

International Baccalaureate Programmes

A Brief Overview

By: Nada Saab, December 1, 2008

Our Future Depends on Education

Attempts for education reforms in American high schools have not been successful since the Nation at risk report of 1983. Although, the real spending per pupil in U.S. public schools has risen be about 50 percent, we have gained little by way of better education results. (IBO Council of Foundation, 2006a)

Transforming the American high school is necessary to achieving a quality education and a more prosperous society. This is directly dependent on the quality of teaching and the educational culture of the school itself. (Jones, 2008; Marino, 2008, McCallum, 2008; Alchin, 2008)

There is a need for a deep and broad change in the schools. As Marzano stated (2005) “The need for truly effective educational leadership is great. The time for improving our schools is short. The opportunity to lead is ours....the knowledge needed to make substantial positive changes in the effectiveness of schools is available. The only thing left is to act”

“In order to prepare young people for life and work in a rapidly changing world, secondary level education systems need to be re-oriented to impact a broad range of life skills”. (UNESCO, 2005)

The challenges of the 21st century are common to all countries and therefore, there should be a global educational solution. UNESCO’s report of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty first Century (1996) emphasized on: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together with, and learning to be.

The three IB programmes are for all grade levels. All three IB programmes, the IB Primary Years Programme (PYP), the IB Middle Years Programme (MYP), and the IB Diploma Programme respond well to those needs. IB programmes provide the modern education, open the best opportunities for the students, support and motivate the teachers. (IBO Council of Foundation, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c)

High achieving schools are rigorous schools. IB schools are rigorous schools. Expanding access to high quality education, such as that of IB, requires vision, time; will, conscious, enthusiasm, risk-taker and open-mind leaderships. (Review 2006 a)

The International Baccalaureate is Worth a Closer Attention

Educators and professionals believe that it is time to take a fresh look at curriculum and pedagogy.

Jay Mathews had been writing about American High schools for more than two decades. Based on what he has learned in that time, it was clear for him that IB and AP are the most important and beneficial improvements in American public schools in the last fifteen years. AP despite its prestige had lost its way in some schools. There were too many restrictions on who could take the courses. (Mathews, 2005)

In *Schools across Frontiers* (2005), Peterson stated “The creation of an international baccalaureate has ceased to be solely an internationalist idea and became a practical necessity”.

Ian Hill-deputy director general stated “ So, as it was being formed in the 1960s, IB international education wanted students to recognize that people share a common heritage, to adopt positive attitudes about other cultures, to respect all human beings, to understand that nations are interdependent, to know about history and the present on a world scale, to be able to commit themselves to a society where one could hold opinions freely and to engage in critical thinking, physical exercise and community service”. (Hill, 2008, IBO Council of Foundation, 2007d)

His Highness the Aga Khan said “there is no better investment that individuals, parents and the nation can make than an investment in education of the highest possible quality”. (IBO Council of Foundation, 2007d)

We can not force a change. Instead, we can adjust the environment to cultivate the change we desire to implement. Lickona suggested (1991) that if schools wish to develop good characters/learning profile, the whole school environment, and its moral culture has to support the growth. Respect and responsibility are the top values of schools. If schools wish to develop character, the must provide the environment to nourish them by provide supportive program and educational training for teachers. The IB programmes seem to be a perfect fit for school to develop intellectual as well as moral growth.

Professor Howard Gardner’s at Harvard University, in his book “disciplined mind”, argues that by the conclusion of the secondary school students should have mastered the basic literacy, the major ways of thinking (including scientific, mathematical, historical and artistic thinking). These concepts are the heart of a successful educational system and are well considered in the IB programmes. (IB world, 2008a)

IB Events and Growth for All Students

IB events allow the students to grow in many ways, intellectually and socially. The academic rigor of the IB is important, but its humanitarian values are everything. IB founders believe that through high-quality education, educators can create a better world. No students are excluded, no matter what their backgrounds might be. (IBO Council of Foundation, 2007d, IBCC, 2008)

IB programs promote the education of the whole person, emphasizing intellectual, personal, emotional, and social growth through all domains of knowledge. IB program characteristics are:

- 1- international
- 2- Develops critical thinking skills
- 3- 2nd language required
- 4- Study across a broad range of subjects, include both individual subjects and trans-disciplinary areas
- 5- Provide collaborative planning and research
- 6- Encourage students to become more responsible members of their communities.
- 7- Emphasizes cultural understanding
- 8- Programs shaped around creating a better world

All aimed to develop students who can create a better world through intercultural understanding and respect. (Hill, 2008, IBO Council of Foundation, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2007c, 2007e)

At the heart of the IB is the learner profile, a long-term, holistic vision of education for the 21st century. It describes 10 attributes of international mindedness whereby IB learners are inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, risk-takers, balanced, caring, and reflective. (IBO Council of Foundation, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2007c)

IB students are exploring, synthesizing, theorizing, and learning how to learn. Done right it seems to be a model for all who want the next generation to be as prepared for modern world as possible. (IBO Council of Foundation, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2007c)

The IB's Strategy

The IB is planning its rapid growth to maximize its worldwide impact through:

- A- Continuously improving the **quality** of the curriculum, assessment, professional development, and research and university recognition.
- B- Broadening **access** purposefully where the programmes can have the most impact, particularly with disadvantaged students, initially, USA Title 1 schools and developing the Diploma Programme Online.
- C- Building a highly effective and efficient organization and **infrastructure** that will be able to deliver high-quality IB programmes and services to schools, so that more students can experience and benefit from IB education, regardless of personal circumstances. (IBO Council of Foundation, 2006c, 2007d, 2008b)

IBO Develops its Curriculum, Practices and Supports Teachers

The International Baccalaureate Research Unit (IBRU) has a role to promote the IB programmes through research-based evidence, stimulate research and form collaboration between the IBO and external research agencies. IB is continuously improving and practices are

based on current educational researches in the field of education. (IBO Council of Foundation, 2007e)

An important feature of IB is that it always seeks to improve educational research through collaboration with universities such as that with Harvard Graduate School of Education's on Project Zero on interdisciplinary learning. The project is based on "teaching for understanding" approach which reinforces individualized instruction and teaching concepts through the use of multiple forms of representation to reach for more students. (IB world, 2008a)

Teachers must adopt new classroom techniques to keep ahead in a changing field. They need to be innovative, creative and lifelong learners. IB programmes respond well to those needs. IBO has the priority to find new ways to support teachers in classroom around the world and enrich their teaching repertoires. (Jones, 2008; Marino, 2008, McCallum, 2008; Alchin, 2008)

The IB trains and support teachers through both traditional face-to-face workshops and online. Face-to-face workshops are organized by each IB region throughout the year. A range of teacher support materials and online courses are offered. The Online Curriculum Center (OCC) is an international community of practice for 66 thousand registered IB teachers. To IB trains and supports workshop leaders and online faculty members. (IBO Council of Foundation, 2007e)

Teachers, coordinators and administrators in the IB programmes are continuously sharing their mission to provide an international education through programmes that have been developed using the best-practice teaching and educational experiences from across the world. (IBO Council of Foundation, 2007e)

The expression "every profession should be an authentically woven occupation" put some pressure on the teachers. Teachers are to be well educated, so they maneuver gently between the disciplines. Teachers are to be models for transcultural, transreligious, transpolitical and transnational attitude, open to unity and complex plurality. (Lake, 2001)

AP and IB Tests

Many states in the united stated are struggling with new high-stakes, multiple choice, detailed oriented tests required for thigh school graduation along with the new federal No Child Left Behind test requirement. Spending a little more money on IB could be the solution. (Mathews, 2005)

The AP test is usually three hours with half of the questions multiple choice, while the IB test is five hours of essay questions. (Mathews, 2005)

The curriculum and examination of the IB programmes showed the influence of three countries. The British brought the essay-type questions. Multiple choice and short answers came from the United States. The French contributed in depth-textual analysis and oral examinations. (Mathews, 2005)

IB test demands both memory and thought. They are designed to inspire the very best kind of teaching. IB had 5,000 examiners in 121 countries, playing a critical role in maintaining the quality of assessment. The tests are independently assessed. Consequently, teachers or administrators have to make sure that the course is being well caught. (IBO Council of Foundation, 2007d)

A Passport to the World's Colleges and Universities

Today, nearly 80,000 students sit the Diploma programme examinations and have access to more than 2,200 universities around the world that recognize the IB Diploma Programme. Colleges have great respect for students who received the IB Diploma. And once college professors realized how robust the critical-thinking skills of IB students were, they often allowed them to move to more challenging courses right away. (IBO Council of Foundation, 2007d, Mathews, 2005)

IB Diploma

The IBO is developing “an online version of the IB Diploma Programme that can both support delivery in existing IB World Schools but also reach out to completely new communities of students that cannot physically attend an IB World School”. (IBO Council of Foundation, 2008b)

Efforts to alter the course of university preparation led to three great IB innovations that distinguish it today from other college level programs, such as AP. Each of the ideas grew from the IB founders' notion of what an educated person ought to be and became a parts of the program that students praise most often- the extended essay, the creative, aesthetic, or social service activity (CASS) and the Theory of Knowledge course (TOK). (IBO Council of Foundation, 2007c; Alchin, 2008, Jones, 2008)

The extended essay had many influences. High school students need and intellectual outlet for “grand passion”. That led to the requirement that every candidate for the IB diploma conduct a significant piece of research on a topic of his or her own choice. The idea was to develop research skills and encourage the kind of critical thinking learned in Theory of Knowledge. The extended essay had to apply to one of the six IB subject areas and be about 4,000 words in length-the equivalent of about sixteen, double spaced pages. It had to be done over four to six months of the candidate's own time under the guidance of a teacher, and be graded by an outside examiner. (IBO Council of Foundation, 2007, 2008, Mathews, 2005)

Peterson did not like what the competition for good college spaces was doing to young people's choices of how to spend their spare time. He was particularly pleased with the second new idea “CAS” for creativity, action, service. The idea was to encourage active involvement and contribute to the growth of the whole person rather than just academic development. “Action” meant physical exertion in sport, expeditions, mountain climbing, gymnastics and other

strenuous activities. Community service was encouraged and includes service to the school itself, such as assisting with younger children, organizing clubs, or launching environmental awareness activities. “Creativity” retained the connotations it had had from the beginning. Many of the CAS projects around the world came to be linked with IB’s emphasis on intercultural understanding. IB students worked with refugee families to reinforce the language of the host country and provide support. (IBO Council of Foundation, 2007, 2008, Mathews, 2005)

The third big IB idea, the Theory of Knowledge ‘TOK’, was initially designed to address two glaring weaknesses in the structure of European instruction. The first was the tendency which most students had to study their different subjects in watertight compartments. Student often did not seem to see connection between literature and psychology or history and literature. The second weakness was the failure to make explicit in the minds of students the differing forms which academic learning and knowledge take. The intention of this course was to help the students to think about the question which underlie the nature of knowledge as presented in the school disciplines and his daily life. (IBO Council of Foundation, 2007, 2008, Mathews, 2005)

Multidisciplinary and Inquiry-Based Learning Aspects of the IB Programmes

Inquiry-based learning and multidisciplinary approaches of IB are effective modern educational strategies.

Science education researchers have been calling for change in science educational practice that prepares scientifically literate students to advance the nation in an increasingly complex technological world. (Linn, 2003) Teachers need to be confident in teaching interactive, inquiry-based modern science courses. The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS, 1989), National Research Council (NRC) and American Chemical Society (ACS) are supporting nation-wide effort to implement learning sciences and national standards-based scientific inquiry education at the K-12 levels.

Recommendations of recent educational researches on successful teaching encourage presenting science in a logical and coherent sequence that reflects the connections among the disciplines and the implementation of multidisciplinary interactive projects. Recently developed multidisciplinary courses at three universities, Harvard, Princeton and Columbia, showed that it is possible to teach science in an integrated fashion to both science majors and non-science majors. The courses are very successful with remarkable large enrollment of highly energetic students. (Amoud, 2006)

Talented and Special Aid Students

The IB On-line Curriculum Center includes supports for gifted, talented and special aid students. Gifted and Talented link includes: Strategies (enrichment, differentiation), Characteristics (early childhood and so on), Resources (journal, textbooks and websites), and Theories (Acceleration and Bloom). Those same supports besides therapies are available for

Attention Disorder, Autism Spectrum, Physical Disabilities, Sensory Impairment, Mental Health, and Specific Learning. There is a link to IBO candidate with special assessment needs, and teaching students with particular special educational and learning needs. (IBO Council of Foundation, 2007e)

Advancement via Individual Determination “AVID” is a program born in California to prepare average kids for IB. The teachers are trying to teach them study skills and increase their confidence so the students could take place in regular or even honors classes. (Mathews, 2005)

Funding

Today 56.5% of all IB World School programmes are state funded. The nature of state-funded education is more likely to ensure “access regardless of personal circumstances” and on average, state schools have larger student cohorts. Title 1 assistance and the proportion of title 1 schools are increasing for all three programmes. (IBO Council of Foundation, 2008a, 2008b)

International baccalaureate North America is aware of the need to better serve under-prepared students, including those who are educationally under-prepared due to their life circumstances. There are many schools across the USA, successfully serving students from low-income families. They are mastering the curriculum for their grade levels and their test scores. (IBO Council of Foundation, 2006a)

IB Education is for a Better World

IB programs provide the modern education, open the best opportunities for the talented students, support and motivate the teachers, which is most needed in our schools for our generations. (IBO Council of Foundation, 2007f)

“Think global, act local” is a way of life for IB World Schools. The concept of International mindedness stresses the fact that the only way to appreciate someone else’s culture is first to be confident in your own. The IB is designed to bring nations together by broadening and deepening the way young people thought about their culture, their histories, and themselves. (IBO Council of Foundation, 2002)

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