

Chapter 15

Life in Hong Kong International School Classrooms: A Case Study of Curricula Reform at the Primary School Level

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Abstract Recent years have witnessed changes in the curricula used in Hong Kong international schools. Primary schools of the English Schools Foundation (ESF) and several in the private sector were previously using the National Curriculum of England and Wales (NC). The curriculum, however, was replaced with the International Baccalaureate's (IB) Primary Years Programme (PYP) in all ESF primary schools and in the international school discussed in this chapter.

First-hand experiences as a primary classroom teacher during and after the transition phase with regard to the implementation of the PYP shall be discussed. Parents in terms of their initial concerns regarding lack of assessment and students in terms of adapting to changes in teaching style and the choices they had in personal learning approaches will also be discussed.

Keywords Hong Kong • IBO • International Baccalaureate Organisation • Inquiry-based learning • International schools • Primary • Primary Years Programme • PYP

The number of international schools in Hong Kong offering the “international education programs” (Law et al. 2012) of the IB has greatly increased in recent years. Up until the late 2000s, the schools of the ESF and most English medium of instruction (EMI) independent international schools were using the NC. Many of the EMI schools decided to adopt the PYP in primary schools and the Middle Years Programme (MYP) and Diploma Programme (DP) in secondary schools and colleges. There is now a fourth programme, the IB Career-related Certificate, and similarly to the DP, it is aimed at students aged 16 to 19 years old, but as the name suggests, its content is career related, whereas the DP is aimed at university preparation. In 2013, there were 27 primary international schools in Hong Kong offering the PYP (IB 2013a).

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The influence and reputation of the IB within international education have been explored in studies (Law et al. 2012; Resnik 2012; Tarc 2009) and claimed to provide an important educational service to students displaced around the world (Hill 2003) or a curriculum for schools to adopt for students who are “globally mobile” (Cambridge 2002; Doherty 2009). It has been described as a “recognized leader in the provision of K-12 international education” (Tarc 2009). International schools have been described as adopting the programmes of the IB in order to have “internationalism and academic quality” (Law et al. 2012). Students returning to their home country or intending to move to a “new” country for university have often encountered problems entering degree and diploma programmes if not in possession of recognised certificates or diplomas of the host country (Hill 2012). The DP has provided students with an internationally recognised qualification accepted in universities worldwide (Bagnall 1997) and has been described as a curriculum with “valid university entry credentials” (Resnik 2012). The programme has been highly advocated and claimed to have “quietly matured into one of the most widely available, and arguably one of the best, advanced academic programs available at secondary schools today” (Sjogren and Campbell 2003). In Australia, the IB has been officially recognised as an alternative to regulated tertiary admission credentials (Doherty 2009). The IB programmes have been portrayed in Australia as selective due to the associated expensive school fees that not all parents can afford; students attending such schools are often described as “privileged” (Doherty 2009). In addition, the programmes have attracted the interest of administrators in Australian public sector schools with the aim of winning back drifting middle classes (Doherty 2009). The notion that schools not offering the IB programmes may fall “behind the game” has also been suggested (Bell 2009), and although not confirmed, this could be one of the reasons why international schools in Hong Kong have chosen to change their curricula. Marketisation (Whitehead 2005), the acceptance of market-orientated values and the IB programmes as globally branded products (Cambridge 2002), has made it a necessity for IB World Schools to maintain well-designed websites and develop updated publicity materials that inform existing and prospective parents. Accessible information will either inform parents unfamiliar with programme content or for families moving to another country wishing for their child to continue to be educated in one of the programmes for continuity purposes.

The IB and the PYP

The IB is a non-profit educational foundation originally established in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1967 (Hill 2002). Curriculum origins were as a series of pamphlets entitled the “International Schools Examination Syndicate” or ISES, published as the International Schools Association (Fox 1998). The organisation has been described as:

A uniquely transitional educational construction, a curriculum without borders [with] a capacity to productively embed itself within a variety of national settings” (Doherty 2009). The mission of the IB is stated as: “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 organisation works with schools, governments and international organisations 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. (IB 2013b)

The PYP was first introduced in 1997 (Drake 2004; Hayden 2006) and is available in English, French and Spanish (Hill 2012) thus potentially increasing the number of schools worldwide that can offer it as their teaching curriculum. The programme is designed for students aged between 3 and 12 years old with whole child development as its ultimate aim (Lee et al. 2012). According to the IB’s website, the programme aims to address the academic, social and emotional well-being of students, to encourage the development of student independence and taking on responsibility for their own learning and to support students gain world understanding and how to function comfortably within it and for personal values to be established in order for international-mindedness to develop and flourish (IB 2013b). In addition, the IB programmes are said to share the common philosophy and pedagogical approach with the ultimate aim of developing the whole student in six different ways: intellectually, socially, ethically, aesthetically, physically and culturally (Hill 2012).

Students are supported to move beyond memorising facts, figures and dates, building on their prior knowledge, explore new ideas, deepen understandings and develop their thinking, communication and research skills. The learner profile underpins all teaching and learning and is comprised of ten principles and was established in 2006, after two years of consultation with IB schools worldwide (Hill 2012). Ian Hill, the deputy director general of the IB before retiring in 2012 stated “Schools inculcate the learner profile into their communities. This is not just for students, but for teachers, parents, and everyone else. As a key cross-programme component, the learner profile is central to the definition of what it means to be internationally minded” (Hill 2012). The learner profile consists of the following competencies that are integrated into all learning areas: balanced, caring, communicators, inquirers, knowledgeable, open-minded, principled and reflective risk takers and thinkers (Hill 2012). In addition to the learner profile, there are ten attitudes, namely, appreciation, confidence, creativity, cooperation, curiosity, empathy, enthusiasm, independence, integrity and respect. Students are actively encouraged to develop and maintain the learner profile and attitudes.

Six transdisciplinary themes underpin the PYP. The IB stipulates in its regulations that each theme should be covered once in each year group within a unit of inquiry (referred to at the focus school as UoI). At the focus school, each unit of inquiry lasted approximately six to seven weeks. The six themes (Hill 2012) are:

- Who we are
- Where we are in place and time

- How we express ourselves
- How the world works
- How we organise ourselves
- Sharing the planet

The PYP, in addition, has five transdisciplinary skills. The main guidance manual “Making the PYP Happen” (IB 2000) states that “The PYP position is that, in order to be well prepared for further education and for life beyond the school, students need to master a whole range of skills beyond those normally referred to as basic”. The five skills are communication, research, self-management, social and thinking.

The UoIs are guided by eight concepts of which, on average at the focus school, three were usually chosen and explored. During the course of the year, all eight concepts were covered, some more than once. The eight concepts (Hill 2012) are:

- Causation – Why is it the way it is?
- Change – How does it change over time?
- Connection – How is it connected to other things?
- Form – What does it look like?
- Function – How does it work?
- Perspective – What are the points of view?
- Reflection – How do we know?
- Responsibility – What is our responsibility?

Teaching Using the National Curriculum of England and Wales (NC) in England and Hong Kong

Before moving to Hong Kong in August 2002, I had taught using the NC for seven years in Southeast England. As the international schools in Hong Kong were similarly using the curriculum, I was, therefore, already familiar with its structure and terminology such as attainment targets, level descriptors and the statutory assessment requirements. This was one reason for me applying to the school. Such familiarity was highly beneficial, allowing me to settle quickly into living and working abroad for the first time and teaching English to students who were predominantly second language (L2) learners. Looking back, when comparing the teaching of the curriculum in England to Hong Kong, there are notable differences. For example, when teaching geography in Hong Kong, place names included in the NC were substituted with more familiar towns, cities and countries in Asia, particularly for the younger students. When teaching mathematics and referring to money, pounds and pence in money-related questions were substituted with Hong Kong dollars and cents. When teaching history, content on the Tudors, for example, was seen as

irrelevant to students in Hong Kong, whereas Ancient Egyptians were regarded as of international interest and, therefore, remained unchanged within the history curriculum and certainly enjoyed by students and teachers alike.

At the first school I taught at, there were a number of students from Laos and Pakistan but born in England. I had no experience teaching English as an L2 before I moved to Hong Kong, and at the time, I cannot remember being daunted by the fact. Looking back, this surprises me. Possibly due to visiting Hong Kong twice before on holiday I was somewhat accustomed to the fact that English is very widely spoken and, maybe, assumed that the students in the year group I was teaching (7 and 8-year-olds) would already be proficient in the language, if they had been students at the school since kindergarten. The English as an additional language (EAL) department was well resourced in terms of differentiated work materials and staff with expertise and qualifications in the EAL field. Coincidentally, I was fortunate that in my first year, the decision was made by the SMT to implement an after-school course titled "EAL in the Mainstream" led by the EAL coordinator over ten weeks. All classroom teachers and teaching assistants participated. The sessions proved to be highly supportive for me when teaching the L2 English students, for example, with the use of picture cues to explain new vocabulary. As almost 60% of the students attending the school were first language (L1) Chinese (Cantonese or Mandarin), the course explicitly covered the differences between spoken Chinese and English which helped enormously in the classroom. For example, that in Chinese, there are no differences between she and he, his and her and I and me. There are no tenses and no plurals. This awareness was crucial when teaching the L1 Chinese students, as I was able to explicitly remind them of the grammatical differences between written Chinese and English or spoken Cantonese/Mandarin and English. Such awareness also meant that unfair criticism of the students did not happen if mistakes were made, for example, not pluralising words. I know that my colleagues also found the course to be extremely useful for their own teaching and student learning. Unfortunately, however, it was not repeated some years later, as I am sure it would have proved equally as beneficial for newer colleagues employed at the school.

It was not until I started teaching English in Hong Kong that I realised just how complicated the language can be to teach and for students to learn. In England, students are immersed in the language. On the whole unless the school chooses, other languages are not formally taught in primary schools. For L1 English students, they continue to be immersed in the language wherever they go, but not necessarily for L2 students, who outside school with their families will most definitely be communicating in their mother tongue. In Hong Kong, I soon realised and appreciated the many rules that exist in English and how complicated they can be. It was, therefore, necessary for me to address such complexes and ensure the students were aware of grammar rules and spelling patterns, for example.

The Transition to the PYP Curriculum

The school made the decision to change to the PYP for two main reasons. Firstly, as a private international school, it was essentially organised as a business. The school has described itself as a non-profit-making organisation. There was a business administrator, whose presence is vital for the school to remain competitive with other international schools in Hong Kong, both in the private sector and in the English School Foundation (ESF). The ESF had talked of changing from the NC to the PYP, and, therefore, to remain competitive, the school needed to follow suit. The school had already experienced a significant number of students moving to ESF schools around 2008 due to absence of a follow-on secondary school. Parents were naturally concerned and made the decision to send their children to ESF primary schools, as they wanted to guarantee a secondary school place, despite the fact that class sizes of the ESF schools were significantly larger. The schools were, therefore, fully aware of past financial problems and wanted to avoid fresh ones. It has been commented (Cambridge 2002) that international education institutions have business-like attributes with a cultural-ideological shift from pedagogical issues towards market-orientated values with the transformation of international education into a globally branded product. The recent changes of curricula in Hong Kong education can be similarly compared with the changing climate in Australia's education system in terms of informational and communication technology growth, the needs of young people changing and increases in social diversity (Law et al. 2012). Law et al. (2012) cited a 2008 report of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs and "the need for multi-skilled, multi-disciplinary workers in a changing employment market has resulted in a national shift in both teaching and learning". Secondly, the teaching staff and SMT were originally from countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada, often expressing the opinion that as an international school with students from approximately 20 countries, an international curriculum should be adopted to more appropriately meet all their needs. International-mindedness, intercultural awareness and diversity are values that the IB claims are fostered within their programmes (IB 2007) and were considered by the school to be of importance to the whole school community. Similarly, to other Hong Kong international schools, the PYP was chosen as the replacement for the NC.

On the whole, staff members were very enthusiastic about the prospect of adopting the PYP. Those approaching retirement age, however, were less enthusiastic; their reluctance to change was somewhat understandable. Teaching has been discussed as an emotional occupation and that teachers are often reluctant to educational change for a variety of reasons including the stage they are at in their careers (Hargreaves 1997a). Hargreaves (1997a) commented, "If educational reformers and change agents ignore the emotional dimensions of educational change, emotions and feelings will only re-enter the change process by the back door". Hargreaves (1997b) also commented on the implementation and restructuring of schools placing "literal and metaphorical impositions upon the lives and work of teachers.

Structural reforms have too often been built on teachers' backs, mandated without their involvement or consent". It was, therefore, essential that the SMT valued the opinions of the staff and were sympathetic and tolerant to their concerns in the transition process.

The SMT was very responsive and accordingly ensured teaching staff, students and parents were adequately informed, prepared and trained for the transition from traditional teaching to inquiry teaching methods. Initially, training was organised and taught by the Deputy Principal who was familiar with inquiry-based teaching methods in Australia and the work of educationalists such as Kath Murdoch and Edward de Bono. The Deputy Principal became the PYP coordinator overseeing the transition process. Staff members attended workshops organised by the IB within Hong Kong and overseas and later became certified as PYP teachers. A cautionary remark has been raised in the literature that consistency in classroom practice is not guaranteed even if a teacher knows the policy or programme (Kauffman 2005), and if their skills are not reformulated to be consistent with programme goals, implementation is in risk of failure (Duffy and Roehler 1986, cited in Kauffman 2005). Staff training was, therefore, a regular occurrence. When the IB held updated workshops, staff members attended. Meetings were often held at other international schools and were an opportunity for discussions with fellow colleagues, many of whom were also in the transition phase. The SMT received full backing from the Board of Governors. Legitimacy or approval is often sought by teachers or school administrators for their school, and the public can have a real influence (Kauffman 2005). Parents, therefore, were fully informed of the intended curriculum changes from the outset, and their approval, understanding and acceptance of the PYP were fundamental to the implementation process. The SMT organised information meetings and workshops for parents to attend allowing them the opportunity to raise questions and any concerns that they had. For the majority of parents who were educated within the Hong Kong local education system, their biggest concerns were with regard to assessment and homework. I remember many Chinese parents continuing to ask me at parent/teacher meetings about, for example, the position of their child in the class; how they would be tested; how work would be graded or commented upon once the PYP was adopted and so forth. They were also concerned about inquiry-based teaching and whether such an approach would be detrimental to their child's learning. They appreciated that their child would gain on a personal and social level but were anxious about a perceived lack of new knowledge gained, for example, in science.

Before formal accreditation procedures were initiated and with the majority of parents reassured of the merits of the PYP, the school decided to trial an inquiry-based curriculum for two academic years that was based on several curricula, including from Queensland and South Australia in the subject areas of science, humanities, arts, information technology, music and physical education. The school continued to implement the NC's literacy (English) and numeracy (mathematics) strategies, as they were considered strong in terms of structure and content. It was also decided that NC end of year assessments should continue to be used, which certainly reassured parents who had uncertainties on assessment procedures.

In the second trial year, the school started formal procedures to become an accredited International Baccalaureate (IB) World School and offer the PYP as its teaching and learning curriculum. When teaching the NC in the past, many teachers planned and taught lessons in isolation. Similarly to the school discussed in Korsmo et al. (2012), the teachers at the focus school, as stipulated by the IB, were required to collaboratively plan as year groups. Experienced teachers, initially less enthusiastic and uncertain about the adoption of the PYP, were now more positive, seeing one of the underpinning philosophies of the programme for collaborative planning as of support to them in the transition process. During this second year, teachers and teaching assistants continued to participate in workshops, training them on how to teach using an inquiry-based approach. The accreditation took place in March 2010, when the school had completed all of the requirements, including the formulation of new policy documents, including a language policy. The school was notified of its success in April 2010.

As previously mentioned, the PYP includes five transdisciplinary skills (communication, research, self-management, social and thinking). An important consideration for schools wishing to become an accredited IB World School is the arrangement and organisation of classrooms, most significantly of the tables or desks in order for students to be able to develop the five skills. To highlight this point, the seating arrangements of United Kingdom and overseas classrooms have been described in the literature (Galton and Williamson 1999; Galton et al. 1999) as children sitting in groups “around tables or at desks pushed together to make a square” (Galton and Williamson 1999). The functioning of groups, however, was further described as “surprising” as the practice did not “appear to match the ideology which one might suppose dictates the decision to bring children together in this way” (Galton and Williamson 1999). That is, grouping children can indicate discussion and sharing of ideas, but in practice, they would be assigned tasks to work on individually. Teachers at the focus school were already organising their classrooms in the layout Galton et al. (1999) described as a “typical classroom” or a “shoebox” layout, opposed to the “horseshoe” layout. The “typical classroom” or “shoebox” layout is, effectively, ideal for inquiry-based teaching and learning, as these arrangements are naturally organised for collaborative groupwork and the development of all five transdisciplinary skills. When the school was in the transition stage, classroom organisation of seats and tables was not, therefore, an additional burden or issue for teachers to consider.

Galton et al. (1999) reported findings of the 1996 Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation (ORACLE) study that was completed over five years following students in their last two years of primary and first year of secondary education. The study investigated the use of individual, group and whole class organisation of learning activities in the core subjects of mathematics, English and science and the foundation subjects of art, geography and history. Individual learning was found to be the highest method in all subjects except science. Whole class teaching was the highest method found for science. Groupwork was found to have least emphasis in all subjects than in art. Galton et al. (1999) commented that art is

usually seen as a subject students work on individually but that the percentage of one-to-one teacher-pupil interaction was only slightly above English.

The findings of the ORACLE (1996) project (see Galton et al. 1999) can be directly compared to the teaching and organisational settings expected within an inquiry-based classroom. Collaborative skills are a compulsory component, and, therefore, it could be predicted that within a PYP classroom, groupwork would be the highest level in the majority of learning activities. For English, however, according to the content of the UoI, specific texts and writing genres were planned in advance for coverage over the academic year, for example, persuasive texts and writing, poetry, report writing, science fiction texts and writing, etc. For the UoI that was based around a business venture, the contents of English sessions were persuasive texts, for example, to familiarise the students with persuasive language in order to attract potential customers in advertisements and face to face. Such content would be taught within whole class shared or group reading sessions and subsequently developed within the UoI sessions when the students worked on tasks individually, in pairs or in small groups. Similarly to Galton et al.'s (1999) discussion with regard to reading and the demands of teaching the NC, as well as juggling the expectations of head teachers, that is, "the pressure of including all the National Curriculum subjects has reduced the amount of time spent hearing the children read. In one class, for example, we observed a teacher attempting to satisfy the head teacher's rule that every child should be heard reading every second day", there were similar concerns for many of the teachers, particularly those teaching the older students who did not have a dedicated teaching assistant. It was common practice for teachers to listen to students read the same differentiated level text as part of a small group in order to satisfy the requirements of the SMT. Another strategy would be for a text to be read as a whole class sharing activity using the interactive whiteboard. The students would also have their own copy of the text, on which they could highlight unknown vocabulary or phrases that they could either question the teacher, their peers, or consult a dictionary at a later stage to confirm definitions.

Mathematics was, whenever appropriate, taught within the UoIs or as stand-alone inquiry units to cover new concepts within the scope and sequence document. When not appropriate to be taught using an inquiry approach, concepts were taught with an inquiry twist and student interaction. The students, however, would usually be working on tasks individually, relatively similar to the reported 1996 ORACLE findings.

The PYP has six subject areas identified, which are language, mathematics, science, social studies, arts and personal, social and physical education. A common concern of the teaching staff, particularly in the first two years after accreditation, was towards science and the teaching of concepts and skills, plus the lack of investigative experimental work. Similarly, but to a lesser extent, the once stand-alone subjects of the NC, namely, art, geography and history, were seen as being neglected within the UoIs. As a result, the UoIs, which were always reviewed after completion, were restructured and given a traditional subject emphasis or focus. So, a UoI might be considered to have a science focus on forces or light or a geographical focus on local land usage. Although some of the more experienced teachers were

less concerned than previously, there was still some concern from them towards the perceived lack of science in the UoIs. In addition, parents also expressed similar concerns with regard to the teaching of science.

As mentioned, when the UoIs were finished, they were evaluated. Evaluation is a major component of the IB programmes for staff and students. Students are encouraged to reflect on the UoIs and, in particular, to focus on the learner profile and attitudes, making judgements on their work, their strengths and successes, as well as the areas that they consider need further development. For the teachers, in collaborative planning sessions, they would meet with the PYP coordinator to discuss the UoIs with the view to required revisions in preparation for the following academic year when the UoI would be taught again. It was not uncommon for UoIs to be completely rewritten, especially in the first two or three years. The school was constantly learning and adapting, finding ways to improve the UoIs. This could be somewhat frustrating, particularly if the teachers felt that the UoI was, on the whole, particularly successful and rewarding for both the students and teachers. More often than not, Central Ideas or the concepts covered would be revised; the areas of the learner profile and attitudes chosen might be reduced in number, but most definitely, the teacher questions would be revised according to what was considered inappropriate to the unit.

Despite the fact teachers were planning collaboratively, there were, at times, grievances with regard to the formal planners designed by the IB that the school was required to use. The planners were seen as too detailed and prescriptive. They were not lesson plans but rather a tool in order to create a curriculum unit (Kauffman 2005) and, therefore, often seen as an additional, arduous and unnecessary requirement. Another common grievance of teachers was the high level of signage in classrooms and around the school. It was a requirement that the UoI being implemented had the focus areas of the learner profile and attitudes prominently displayed in the classroom with the remaining areas left on display, but separated. This was the same for the transdisciplinary (or organising) themes and the eight main concepts (e.g. Function – How does it work?) In addition, the Central Idea for the UoI supposed to underpin every session was also required to be on display. In the initial session(s), termed “tuning in”, there would be a provocation to the unit with the principle aim of engaging the students. The Central Idea would be discussed, normally in small collaborative groups and interpreted by the students. Discussion would usually follow as a whole class to gather ideas and look for similarities in opinions and ideas with a view to the next stage of the unit. An example of one UoI covered at the school was as follows:

- The organising or transdisciplinary theme – How we express ourselves.
- The Central Idea – “Performing arts can be an expression of people’s desire to communicate their ideas and feelings to entertain or inform others”.
- The concepts covered – change and reflection.

When planning the unit, the teachers and the PYP coordinator would formulate four lines of inquiry that, with the Central Idea and concepts, would become the programme of inquiry. For the unit described above, the four lines of inquiry were

using performing arts to express ideas and feelings; emotions, feelings and self-expression as part of performance; history of performance; and reasons for performance and performance effects.

Inquiry-based teaching is very different to traditional teaching methods, and initially, it was difficult to adapt for both teachers and students. The students were now being given the opportunity to learn using what were initially termed by the school as “smarts”. For example, if a student was particularly good at writing and reading, they would be described as “word smart”; if a student enjoyed painting and drawing, they would be described as “picture smart”; and if a student was into sports and exercise, they would be described as “body smart”. In addition to the Central Idea, concepts, etc. each classroom had signage with the different smarts displayed as reminders for the students and staff. The students were encouraged to work from time to time using their particular smart or smarts. Traditional teaching methods would usually consist of mainly closed questions, prescriptive workbook or photocopiable worksheets (Kauffman 2005). Inquiry-based teaching, in comparison, is called for open-ended questions to initiate discussion with peers, questioning and the development of research skills. Research could take the form of primary sources (asking others) or secondary sources of information such as the Internet, reference books, magazines and so on. Kauffman (2005) investigated the implementation of the PYP in three schools and, in his discussion, provided accounts of the various methods and lines of questioning that the teachers used. For example, Kauffman (2005) reported “The teacher encouraged the students to read and independently answer their own questions. The other 4–5 grade teacher connected the Gold Rush to writing and IBPYP attitudes”. Kauffman (2005) further reported that one school “involved students in many experiential activities and in classroom management”, whereas, in comparison, the other school “seemed to be in the midst of changing practices to be more consistent with IBPYP”. Kauffman’s findings provided examples of schools in a similar position to the focus school.

On the whole, the initial transition from the NC to the PYP was smooth; however, there were still a significant number of parents who were unconvinced of the merits of the PYP and at parent/teacher interviews, for example, raised their concerns. Most of the time, concerns continued to be focused on homework and assessment issues. For teachers, concerns were often mentioned with regard to the amount of work that was in the children’s exercise books. Teaching methods of the PYP included the use of collaborative working in small groups and the development of skills such as researching. Much of the time, larger sheets of paper were used for student ideas, and, hence, the only logical way in which evidence could be recorded for accountability to parents and the senior management team was photographs. It was not uncommon for student inquiry unit folders to include a number of colour photocopied photographs and reflection sheets that they had written of the activities.

During the course of the academic year, students would choose work which they were particularly proud of for inclusion in their Student-Led Conference (SLC) folder. The SLCs were held in May and were, as the name suggests, conferences led by the student. Parents were invited to attend, and the students showed their work.

The conferences were scheduled for one hour. The work selected for their folder would be reflected upon, for example, what they had learnt, did they overcome any difficulties to achieve the task, which of the learner profile and attitudes had they improved upon and so forth. My observations of the SLCs were always positive and of admiration for the students. They were, essentially, replacing the teacher's role of the past by conducting the final parent/teacher meeting of the academic year. Parent/teacher meetings continued to be scheduled in the first and second term. Although daunting for the students initially, during the five years I was teaching the older 9- and 10-year-old students, who had been taught at the school using the NC and the PYP, the confidence they exhibited when conducting their SLC could be astounding. Not only at their SLC but throughout the year, they were confidently presenting ideas in small groups, to the whole class, the year group or, indeed, the whole school. My colleagues and I would often comment on how times had changed from when we were at primary school and the difference now in our expectations of young students.

In the final year of the PYP, the 10- and 11-year-old students participate in their exhibition. The exhibition is described by the IB as students undertaking "a collaborative, transdisciplinary process that involves them in identifying, investigating and offering solutions to real-life issues or problems" (IB 2013b). For two consecutive years, I was fortunate to be a mentor to two groups of three students on their exhibition journey. On a personal level, I was proud to have either taught them the previous academic year or when they were 4- and 5-year-olds. The exhibition aims to bring together the many components of the PYP, including the learner profile, attitudes, concepts and transdisciplinary skills. There are critics of the PYP and other programmes of the IB, but on a personal level and writing as a qualified primary school teacher who has taught using the NC and PYP, the advantages of the PYP far outweigh any disadvantages. The world is certainly influenced by the ever-advancing changes in technology. Students are required now to present their ideas, conduct their own research and have the ability to work individually and collaboratively. The PYP curriculum would certainly appear to fulfil the mission of the IB and adequately prepare young students for their secondary schooling and beyond.

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