

**Great Hearts Academies** are classical liberal arts charters throughout Arizona and Texas. They promote the cultivation of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty in every aspect of student learning. They believe teaching is an act of prudence, an art rather than a science, and **Teaching itself is fundamental to humanity.** Guided by these principles, they have also found incredible success with Swivl.



#### WHY VIDEO?

Great Hearts places an emphasis on arts, humanities, and philosophy and they contend that technology can sometimes

be distracting to student development when it is deployed without purpose or strategy. Therefore, they have found Swivl to be a true cultural fit for their mission.

Great Hearts doesn't just believe in cultivating the minds and hearts of their students - their devotion to these principles guide their administration of support and professional development to their faculty and staff. As important as it was to procure technology that is ideologically consistent with their mission, it was also crucial to implement a solution that is incredibly easy-to-use and effective for delivering meaningful, results-driven professional development opportunities. Swivl met all of the marks.

Great Hearts believes that while we can write down some good practices, we all know that teaching teachers is best done through coaching and by example. The very best examples happen in small pockets in a school or across the network. And while it is best to have experienced teachers mentor and coach newer teachers in person, the reality of time and space constraints can cause roadblocks. Ideally, Great Hearts would bottle up the magic of some of the best in their network (those who have the instincts and/or experience) and pass that essence along to teachers in another place in time; until then, video coaching is the way forward to spread that knowledge and expertise most effectively.

They embarked on the journey of video coaching with a clear goal in mind: video cannot and will not replace human interactions. When managed effectively however, video is the best tool for practicing self-reflection, facilitate coaching at convenient times and from remote locations, sharing best practices, and administering wide-scale training. Research says video breaks down human bias, allows teachers and their coaches to confront the reality of the classroom, and then decide what they are going to do with this reality to improve outcomes for their students.

#### A PLATFORM THAT PUTS TEACHERS FIRST

In the past, Great Hearts teachers tried recording lessons using other apps for the purpose of sharing and commenting. The problem was that navigating certain platforms was cumbersome and videos took too long to upload. Also, one could not automatically upload from the recording device - the video had to be taken off an SD card. In the life of a teacher, this run-around was a deal breaker. They needed a tool that teachers could set up on their own and which

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**29 academies**  
throughout Arizona  
and Texas

**16 robots** across the  
GreatHearts  
network

automatically uploaded videos to a usable sharing platform. Too many cords, buttons, or prompts were also deal breakers.

After some intensive searching on Google, Swivl presented itself as a viable option. The online platform which allows for automatic uploading of video, the relative simplicity of set-up and operation, and, yes, the fact that the robot tracks the speaker, made Great Hearts take a gamble.

Since Swivl's components are intertwined: the Swivl robot is tied to the Swivl app and the Swivl app is tied to Swivl cloud, it wasn't a huge ask of teachers to simply borrow a robot (in checkout systems managed at the school level), hook up either a school-issued tablet or personal mobile device, and view the videos on their browser in Swivl cloud. Everything syncs automatically - teachers can record a video, upload to Swivl cloud, and share with others to receive feedback. One Swivl user from Great Hearts emphasized the convenience of the platform for coaching purposes: "I enjoy that I can watch the video on the evenings, weekends. As a working parent this is very helpful so that I can be present in my own classroom as well as be present for my own kids. This is a great way to do observations."

When the first goal is to achieve basic self-reflection, Swivl is a no-brainer. No one has to prop up your camera or be present in your room in order to record your teaching. Recordings are private (with the exception of the students in the room, who are always going

to be present), unbiased, and holistic. To be anywhere in a classroom and to be seen and heard by your recording device brings advantages that other technologies simply can't compete with.

And because Swivl was built for a variety of users, purposes, and demographics, the cloud platform isn't structured to be an evaluation tool for Administrators. There are no scales or grading systems and it can be completely customized to carry Great Hearts' framework for video tagging and organization and categorization of time-stamped commenting for structured dialogue around their video coaching guidelines. In fact, in a random survey, most of the Swivl users in Great Hearts coaches listed tagging, commenting, and applying custom categories to be features they simply could not live without. Since personalization is at the heart of Great Hearts mission and coaching values, Swivl Cloud's versatility allows them to keep their video coaching personal too.

Using Swivl is a great way to connect teachers with coaches and eventually Great Hearts dreams of creating a best practices library to capture the magic of teachers to share with other aspiring faculty. One of the schools in the network - Great Hearts Arete Prep Academy in Gilbert, AZ has used Swivl to meet even more pressing needs - such as accommodating students with special circumstances. Not only are school leaders at Arete Prep utilizing Swivl in their short cycle observations, but teachers use Swivl independently to reach homebound students through recording classroom instruction.

Currently, Great Hearts is piloting a remote coaching program which connects teachers across their

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network in peer-coaching relationships. Coordinating with headmasters of each school, the professional development team at Great Hearts match aspiring teachers to veterans for coaching. Travel across the Phoenix Valley can be a deterrent to veteran teachers in helping their less experienced colleagues, and Swivl has really bridged this gap in facilitating a genuine connection between them.

Additionally, Great Hearts uses Swivl to leverage the manpower of their highly specialized phonics coach who is stationed in Arizona. In order to give her better and more access to schools (especially those in Texas), teachers began recording phonics lesson and sending them to her for comments and feedback. By utilizing the custom comment categories the phonics coach can code her feedback for teachers to reflect critically and strategize their instruction better.

Finally, for Professional Development enhancement, Swivl has been deployed for recording summer training sessions. For teachers unable to attend the workshops, it has been a crucial tool in ensuring they do not miss out on their opportunity to receive network-led PD.

#### WHAT DID GREAT HEARTS LEARN?

Great Hearts is committed to building a culture of trust, mentorship, and support within their charter network, but even they encountered apprehension from teachers when introducing Swivl. Instead of asking: What can I learn from recording my class using Swivl? Some teachers nervously wondered: Why do you need to record my class? Is this mandatory? Therefore, the deployment of Swivl was approached with caution and care. The word 'mandatory' would be obliterated from the conversation.

They got buy in by addressing the needs noted by school leaders by offering Swivl. Observing phonics coaching in Texas for example, was a neat corner case to get started. Strong teachers were identified (with the help of headmasters) who agreed to be recorded for future trainings and PD. Those teachers loved the idea of contributing to something bigger than themselves and welcomed Swivl in. Whatever

your district needs to focus on most, make it the mission of Swivl's usage.

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In 2015, the professional development team at Great Hearts purchased 11 robots which are lent out to schools for use. This year, nine robots are housed full-time at schools across the network with two of them available for schools to check out for short-term use. In addition to these 11

units, four schools in the network (Arete Prep, Archway Trivium East, Archway Trivium West, and Scottsdale Prep) loved the tech so much they purchased their own Swivls - one school even purchased two! Teachers are given the advice by their headmaster and/or coach to record segments of their lesson they feel they have mastered. Associating Swivl with something positive that celebrates this craft is one way to entice them to keep recording and start focusing on areas for growth as well.

Great Hearts adopted a Swivl team account fairly early on as well and have always kept it small, targeted, and organized.

Participants in the peer-coaching program are ushered in to the Swivl team as Pro users throughout

**1,300 videos**  
uploaded and over  
**42,000 video**  
**minutes** recorded

**2,600**  
**comments** shared  
between teachers,  
coaches, and  
headmasters

the year depending on when their coaching cycles run. Great Hearts Headmasters remain as Pro users throughout the year in order to share video best practices with their teachers.

Future headmasters at Great Hearts Headmaster College are also given the chance to use Swivl in the hopes they'll continue the practice of video observation when they arrive at their schools.

As exposure has grown around Great Hearts, so have opportunities for using the platform. Veteran teachers want to make an impact and coach their peers. One peer coach noted: "This has wonderful potential for the future so teachers can coach and observe without sacrificing lots of their own class time."

For Headmasters, Swivl's utility aligns itself with their goal of increasing short cycle observations in their schools. Relationships across network and state boundaries are flourishing, helping to solidify Great Hearts' values around collegiality.

From a logistical standpoint, Great Hearts also recognized the need to assign a Swivl "expert" at both the school level and district/network level - someone who can assist with troubleshooting and managing the robots. Also, deployment must be fairly centralized at a district or network level, with regular contact maintained with schools, lest you risk your robots becoming paperweights or shelf decoration.

## SWIVL'S FUTURE IN GREAT HEARTS

While no technology is perfect and implementing technology will always come with a learning curve, Swivl has adapted in a variety of ways to constantly meet the needs of teachers. While the idea of tracking and a clear microphone might be just good enough for certain types of observations or for National Board Certifications; the only way to truly address the needs of students is to hear what they're saying, no matter where they are in the class.

Great Hearts knows this and has stocked up with eight C3 robots which provide for two additional microphones you can place around a classroom. Multi-microphone has allowed teachers to hear more students and form greater understanding of the workings within their classrooms.

Just like Great Hearts operating across two states,

some districts stretch far and wide. Connecting a mentor with their mentee for live coaching opportunities was challenging. With the introduction of Swivl Live the geographical divide can be bridged after all.

And when Great Hearts first started with Swivl, some noted that whiteboard glare or blurry projected images made it difficult to achieve a holistic observation. So Swivl introduced Screen Recording, a feature that allows the teacher to record themselves with Swivl and record their desktop at the same time. No more glare.

Finally, the customization of Swivl Cloud's online platform allows Great Hearts to build coaching content that is true to their mission through the use of video tags, comment categories, and sharing groups.

While other platforms boast feature set upon feature set that can be overwhelming to introduce to teachers who already have enough on their plate, Swivl tries to keep things simple. Great Hearts chose Swivl to allow teachers to capture high quality video and audio in order to supplement the robust video observation program they were already developing. And while Great Hearts Academies' mission is unique, their goals are not. Like every school district or network in the the world, the leaders at Great Hearts strive to profoundly support and mentor each and every one of their educators to provide the best outcomes for their students. And Swivl is just one tool they use to make that dream a reality.

Interested in connecting with

**GreatHearts?**

Reach out to: [PD@GreatHeartsAmerica.org](mailto:PD@GreatHeartsAmerica.org)



Want to design a video observation program similar to GreatHearts in your organization?

We can help.

Contact us: [team@swivl.com](mailto:team@swivl.com)

1-888-837-6209