

Expanding Inclusivity in the International Baccalaureate Programs

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Position Statement

When IB programs of study are adopted at all school levels, student achievement is positively impacted. The inclusivity of the rigorous DP program of study can be improved by adopting the IB programs in sequence, delivering proper academic preparation, and scaffolding student supports.

Introduction: International Baccalaureate and Its Programs

The foundational precepts of the International Baccalaureate (IB) programs are equity, access, and intercultural awareness. IB's mission is "to develop inquiring, knowledgeable, and caring young people who help create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect" (International, n.d.). Conceived in the early 1960's by teachers at the International School of Geneva, the Diploma Program (DP) was a pre-university program designed to bring academic coherence to students studying primarily at private international schools (Connor, 2008).

IB has grown and changed dramatically through the years. It now offers four programs with 3,423 participating schools in 141 countries, educating 1,028,000 students from ages 3 to 19. The Primary Years Program (PYP) is geared for students from grades K – 5, the Middle Years Program (MYP) encompasses grades 6 – 10, and the Diploma Program (DP) encompasses grades 11 – 12 (International, n.d.).

March 2011, only seven percent of all IB schools were offering both the PYP and MYP (Bunnell, 2011).

Though expensive to implement, IB has seen a great deal of development and success in the US, especially within the last decade. Looking to improve educational outcomes, IB has

The Primary Years Program and Instructional Precepts

Schools looking for rejuvenation or renewal can adopt the PYP as a structured framework without concern for strict compliance with a standard. The PYP is primarily a way of curriculum organization, rather than a prescribed program of instruction. No specific content or disciplinary knowledge is required; rather, the focus is on the method of instruction. Teachers use an interdisciplinary approach as they guide student inquiry. Much of the learning is research and project based. Reading and mathematics are studied in the context of other subjects as ways to make meaningful interpretations. The PYP stresses that students are active in their learning and responsibly take action on the basis of what they know (Kauffman, 2005).

A distinctive aspect of the PYP is an emphasis on internationalism or global awareness. The implementation of this is up to the school and often at the discretion of the individual teacher in the classroom. So, the instruction of global awareness can take many forms and levels of rigor. Teachers are encouraged to go beyond the obvious flags, food, and costumes of other countries, and pursue a genuine understanding of cultures and societies (Kauffman, 2005). The program's respect for diverse cultures was especially considered a significant advantage in schools whose students and teachers represent different cultures. Children learn to look for the similarities in people rather than the differences (Stillisano, Houstrup, Waxman, and Rollins, 2011). Culturally responsive schools embrace the community's diversity and use the cultural and personal differences of students to enhance educational opportunities (

these as required by government entities. Students are taught the interrelation between subjects through interactions of health and social education; community and service; human ingenuity; approaches to learning; and environments. All subjects are taught with an eye to intercultural awareness, holistic learning, and communication. At the core of the MYP is a personal project, which is a culmination of their learning in the MYP (International, n.d.).

The Middle Years Program and Instructional Precepts

Like the PYP, the MYP employs the inquiry-based or constructivist method of teaching, placing the learner in charge of his/her understandings. Evaluations are criterion-based with an emphasis on self and peer assessment. MYP courses are designed to show students that knowledge is an interrelated, coherent whole. Teachers are responsible for guiding students to see the cross- disciplinary relationships (Bunnell, 2011).

The MYP program fits the needs of schools undergoing radical school improvement.

Rationale for Adopting the MYP

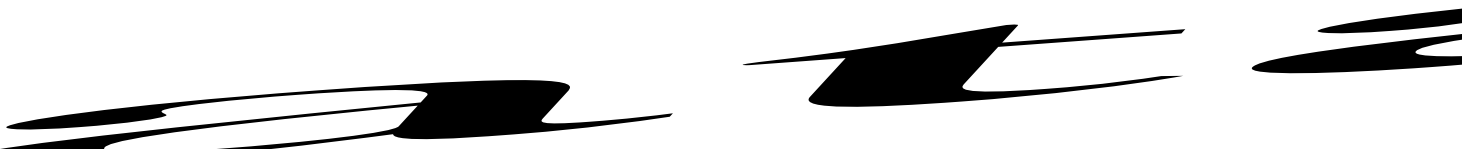
Many schools adopt the MYP to create a ‘seamless’ curriculum that ascends from the PYP through the DP. Though they have different curriculum design models, the PYP and MYP transition challenges between levels is minimal. The PYP and MYP share the same philosophical constructs and hold the values of global perspectives, diversity, and community service. Though educational philosophy is important, pragmatically schools adopt the MYP as a marketing strategy. Schools use the IB logo as a branding of educational excellence. Adopting the MYP is seen as a strategy to attract students from outside the normal school catchment and increase school enrollments.

An advantage of adopting the MYP is excellent, ongoing teacher training and development. IB requires that teachers hold the certification and participate in annual conferences or workshops. In many instances this is the only cohesive professional training that building teachers receive as a whole group. Teachers within buildings generally have widely varying pre-service education that differs in vintage and educational outlook. IB trainers are practitioners who deliver worthwhile, intelligent training that combines theory with practical ways to use the inquiry instruction. Additionally, IB training has the capacity to build teacher connections both nationally and internationally (Sperandio, 2010).

The Future of the MYP

It is projected that 2,000 MYP schools will be added to IB programming by 2020. Much concern has been registered that growth might compromise quality in the future. IB needs to ensure that curriculum development, assessment, and teacher training continue to be solid and responsive. The MYP is considering several changes, including compulsory moderation of

assessments. Academic content



scores, increased opportunities for co-curricular involvement and leadership, and an improved focus on community service (O'Connor, 2011).

Foust found that targeting IB (and AP) classes to a narrow section of high ability and gifted students creates a safe, enhanced environment for students who enjoy learning and are focused on success. Completing IB (and AP) coursework raises student confidence and in homogeneous settings builds friendship and special bonds within a group of students. The disadvantages of rigorous coursework include: large workloads and perceived negative

result of these actions, the number of students in DP coursework grew exponentially. The study found that opening the DP to a wider group of students did not dilute the DP building test scores over time (Burriss

Factors in DP Program Success

Teacher Leadership.

Teachers who are positive about their students are critical to the process. These are teachers who work hard to help their students succeed and who have a 'heart for students' (Mayer, 2010).

IB students are encouraged to collaborate and study with their peers. The community of peers students develop is quite instrumental in building success. When hard-working, intellectually curious students align themselves with others, strong bonds are created. Students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds can form lasting and supportive friendships. Students learn to work together to solve problems and discuss ideas that arise in class studies. In IB, the norm is, 'it's okay to be smart' (Cocoa et al., 2012).

Building Effective School and Community Supports For IB Programs

When school districts coordinate school-based IB programs, greater articulation and cooperation is the result. District coordinators can help to connect buildings as they logically articulate PYP, MYP, and DP programs. Districts should appoint leaders who understand the interactions between mandated academic standards and also 'know and care about' IB. Especially in districts with multiple schools involved, the implementation of IB training can be handled smoothly. IB teachers can cooperatively share ideas and successful projects intra-district. Training costs can be mitigated by sending large groups of teachers to training sessions or bringing trainers on site. An effective strategy to combat accusations of 'elitism' with DP teachers is to widely train for DP teaching. Creating partnerships between IB schools and a local university for training current and pre-service teachers was positively explored (Siskin & Weinstein, 2008).

Vitally important to IB program success is the satisfaction of the whole school community, particularly the parents (Twigg, 2010). Since the vast majority of IB programs in the U.S. are in public schools, community sentiment and politics play greatly into implementation decisions. Funding for IB schools often takes money from other schools,

programs in schools is not prohibitive. Most of the money that districts invest goes to teacher training. Consistently, the research shows that IB training is excellent (Stillisano, et al., 2011; Weinstein, et al., 2010). Conducted by master teachers who have similar experiences, training is purposeful, meaningful, and positive. The costs of training entire staffs can be minimized by bringing IB trainers on-

implementation, teachers could work across the area to develop lesson plans. Constructivist, inquiry-based teaching takes at least two to three years to fully develop. Having more schools in the area would mean a wider pool of teachers who understand IB paradigms and can fill open teaching positions cross

in areas that have diverse or impoverished populations. Developing more IB programming in Omaha-area schools is a way to bring the very best that we can offer to our students.

Author's Information

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