GUEST COLUMN – May 2023

Inter-school collaboration has never been more important
Jack George

There are a lot of things at Aiglon College, Switzerland, about which we can be proud, but one aspect stands out for me - it is our scholarship programme.

We are in the fortunate position of being able to offer a growing number of full scholarships, for up to three years, to students in partner schools in developing countries across the world. Our scholars go on to top universities and have the opportunity to benefit from what we are proud to call 'world leading character education' which truly develops the mind, body, and spirit.

My role as Assistant Head recently allowed me the privilege to travel to Starehe Girls' and Boys' Schools in Nairobi, Kenya. The idea was to interview potential scholars and, at the same time, discuss how the money we raise for the schools is allocated to improve education for current and future Stareheans.

As an educator I believe that we are on the brink of a revolution bigger than the birth of the internet, in the form of block-chain and AI. At Aiglon we are building the conceptual and physical foundations within which this can flourish. As well as a physical innovation centre, we are currently trialling holistic, Instagram-style reporting, non-fungible token awards and credentials, AI personal tutors for homework, and even Eduwallets so students can be true authors and therefore owners of their educational narratives.

We call this 'School 3.0' and want to share this framework in an open-source model with all who wish to embrace it.

During my meetings in Nairobi I got to know staff well. Their passion for teaching and learning was inspiring and we talked about the future of education late into the night over Kenyan wine and coffee. When discussing our conceptual framework for the future my counterparts were excited, at times sceptical but always open to ideas.

They spoke of getting up at 4am to run catch-up classes for groups of fifty students as a result of fallout after COVID, and that AI could help to ease their load. Naturally, we then moved onto the role of the teacher when knowledge transfer and, to some extent, ownership of educational journeys is handed over to the

student and AI. We both agreed that the role of a teacher will move towards facilitation of learning - celebrating soft skills and the human side of teaching and learning will become ever more important.

I was informed by the Starehean students themselves that they pride themselves on their oracy skills, their ability to work independently during self-directed learning time, which occurs as well as homework, and their autonomy when running student-led activities.

Coincidentally, or perhaps not, these are the exact areas that the Academic Leadership Group at Aiglon has identified as priorities for future improvement for our students. When asked about why Starehe is so successful at these traits, their primary response was that the school's values make it so. We at Aiglon must learn from their staff in order to achieve our priorities.

In essence, we are financial supporters of Starehe schools but in terms of all other involvement we are collaborators through a shared passion for progress in the never perfect craft of education. Networks such as Round Square facilitate this collaboration through a values-based approach, and we as educators should harness these channels to build the educational infrastructure of the future.

I would encourage all schools to collaborate with others beyond their regular networks, regardless of available resources, and to move towards an open-source model in which all initiatives are shared with a view to improve teaching and learning for all.

As AI and block-chain begin to change our world, we must lay common foundations throughout the sector and allow healthy competition through the human qualities that we refine and celebrate. We must actively establish positive relationships with the best edtech companies so as to redesign the sector together.

In essence, we are at a beautiful point in the history of education where technology can help us rebuild digital, social, and even societal foundations. Let's ensure that the structures we create democratise learning for all young people, empower students to control their own narrative, and holistically celebrate the incredible humans that they are.

Jack George is Assistant Head, Aiglon College, Switzerland