

Here's our first official Sandcastle blog

Patrice shares that she created the CLIC committee at her school in Spring 2024 with the following goals:

- To foster an environment of cultural awareness and appreciation.
- To celebrate the diverse backgrounds of our students.
- To promote multilingual engagement and language learning.
- To harness the learning potential afforded by the diversity of our community.

It just takes a CLIC

Patrice Thompson, December 2024

When I joined Rabat American School last year, I was delighted to realize the diversity of the community. Having worked in international environments in Asia and the US, I knew the rush of being surrounded by people from diverse backgrounds. However, the sheer tapestry of cultures represented at the school was unprecedented to me. In my homeroom alone last year of just 16 students, I had 10-year-old representatives from:

- Belgium
- China
- Colombia
- Ecuador
- India
- Italy
- Morocco
- Tunisia
- UK
- USA

I had stumbled upon a tiny UN representing every major inhabited continent besides Australia. What an incredible opportunity for learning from each other! As an anthropophile (a word I just made up that means a “someone with a love for human cultures and societies” -- suggestions on workshopping this are welcome), I quickly got to work setting up my 5th grade classroom environment as one in which we very purposefully embraced cultural and linguistic inclusion. I encouraged students with a mutual home language to use it with each other in social and academic settings, as long as they were using it to be inclusive and not gossipy. I invited the Chinese parents in for a grade-level Lunar New Year celebration to welcome in the Year of

the Dragon and encouraged everyone to wear red. We threw a Holi party, utilizing a miniscule amount of Holi powder from the Indian embassy and colored chalk that my TA and I ground up. Every morning in our Community Circle time, my students greeted each other in the “language of the day” picked from a rota of languages from the class, and said “thank you” when the speaker of that language told them to sit down. Periodically, I set up language partners in which speakers of a mutual home language would discuss academic topics in their home language, something they had never experienced before (unless their language was English, of course).

By the end of the year, I looked around and realized that I was operating as a one-person-show, and so were other teachers -- within their capacity, every homeroom teacher was certainly not discouraged from harnessing the diversity of their classrooms, but everything was at their discretion. School-wide initiatives focused on community and local and American holidays.

Leadership lauded praise, and I also saw an opportunity for something I could do personally to mobilize our resources to celebrate the exciting diversity in the student body. Along with another cosmophile (is this a better new word?), the head of the EAL department, I pitched a committee to our elementary principal and the school-wide Director of Teaching and Learning. The CLIC (Cultural and Linguistic Integration Committee) would be implemented in elementary school for the 24-25 academic year and hopefully expand into secondary thereafter. Here’s a slide from our presentation:

Aligning CLIC with our School's Vision & Mission:

Vision: The Culture and Language Integration Committee (CLIC) directly supports this vision by:

- Celebrating the rich cultural and linguistic diversity within our Rabat school community
- Providing authentic learning experiences that leverage our unique global perspectives
- Empowering students, staff, and families to thrive through cross-cultural engagement

Mission: CLIC aligns with this mission by:

- Offering real-world exposure to global competencies and multilingual skills
- Empowering the community to take action in showcasing our diversity as a strength
- Cultivating a greater sense of belonging and personal growth through cultural exchange

The establishment of CLIC will be a key initiative in positioning our school's diverse community as a unique selling point of RAS above all other schools. This initiative can serve as an extraordinarily effective marketing tool for attracting new families exploring educational options in Rabat. By embracing and celebrating our cultural assets, we will prepare students to thrive in an interconnected world.

Vision
Dynamic, diverse, authentic learners - thriving together.

Mission
We engage in real-world learning opportunities.
We empower learners to take action.
We foster belonging and personal growth.

Leadership enthusiastically supported the idea, thus CLIC was put into motion this year as a sub-committee of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Council with the following objectives:

- Coordinate and promote home language After-School Activities
- Promote translanguaging as a standard practice to help students make meaning of the curriculum, make connections to the material, and facilitate appreciation for each person’s home language(s)

- Facilitate language exchange programs and conversation circles among students, staff, and parents.
- Collaborate with language teachers for extracurricular workshops.
- Organize cultural events/assemblies showcasing traditions and cuisines.

As we're halfway through the school year, now is a good time to reflect on our progress so far. Thanks to the efforts from our CCA coordinator in response to our committee formation, two after-school activities led in different home languages (Spanish & Darija, the local Moroccan Arabic dialect). The CLIC puts together videos to be shown in monthly assemblies showcasing upcoming holidays, starring students at the school. For example, at the most recent assembly for December, we had 3 videos: some German students explained Nikolaustag, an Israeli girl and her brothers told us about Hanukkah, and a handful of Dutch children took us through Sinterklaas. These videos are about a minute long, and they are very cute, as you can imagine.

We've also got a project in the works to make a "welcome" sign in all 28 (!) home languages at the school. We are collaborating with the high school STEAM teacher to put together the sign with laser cutting and a 3D printer, which will include the word, the language label, and (thanks to some workshopping during the Sandcastle sessions with Paul), a QR code to an audio clip of a student saying the word. This is a zero-budget project, (my Director of Teaching and Learning prefers the term "sustainable"), meaning that some people traipse around their neighborhood looking for spare wood parts lying around. OK, fine, *I am some people*. I am walking around my neighborhood looking for wood like a crazy person.

Finally, inspired by Sandcastle and my newfound zero-budget power (you can do anything if you don't need money for it), I am working with the head of the PTA to throw a "multicultural winter celebration," in which parents will come to school to share a holiday in classrooms with music, clothes, a small presentation, and maybe some food, while classes rotate to "experience" these holidays. The plan is to distract elementary students in the auditorium with some carols (looks like I'm also planning an assembly, note to self) with a special visit from Santa (my husband, a second grade teacher, will have to inform him too) while parents set up, then they will go enjoy the festival for an hour and a half before heading home for the day.

Looking to the future, the Director of Teaching and Learning has not forgotten my offer to do an in-house training on translanguageing for teachers, the first of which is on the calendar for February 2025. Thanks to [my experience at SIS](#), I can pull out that powerpoint from somewhere and get some takeaways ready! (Dear God, please tell me I saved the powerpoint.) I will also be coordinating International Mother Language Week activities that month, and have already gotten excited to revamp it into a very involved experience.

Phew! Did I mention that I also run a violin club, attend DEI Council meetings, am a choir director, and the collaborative team lead for upper primary (G3-5)? Oh yeah, and I still teach 5th grade. The thing about a small school means that there are a ton of opportunities to get involved. See an area of growth that interests you? Guess who's in charge of *that* now!

I find myself feeling both enthusiastic and a bit weary, as it could be because I just feel like the incredible gift of diversity at our school isn't always recognized as the standout feature that it truly is. Our school excels in many areas, from our dedicated and talented teachers to our beautiful campus. Our standardized scores are impressive, we boast a strong athletics program, and we have an amazing parent community eager to engage—though they sometimes lack the resources to do so. It would be wonderful to celebrate our uniqueness more boldly: “HEY! LOOK OVER HERE! WE ARE HIGHLY INTERNATIONAL!” However, it seems that the focus tends to be scattered, which can make our strengths feel less pronounced. Personally I think our internationalism is the greatest asset we have. We need a director of multiculturalism who can spearhead these efforts full-time -- not just one who makes videos and school-wide plans during her planning periods and weekends. Our CLIC meetings have to be pretty much relegated to a WhatsApp group, since we're all too involved with other obligations to do it any other time. Between collaboration meetings, I jet over to the high school to talk to the STEAM teacher whenever I can about our welcome sign, but it could be so much further along if I could just have one more hour in the week.

Anyway, that's where we are so far. I'm grateful to have the autonomy to take on these big projects, but there's so much more opportunity for things to be done. Hopefully our movement will grow and, with a “Welcome” sign established and more wheels put into place in SY25-26, I can help/convince the rest of the community that our internationalism should be a main focus, not an afterthought.