

## Do You See the IB in Your FYP Child?

As Southpointe FYP parents, you are now becoming old hands with the International Baccalaureate (IB) foundation, right? Have you noticed the IB coming home in your child? It may help to dig a little deeper to be sure . . .

The mission of the IB is,

“The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.

To this end the organization works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment.

These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.”

This mission statement is the heart of the Primary Years Program (PYP) framework that Southpointe Academy teachers have diligently used all year to shape their teaching. I like to think of the PYP and teaching in a bowling metaphor. The British Columbia (BC) Prescribed Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and the aims of the PYP are the pins at the end of the lane. The student is the bowling ball, the teacher is the initial momentum of the ball and the PYP framework is the bumpers on the lane. The bumpers exist in the younger grades (K-5) because this is when Inquiry (learning) needs to be guided so that students are able to reach their learning goals (the pins) but are given enough freedom and lead way (the lane) to find their own path to the objectives.

This PYP framework, the bumpers along the lane and some of the pins, is designed with the understanding of how learners construct their meaning. Teachers plan in three main chunks. One is with “the written curriculum.”

This is the examination of *what* we want students to learn. The second one is “the taught curriculum.” Here, teachers collaborate and decide *how* students will best learn. The last chunk is “the assessed curriculum.” Teachers now determine how they will *know* what the students have learned. In order to better understand if you are seeing the IB in your child, we’re going to dig deeper into understanding that first chunk of teacher planning - what is it, exactly, that we want our children to learn?

The PYP provides, in its instructions on how teachers build their bumpers and what pins to place for them (the written curriculum), five essential elements. These elements are utilized for each of the six PYP units taught throughout the year: Who we are; Where we are in place and time; How we express ourselves; How the world works; How we organize ourselves; and, Sharing the planet.

The five essential elements of the written curriculum are:

1. **Knowledge.** On one level, this is the area for the BC PLOs. This is where the teacher plugs in that what the Ministry deems the grade level child needs to learn. These PLOs are lined up and chosen to match up with the way each grade level teacher intends to teach the six transdisciplinary units over the course of the year. In practice, however, an IB teacher extends the PLOs to global understanding. For example, Grade 4 needs to teach, according to the Ministry, the culture of the First Nations. A Grade 4 IB teacher will teach what a culture is and use the First Nations to examine a culture in detail. But the learning and understanding will not stop with First Nations. Students will come away understanding that all cultures have some specific elements.

2. **Concepts.** There are eight key concepts in the PYP framework: form, function, causation, change, connection, perspective, responsibility and reflection. These concepts help shape the direction of the bowling lane and the bumpers. Teachers focus on two concepts per unit and all eight are visited throughout the year and every ensuing year in the PYP. The concepts enable teachers to guide students towards deeper understanding with bigger connections and critical thinking. The concepts are universal and help steer the way the PLOs are taught, or as I mentioned, the direction of the bowling lane. For example, in Grade 5 students are required to learn about immigration. You could explore the *change* and

*connection* of immigration - which may lead to how immigration affects people's lives and that of their families. Or you could examine the *perspective* and *responsibility* of immigration - which may lead to looking at how communities feel about immigrants and how immigrants feel about their new home and a government's responsibility to support citizens and immigrants. You can see that choosing the concept can drastically change the direction of the learning. This powerful influence of concepts is why they remain consistent throughout the program, help create connections and encourage global thinking.

3. **Skills.** The IB transdisciplinary skills (thinking, social, self-management, communication and research) incorporate the life and basic skill sets students need to accomplish the program's mission. This is where you, as a parent appreciating the aesthetic but worrying about the academic, can breath a sigh of relief. Despite the lofty and abstract aims of the PYP to educate the whole child, the IB recognizes and honors the need to teach the basics to students. Within this element, teachers can break down the basic academic and social needs of the students to be successful in the activities and goals of their unit, and of their community. Way beyond Ministry guidelines, as well, the PYP emphasizes the needs of the whole learner. Teachers are expected not only to model and teach spelling, grammar and arithmetic, for example, they are also expected to teach self-awareness and cooperation. Again, like the power of the concepts, these skills remain the same and are revisited every year, all year. Of course, teacher's expectations of students grow as the children mature.

4. **Attitudes.** One cannot, should not, overlook the learner themselves when planning what to teach the learner. This fourth essential element of writing the curriculum includes the twelve IB attitudes: appreciation, commitment, confidence, cooperation, creativity, curiosity, empathy, enthusiasm, independence, integrity, respect, and tolerance. Because students are expected to be active learners, it is necessary to plan for their thinking and behavior as much as for the skills and knowledge that we want them to obtain. Teaching and modeling the IB attitudes directly encourages students to analyze their own thoughts and actions. This reflection develops metacognition (awareness of one's own thoughts and thinking process) and leads to students who are self-aware and take responsibility for their own learning and actions. Student development of positive attitudes is essential to the continued success of the learning

community, becoming an independent learner and a caring member of society. Teachers begin with direct teaching and small steps that remain consistent throughout the program so that students graduating from the PYP have a solid foundation that allows them to thrive for the rest of their lives. Your child may not be using the vocabulary regularly at home yet, but they have been learning about these attitudes this year. Each year you may see more and more of these elements in your child at home. I do sincerely hope you have seen some of these attitudes thus far this year. Just think where we can be in five years of consistent exposure to these expectations!

5. **Action.** Are you tired yet? I know that your child is tired when they come home after a day of getting themselves down this bowling lane! Just think of the teachers - this is just the first chunk of their planning. Whew. Action is the last essential element of the written curriculum. Yet, this isn't actually something a teacher can plan for. This is the part where the bowling ball has finished its journey and knocked down what pins it could. This is where my metaphor morphs a bit. The ball must now make a decision. Does it do a happy dance? Does it go and tell another ball or pin about its journey? Does it pick up the pins, stack them back up and walk away? Or does it take the pins home and continue to play? Action is what a teacher hopes will happen. A teacher hopes that the bowling ball will collect those pins, take them home, and figure out just what else they can be used for. Actually, any of those responses would be just fine, except to simply walk away and move on without a backward glance. Action is the manifestation of the other elements of the written curriculum. It is what your child does with his or her learning. Do you see the IB in your FYP child? Does your child take action once they have delved into their unit of inquiry and reflected upon and processed their learning?

Action in PYP students can range from very simply telling you about their day and what they learned to demanding on starting a fundraising program to help save a rain forest. Teachers can hypothesize action that may occur and will certainly record action that does occur, but they cannot demand it. Action comes from within a child who has internalized and reflected upon their learning. It comes from a child who is so moved by their explorations in class that it spills into the choices they make outside of the classroom. Action is what IB students do with their learning and it is a wonderful thing to see. It shows us that learning has made an impact and driven the child

to respond. At home you will be able to see all the knowledge, skills, attitudes and concepts they have been absorbing come back in their own words and understanding. Your child may ask questions like, *How many teeth do sharks have?* when learning about ocean creatures. Your child may say, *No, Dad, Pluto isn't a planet anymore. It's a dwarf planet,* when learning about space.

Maybe these are small steps. But they will get bigger as students learn in this framework consistently over a number of years. Their actions will grow from those small facts to deeper impressions and students will begin to seek ways to make a difference in the world around them. Their understanding of self and independence will blossom. They will develop a desire to explore more independently and seek answers to more and more complicated questions. You will see the shift to gain more knowledge, master skills and become caring, active citizens. This is what we hope to see as an IB community.

Pay close attention to this action. Is your child making more references, asking more questions, and looking for ways to do something with their learning more than in previous years? Share these explorations with your child's teacher. This is crucial evidence of the IB growing and thriving in your child. The better our community becomes at helping our children, our learners, explore these five essential elements, the more we will see the IB mission brought to life in our kids.

So when your child wants to plant some vegetables to promote sustainable eating, go with it and celebrate. They are learning to share the planet. When they revisit that theme in Grade 4 and insist on a few hours of Internet surfing to see just what European exploration did to the Native population, help them find those easier websites so they don't get discouraged with rhetoric. And watch out in Grade 5, they might just need a little help in drafting their letter to the Prime Minister about the problems with our salmon population! When these tasks are things they insist on because they are important to them and come as independent initiative, these students are set to be life long, caring and responsible learners. That is the IB in your child. I hope you've had some glimpses this year!

Thank you to all the parents who have shared their child's action with the school and teachers. Hearing the stories you share about your child's

manifestations of their learning makes all the reflecting and planning well worth it. We are thrilled that you see the IB in your FYP child.

Resources for this article: [www.ibo.org](http://www.ibo.org)

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