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Beyond Food and Flags

Moving from multiculturalism to internationalism
in the IB classroom

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What does internationalism mean to the mission of the IB?

The International Baccalaureate aims to:

1. develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.
2. work with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment.
3. encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that *other people, with their differences, can also be right.*



International-mindedness is an attitude of openness to, and curiosity about, the world and different cultures. It is concerned with developing a deep understanding of the *complexity, diversity and motives that underpin human actions and interactions.* (DP9, 2009, p. 4)



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What does that mean in PYP and MYP terms?

For the IB, the three components of international-mindedness are meant to be foundations for all IB education:

1. Multilingualism
2. Intercultural understanding
3. Global engagement



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“The students explore this common ground collaboratively, from the multiple perspectives of their individual experiences and backgrounds... This sharing of experience increases the students’ awareness of, and sensitivity to, the experiences of others beyond the local or national community ... To enhance this awareness of other perspectives, indeed of other cultures and other places

(PYP8, 2013: 36,)

(Intercultural awareness) 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...By encouraging students to consider multiple perspectives, intercultural awareness not only fosters tolerance and respect, but also aims to develop empathy and understanding, and the acceptance of others’ rights in being different. (MYP2, 2009: 4).



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Two common traps for teachers

Universalism

- This is the belief that there are some universal truths, not influenced by culture, which frame the study of particular disciplines. The argument is used most often for math and science.

Multiculturalism

- This is the acknowledgement and introduction of other cultures to the classroom, though not necessarily in meaningful ways.



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Strategy #1: Themes of global significance

- What impacts the whole world? What issues do we face together?
- Global warming, energy consumption, waste disposal





Strategy #2: Epistemological differences

- What are the differences in our belief systems and knowledge bases (so TOK!)?
 - Biology: Eastern vs. Western perspectives on human anatomy (reflexology, acupuncture)
 - Chemistry: Eastern vs. Western medicine
 - Social and Cultural Norms: family obligations, “greater good” vs. individual rights





Strategy #3: Global parallels

- What are some similar debates in other parts of the world?
 - Immigration, marriage equality, examples of history repeating itself





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What opportunities does this present to us for enrichment?

- Themes of global significance:
 - Recycling projects
 - Overfishing
 - Space: The final frontier
- Epistemological differences:
 - What is medicine? (herbs, chicken soup, and OTC cold medicine)
 - What is food? (theperennialplate.com, Norah Dooley for PYP)
 - What is art? (mandalas, mosaics, and modernism)
- Global parallels:
 - Limitless, for art, music, dance, theater. What are the popular works of the past ten years, and why? What does that say about the cultural context? Are the messages universal? Why or why not?
 - What scientists are doing significant work in other countries right now? How is that work important to their nations, and to the research community?



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Some of our ideas for class assignments...

- Spanish: dancing lesson, with a discussion of how salsa developed as part of Hispanic culture
- History: protest art project, examining how political movements have inspired artistic ones, trading cards (dictators of the world)
- English: learned to prepare food from Works in Translation novels (*Paradise of the Blind*, *Season of Migration to the North*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*) with a focus on how the foods evolved based on climate, history, culture, religion.
- Science: documentaries on issues related to global warming (Group 4 projects)
- Math/Engineering: global construction projects, analyzing and reconstructing bridges, tunnels, dams, and monuments from other nations



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Some of our more ambitious projects...

- Monthly IB Global Cultures and Cuisines Club: How does food differ, even across one country, due to geography and climate? How do immigration and invasion patterns influence food culture? What is a “staple” food, and why?
 - So far, we’ve covered Italy, Egypt, Native America, Germany, Colombia, Senegal, Ireland, Philippines
- Annual student-organized festival closely examining a different country each year
 - So far, we’ve done Japan (2011), Ancient Greece (2012), and Egypt (2013), with Norway in 2014.
- International Film Festivals, with discussion: Spirited Away, Pan’s Labyrinth, OMG, International Shorts
- IB On the Move: this has been a series of weekend outings, ranging from attending plays at local theaters to visiting a local farm, and learning crafts from local artists, with a focus on CAS opportunities for reflection.
- Annual international field trip: Costa Rica (2011), Italy and Greece (2013), London and Paris (2014), China (planned for 2015)
- Camp IB, an annual week of experiential learning in the DC Metro area.