**MONACO’S MODEL STUDENTS**

By bringing the United Nations into the classroom, students at the International School of Monaco and Collège Charles III are learning a set of invaluable life skills as they grow into tomorrow’s global citizens.

“"You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it," famously quipped Atticus Finch in To Kill a Mockingbird. And, for a handful of high school English students studying Harper Lee’s modern classic as part of their IB curriculum at the International School of Monaco (ISM), these words rang true every time they had learnt during Model United Nations (more commonly known as MUN), an extra-curricular activity held one lunch time a week.

“Learning to think and act on behalf of countries that students may not be overly familiar with leads to a more sympathetic mindset towards alternate political viewpoints,” explains Keith Oxley, ISM’s MUN director. The private school overlooking Port Hercules runs a MUN program for both Middle and Secondary School students and is joined by Collège Charles III as the two schools to offer MUN in the principality.

Away from the confines of the school curriculum (although its lessons resonate throughout it), MUN introduces diplomacy and international relations into the classroom by imitating the United Nations framework. Usually (though not exclusively) an elective activity, students have weekly classes as they prepare for MUN conferences, which they attend as delegates. At these conferences, each student is placed in a committee, such as Human Rights or Environment, and assigned a country to represent – and they must research extensively its position on selected topics and write resolutions to debate.

Conferences can be local, such as SAMUN in Sophia-Antipolis for middle school students, or further afield for the past two years, ISM secondary school students have travelled to Geneva for FerMUN, which takes place in actual UN buildings and attracts schools from across the globe. In March, ISM hosted its own conference, with students from Collège Charles III and Collège l’Éganaude in Biot participating.

Topics debated vary at each conference, yet are united in their global relevance. At April’s SAMUN, issues included “Protecting the Human Rights of Unaccompanied Migrant Children and Adolescents,” “Promoting the Responsible Disposal of Electronic and Hazardous Waste,” and “The Situation in Somalia.”

In a year that marks the 70th anniversary of the first MUN conference in St. Lawrence University, New York State, it’s obvious the concept is just as important today as it was in the post-war period. “MUN questions cultural, religious and economic differences between students and gives everyone an equal footing when faced with the challenges of an increasingly global society,” Oxley says.

For James Wellings, Head of Middle School at ISM, the skills MUN promotes is one of the reasons this activity is so invaluable. “What do we want our learners to be, moving into the future?” he asks. “We want them to be great communicators. We want them to have empathy. We want them to speak publicly. We want them to be able to construct an argument. We want them to listen and analyse. MUN has all that in abundance in a really nice, structured way that helps scaffold some of those core ideas for them,” he explains.

Wellings also applauds the relevance MUN brings to the classroom. “In teaching, we often have situations which aren’t the real world. Whereas, if we’re talking about solving the water crisis in South Sudan, for example, that’s a real-world situation they can get to grips with, and they know the adults are also talking about it, which is a great thing.”

Across the principality at Collège Charles III, Caroline Dubos incorporates MUN into her 4ème geography syllabus (although in In 3ème, the subject becomes elective). “It’s amazing for the children to be able to tackle learning another way. Instead of having something very academic on sustainable development, they are able to see what it is like for a country to get a real project for sustainability off the ground and how difficult and challenging that can be,” she says.

For Dubos, the program offers a “rare opportunity,” as she phrases it, “to demonstrate to them that what we are teaching has a use somehow when they will be adults.” A course where lessons in respect, tolerance and citizenship are some of the greatest outcomes, she believes the importance of MUN for today’s current crop of students lies in personal development. “I’m not really interested in grades, rather building them into aware citizens of tomorrow,” she explains.
Europe Diplomatic sat down with four MUN students at ISM to discuss the MUN experience and what it means to them:

“At school, we learn how to actually debate and about the procedure and how to speak officially,” explains year 10 student Anais Shakidi. “We practice how to write resolutions as we need to debate them too.”

The first day of a student's first conference takes some time to settle into. “One of the most challenging aspects, especially at your first conference, is trying to put yourself in the place of the country you are representing. You may have to argue points you don’t believe in,” explains fellow year 10 student Gemma Griffiths (the Secretary-General at ISM's recent MUN conference). “But it allows you to see both sides and really opens your mind to other possibilities.”

Year 9 student Sophia Hilbert agrees. “At first I was quite nervous,” she says. “All the language was quite confusing but we soon got used to it – and it all became much more clear at the actual conference I enjoyed debating and meeting new people.”

Her classmate Charlie Wurz says he was quite shy on the first day. “But then I really found my way. As it went on I started speaking a lot, always raising my hand,” he says. This is the very reason Charlie chose MUN. “I wanted to improve my speaking and communicating skills for my career in karting,” he explains.

All agree that MUN has opened their eyes to global issues and increased their awareness of world affairs. “We don’t really talk about topics like illicit trade in small arms and light weapons at school,” says Shakidi. Griffiths is impressed by the scope of the subject-matter. “A lot of the issues (the Secretary-General at ISM’s recent MUN conference). “But it really stands out, “ says Sebban. “A delegate from Israel was debating with the other students. I think they have found their place now.” Appreciation has also filtered back from their families. “I’ve had a lot of parents thanking me for the conference too,” Dubos says.

Both schools acknowledge the program’s ability to help students find themselves outside of the traditional classroom environment. Simone Sebban, Head of Secondary School at ISM, travelled with the students to FerMUN in Geneva in January and says one of the most rewarding aspects was seeing shy students blossom. “We took two young girls who were new to the school. At first, both students were very hesitant but they soon opened up and, by the end of the trip, were communicating a lot more freely with the other students. I think they have found their place now.” Appreciation has also filtered back from their families.

Europe Diplomatic: How important are initiatives such as MUN for developing our future leaders?

Carole Lanteri: I think that initiatives that can help students to dive into a job are of utmost importance, including for diplomacy. There are so many clichés attached to the diplomatic world, starting from “diplomats spend their time in lunches, receptions, etc...” to “being diplomat means being a spy”. With MUN, they can see one of the multilateral aspects of diplomacy. Students participating in MUN also develop and/or train skills that are critical in many jobs. Not only diplomacy being able to analyse a situation quickly, to collect information, to develop strategies and to find allies for reaching the best possible result. That is the beauty of multilateralism.”

- Q & A -

with Carole Lanteri, Permanent Representative of Monaco to the United Nations Office at Geneva

Asides from the obvious skill acquisition fostered by MUN, such as critical thinking, public speaking, teamwork and debating, there is much emphasis placed on the student-led character of the program. “We train the students to lead themselves, so it’s a platform for them to take ownership of both their academic learning and personal growth,” Oxley explains. Senior MUN students hold the positions of Secretary-General and Deputy Secretary-General and chair the various committees. In keeping with correct UN protocol, students must refer to each other as ‘delegate’ of their represented country rather than by their first name and follow parliamentary procedure. At multilingual conferences, such as FerMUN, student-interpreters provide a live translation.

MUN students may find themselves arguing some of the most complex issues in the world – the type that politicians and diplomats cannot reach common ground on – but, no matter how heated the debate gets inside the conference, the goodwill spirit of MUN always shines through. “One example really stands out”, says Sebban. “A delegate from Israel was debating with his counterpart from Palestine; they were deep into an argument about the politics. When they were finished, however, they shook hands and hugged. It was a great example of unifying the world through MUN.”

Europe Diplomatic: How important are initiatives such as MUN for developing our future leaders?

Carole Lanteri: I think that initiatives that can help students to dive into a job are of utmost importance, including for diplomacy. There are so many cliches attached to the diplomatic world, starting from “diplomats spend their time in lunches, receptions, etc...” to “being diplomat means being a spy”. With MUN, they can see one of the multilateral aspects of diplomacy. Students participating in MUN also develop and/or train skills that are critical in many jobs. Not only diplomacy being able to analyse a situation quickly, to collect information, to develop strategies and to find allies for reaching the goal that has been given to them. And of course, being able to compromise if needed to reach the best possible result. That is the beauty of multilateralism.”

Chrissie McClatchie