

A BASIS FOR PRACTICE

THE MIDDLE YEARS PROGRAMME

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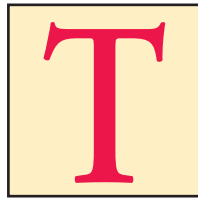
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International Baccalaureate Organization
Headquarters • Route des Morillons 15 • Grand-Saconnex • Geneva CH-1218

www.ibo.org

THE ORIGINS OF THE MIDDLE YEARS PROGRAMME



THE MIDDLE YEARS PROGRAMME (MYP), designed for students aged 11–16, has been offered by the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) since 1994. The MYP began as an initiative of the International Schools Association (ISA): the development of what became known as the International Schools Association Curriculum (ISAC) was undertaken in the 1980s by a group of teachers and administrators from international and internationally-minded national schools (ISA, 1991). The aim was to develop a curriculum encouraging international awareness in young people with emphasis on the skills, attitudes and knowledge needed to participate in an increasingly global society.

The ISA created a framework that allowed schools sufficient flexibility to meet local educational requirements while stating required objectives in each subject. The original ISAC was developed by the participating schools themselves with support from the IBO. The MYP has continued to grow under the auspices of the IBO in the same spirit of collaboration with and among schools. Whereas the original philosophy and basic principles of the framework have remained, the programme has developed significantly since 1994 in terms of the objectives, assessment details and guidance provided to schools. It will continue to develop as more schools from various regions and cultures become involved.

As the programme itself develops, the curriculum guides of the MYP are subject to a regular cycle of review and development. In addition, the IBO makes available to schools a variety of teacher support materials, such as sample units of work and assessed student work. ■

AIMS TO DEVELOP INTERNATIONALLY-MINDED, INDEPENDENT LEARNERS



MIDDLE YEARS PROGRAMME students are at an important age of transition, of personal, social, physical and intellectual development, of uncertainty and questioning, of searching for relevance and meaning. Emerging adolescents, influenced by their years of primary schooling, are entering a phase where their social and cultural experiences in and outside school have a determining impact on their perception of themselves, their self-esteem, their sense of identity and their capacity to relate to others. The programme is devised to help students develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills they need to participate actively and responsibly in a changing and increasingly interrelated world. This implies a “living curriculum” (Beane, 1990), one which calls for more than “knowing”: it involves reflective thinking, both critical and creative, about ideas and behaviours. It includes problem solving and analysis, clarification and discussion of personal beliefs and standards on which decisions are made. It also leads to critical thinking and action.

The MYP is designed to teach students to become independent learners who can recognize relationships between school subjects and the world outside, who can adapt to new situations and combine relevant knowledge, practical and social intelligence to solve authentic problems alone or in groups. Successful teaching of the programme requires commitment to its fundamental principles on the part of the whole school community, and a high degree of communication and collaboration between teachers.

The programme aims to enable students to:

- build upon their spirit of discovery to develop an understanding and enjoyment of the process of learning, independently and in cooperation with others
- acquire knowledge and understanding and prepare for further learning
- recognize the extent to which knowledge is interrelated
- learn to communicate effectively in a variety of ways
- develop a sense of personal and cultural identity and a respect for themselves and for others
- acquire insights into local and global concerns affecting health, the community and the environment, and develop a sense of individual and collective responsibility and citizenship.

Three fundamental concepts – listed below – underpin the development of the programme, in each participating school across the world.

Holistic learning in the context of the MYP

Like the Primary Years Programme, the development of the MYP has been substantially influenced by a constructivist, process-led view of learning in which the student develops an understanding by consciously learning how to learn and linking new knowledge to existing knowledge. Theorists such as Gardner (1999), Perkins (1992), and Wiggins and McTighe (1998) stress the vital importance of thoughtful learning and connections within a pedagogy of understanding.

The focus of holistic learning is the discovery of relationships between areas of knowledge, between the individual, communities and the world. The programme emphasizes the study of traditional subject groups: languages (best language and additional language), humanities, sciences, mathematics, arts, technology, physical education. However, the MYP requires schools to organize learning so that students will become increasingly aware of the connections between subjects, and between subject content and the real world. The fundamental concept of holistic learning has led to the curriculum model of the MYP, providing five central elements called the “areas of interaction”, to which all disciplines contribute subject knowledge, conceptual understanding and skills. As students realize that most real-world issues require insights gained from a variety of disciplines, they are encouraged to draw on the many different approaches to acquiring knowledge. Helping students discover how knowledge is interrelated not only helps their intrinsic motivation but encourages deeper, lasting understanding, and facilitates transfer of learning (see, for example, Jacobs, 1997).

The MYP requires teachers to become concerned with the total experience of the student at school. Organizing a well-rounded experience over the five years of the MYP requires team planning across subjects on the part of teachers as well as discussion of, and reflection on, the curriculum and learning activities from the point of view of the student.

Intercultural awareness

This concept is concerned with developing students’ attitudes, knowledge and skills as they learn about their own and others’ cultures. For adolescents, this means considering the many facets of the concept of culture, and experiencing and reflecting on its manifestations in various contexts. This is particularly important at an age when adolescents discover and affirm an identity while they experience the need to be accepted by a social group, when they discover a cultural heritage increasingly influenced and transformed by a globalized world. By encouraging students to consider multiple perspectives, intercultural awareness not only fosters tolerance and respect, but also aims to develop empathy and understanding, the acceptance of others’ rights in being different.

The MYP is taught in a range of schools, some with students and teachers of many nationalities, and others with a more homogeneous student population and teaching staff. Developing intercultural awareness in an MYP school involves everyone. It affects the organizational structure, policies and practices, the climate within the school, the relations with the community outside, as well as the content of the curriculum taught through the subjects and interdisciplinary activities. This fundamental concept guides the development of the curriculum framework within the subject groups, affecting content (focusing on global issues, on languages and varied manifestations of cultures) and pedagogical approaches (allowing reflection, dialogue, active inquiry, action). As they learn to construct meaning by exploring other ways of being and different points of view, students become more informed about, and sensitive to, the experiences of others, locally, nationally and internationally. Intercultural awareness also means considering the attitudes created as a result of learning and encouraging involvement in action and service. It is central to the programme, a critical element in developing internationally-minded students.

Communication

The curriculum requirements and the aims and objectives of the MYP subjects emphasize the central importance of communication, verbal and non-verbal, as a vehicle to realize the aims of the programme. A good command of expression in all of its forms is fundamental to learning. In most MYP subject groups, development of communication is a key objective and an explicit part of the assessment, as it supports understanding and allows student reflection and expression in different forms.

The IBO places particular emphasis on language acquisition, which does more than promote cognitive growth: it is crucial for exploring and sustaining cultural identity, personal development and intercultural understanding. Students are required to develop at least two languages within the MYP, normally their best language and another language. Many schools, depending on their circumstance and needs, will encourage students to study more than two languages.

This fundamental concept also touches the development of the students' understanding and appreciation of different modes of thinking and expression, including the arts and the use of information and communication technology. Like the fundamental concept of intercultural awareness, it affects the delivery of the programme itself, as teachers need to engage in common planning across subjects and as students learn to work in teams. ■

PROVIDES A BALANCED AND FLEXIBLE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK



THE MYP REQUIRES SCHOOLS to teach a broad and balanced choice of subjects in every year of the programme, organized into eight subject groups:

- language A (the student's best language)
- language B (an additional language)
- humanities
- sciences
- mathematics
- arts
- technology
- physical education.

The MYP curriculum guides, published by the IBO for every subject group, outline a framework of concepts and skills intended to provide appropriate direction and advice to schools, and ensure some commonality among MYP schools worldwide. The MYP's curriculum framework allows schools a great degree of flexibility in keeping with their local educational requirements and choices. However, all MYP schools are required to structure their curriculum to allow their students to achieve the aims and objectives of each subject group, confirmed by the IBO in terms of final achievement at the end of the programme.

While the objectives of the MYP subject groups ensure an academic challenge, the MYP is not designed as a selective programme for a limited number of students. Indeed, the flexibility of the MYP is designed to allow all young people to benefit in different ways from the programme's holistic, integrative approach to teaching and learning.

The MYP requires teachers to consider their subject as part of a group within this framework. As a team, they develop their own interim objectives, the content taught in each subject in every year of the programme and the details of their assessment practices according to the requirements of the subject group.

The concept of balance is fundamental to the development of the programme worldwide and in schools.

- The programme requires schools to provide learning in a broad base of subjects each year. As the students mature and develop thinking skills, they explore the eight subject groups with increasing depth, and realize how the subject groups are connected to each other and to global issues.
- The course objectives include skills and processes as well as a framework of broad concepts: the aim is to ensure that students go beyond knowledge of content, develop a genuine understanding of principles and an ability to apply them in new contexts, in preparation for further learning.
- The programme also encourages a balance between formative and summative assessment, using a range of activities within units to allow students to use and demonstrate a full range of thinking skills. Assessment strategies used by teachers should also combine teacher-led assessment, group and/or peer evaluation, and student self-assessment. ■

FOCUSES TEACHING AND LEARNING THROUGH THE AREAS OF INTERACTION



THE FIVE AREAS OF INTERACTION provide the MYP's main focus for developing the connections between the disciplines, so that students will learn to see knowledge as an interrelated, coherent whole. The areas of interaction are embedded in the subjects and developed naturally through them. They provide both an organization and an extension of learning within and across the subjects, through exploration of real-life issues.

They can also inspire special activities and interdisciplinary projects. They should form part of the framework for student inquiry and take investigative learning further than subject boundaries. The areas of interaction are a vehicle for refining conceptual development through the different perspectives they offer, creating a deeper level of understanding. They guide reflection and lead from knowledge to thoughtful action (Stobie, 1996).

Through **approaches to learning** (ATL), schools provide students with the tools to enable them to take responsibility for their learning. Central to this is “learning how to learn” and developing in individuals an awareness of how they learn best, of thought processes and of learning strategies (Perkins, 1992).

This area of interaction goes far beyond traditional study skills. It also includes:

- organizational skills and attitudes towards work
- collaborative skills
- communication
- information literacy
- reflection
- problem solving and thinking skills
- subject-specific and interdisciplinary conceptual understanding.

Approaches to learning involves articulating, organizing and explicitly teaching the skills and practices that students require to become successful learners. Recognizing and helping students develop the range of their capacities (Gardner, 1999), positive attitudes and effective habits of mind is the shared responsibility of teachers, and is at the core of all curriculum development and delivery (see figure 1).

Community and service starts in the classroom and extends beyond it, requiring students to participate in the communities in which they live. Giving importance to the sense of community throughout the programme encourages responsible citizenship as it seeks to deepen students' knowledge and understanding of the world around them. Students should be encouraged to make connections between their intellectual and social development and the benefits that they can contribute to the community by asking themselves, “How can I make a difference?”. Students discover the social reality of self, others and community. In so doing, this area of interaction encourages the

affective, creative and ethical as well as cognitive development of the adolescent. The emphasis is on developing community awareness and concern, and the skills needed to make an effective contribution to society. This involves a process of discovery of self and community, and reflection inside as well as outside the classroom (figure 2).

The area of *homo faber* allows students to explore in multiple ways the processes and products of human creativity. It considers their impact on society and on the mind. Students learn to appreciate and develop in themselves the human capacity to influence, transform, enjoy and improve the quality of life. This area of interaction therefore encourages students to see the relationships between science, aesthetics, technology and ethics. It is at the core of student-centred learning, where the students themselves are placed in the position of *homo faber*, solving problems, showing creativity and resourcefulness in a variety of contexts throughout the curriculum and school life. *Homo faber* culminates in the personal project, where the student chooses an area of inquiry and creation (figure 3).

One school introduces to its teachers aspects of approaches to learning by asking them to reflect collectively on the following three questions.

- *How do we decide what is most important for our students to learn?*
- *How can we give them ownership of their learning?*
- *How can different disciplines contribute in the most effective way to “learning how to learn”?*

The same school then helps its year 1 and year 2 students to organize their reflection process at the end of each term around four generic questions.

- *What sort of learner am I?*

For example: investigating learning styles; considering the characteristics of a good learner in the different subjects; thinking of, and using, effective learning strategies.

- *How can I research effectively?*

For example: accessing information from different sources; finding and selecting relevant information; evaluating and presenting the results of research.

- *How can I organize my time and my materials well?*

For example: establishing and respecting timelines; achieving a balanced workload, organizing notes and documents.

- *What have I learned and done well this term?*

For example: analysing successes and difficulties, setting new goals, reflecting on the approaches to learning that have worked best.

Students respond to a short questionnaire and self-assess their work in major projects or units accomplished during the term.

figure 1

Within their technology class, groups of year 1 students are engaged in designing and creating board games for primary age students. The games are intended for a local orphanage. Within the research stage of the design cycle in technology, the students have considered the needs of the children, and appropriate strategies to make the games attractive and fun to play. It is planned that the young children will actually come as guests to the school, and learn to play the games with the class. The children will then receive the games as gifts.

Such whole-class activities organized in some subjects are complemented by individual and small group initiatives where students commit time and energy to service activities in the community (within or outside the school), adapted to their age group, such as:

- contributing to student committees and organizations (for example, newspaper, welcome committee for new students)
- volunteering to help host or clean up after school activities (for example, parents' evenings, special events)
- assisting other students (for example, newly arrived, or second language students) through tutoring
- visiting and doing simple chores for senior citizens who live alone
- participating in local volunteer organizations.

figure 2

While studying the history of drama from the ancient Greek tragedies onwards within their performing arts course, year 5 students become interested in the role of the physical environment in staging the plays. By focusing on the setting, location and construction of the theatres for which these plays were originally written, students compare and contrast their cultural, social and environmental impact. The mysterious ability of the Greeks to design acoustically superior amphitheatres leads to an exploration into the concepts of physics to attempt to understand how this was achieved.

This study of the impact of the physical environment on the staging of plays leads music students in the same year to consider advances in sound technology and the development of auditoriums which optimize sound quality for the audience. The students discuss the criteria used to make judgments of quality and research whether the most famous venues of the past were actually the ones that had the best acoustics. Students then consider the implications of design on orchestral performance.

This unit of work involves common planning on the part of the arts and sciences teachers. Both disciplines contribute different perspectives and engage students in inquiry, focused on how to construct a favourable environment for the enjoyment of the arts.

figure 3

As part of a science unit on heat and energy, year 2 students conduct audits of energy use in their homes by studying usage and costs of electricity. Some students also survey users' manuals and brochures from department stores to compare the energy consumption of different brands of electrical appliances. As a result, they produce a pamphlet that is distributed to the school community. Related environmental issues are discussed in science and in geography classes where students discuss water consumption and needs in different contexts. As a project, they count water units used at school and in their homes to appreciate the vast consumption of water in developed countries.

figure 4

The area of **health and social education** deals with physical, social and emotional health and intelligence, key aspects of development leading to complete and healthy lives. Through this area, students become better informed about health issues as they consider life options. The students' experiences in this area should develop in them a sense of responsibility for their own well-being and for their physical and social environment.

Integrating health and social education throughout the curriculum and school life aims to prepare students for life by developing their ability to make choices from alternatives, and to evaluate and make decisions about the health hazards they may face. The exploration of this area in the subject groups allows students to discuss and reflect on medical, psychological, sociological, economic and legal aspects of health across times and cultures.

The scope of this area of interaction goes beyond the acquisition of content knowledge. Students are increasingly in a position where they make choices that require critical thinking. Teams of teachers will therefore need to structure learning through the perspective of health and social education in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values (figure 5).

A group of year 4 history students are learning about the early Middle Ages in western Europe as part of their school's curriculum. On one side of the board in the classroom the following words are written: "Health and social education: to what extent does this period deserve the name 'Dark Ages'?"

The explicit focus on aspects connected to the area of interaction **health and social education** over the course of the unit provides common threads to guide the students' questioning. As they study the period and conduct individual and group research on specific topics within the unit, students will need to go beyond the historical facts, to focus on health and social issues, ways of living and values within society, and, importantly, to compare their own with other contemporary health and social environments.

In dealing with the complex question above, which can be considered from a number of perspectives, students extend their learning beyond knowledge of facts and develop a broader understanding of issues linked to the subject and to real life. The focus on health and social education drives learning and assessment in this unit.

figure 5

As teachers plan the curriculum in their subject groups, and individual modules and lessons within them, the areas of interaction area used as a common vocabulary and focus to enhance students' awareness of their dimensions and their interconnected nature. This process helps students link new learning to previous academic and life experiences, and facilitates application, retention and transfer of knowledge. For young students, this awareness will start at the level of identification of connections with broad issues and concepts. As students grow in their understanding,

the integration of the areas of interaction should develop from explicit links to a real focus on specific aspects, and an exploration by students of the dimensions of this area of interaction as a context that becomes part of the fabric of the subjects and enhances learning. Where appropriate, students should be given opportunities to act as a result of their understanding of the issues. ■

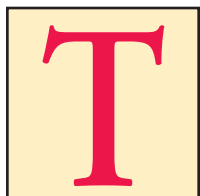
THE PERSONAL PROJECT ENGAGES THE STUDENT IN INDEPENDENT INQUIRY AND REFLECTION

IN THE LAST YEAR OF THE MYP, students complete the personal project, a significant body of work, the product of the student's own initiative and creativity. The personal project must reflect a personal understanding of the areas of interaction and the application of skills acquired through approaches to learning. MYP students are expected to choose their project, which can take many forms, and take the process to completion with the supervision of an adult in the school. The personal project forms part of the assessment scheme of the MYP. It involves planning, research and a high degree of personal reflection (figure 6).

Myriam, an MYP student, explored the issues relating to refugees and asylum seekers in her country and region, as part of her humanities course in year 4. She decided in year 4 to become involved in community and service activities to help secure appropriate items of clothing and household appliances for newcomers to her community. In so doing, she has discovered that little is being done, except for language courses, to help young people of her age adapt to their new social environment. As a follow-up to her community and service, Myriam decides that the goal of her personal project in year 5 of the MYP will be to organize a local community scheme whereby students in her school will pair up with young newcomers to the community, get to know them, help them become more familiar with the city and its facilities, and make new friends. Her personal project research focuses on the backgrounds and cultural contexts of the new immigrants to her region. As part of her project, she organizes an "awareness week" in her school to foster an interest in the issue and a commitment on the part of other students; she also initiates a variety of social activities to create personal contact between students and newcomers. She reflects on her project in her personal statement and finds that it has helped her develop new perspectives and a deep interest in community issues.

figure 6

ENCOURAGES STAFF COLLABORATION AND A VARIETY OF TEACHING METHODS



EACHERS OF THE MYP have a crucial role to play in curriculum development, as well as in teaching itself. To make the whole curricular experience coherent for the students, teachers need to be aware of the whole school curriculum beyond the age group(s) and subject(s) for which they are directly responsible. Schools are expected to organize staff meetings at which experiences are shared, cooperation sought, and linking work among departments developed.

Teaching the MYP requires vertical and horizontal planning by teams of teachers. Vertical planning involves the selection of content, and agreement on expected levels of achievement within individual disciplines, as well as the progression of learning within the areas of interaction for each year of the programme. Horizontal planning involves interdepartmental discussions among teachers of a particular grade level. The purpose of these meetings is to develop awareness among teachers about the content, processes and objectives taught in other subjects.

The MYP encourages the use of a variety of teaching and learning methodologies suitable for different age groups, to produce a climate where students discover how they learn best in different contexts. The MYP requires teachers to reflect individually and collectively on the methods and resources used within their classes to choose appropriate approaches for their subject, using the areas of interaction at the core of their planning, and addressing a variety of learning styles. Effective activities need to be developed, to challenge students on a personal level, deepen understanding, stimulate inquiry, and encourage reflection and creativity. Examples include:

- formal teacher instruction, using one or several areas of interaction as a focus
- presentations and inquiry-based projects led by the students themselves
- open-ended investigations and problem-solving activities in or out of the classroom context, involving individual or collaborative work
- games, role plays, field trips, extra-curricular activities.

The aims and objectives of each subject group emphasize critical thinking, values and attitudes in addition to knowledge, understanding and skills. Reflection on the learning process, as well as the subject content, is therefore crucial.

Interdisciplinary learning, where the central concept has been carefully chosen in the light of the areas of interaction, can be a very useful mechanism for applying the connections between subjects realistically, provided the subject-specific objectives are carefully considered for all subjects involved. Most of these experiences will be organized naturally through subject teaching: teachers synchronize their teaching relating to common concepts and plan a more comprehensive unit involving perspectives from several subject groups and shared assessment of more complex projects. Within these projects, the subject groups will contribute their methodologies to enrich and enhance the learning experience.

Where schools are teaching the Primary Years Programme (PYP), emphasis on interdisciplinary work in the earlier years of the MYP can help in the task of providing a smooth transition from the more transdisciplinary approach of the PYP to the emergence of distinct subjects in the MYP. ■

CONSIDERS ASSESSMENT WITHIN THE LEARNING PROCESS

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ASSESSMENT IN THE MYP is an integral part of learning, involving students in self-assessment and providing feedback on the thinking strategies and processes as well as the outcome. The MYP requires teachers to organize continuous assessment, over the course of the programme, according to specified criteria that correspond to the objectives of each subject. Regular internal assessment and reporting play a major role in the students' and parents' understanding of the objectives and criteria, in the students' preparation for final assessment, and more generally in their development according to the principles of the programme.

The MYP offers a criterion-referenced model of assessment. Teachers are responsible for structuring varied and valid assessment tasks (including tests and examinations) that will allow students to demonstrate achievement according to the required objectives within each subject group. These include open-ended problem-solving activities and investigations, organized debates, hands-on experimentation, analysis and reflection.

In keeping with the ethos of approaches to learning, schools are encouraged to use a variety of formative assessment methods that involve the learner. The choice of quantitative and qualitative assessment strategies and tools (rubrics, performance records and checklists, portfolios) is the responsibility of the subject teachers, with an emphasis on self-assessment and peer-assessment. These strategies and tools should be designed to allow the students to show real understanding through flexible and appropriate application in new contexts (Perkins, 1992, and Gardner, 1999). Recording and reporting should be organized by teachers to provide students with detailed feedback on their level of achievement according to the criteria of the subjects (Marzano, 2000). ■

THE IBO VALIDATES FINAL ASSESSMENT THROUGH EXTERNAL MODERATION

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FINAL ASSESSMENT in the MYP requires teachers to make judgments based on the rigorous application of the prescribed assessment criteria defined in each subject guide. Schools may request IBO-validated grades on official MYP records of achievement and MYP certificates for students completing the programme. For schools opting for this validation procedure, standardization of assessment according to MYP world standards is ensured through a process of external moderation of teachers' internal assessment. The official MYP subject criteria and corresponding levels of achievement (described in the subject guides), must be used as the basis for results submitted to the IBO. External moderation involves trained, experienced MYP teachers, and results in the application of a moderation factor where needed, and in detailed, subject-specific advice to the school regarding the understanding of subject objectives and assessment criteria. ■

CONCLUSION

The MYP emphasizes a broad and balanced education which focuses on values as well as intellect. It addresses the students' physical, affective, social and intellectual development. In helping students to understand the connectedness and applications of knowledge, it serves their search for relevance and meaning, and helps them come to a deeper understanding. At the same time, the MYP allows the nature of each subject to emerge with integrity and rigour as the students prepare for the Diploma Programme or other upper secondary studies.

The MYP is designed to help adolescents to develop a knowledge of, and interest in, local and global issues. The explicit emphasis on communication and intercultural awareness encourages international-mindedness and responsible citizenship. In age-appropriate ways, the programme involves students in concrete, socially responsible action and service, individually and in groups.

The framework of the MYP requires schools and teachers within them to work as teams in reflecting on, developing, organizing and delivering the curriculum, with close attention to the perspectives of the students. It empowers teachers and students to shape a stimulating but rigorous learning experience.

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THE MIDDLE YEARS PROGRAMME

The printed document, *A basis for practice, the Middle Years Programme*, is a companion to the online version that appears on www.ibo.org, the IBO's public Web site. The online version is revised more frequently than the printed one and should be considered the valid document. Changes since the last printed version appeared will be posted on www.ibo.org as an easy reference for schools.

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