these Virtual Classrooms at the click of a button, and attend school as though nothing had changed.

It would be false to say we did not face hiccups, and that the entire process was smooth. It wasn't. We did face teething problems at the onset with slow-moving Wifi, tech-novice parents and concerns of too much screen time. But our Help desk professionals toiled day and night to resolve each and every problem, sacrificing long hours (sometimes sacrificing their weekends) to ensure that each and every query of each and every parent was successfully resolved. Our counsellors were on call with parents who were stuck in their home country, unable to emigrate to new destinations with children unable to attend school - giving them practical online solutions like Virtual Classrooms.

These students were allowed to join classes from wherever they were, logging in to a campus of their choice and continuing their education until such time that things return to normal. Textbooks were purchased online and delivered at the home, so that lock down rules are not broken, payment facilities were moved online and a helping hand was extended to those who found it economically difficult to carry on due to loss of income.

We are two months into the Covid crisis, and I cannot be more proud enough to say that our systems are now running smoothly. Parents, initially skeptical of the fluency of running these classrooms, have gone out of the way to write to us, send us video logs and photographs of their children enjoying Virtual Classrooms. They have written notes of thanks, praising the efforts of the school, and complimented our

teachers for managing the classes well, even when students are scattered all over the place.

Our teachers have not just conducted regular lessons, but have made sure that each classroom session is more interactive and more engaging than usual. They understand the constraints of working parents - who may be working from home during virtual school hours - by keeping students' spirits high through different activities, and events which will ensure equal participation for all.

Our academic and non-academic staff have held Educational Webinars, contests, panel discussions and talks on topics ranging from Scholarships for the deserving, Mental health in the time of Covid and Cooking contests for parents and children, to send a clear message that we are one big family, and that we are always there for our parent and student community.

One parent, even went to the extent of confessing that although she was not sure how Virtual Classrooms would work at first, she is now all game for this initiative, and would support us even in future, for she knows that GIIS has her child's best interest foremost in their mind. One of our knowledge partners has also commended our Virtual Classrooms as the right step in the right direction.

This is evidence enough that we are on the right path. Satisfied parents, knowledgeable students, proud teachers and staff is what GIIS family is made of - as we enter the third month of restrictions due to Covid-19.

Our vision, our sheer determination and our meticulous planning and execution has borne fruit. They are sweet and healthy - a benefit that can not be downplayed or undermined. And I can assure you, that with such a system in place, there can be no crises - Covid-related or otherwise - that will keep us from doing what is best for our students. All we need is the support of our dedicated staff, a pulse on the changing dimensions of the world and an eye on the future.



www.globalindianschool.org