

Expanding Inclusivity in the International Baccalaureate Programs

Stephanie A. Burdic

University of Nebraska Omaha

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### **Abstract**

When International Baccalaureate (IB) programs of study are adopted at all school levels, student achievement is positively impacted. The Primary Years Program (PYP) and Middle Years Program (MYP), designed for whole school adoption, emphasize inter-disciplinary inquiry-based learning designed to engage students and build critical thinking and questioning skills. The curriculum in the PYP and MYP is school-based. Schools seeking renewal and fresh approaches to student learning have adopted these programs world-wide. Though valid stand-alone programs, the PYP and MYP build into the academically rigorous Diploma Program (DP). Though sometimes perceived as an elitist program, the DP is actually egalitarian as it embraces internationalism and diversity. The DP curriculum is prescribed by IB with demanding coursework. Student assessment, both internal and external, covers subject-specific criteria with an emphasis on writing and critical thinking. The inclusivity of the rigorous Diploma Program can be improved by adopting the IB programs in sequence, delivering proper academic preparation, and scaffolding student supports. Excellent teacher training at all levels has been essential to the success and cohesion of IB.

### **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.).

Relatively few schools adopt the IB continuum simultaneously. Though IB stresses the continuum of PYP, MYP through DP, 82% of all school systems only offer only one of the IB programs. Of all schools, 55% offer the DP only, 13% the MYP only, and 14% offer the PYP only. As of August 2011, only nine percent of DP schools were also offering the MYP; as of

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 become attractive to schools that are looking for quality reforms. IB's strength is cohesive programming that emphasizes inter-disciplinary studies, global-mindedness, and critical thinking. The DP program in particular, offers rigorous coursework based on verifiable standards. Universities see the DP as a recognizable stamp of excellence and grant scholarships or advanced standing on the basis of completed coursework (Cech, 2007).

### **The Primary Years Program**

First discussed at the European Council of International Schools (ECIS) conference in Rome, in 1990, the Primary Years Program (PYP) was formally adopted by IB in 1997. The PYP is structured around an inquiry-based model of curriculum delivery. Schools who adopt the PYP use their own curriculum standard as they study language, social studies, mathematics, the arts, science, and personal, social and physical education. Learning around these six trans-disciplinary themes: who we are; where we are in place and time; how we express ourselves; how the world works; how we organize ourselves; and sharing the planet. Cross-disciplinary units that have an international or global-minded theme are the core of the PYP program. Students are encouraged to understand concepts and act on the basis of their learning (International, n.d.).

### **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 (Janice Garnett, personal communication, June 20, 2012). Because of these precepts, IB programs should be especially attractive to school districts that are implementing culturally responsive teaching initiatives.

Teacher acceptance of the program is essential to the program's success. 'Inquiry enthusiastic' teachers exhibit high personal expectations as they organize, deliver, and assess the students. They value the contribution of children as empowered individuals who share the responsibility for learning. Confident teachers who are open-minded and flexible thrive as they instruct in an inquiry-based environment. Teachers who were trained in pre-service coursework to deliver inquiry based learning or teaching thematic units adapt to the PYP-style well. In hiring, administrators need to create or adapt an instrument to identify teachers who can adapt to inquiry-based teaching. Teachers must be self-empowered, but a dialogic structure for collaboration must be in place (Twigg, 2010).

IB training is perceived to be a great benefit in building the professionalism of teachers. Teachers are challenged to question their philosophy of education as they explore new methods of engaging students. Teachers learn how to make students deeply question and explain what they have learned. The PYP provides a framework for teachers to teach critical thinking skills as they come up with the investigations and the research. Principals, IB coordinators, and teachers agree that IB training has helped them to become lifelong learners and the school to become a collaborative learning community (Stillasano, et al. 2011).

Kauffman studied the implementation of three programs in distinctly different schools. He found that though teachers understood the precepts of the PYP, their implementation noticeably varied. The PYP leaves a great deal up to interpretation, which is one of its strengths. As part of the authorization process, teachers are trained to use instructional guides provided by the IBO. Training is provided to schools is by consultants, usually educators practiced in the PYP. Each school has a local IB coordinator who monitors the program and lends assistance to teachers. The ideal coordinator is a respected and personable veteran teacher, most likely from

the local school. As schools are authorized, the IBO understands that schools will not be 'perfect' but will continue to improve. To guarantee quality, continuous teacher development, especially through regional support groups is recommended (Kauffman, 2005).

### **Student Achievement in the PYP**

In a study of several Texas schools that have implemented IB programming, it was found that the behaviors/activities observed in the IB classroom were favorable and higher than those found in similar classrooms in state schools. The observations showed that students were involved in learner-centered activities that encouraged discussions as well as the connection between ideas and concepts. However, the extent of these activities varied from classroom to classroom (Stillisano et al., p. 181).

Jordan (2009) studied the academic impact of the PYP on learners by using data from the Palmetto Challenge Achievement Test (PACT) from 28,948 students in South Carolina over a period of eight years. He found that students who participated in the PYP had significantly higher scores on this measure than their peers. Importantly, the achievement gap between majority and diverse students from impoverished backgrounds was nearly mitigated. School leaders attribute the inquiry-based model of learning that utilizes Piaget's theory of constructivism for the positive test results. Children of all academic levels bring prior knowledge to the learning situation and in the PYP model, they engage with the teacher to construct learning. Strong and dedicated teachers are a significant factor in student success. PYP students may have been advantaged in taking the PACT test over their peers because they were accustomed to the open-ended question format. Jordan further noted that new programs

and curriculum adoptions in non PYP schools had increased over all test scores in the latter part of the study.

### **PYP and the IB Stamp of Excellence**

As schools are increasingly scrutinized, districts look to raise academic standards, offer greater parental choice, and have a recognizable standard of excellence (Bunnell, 2009). Because high schools with DP programs consistently rate among the nation's best, districts are looking to the additional programming at other grade levels that IB has to offer. Schools that have experienced success with the PYP have become models for those looking to whole school reform. The PYP is designed to engage every student without regard to ability. The full spectrum of IB programming has the PYP at its base and is the natural progression of students into the rigorous DP program (Cech, 2005). The PYP is designed to build academic confidence as students learn to research, creatively explore the world, and come to new understandings.

### **Middle Years Program (MYP)**

The first draft of the Middle Years Program (MYP) appeared in 1997 and was piloted in 12 schools the year thereafter (Bunnell, 2011). The MYP is the largest IB program in terms of contact with students though the exact number of students involved in the MYP is difficult to ascertain since many schools do not register students for external moderation and certification. The US, Canada, and Australia have 70% of all the MYP schools. Chicago has the sixth largest MYP block world-wide.

Individual schools determine the curriculum which is based around eight academic areas. These curricular areas include: Language A; Language B; Humanities; Technology; Mathematics; Arts; Sciences; and Physical Education. Schools may include subjects beyond



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. Schools adopting the MYP generally take a whole school approach where all students, regardless of ability participate. The MYP is non-prescriptive in terms of curriculum. Individual schools choose the objectives, content materials, and assessment methods. International awareness and responsible citizenship is infused throughout the curriculum. A prime reason that schools adopt the MYP is the innovative program features, which include a focus on interdisciplinary studies, a culminating personal project, a community service requirement, and an emphasis on creativity (Sperandio, 2010).

### **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 may be prescribed in the last two years, instead of leaving curriculum in the hands of participating schools. IB is looking to lower the cost for schools and in an appeal to international schools, promoting greater MYP awareness among colleges and universities (Bunnell, 2011).

### **Transitioning Between the MYP and the DP**

The transition between the MYP and the DP can be problematic. MYP classes are marked by interdisciplinary units taught with creativity; the DP has subject-specific approach which is taught with a rigorous, prescribed curriculum (Hallinger, 2011). The MYP is generally a whole-school adoption using the local curriculum. In contrast, many schools operate the DP as an honors program targeted to gifted students, operating as an exclusive ‘school within a school.’ Relatively few students belong to the DP cohort. Only diploma candidates are allowed to take the rigorous IB coursework, making it a narrow and insular program of study.

### **The Diploma Program**

Founded in 1962, the Diploma Program (DP) is an academically rigorous course of study that is designed for students planning a university course of study. Normally taught over the course of two years, the challenging and demanding curriculum is determined by the IBO. Course work is both assessed internally by the local school or externally by specially trained and appointed moderators. The DP divides curriculum into six academic areas which include: studies in language and literature, individuals and societies, mathematics and computer science, the arts, experimental sciences, and language acquisition. All students study Theory of Knowledge (TOK) which philosophically challenges the basis of understandings. In addition, students are required to be involved in activities beyond academics that require involvement in

the community. Students also write an Extended Essay that is designed to challenge their research and writing skills (International, n.d.).

### **Student Achievement in the DP**

Schools that adopt the elite ‘school within a school’ model of the DP target motivated students with exceptionally high ability to enter the program. Enrollments in ‘exclusive’ DP programs generally reflect a small percentage of the overall student body. Students are tracked from the beginning of high school (and before) into classes that have the highest degree of academic rigor. The cohort takes DP classes in common which building strong bonds between students. In this this model, a substantial majority of students in the program achieve the diploma, garnering marks that surpass world standards.

The DP brings a substantial set of expenses including IB membership fees, off-site teacher training, specialized curriculum materials, and exam fees. With exclusive DP programs, the costs directly only benefit a few, but schools see an effective return on the investment. Since the DP is seen as a qualitative mark of educational excellence, parent and student choice builds the school enrollment. Using the DP as a marketing tool and branding with the IB logo is a sign to the community that a school or district is serious about academics. Schools who are at their maximum enrollment level receive more funding, which can be used to make general improvements to the school and keep staffing levels high (O’Connor, 2011).

Administrators see a ‘ripple effect’ of DP programming on students who do not participate directly in the program. DP schools see increased enrollment in the early high school tracking that leads to the DP program. It is hoped that the few students at the very top will set an atmosphere of serious study for all students. Schools that adopt the DP see rising ACT and SAT

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 stereotypes by general education students, as well as stress and fatigue. Students in the study overwhelmingly believed that the positives in taking advanced courses overcame the negatives. Schools need to look at mitigating negative factors by teaching students stress reduction and time management techniques. Motivation to learn and a challenging curriculum should not be privileges reserved for advanced students in advanced classes (Foust, Hertberg-Davis, and Callahan, 2009).

### **Broadening Access to the DP**

Because of its rigor, the DP program has often been seen as an 'elite' program for academically strong, highly motivated, and often affluent schools and students. Though the DP is academically elective and selective, it is inclusive. Students with varying academic abilities and backgrounds can be successful DP students. The IB organization seeks to purposefully reach out to all communities, making the IB DP available to all students, while unapologetically maintaining rigorous, exacting academic standards (Weinstein, Siskin, and Sperling, 2010).

Schools looking to bridge the achievement gap among diverse students look to broadening AP and IB coursework for all their students. The essential components for success in

building students toward AP and IB programs are: academic rigor in courses leading to higher level courses, quality teacher-student interactions characterized by encouragement to succeed, and teaching for meaning. Smith found that student success is an exponential proposition – success begets success (Smith, 2010).

The IB DP can be successfully implemented in an urban high school with a diverse population when students are given strong support structures. Mayer (2008) studied an urban high school in California that primarily serves Latino, Black, and Southeast Asian students. Students clearly know they must achieve a high level of performance but are openly encouraged to attempt the DP. Academic enrichment opportunities including: study-skills classes, tutoring, and summer course work added to student success. Importantly, teachers actively work with students both inside and outside the classroom. Giving students access to a specially-trained guidance counselor was also instituted. Students are encouraged to rely on one another for support and motivation. Even with these structures in place, students at this school score far below their US and world peers on IB exams and relatively few IB diplomas are awarded.

South Side High School in New York began the process of broadening the DP program in 1998 as administrators observed that only a small percentage of students were participating in DP classes, despite the fact that 90 percent of the students at that school were college-bound. By de-tracking students in the middle school, students were prepared for the rigorous DP coursework. This was especially beneficial for minority students were most likely to be taking lower track Math and Science classes. The learning culture of the high school was built upward, with all classes considered to be ‘pre-IB.’ Students were encouraged to take risks in taking academically challenging courses as the school built a culture of success. Teachers in the building were given extra time to work with students and improve instructional techniques. As a

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, Weiner, Wiley, and Murphy, 2007).

Beginning in 1997, Chicago Public Schools implemented the IB DP in several Chicago neighborhood high schools. The goal was to bring the academically rigorous program to low-income students in the hopes of raising achievement, increasing the probability of high school graduation and opening the probability of entering into university studies. Saavedra (2011) found that the IB DP as implemented by the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is a cost-effective way to increase high school graduation rates. As of 2010, a year of CPS's implementation of the DP, along with the associated preparatory programs for students in the ninth and tenth grades costs \$650,000. This works out to an average cost per student for implementing the IB DP, including related exam costs, of \$217 (p. 28). Students who participate in the IB program increase their high school graduation and enrollment in college from 17 to 22 percent. Further, this study estimates that IB enrollment increases students' ACT scores by as much as .5 standard deviations. The IB Diploma studies are especially beneficial for boys, who in urban environments have a greater drop-out rate than girls (Saavedra, 2011).

Though the DP is a comprehensive course of study, individual schools can elect to have students from the general population take DP classes that interest them. Though not exactly equivalent to AP classes, students are able to earn IB Certificates for successful course completion. This option allows schools to fill DP classes to a greater capacity and gives the DP broader visibility to the general school population (O'Connor, 2011). This option is controversial as many believe it dilutes the holistic nature of the DP program.

## **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). Though teacher attitude is important, professional IB training for DP teachers is factors largely into school success. During training, which is usually held off-site, teachers are encouraged to have high expectations for students as they work through the rigorous DP curriculum, gain a holistic view of the DP, and understand how to prepare their students for the end-of-year exams (Mayer, 2010). Weinstein found that the most essential support structure for schools embracing the DP is IB professional development. “Indeed, the extraordinarily positive (even raving) descriptions of the trainings...stand out as exceptional across studies of educational reform and professional development” (Weinstein, Siskin, and Sperling, 2010, p. 51).

The involvement of guidance counselors plays a key role in the success of IB DP programs. In many cases the counselors are the first contact students have with the DP program. Guidance counselors determine which students enter the classrooms and play a key role in helping the whole school understand IB. Informed and involved counselors inform students about the DP and encourage success after the process begins. When counselors recommend the DP to students beyond those who have stellar academic records, the programs grow (Weinstein, et al., 2010).

Especially crucial to program success is the program coordinator, a teacher who is responsible for the success of the IB program within the building. Using the peer-to-peer model



of leadership, the coordinator helps to build a sense of commitment among the teachers. In schools with high administrator turn-over rates, having a committed, long-term coordinator gives the consistency the program needs. District and local administration can run counter to the goals of the IB DP. In large, bureaucratic districts the DP can get lost in a sea of other issues and funding can be problematic. Often political considerations cause district officials to be more concerned about allocating funds to raise the scores of the lower achieving students than to maintain a program designed to give high-achieving students maximum learning opportunities. The coordinator needs to be a consistent advocate for the DP at all levels (Mayer, 2010).

### **Student Learning Experiences.**

The IB program creates an intentional set of quality learning experiences that encompass the entire high school experience. For the most part, from the beginning of the ninth grade year through the twelfth grade, students have a set program to follow. Though the IB allows a degree of choice within the six academic areas, students are constantly aligned with the goal of finishing the DP. Students in the DP are assessed through a variety of measures, including both oral and written exams. IB also uses formal papers and lab assignments to evaluate students (Coca et al., 2012).

IB's unique focus on looking at the world through different perspectives is also a contributor to student success. The IB encourages creative thinking and respects students' varying opinions of the world. An international focus in education certainly has an appeal to students who are immigrants, or the son/daughter of immigrants. All DP students have a world language component in their program. Students who are fluent in a language can use this knowledge to fulfill that challenging DP component (Coca et al., 2012).

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,

causing resentment and dissension. Leading economists and government officials at the national level have embraced IB's academic rigor combined with international perspectives as a way to increase America's global competitiveness. Many school districts were enticed to adopt IB programming through a series of federal grants. A volatile conservative backlash has ensued, causing potential political considerations for districts planning to enact IB programs. At the forefront of complaints are allegations that IB is anti-American coupled with concerns that the federal government is interfering in local educational matters. Though all three programs have been attacked, the major emphasis has been on the PYP and MYP dimensions. The IBO has taken steps to clearly dispel the negative assertions that have been generated about the program. Because funding for IB programs is crucial, districts need to positively understand IB's underpinnings and effectively communicate them to the community (Bunnell, 2009).

### **Implication of the Findings and Application to MOEC**

#### **Implication of the Findings**

IB programs have been designed to support inclusivity and student success. The PYP and MYP are programs that have been designed to benefit whole school communities. Since the focus is on inquiry-based learning, all students in the PYP and MYP can be successful. Students learn how to ask essential questions and pursue academic skills in context. Students learn to research and think creatively. Further the PYP and MYP put learning into context as students are encouraged to explore their local communities. As students mature, they are also encouraged to go beyond themselves and understand others in the world.

Because the PYP and MYP go beyond rote learning, they teach the students the thinking problem-solving skills needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century world citizen. The cost to implement these

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-site. With whole school implementations, teachers build common understanding of educational practice and teaching techniques. IB training recognizes teachers as intelligent professionals, so seminars are intensive and challenging.

At first blush, the DP seems to be a radical shift from the inclusiveness of the learner-centered PYP and MYP programs. The design matrix of the DP shifts from being learner-centered, to a model that is philosophical, academic, and active. Actually the PYP and the MYP are excellent preparations for the DP. With inquiry-based learning, academically advanced students can press themselves to learn to their potentials. By learning to question and research, they learn underlying concepts and how to apply knowledge. Learning how to integrate knowledge between disciplines is strength of the PYP and MYP. Though the DP is more subject-specific, a broad knowledge base helps students who must be competent in all areas to achieve the diploma.

The DP is an excellent barometer of student attainment with an international standard. By using a combination content-specific tests, oral exams, and written pieces, students can evaluate their learning on a world stage. IB's standards are uncompromising. Because the DP is rigorous academically, many early adopters, particularly in the US, utilized it as specialized program for the gifted and talented. DP programs were set-up as exclusive 'school within a school' programs that appealed to a narrow band of impressive students. Touted as an excellent pre-university program, affluent students used the DP to bolster their chances of competitive

university admissions. This runs counter to IB philosophy, which is inclusive and disavows elitism. “The implementation of using the IB track for a certain subset of students can be seen as a ‘lethal mutation’ (McLaughlin & Mitra, 2001) of the first principles of equity, access, and intercultural competence around which the founders of the IB constructed their program” (Conner, 2008 p. 345). This is a call for all schools to reconsider the constituency of the DP, make it generally available a broader student population (with adequate non-tracked academic preparation), and actively engage students to do the hard work necessary to obtain the diploma.

Schools implementing whole school reforms are choosing IB programs. With the encouragement from federal grants, a substantial number of Title I schools have adopted the PYP, MYP, and DP programs. Diverse students living in poverty can be successful in rigorous DP classes, given the proper supports. These supports include: proper academic preparation courses, tutoring, and enhanced teacher involvements.

The IB continuum supports excellence at every level. Teachers in the PYP and MYP are encouraged to go beyond traditional delivery of subject matter and engage students through inquiry-based learning. With this methodology all students can succeed at their own levels as they creatively explore the world. The DP demands academic rigor, but implementation should go beyond ‘a school within a school’ and include larger numbers of students. With the right scaffolding, which includes the IB continuum, vertical alignment, peer support, and academic tutoring, more students will be successful.

IB Programming at every level can help students and teachers build bridges of understanding and cultural awareness. Because the PYP and MYP are inquiry-based, students can choose to study topics that help them become more fully self-aware as they learn to

appreciate their heritages. This brings a richness of learning that highlights the mosaic of cultures and interests in every classroom. Further, IB seeks for all students to understand the world beyond the classroom. PYP students learn to think of their relationship to the neighborhood; both MYP and DP programs emphasize community awareness and service to others. Beyond this, IB seeks to bring international understandings to all students in the hopes that greater recognition and respect for world communities will bring a stronger, more peaceful world.

### **Application to MOEC**

Hopefully more schools in the metro area will continue to adopt IB programs, either as singleton adoptions, or as a K-12 full continuum of learning. Districts that implement the full continuum should align the programs to match within catchment areas so students can benefit from their educational and philosophical continuity. Because the MYP covers grades 6 – 10, which typically is all of middle school and the first two years of high school, it is recommended that all feeder middle schools going into a MYP high school adopt the MYP. This builds strength program-wide and ends the conundrum of how to sustain a continuous, whole school adoption at the high school level. Districts that adopt both the PYP and MYP find the transition to the DP is eased. Schools that have the DP should look to active, inclusive recruiting into the DP program, consider implementing IB Certificate courses for students who want to take individual classes, and build support scaffolds for all students who participate.

As more districts in the Omaha metro area adopt IB programs, a consortium of support can be developed. A major expense of IB program implementation is training. MOEC could bring in IB trainers and have districts share the cost of professional development. With wider

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-districts.

Ongoing training is a must for teachers working in IB programs. MOEC's mentoring program offers excellent structures for veteran teachers in IB schools to work with new teachers. Schools offering IB programs should strengthen their ties with MOEC's mentoring program and make sure a substantial numbers of veteran teachers receive training. Though mentoring is designed to build in-building relationships, it could be expanded to intra-district mentoring relationships to connect teachers in the IB programs.

Much of the success in the PYP and MYP is due to excellence in teaching and employing inquiry-based, student-centered teaching techniques. Building a pipeline of new teachers in to IB programs would benefit districts wanting to hire enthusiastic, well-prepared teachers. The University of Nebraska, Omaha (UNO) could work in cooperation with schools that offer the PYP and MYP to educate pre-service teachers in the use these constructivist strategies. Special observations and internships could be arranged. Furthermore, pre-service teachers interested in teaching at IB schools could arrange student-teaching experiences that would enhance their opportunities to be hired locally, nationally, or around the world.

More IB programming will not dilute the programs that are already in place. School districts from throughout the area should consider implement the full spectrum of what IB has to offer. IB programming can be a solution to schools seeking entire building renewal, especially

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**

The author holds a B.A. in Liberal Arts from the University of Northern Colorado and a M.A. in Educational Administration from the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She is employed by Millard Public Schools as a teacher-librarian and is involved with students in the IB DP program, particularly with the Extended Essay. She is involved with literacy issues and is co-chair of the Young Adults Choices of the International Reading Association. In her spare time, she teaches pre-service teachers at Grace University.



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