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Abstract

International Baccalaureate (IB) schools have experienced dramatic growth worldwide over the past decade in response to burgeoning demand for high-quality education with an international orientation. One increasingly common trend has found international schools adopting two or more of the three programs offered by the IB: the Diploma, Middle Years and Primary Years programs. While the IB's three academic programs cover the full K-12 education continuum, they were developed in an evolutionary rather than a strategic fashion and operate with very different curricular assumptions. Thus schools adopting multiple IB programs have reported a variety of 'transition problems' as students move from one program to the next. In light of these reports, the IB undertook a global survey of IB Program Coordinators in 2008 with the goal of better understanding the extent and nature of this problem. In this study we analyze those data in an effort to understand the challenges that schools are experiencing as they seek to support students in making a successful transition from the Middle Years Program to the Diploma Program. We also highlight differences in the challenges faced by partial continuum and full continuum IB schools and offer recommendations for addressing the 'transition problems' identified in the study.

Keywords

International Baccalaureate, full continuum schools, MYP–DP transition, partial continuum schools, program implementation

The number of schools offering the International Baccalaureate's (IB) academic programs has grown dramatically in recent years in response to burgeoning demand for high-quality international education (IB, 2009a). Concurrent with this growing global demand, the IB platform has grown from the well-recognized, upper-secondary Diploma Program (DP) to include the Middle Years Program (MYP) and Primary Years Program (PYP) as well. Recent data on program adoption indicate a strong growth trend in which schools are increasingly implementing multiple IB programs (IBO, 2009a).

Consequently, it has become common usage for international education practitioners to refer to an 'IB continuum', and the three programs are indeed undergirded by the same international

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orientation and values. Nonetheless, we note that the three IB programs were neither designed at the same time nor designed with inter-program linkages in mind. Instead, they evolved organically in response to emerging needs and opportunities in the global education marketplace (Hallinger et al., 2010; Hill, 2002). As a result, the three IB programs were conceived and designed as self-contained units and incorporate different approaches to curriculum design, instructional delivery, learning culture, and assessment.

This opportunistic approach to program expansion by the IB has been mirrored in the manner by which schools have adopted the three programs. We observe that relatively few schools have adopted all three programs simultaneously. The more frequent approach has been evolutionary, with schools first adopting a single program, usually the DP, and later expanding their IB platform after gaining positive results (IBO, 2009a).

There have, however, been unanticipated consequences of this organic approach to IB program design and adoption. Both the IB and school practitioners acknowledge problems among students in making a smooth transition from one program to the next in schools that offer multiple IB programs. This issue has taken on greater importance as the number of schools adopting multiple IB programs has increased over the past decade (IBO, 2009a). The issue of IB program transition represents the practical focus of this empirical study.

More specifically, the purpose of this study was to examine the global landscape of transition challenges that have emerged as the number of schools electing to employ multiple IB programs has increased. We limit this report to a focus on the transition between the Middle Years and Diploma Programs in IB schools. Our inquiry seeks to identify the nature of transition challenges perceived by IB Coordinators throughout the world when their schools implement both the MYP and the DP. In addition, we analyze the IB Coordinators' perceptions concerning changes that are needed in order to improve the transition from the MYP to the DP. We address these issues through the analysis of data collected by the IB in a global survey of IB Coordinators conducted in 2008.

This research seeks to make several contributions to the literature in international education. First, we note that, despite the unprecedented global growth of schools employing IB programs, empirical research is limited. Second, a similar trend is also apparent when it comes to transition issues and school improvement more generally in IB schools. Only a handful of case studies have investigated related issues (e.g. Millikan, 2001; Stobie, 2005, 2007); research that addresses program transition on a global scale simply does not exist (IBO, 2009a). Third, the growth in the number of schools employing multiple IB programs is challenging the capacity of school leaders to maximize the learning benefits of operating multiple IB programs within the same school. If the current trend in IB program adoption continues, this research has the potential to inform practice as well as program design for IB program implementation. Finally, we suggest that gaining leverage on the issue of successful program implementation in IB schools can also contribute to the broader literatures on curriculum reform and school improvement using international schools as the contextual focus (Harris, 2001; Hopkins, 2000; Jackson, 2000; Newmann et al., 2001).

Background on international education and IB program transition

In this section of the article we present literature relevant to this study. We briefly discuss the changing context of international education, and the evolving status of the International Baccalaureate and its component programs. Finally, we review empirical literature related to program transition in IB schools.

Growth in international education

The growth in international education reflects varied needs, pressures and opportunities that have emerged in the education sphere over the past 50 years (Fox, 1985; Hayden and Thompson, 1995; Hill, 2001, 2002). In the earlier stage (i.e. pre-1990s) of development in international education, two primary motivators dominated the decision by schools to provide an international curriculum (Hayden and Thompson, 1995). In some schools the decision was grounded in overtly philosophical reasons, such as a desire to contribute to a global society or to prepare students with a more global or international perspective. Other schools were responding to a more pragmatic need among expatriate professionals for schools that were capable of delivering high-quality, internationally accredited preparation for entry into tertiary education institutions anywhere in the world (Fox, 1985; Hayden and Thompson, 1995).

The advent of economic globalization in the 1990s accelerated growth in demand for international education arising from both sources. The broader relevance of a 'global perspective' was enhanced by increasing economic and political integration, and further facilitated by advances in information technology (Ohmae, 2005). Issues of economic, cultural and environmental sustainability were increasingly framed in light of the development of more positive 'global attitudes' among future generations. Moreover, as multinational companies dramatically expanded their operations in emerging markets (e.g. in East Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America), the number of expatriate professionals working globally rose dramatically.

Over the past two decades, however, an additional motivation has blended with these two factors, further accelerating the explosive growth in international education. In many developing countries international education, often conducted in English, has come to represent a preferred alternative to the local school systems. Well-educated 'local parents' may view the local school system as parochial, lacking in quality, or aimed towards the wrong educational goals. As a result, in developing nations, expatriate parents are increasingly joined by parents from local communities in seeking access to international schools.

This perception is supported by data published by ISC Research (2008) which found that approximately 80% of students in international schools come from the wealthiest 5% of local populations (cited in Walker and Cheng, 2009). This phenomenon resonates with the rapid growth evidenced among international schools in the developing world. For example, between 1997 and 2010 the number of international schools in Thailand grew from less than 20 to more than 130. The main source of growth stems from demand among Thai parents who have come to view international education as a more reliable, progressive and internationally credible alternative for preparing their children for tertiary education (Khaopa and Kaewmukda, 2010).

Overview of the three IB programs

It is within this evolving landscape of international education that the International Baccalaureate has developed as one influential species (Bagnall, 1997; Cambridge, 2002; Doherty, 2009; Hill, 2002). The IB has built progressively on the early success of its Diploma Program (DP). First offered in the late 1960s, by 2010 more than 2,000 schools around the world had adopted the DP (IBO, 2010). More recently, and concurrent with the growing popularity of the DP, the IB undertook development of the Middle Years Program in 1994, and the Primary Years Program in 1997 (IBO, 2010). Over the past decade the fastest rate of IB program adoption has occurred in the Asia Pacific region (IBO, 2009a). Today more than 400 schools in the Asia Pacific region are employing one or more of the IB programs, and the majority of these schools are located in the independent school sector (IBO, 2010).

The Diploma Program, designed as a college preparatory curriculum with an international orientation, has achieved a reputation as the 'Cadillac of College-Prep Programs' (Gehring, 2001). Today, the DP is a two-year course consisting of six subjects coupled with Theory of Knowledge, Extended Essay, and a Creativity, Action, Service (CAS) program. Learning in the DP is largely assessed through external IB examinations. Observers have characterized the DP as a highly utilitarian school-leaving curriculum, the strengths of which lie in its international orientation, progressive pedagogy and focus on developing the whole person (Hill, 2001; Stobie, 2007).

The Middle Years Program (MYP), initiated in 1994, was designed as a curriculum for the 11–16 age range. The MYP includes eight disciplines combined with a personal project. There are no external examinations. While the MYP shares a similar international perspective with the DP, there is a significant distinction. As Renaud (1989) pointed out, the MYP is not viewed as a school-leaving certificate and does not comprise an actual curriculum per se (cited in Stobie, 2007).

The Primary Years Program (PYP), designed for students aged 3 to 12 years, was launched in 1997. The philosophical foundation of the PYP asserts that young students learn best by constructing models of understanding through their personal experience (Biro, 2003). In other words, the PYP emphasizes student construction of knowledge fostered by structured inquiry (IBO, 2009b). While the PYP acknowledges the importance of traditional disciplines (e.g. Language, Mathematics, Social Studies, Arts, and Science and Technology), it focuses more on acquiring skills and knowledge in relevant contexts, and encourages students to transcend the boundaries of traditional subjects during their inquiry (Biro, 2003). In this regard, the PYP is more closely aligned with the MYP in terms of its pedagogical underpinnings than with the DP.

Literature on IB program transition

As suggested earlier, the three IB programs were not designed with the assumption that students would necessarily progress from one to another. Thus, despite certain shared values (e.g. global perspectives, diversity, community service), a variety of transition challenges have emerged as students move from one program to another, even within the same 'IB school'. In this article we focus on the transition between just two of the programs: the MYP and the DP.

Our inquiry was informed by the few prior studies that examined related issues. Millikan's case study (2001), for example, provided useful insights about transition and continuity between the three programs. He conducted interviews with key staff from seven IB schools that were implementing all three programs in Australia. Millikan identified 'structural differences both within and between programmes' (p. 4), and noted the impact of differences in the terminology to describe key features of the learning process and outputs. He suggested a need for more intentional articulation of linkages and development of a common language among the IB programs.

Stobie's (2005, 2007) research reviewed archival data in order to explore issues of coherence (holistic fit) and consistency (curricular continuity) in IB schools offering multiple programs. He identified several features that appeared to enhance coherence and consistency between the IB programs. These included sharing the same IB vision, developing international perspectives, emphasizing the learning process, focusing on critical thinking skills and the application of knowledge, and encouraging lifelong learning (Stobie, 2005, 2007). Stobie further asserted that differences in curriculum design and approaches to assessment noted in the previous section negatively impacted coherence and consistency across the programs.

We highlight the fact that the issue of program transition has emerged as a largely unanticipated problem of program implementation. As the IB brand gained international acceptance, it has become increasingly common for schools to expand from offering a single IB program (usually the

DP) to offering two or more IB programs. Thus, in recent years, there has been an increase in the number of partial continuum schools (PCS) offering two programs and full continuum schools (FCS) offering all three IB programs (IB World Magazine, 2010).

It is within this context of global growth in the offering of IB programs that the relative frequency, type, and magnitude of transition-related issues faced by IB schools have assumed increasing salience. Moreover, we suggest that differences in the nature of these challenges as they emerge among PCS and FCS have practical importance as school leaders make strategic decisions that impact student and school success. In line with this issue, the IB recently called for research on the MYP–DP transition (IBO, 2009a) in full and partial continuum schools (IBO, 2009b). With this in mind, the current study sought to explore not only transition issues in general but also possible differences between full and partial continuum schools in addressing transition challenges.

Research questions

The present study addresses the following research questions:

- 1 What challenges are impacting program transition from the Middle Years Program to the Diploma Program across IB schools internationally?
- 2 Do IB Coordinators in partial continuum schools (in this case MYP–DP programmes) and full continuum schools (PYP–MYP–DP programmes) perceive these challenges similarly?
- 3 What changes are suggested for improving program transition in IB schools?

Method

This article presents data from a multi-methods study of program transition in IB schools located throughout the world, employing data collected in the IB's global survey of IB schools conducted in 2008, and reporting both quantitative and qualitative data.

Data

A global survey conducted by the IB in 2008 targeted schools offering both the MYP and DP, including full continuum schools (PYP–MYP–DP). Of 177 schools worldwide participating in the survey, 175 schools (98.8%) returned completed questionnaires. The schools were divided more or less evenly between full and partial continuum IB schools.

The surveys were completed by 235 IB Coordinators. In many of the schools, only one of the school's IB Coordinators responded to the survey. This led to an observed response rate of 49% of the total number of IB Coordinators working at the 175 schools.

The questionnaire covered a wide range of issues related to the MYP–DP transition. These included challenges embedded in the transition as well as changes needing for improving the transition. While most of the questions employed structured responses, open-ended questions were also included.

Data analysis

The analyses included in this article focus on the IB Coordinators as the unit of analysis. There are several reasons for using IB Coordinators instead of schools as the unit of analysis, despite a lower response rate. First, although the dataset contained school IDs (unique numbers assigned to each participant school in the survey for tracking information by school), some of the schools included

Table 1. IB Coordinators' evaluation of the MYP–DP transition

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Needs improvement	No connection	N
Frequency	14	84	70	57	10	235
Percentage	5.9%	35.7%	29.8%	24.3%	4.3%	100%

responses from at least two IB Coordinators. Therefore, schools do not represent a consistent unit of analysis. Furthermore, there were often inconsistent responses between the two or three IB Coordinators responding within the same schools. Given that there were 59 schools with two or three Coordinators (33.7%), this could prove to be problematic if the school were used as the unit of analysis. Second, it was not feasible to construct a composite variable by combining the responses of multiple IB Coordinators within one school, because the data consisted largely of categorical or binary variables which do not lend themselves to averaged responses.

Of the 235 IB Coordinators, 125 Coordinators were from full continuum schools. The other 110 Coordinators were from schools offering the MYP and DP (103 Coordinators), the MYP (6 Coordinators), or the DP (1 Coordinator). While we used the whole sample for identifying the general patterns of IB school characteristics, we excluded the 7 Coordinators from schools that offered single programs, since their responses were not relevant to our subject of investigation (i.e. comparing transition in FCS with transition in PCS).

Analytically, the survey dataset included largely binary or ordered categorical variables. Therefore, we employed a series of chi-square tests to analyze the data. Alongside this categorical data analysis, we also conducted content analysis of responses to open-ended questions in the survey.

Results

The presentation of results follows the foci of the three research questions. First, the general trend of findings regarding MYP–DP transition is examined. Second, the perceptions of IB Coordinators from PCS and FCS are explored. Finally, recommendations suggested by the IB Coordinators for improving program transition are examined.

Overall evaluation of the MYP–DP transition

We first examined patterns in the IB Coordinators' evaluations of the MYP–DP transition. As presented in Table 1, only 35.7% of the IB Coordinators perceived the MYP–DP transition in their schools as 'good'.

Another 29.8% assessed it as 'satisfactory', and 28.6% of the IB Coordinators felt that transition either needed improvement or demonstrated 'no connection'. This variable pattern of perceptions does suggest that program transition represents a salient issue for these IB schools.

To further explore the IB Coordinators' evaluations of program transition, we conducted a 2 by 2 chi-square test: PCS/FCS by the MYP–DP transition having the same five strata illustrated in Table 1. There was no significant difference between PCS and FCS Coordinators in terms of their 'overall evaluation' of whether the MYP–DP transition was successful in their schools ($p = .139$). At the same time, however, IB Coordinators from FCS were more likely than their counterparts in

Table 2. MYP–DP transition challenges: similarities in perceptions of IB Coordinators in PCS and FCS

Transition challenges	Type of school	Relevant	Neither relevant nor irrelevant	Irrelevant	Mantel–Haenszel chi-square test	N
Dealing with detailed and prescribed content in the DP	PCS	68 (68.0%)	23 (23.0%)	9 (9.0%)	$\chi^2(1) = .005, p = .9415$	219
	FCS	84 (70.6%)	22 (18.5%)	13 (10.9%)		
Change in student attitude to learning	PCS	52 (54.2%)	28 (29.2%)	16 (16.7%)	$\chi^2(1) = .483, p = .4867$	209
	FCS	56 (49.6%)	35 (31.0%)	22 (19.5%)		
Transition problems embedded in program design (MYP)	PCS	40 (41.7%)	42 (43.8%)	14 (14.6%)	$\chi^2(1) = .047, p = .8284$	212
	FCS	57 (49.1%)	36 (31.0%)	23 (19.8%)		
Decreased emphasis on skill development in the DP	PCS	33 (34.0%)	49 (50.5%)	15 (15.5%)	$\chi^2(1) = 1.65, p = .1986$	215
	FCS	58 (49.2%)	39 (33.1%)	21 (17.8%)		
Difficulty in identifying through-lines	PCS	37 (38.1%)	41 (42.3%)	19 (19.6%)	$\chi^2(1) = .483, p = .4867$	209
	FCS	50 (42.4%)	42 (35.6%)	26 (22.0%)		
Discontinuing holistic development of students	PCS	32 (32.3%)	47 (47.5%)	20 (20.2%)	$\chi^2(1) = .842, p = .3586$	215
	FCS	50 (43.1%)	41 (35.3%)	25 (21.6%)		

PCS to view transition as satisfactory: $\chi^2(1) = 4.56, p = .045$. Conversely, Coordinators from PCS were 2.46 times more likely than their counterparts from FCS to indicate that the transition needs improvement: $\chi^2(1) = 8.51, p = .004$. In sum, IB Coordinators in partial continuum schools tended to evidence a somewhat more negative evaluation of transition from the MYP to the DP than their counterparts in full continuum schools.

MYP–DP transition challenges

In general, there was relatively strong agreement among the IB Coordinators concerning the challenges in facilitating student transition from the MYP to the DP (see Table 2). Regardless of the type of schools in which they work, more than one-third of PCS and FCS Coordinators viewed the following issues as relevant transition challenges:

- Dealing with detailed and prescribed content in the DP (69%: calculated by [68 PCS Coordinators + 84 FCS Coordinators]/219 Coordinators)
- Change in student attitude to learning (52%)
- Transition problems embedded in program design (MYP) (46%)
- Decreased emphasis on skill development in the DP (42%)
- Difficulty in identifying through-lines (40%)
- Discontinuing holistic development of students (38%)

While IB Coordinators shared a common assessment of challenges in these areas, there were several other areas in which perceptions of IB Coordinators in PCS and FCS differed (see Table 3).

Table 3. MYP–DP transition challenges: differences in perceptions of IB Coordinators in PCS and FCS

Transition challenges	Type of school	Relevant	Neither relevant nor irrelevant	Irrelevant	Mantel–Haenszel chi-square test	N
Reduction in variety of assessment types	PCS	27 (28.1%)	55 (57.3%)	14 (14.6%)	$\chi^2(1) = 7.07, p = .0078$	213
	FCS	59 (50.4%)	44 (37.6%)	14 (12.0%)		
Smaller range of teaching methodologies used in the DP	PCS	28 (28.9%)	49 (50.5%)	20 (20.6%)	$\chi^2(1) = 11.2, p = .0008$	215
	FCS	68 (57.6%)	32 (27.1%)	18 (15.3%)		
Adapting to fewer subjects in the DP	PCS	19 (19.6%)	49 (50.5%)	29 (29.9%)	$\chi^2(1) = 6.94, p = .0084$	209
	FCS	9 (8.0%)	55 (49.1%)	48 (42.9%)		
Transition problems are school-based	PCS	51 (52.6%)	32 (33.3%)	14 (14.4%)	$\chi^2(1) = 23.1, p < .0001$	205
	FCS	27 (25.0%)	36 (33.3%)	45 (41.7%)		

First, we note that IB Coordinators (52.6%) in PCS were twice as likely as IB Coordinators (25%) in FCS to attribute transition problems to factors associated with the school as opposed to the design of the programs. This suggests the possibility that IB Coordinators in FCS may tend to adopt a more holistic perspective towards program implementation.

Second, the two groups of IB Coordinators viewed approaches to assessment differently: 50% of the IB Coordinators from FCS viewed ‘reduction in variety of assessment types’ as a relevant challenge, whereas only 28.1% of the Coordinators from PCS shared this perception. This trend was further reinforced by data generated from open-ended questions, as illustrated by the following:

Maths can be an issue. Assessment values different qualities in MYP and DP. (Coordinator 1 from a FCS)

The inconsistency in aligning MYP assessment to DP Program. Confusing to students & parents. (Coordinator 2 from a FCS)

Third, whereas a majority of the FCS Coordinators (57.6%) indicated that the ‘smaller range of teaching methodologies used in the DP’ was a challenge for students, only 28.9% of the Coordinators from PCS shared this perception. Again, some FCS Coordinators suggested that this was especially problematic in Mathematics and Science classes which tended to ‘become much more content based and driven’, compared with the MYP (Coordinator 3 from a FCS).

Changes recommended for improving the MYP–DP transition

The data indicated a considerable level of agreement among IB Coordinators globally concerning the types of changes needed to improve the MYP–DP transition. More specifically, a majority of IB Coordinators, regardless of the school types (PCS or FCS), indicated a need for change in the following eight areas:

- 1 Publication of MYP vertical and horizontal articulation documents (87%)
- 2 Publication of IB cross-program articulation documents (81%)
- 3 Provision of more teacher support and guidance for the MYP (78%)
- 4 Greater MYP recognition with governments and universities (76%)
- 5 Development of standardized internal MYP assessment tasks (67%)
- 6 Access to a wider range of assessment tools in the DP (65%)
- 7 Increased emphasis on interdisciplinary learning in the DP (61%)
- 8 More teacher support and guidance for the DP (54%)

Notably, the first three items indicate a need for additional ‘program resources’ from the IB in order to implement more coherent and consistent program transition for students. IB Coordinators sought greater clarity in guidelines designed to foster better cross-program articulation and consistency. This also extended to changes regarding assessment policies across the programs (e.g. standardized internal MYP assessment tasks, wider assessment tools in the DP).

There were several additional areas where the IB Coordinators evidenced a desire for changes designed to facilitate better program transition, but in which there were differences in the strength of association between PCS and FCS Coordinators (see Table 4 for statistical data):

- Greater DP recognition (PCS 82.4%, FCS 69.5%)
- MYP personal project and DP extended essay made more similar (PCS 55.4%, FCS 39.8%)
- Prescribed MYP content syllabus (PCS 63.1%, FCS 45.3%)
- Increased emphasis on pedagogy in the DP (PCS 44.0%, FCS 67.5%)
- Harmonizing terminology between programs (PCS 74.3%, FCS 85.1%)

Table 4. Changes needed for improving the MYP–DP transition: differences between PCS and FCS Coordinators

Changes needed	Type of school	Important	Neither important nor unimportant	Unimportant	Mantel–Haenszel chi-square test	N
Greater DP program recognition	PCS	84 (82.4%)	15 (14.7%)	3 (2.9%)	$\chi^2(1) = 5.25, p = .0219$	220
	FCS	82 (69.5%)	27 (22.9%)	9 (7.6%)		
MYP and DP projects made more similar	PCS	56 (55.4%)	25 (24.8%)	20 (19.8%)	$\chi^2(1) = 5.46, p = .0194$	224
	FCS	49 (39.8%)	37 (30.1%)	37 (30.1%)		
Prescribed MYP content	PCS	65 (63.1%)	19 (18.4%)	19 (18.4%)	$\chi^2(1) = 5.76, p = .0164$	220
	FCS	53 (45.3%)	32 (27.4%)	32 (27.4%)		
Increased emphasis on pedagogy in the DP	PCS	44 (44.0%)	48 (48.0%)	8 (8.0%)	$\chi^2(1) = 9.25, p = .0023$	220
	FCS	81 (67.5%)	32 (26.7%)	7 (5.8%)		
Harmonizing terminology between programs	PCS	78 (74.3%)	22 (21.0%)	5 (4.8%)	$\chi^2(1) = 3.84, p = .0498^a$	226
	FCS	103 (85.1%)	15 (12.4%)	3 (2.5%)		
External MYP examinations	PCS	35 (34.7%)	31 (30.7%)	35 (34.7%)	$\chi^2(1) = 4.71, p = .0299$	221
	FCS	32 (26.7%)	26 (21.7%)	62 (51.7%)		

^a2 cells (33%) have expected count less than 5, resulting in a loss of statistical power

Discussion

This study analyzed a global survey of IB Coordinators in 175 international schools offering both the Middle Years and Diploma programs. The results indicate considerable variability in perceptions of effectiveness of program transition from the MYP to the DP. While a little over a third of the IB Coordinators viewed program transition in their schools as good, a little over one quarter asserted a need for improvement. Moreover, even when the IB Coordinators viewed transition as satisfactory, they still offered numerous suggestions on how the impact of the multiple IB offerings could be improved. We discuss these findings in greater detail in the following section.

IB program transition challenges

In summary, IB Coordinators across the 175 multi-program IB schools identified several key challenges impacting successful transition.

- Dealing with detailed and prescribed content in the DP
- Decreased emphasis on skill development in the DP
- Difficulty in identifying through-lines
- Discontinuing holistic development of students
- Program design issues in the MYP
- Changes required in student attitudes towards learning in DP

Responses to open-ended questions further suggested that the most significant factor was differences in the fundamental nature of the MYP and DP. Whereas the DP consists of a detailed, prescribed curriculum with an associated external assessment, the MYP contains no curriculum content or external assessments. Rather it consists of a broad, interdisciplinary, inquiry-based learning framework aimed at developing developmentally suitable skills and attitudes in middle years learners. As noted, these differences between the programs are what make them distinctive, and each of them is valued accordingly. Yet these differences impact the capacity of the schools to achieve consistency and coherence in the learning content and culture as students move through the school from one program to the next. Thus, the issue of program transition has emerged organically as a result of schools offering multiple IB programs.

In this context, it has fallen to curriculum leaders at the school level to develop strategies that articulate and enhance links between the MYP and DP in ways that harmonize the students' experience without losing the strengths of each program. In a recent qualitative study, Hallinger et al. (2010) found that, even in highly successful IB World Schools, the IB Coordinators characterized program transition as an unanticipated and continuing challenge. Their study further identified several emergent strategies and practices that IB schools in the Asia Pacific region had developed in response to this problem. These included intensifying teachers' cross-program interaction, intentional and opportunistic cross-program teaching, backwards mapping of curriculum objectives, organizing opportunities for cross-program student interaction, and staff position switching.

We further note the 'historical accident' whereby IB schools have tended to adopt the DP first and the MYP later. As such, there has been a tendency to use a 'backwards mapping' strategy as a means of achieving curriculum consistency and coherence. This strategy begins with the curriculum objectives of the DP as a means of 'mapping' relevant curriculum content for the MYP. As noted by teachers in a related study (Hallinger et al., 2010), while this approach can

enhance consistency, it also holds the possibility of weakening or distorting the unique character of the MYP.

Other challenges are conceptually separable but practically entangled. For example, 'decreased emphasis on skill development in the DP' appears as a challenge related to the DP's prescribed and examination-related contents. Because the DP brand is so strongly associated with successful college admissions (Renaud, 1989 cited in Stobie, 2007), administrators and teachers in the DP are highly sensitive to the IB assessment and reluctant to make radical changes (Hallinger et al., 2010). Thus, the very strength of the DP serves as a constraint to developing skill-focused learning and employing a broader set of learning strategies. We interpret challenges such as 'difficulty in identifying through-lines' and 'discontinuing holistic development of students' within a similar perspective. That is, the constraints originating in the DP examination weaken efforts to achieve coherence with the inquiry-oriented, team-learning culture that predominates in the MYP and also in the PYP.

Changes needed for the MYP–DP transition

Several suggested changes were identified by the IB Coordinators for improving student transition from the MYP to the DP, as noted earlier:

- Publishing MYP vertical and horizontal articulation documents
- Publishing IB cross-program articulation documents
- Providing greater support and guidance for teachers in the MYP and DP
- Working towards greater MYP program recognition with governments and universities
- Providing standardized internal MYP assessment tasks
- Providing access to a wider range of assessment tools in the DP
- Increasing emphasis on interdisciplinary learning in the DP

These changes suggest a desire among the IB Coordinators for additional resources, tools, and support from the IB in order to enhance the combined impact of the individual programs. For example, the most frequently identified recommendations consisted of providing additional program resources such as MYP vertical and horizontal articulation documents and cross-program articulation documents. Both recommendations suggest a desire for the IB to engage the issue of cross-program alignment proactively through the development of clearer guidelines.

The IB Coordinators further indicated the need for changes regarding assessment policies across the programs. Specifically, 'wider assessment tools in the DP' was viewed as a desired change. While the DP assessment was acknowledged as a valid and credible assessment, there was also a shared perception that it was both incomplete and failed to build on the high-quality formative assessments of learning employed in the PYP and MYP. At the same time, the IB Coordinators also suggested that the MYP assessments could be enhanced through the development of more rigorous and systematic approaches.

We also noted that the perspectives of IB Coordinators from partial and full continuum schools appeared to diverge with respect to several issues. IB Coordinators from full continuum schools were more likely than their peers from partial continuum schools to view the reduction in types of assessment and teaching methodologies when moving from the MYP to the DP as a relevant transition challenge. Indeed, our data consistently suggest that IB Coordinators in full continuum schools seem to be more troubled by the lack of alignment and coherence than are their counterparts in partial continuum schools. IB Coordinators in the full continuum schools appeared to place a

greater priority on achieving consistency and coherence across programs. They were also more likely to attribute transition problems to the design of the DP. Conversely, IB Coordinators from PCS were more likely to view transition challenges as ‘school-based’ or emerging from the school’s implementation of the programs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our analysis of the IB global survey suggests that there are significant challenges facing ‘IB World Schools’ as they seek to achieve the envisioned benefits of implementing multiple IB programs. The alignment (or consistency and coherence) of IB programs in terms of curriculum, assessment, and pedagogical approaches is at the core of the challenges that were identified in this study. Some of these challenges can be addressed at the individual school level through curriculum management strategies, but others will require ‘policy responses’ from the IB.

Underlying this discussion is an assumption that ‘program effects’ on student learning can be enhanced through the development of greater cross-program coherence and consistency. Each of the three IB programs has a set of philosophical and pedagogical features that combine to create its unique signature. Our data suggest that the unique features that distinguish the programs are creating transition challenges that could be detracting from the desired impact on students.

This assumption resonates with research conducted on effective schools which posits the existence of a ‘school effect’ on learning (Hallinger and Murphy, 1986). Scholars suggest that this ‘school effect’ is achieved through the development of productive school-wide norms and structures that enhance the impact of component curricula and programs. Since many IB World Schools operate as K-12 schools, the issue of how to achieve the most productive school-wide learning environment has emerged as a challenge for both policy (i.e. for the IB) and practice (i.e. for curriculum leaders and teachers) in international schools.

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