

What are the benefits of the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme for teaching and learning? Perspectives from stakeholders in Australia

Summary developed by IB Research based on a report prepared by:
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Background

This study examines perspectives from teachers, coordinators and principals on the benefits of the International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle Years Programme (MYP) for learning and teaching in Australia. In general, the study addresses the impediments and enablers of offering the MYP, as well as the benefits and challenges of the MYP for learning and teaching. The study also reveals new insights about the impacts of national curriculum standards and school funding regimes on the MYP in Australia.

Research design

Researchers employed a qualitative research design involving case studies, semi-structured interviews and document analysis to gather data about stakeholders' views on the impact of the MYP on learning and teaching. This small-scale study explores the perspectives of seventeen MYP teachers, five MYP coordinators and six school principals from three public and two private schools in Australia. The overall socio-economic composition of the schools ranged from "middle-low" to "high". In addition to school stakeholders, researchers also interviewed four representatives from Australian governing bodies and public education authorities.

Findings

Philosophy, principles and approaches of the MYP

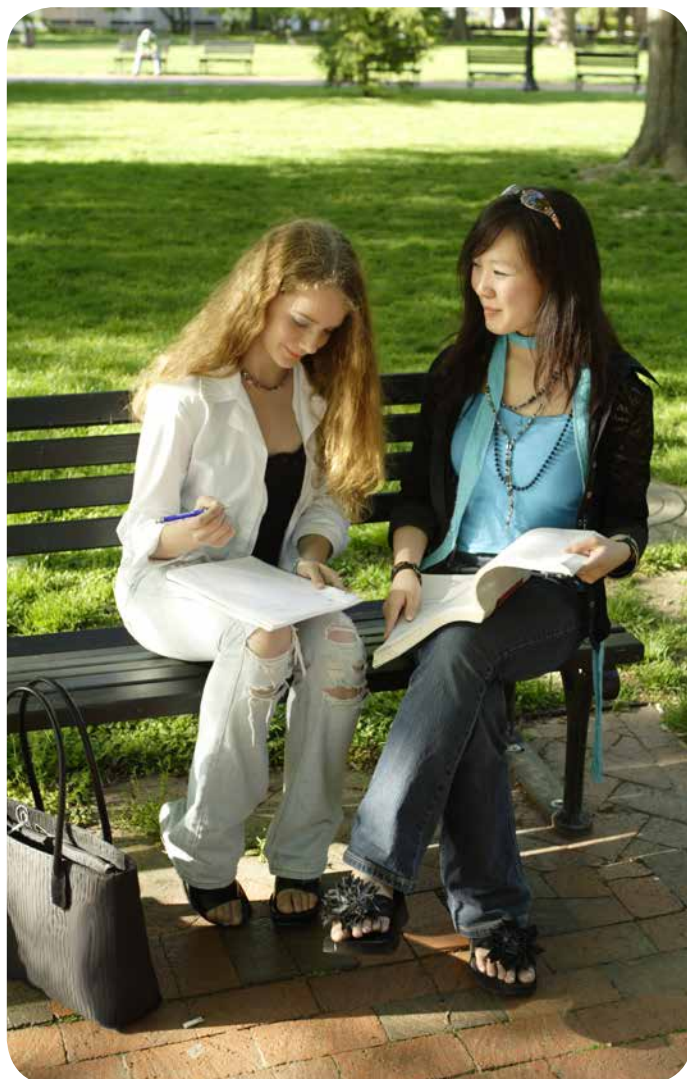
- All participants reported widespread approval of the philosophy of the MYP. The majority of the teachers, coordinators and principals recommended the MYP as a high-quality learning framework that is academically rigorous, engaging for students, authentic and holistic. None of the participants voiced concern about the underlying principles of the MYP, and the majority recognized the suitability of the MYP for the adolescent phase of learning.
- Participants valued how the MYP promotes student inquiry, critical thinking and other academic and non-scholastic skills. The focus on concept-driven, inquiry-based and interdisciplinary learning make the MYP a desirable option in Australian schools. As the principal of one of the schools noted:

"The world class thing about IB is the actual pedagogy, it's not focused on content. Content's important and we need to know stuff, but it's how we manipulate it and it's the enquiring model. It's about challenging kids to think critically, to have to come to

a point of view. For us, it's a much better proposition than the Australian curriculum ... which is a whole bunch of content when all of the research is saying, 'Reduce the content, increase the thinking, increase the creativity, increase the problem-solving'".

- Participants believed the MYP encourages links between academic subjects and real-world contexts. They also appreciated its emphasis on local and global citizenship and its ability to promote connections to the local community. One of the coordinators interviewed remarked:

"... the whole idea of the MYP is a path trying to develop not just subject content, but we want the students to develop as a whole, put back into the community and see the links between learning areas. We're trying to take them on a journey so that they're building their skills so that they can develop not only internally but externally with others".



Organization and structure of the MYP and the Australian curriculum

- Many educators reported that working with “two authorities” (the state jurisdiction and the IB) creates challenges for planning, timetabling, assessment and reporting. This in turn can increase teacher workload and stress. Teachers noted that marrying the Australian national curriculum with the MYP requires careful planning, a substantial investment in time, and reporting and complying with the standards of “two masters”. Reporting challenges are especially pronounced for public schools, as they have to meet the requirements of both the local jurisdiction and the IB. A teacher from one of the public schools describes this experience:

“I think for us straddling the Australian curriculum and the IB creates challenges because we are having to make sure that we do everything from two areas. Whilst it would be nice to have the MYP and just cherry-pick from the Australian curriculum how we’re going to incorporate those things in, it just makes it harder for us. It’s not impossible. It just makes life a bit tougher”.

- Participants requested more support and exemplars from the IB and their jurisdiction to overcome the perceived ‘gap’ in support. At all schools, educators noted that training, support and resources for managing the extra demands associated with offering the MYP were not always adequate.
- The cost of the MYP was mentioned by teachers, coordinators and principals in both public and private schools—specifically direct programme costs and professional learning costs. These costs were particularly challenging for the public schools. An MYP coordinator from one of the public schools commented:

“I feel like it doesn’t necessarily acknowledge the diversity of situations that schools find themselves in. It became very evident to me that as a public school, and with all the restrictions around being a public school and money, we don’t have the opportunities to take the MYP to that next level that I’ve seen schools that are well funded achieve”.
- In spite of challenges related to cost, the MYP framework was perceived as a vehicle for the professional development of teachers at all stages of

their careers. Participants reported that professional development for the MYP invigorated more experienced staff while helping teachers with less experience to develop. In particular, teachers valued how MYP professional development helped them to focus on inquiry and skill development rather than just content, and they believed that it made their assessments more rigorous and authentic.

- Educators also appreciated the rigour of the MYP in helping to prepare students for further study. Additionally, many teachers suggested that learning, teaching and assessment had improved. When asked why one of the schools was continuing to offer the MYP, the principal remarked:

“For me, the key purpose for continuing in it [the MYP] is the rigor ... the previous chief executive of the education department used to ask me, ‘Why are you so passionate? Why are you coming to see me all the time about this stuff? What can our system learn from the IB?’ I said, ‘The key things it can learn is: have a reviewing process which is positive and affirming not just negative, and have a system that develops young people in a holistic way and stops measuring the trivial. Value what’s really important’. You ask any principal or educational thinker on either, one of the most important outcomes for education, they don’t start naming the content of courses”.

Summary

Educators in this study believed that the MYP is a high-quality learning framework that provides genuine benefits for learning and teaching. All participants valued the philosophy and principles embedded in the MYP. There were also challenges with implementing the MYP in Australia, however. These challenges related to the need for additional support for teachers, the financial costs of the programme and the increased planning and reporting necessary to meet both IB and local jurisdiction requirements. Nevertheless, the study indicated that the MYP has great potential to improve the relevance and authenticity of schooling for adolescents in Australia, while providing rigour and holistic development.

This summary was developed by the IB Research department. A copy of the full report is available at ibo.org/en/research/. For more information on this study or other IB research, please email research@ibo.org.

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