

Values, Constructivism and the IB Continuum

*This paper is, in essence, a development of an earlier paper, a short version of which was published in **IB World** in August 2004 under the title **Values Cementing the IB Continuum**. The first version was prepared for an MYP committee at IBCA during 2002.*

The Learner Profile

The profile and the supporting booklet represent wonderful progress towards a genuine sense of continuum, embodying values not only for learners but for teachers and schools as well. But I am concerned about the phrase “implementing the learner profile”. The phrase seems to imply that these desirable characteristics are some sort of add-on rather than intrinsic to the philosophy of the programmes; perhaps it also implies some kind of assessment, in some minds. I would rather suggest that the highly desirable traits of the Learner Profile are just that; they are not, I suggest, to be seen as outcomes in the sense of something we can legislate for. We can all behave in ways conducive to their realization, but we cannot guarantee them as outcomes for every individual.

The implication of this paper is that we should build the opportunities for development of these characteristics into all our curricular planning, simply by sharpening our focus in particular assignments or units of inquiry, a term, by the way, which I think should be adopted in all three programmes; what a positive effect that could have on the planning mindset of teachers in the MYP and Diploma. More of that, later.

The evidence will be indirect through indicators of school climate, but also and especially in the way in which units of work are set and in students’ responses to values-related questions.

Programme Standards

Several standards and indicators relate closely to this discussion, notably, amongst others:

- Standard C1, common practices 2, 3, 6, 8, 10
- Standard C3, common practices 1, 2, 4, 7, 10
- Standard A in general

Values

A fundamental assumption of this paper is that there is no such thing as a values-free education, educational environment or curriculum. I imagine that this view is unlikely to be challenged in this group!

A second fundamental assumption in this paper is that learning values is a matter of constructing meaning from a multitude of experiences and in a non-linear way, as in any other area of learning. Values education is therefore, in this perspective less a matter of the deliberate inculcation of a set of values, a kind of indoctrination in its most extreme form, than a matter of clarification of the nature and origin of the values one holds. This position is intrinsically recognised in the non-absolutist stance expressed in the IBO mission statement and the Learner Profile.

In this view, Values Education has, I think, four aspects for growth and learning:

- The identification and articulation of the position held
- Increasingly clear understanding and analysis of the origins of that position
- The capacity to challenge or defend the position
- The capacity to reflect deeply on beliefs and actions and their implications

It is all about becoming increasingly explicit about the position one holds.

The R word

Schools and teachers must, in this view, structure opportunities to allow and encourage students to be consciously aware of their construction of understanding in values-related areas. We must aim for a kind of metacognition with respect to values. At its best, I think this is what reflection means. Reflection is a term that has recently had some deservedly bad press: it is a bit of a vogue word in educational jargon and much of what passes for reflection is barely more than facile opinion, expression of feeling or hopeful assertion of better quality work in the future. Structured, engaged thinking does not sometimes seem to have entered into the processes of reflection.

The PYP uses the Think-Act-Reflect sequence as a daily classroom tool and this is certainly one approach to learning good habits of mind that could usefully transfer to the MYP classroom. Later, I explore how the MYP Areas of Interaction provide a framework for deep and purposeful reflection.

One place where processes of more demanding reflection on values is expected in the IB Diploma is in Theory of Knowledge. As the ToK guide (2006) says:

What makes TOK unique, and distinctively different from standard academic disciplines, is its process. At the centre of the course is the student as knower...In TOK they have the opportunity to step back from the relentless acquisition of new knowledge, in order to consider knowledge issues.

Such issues include knowledge claims including many of an ethical and values-related kind, and

TOK activities and discussions aim to help students discover and express their views on knowledge issues...to listen to and learn from what others think. In this process students' thinking and their understanding of knowledge as a human construction are shaped, enriched and deepened. P3

What one sees here is a commitment to constructivist thinking, albeit less explicit or less developed than one finds in the development of the theoretical underpinnings of the PYP with its unequivocal commitment to inquiry and the construction of meaning, a position:

...of commitment to structured, purposeful inquiry that engages students actively in their own learning. In the PYP it is believed that this is the way in which students learn best – that students should be invited to investigate significant issues by formulating their own questions, designing their own inquiries, assessing the various means available to support their inquiries, and proceeding with research, experimentation, observation and analysis that will help them in finding their own responses to the issue. The starting point is students' current understanding, and the goal is the active construction of meaning by building connections between that understanding and new information and experience, derived from the inquiry into new content. (2007 revision of Making the PYP Happen)

I am very pleased to report that at a recent (September 2006) meeting at IBCA of administrators and teachers from three-programme schools, this statement was seen as a viable manifesto for the DP and MYP as well as for the PYP. It must of course be acknowledged that there is a discipline based structure of all three programme models. Such a basis is more to the fore in MYP delivery, at least in most schools and is very clear indeed in the Diploma. Such an acknowledgement should not diminish an understanding of the value of constructivist inquiry in all three programmes and within subjects as well as in units of work intended to transcend discipline boundaries. The term *Unit of Inquiry* has long been associated with transdisciplinary inquiry in the PYP; I see every reason to adopt the phrase in the MYP. It could helpfully replace the term unit of work, or topic, both within subjects and for units or interdisciplinary work. The widespread, if imperfect, use of guiding or essential questions in MYP unit planning supports this view, and would in turn be usefully more sharply focussed by it.

The fact that the processes will inevitably (probably) be led less by students and more by teachers in the later MYP years, and even more so in the Diploma, does not seem to me to diminish the principles.

An important recent realisation for me has been that the hexagons and octagon are better thought of not as *curriculum* models, but as *programme* models. The curriculum model that considers the written, taught and assessed curricula as the basis for planning seems more supportive of an inquiry- and resource-based programme. Such thinking places the learner-as-constructor, and consequently the learner profile, at the centre of a planner's thinking. I thank Jennifer Giddings for the clarity of exposition of this point at a recent meeting at IBCA, in September 2006.

Values Cementing the IB Continuum

It is sometimes asserted, though less now than a handful of years ago, that the PYP, MYP and DP do not readily articulate, perhaps because of differences in the age and origins of the programmes. I see constructivism as supporting a values-based framework which helps us see the programmes as a continuum. In this part of the paper, I explore how the MYP Areas of Interaction provide a link to the Diploma, particularly with respect to ToK, CAS and the Extended Essay. Similarly, the concepts, skills, attitudes and actions at the centre of the PYP support the constructivist foundation for programme articulation through pedagogy and assessment. Such understanding takes us beyond the obvious commonality in the continuum: the requirement of holistic breadth in curriculum and emphases on intercultural awareness and communication.

MYP provides the vital bridge

I am often puzzled by criticisms levelled at the MYP. They are usually variations on three simple themes: rigour (or the bland assertion of its lack), teachers' work and the complexity of the model.

It is sometimes asserted that the MYP does not explicitly capitalize on the constructivist strength of the PYP. While the diagrammatic representation of the MYP is perhaps not as obviously constructivist as that for the PYP, I believe the MYP fulfills quite explicitly many accepted criteria of constructivist approaches to curriculum, approaches widely held to be vital for middle schooling, if our pupils are to be truly engaged in their learning. It seems not merely serendipitous that parents in MYP schools repeatedly say that the MYP experience has made their children more independent, more engaged and more inclined to challenge assumptions.

At the heart of the MYP are the five *Areas of Interaction*. These provide globally significant **values-related perspectives** through which much of the subject curriculum must be viewed. Some broad guiding questions, constructivist in style, characterize each *Area* in the August 2002 Guide, rather more explicitly than in earlier editions. The table shows further suggestions for questions we use to underscore the importance of values-clarification and the analysis of values as a determinant of meaning and of action in citizenship. Note that *Homo Faber* can also accommodate a futures education perspective.

The table also shows some exploratory thinking about explicit links to ToK. The links are intended to show how MYP inquiry through the Areas of Interaction can give a thorough grounding in the skills of distinguishing personal (private) knowledge from propositional (public) knowledge.

Areas of Interaction	Characterizing Questions taken from the AOI Guide	Further suggestions for focussing on values	Related to Theory of Knowledge: Ways of Knowing and Areas of Knowledge	How does each relate to the Learner Profile ? (Participants' thinking space)
Approaches to Learning	How do I learn best? How do I know? How do I communicate my understanding?	Where do my values come from? How do they colour my learning? How might I challenge or defend them?	Language, Reason, Emotion, Perception (sensory and cultural)	
Community and Service	How do we live in relation to each other? How can I contribute to the community? How can I help others?	What are my values? How have they been formed? What action can I take? What are my responsibilities?	Perception (Cultural), <i>History, Ethics</i>	
Environment	Where do we live? What are my responsibilities?	What are my values? How have they been formed? What are my responsibilities? What action can I take?	<i>Natural Sciences, Ethics</i>	
Health and Social Education	How do I think and act? How am I changing How can I look after myself and others?	What are my values about personal relationships? What action can I take? How should I act?	<i>Ethics, Human Sciences, Natural Sciences</i>	
<i>Homo Faber</i>	Why and how do we create? What are the consequences?	Where does the power lie? By what values were famous thinkers motivated? What might the future hold? What is the truth? How do I know what is right?	Language, Reason, Emotion, Perception <i>History, Sciences (Natural and Human)</i> <i>Ethics, Arts, Mathematics</i>	

One might argue that the Diploma is currently the weak link in the values-based dimension of the programs. Values-based elements may seem less clearly defined than in PYP and MYP, but *Theory of Knowledge* in particular puts demands of values clarification on Diploma students; importantly, it does this at a time in their lives when they have a level of intellectual maturity to examine their own beliefs with dispassion and logic but also with a level of emotional/affective independence as well as a fuller command of subject knowledge to inform debate. In analysing knowledge claims and counterclaims in various disciplines and ways of knowing, students cannot avoid values-laden issues, assertions and arguments. In their essays and oral presentations they grapple with questions like

- What makes evidence good enough to justify belief?
- What justifies the name of art?
- Do we act ethically out of social duty, religious belief, universal principle or self interest?
- When can it be right to disobey the law?
- Can suicide bombers be right?

Assessment and Reporting

The recognition of what Elliot Eisner helped educators understand as the **hidden curriculum** is supported not only through the conscious exploration and deconstruction of values, but also in the explicit requirement in the MYP that teachers will use a range of assessment techniques, so that students internalize the sense that different styles of learning and demonstration of learning are valued by their adult mentors. Teachers must apply an assessment repertoire which genuinely seeks a significant place for communication, problem solving, values-clarification, interconnectedness across disciplines, sustained writing or oral presentation, self and peer assessment and conscious reflection. These are to complement approaches which rely more exclusively on various tests of recall of factual knowledge, learned ideas and procedures – the “core content” of more traditional curricula. Not that these elements are unimportant; they are merely the pre-constructivist elements which still have a place in the balanced picture of the MYP and PYP curricula.

One challenge in some schools has been assessment and reporting in the PYP; one approach might be to work downwards from MYP practices which should, in my view, make full use of the learning objectives, assessment criteria and level descriptors. Such processes, well communicated, are, in my experience, greatly appreciated by parents and students alike. In the other direction, within the MYP framework, we should be challenged by our PYP colleagues to help older children be both engaged and responsible through reflective reporting processes such as cumulative portfolios and formal student-led conferences.

A place for examinations? (An aside, now)

I am puzzled when I hear of DP schools who suggest that the MYP does not articulate with the DP because the latter has assessment based to a large degree on an external examination; we would caution against any assumption that the MYP rejects examinations; rather *Approaches to Learning* would have teachers and students understand that examinations are but one limited form of demonstrating some types of learning. While the examination as a form of assessment may be amenable to some development to bring it more into line with constructivism and the MYP's more communicative criteria for assessment, it seems reasonable to contend that such thinking is in its infancy.

The concepts of **service learning** and **learning in a community context** have been alluded to already; at St Dominic's we combine the roles of DP CAS Coordinator and MYP Area leader for Community and Service. In the future this service learning coordination might extend to the PYP as well, to support the fact that all three programmes encourage real-life, collaborative, active learning through projects which seek to be as authentic as possible. Such learning is another established mark of constructivist thinking, as is the place of **personally-driven learning** which is stressed throughout the MYP experience, but comes to its culmination in the *Personal Project*, in which students must choose for themselves a problem- or purpose-based investigation, construction or creation, and reflect metacognitively on what they have achieved.

Metacognition and the planned development of skills and thinking processes at different levels of complexity, structured reflection, collaborative assignments and self direction are just some of the ways MYP teachers are encouraged to **guide and empower the learners** in their care. Single mode "sage on the stage" delivery and the mere regurgitation of limited text-based learning are not the essence of MYP classrooms. Of course there are bodies of knowledge to be mastered, but the MYP leaves room for students to negotiate at least some of their learning and how it will be assessed. There is a real attempt to enable students to realize that their schooling can be useful in the "now" world as well as be a basis for further schooling. Carefully devised level descriptors to support **criterion-based assessment** underpin the importance of open-ended, even risk-taking, achievement rather than mere demonstration of competence. Under such a regimen, significant cognitive growth – both inside and outside the classroom – is enabled and recognized.

Of course the MYP has not abandoned subject-focussed learning. While supporting the growth of bodies of scholastic knowledge through an eight "subject" structure, the MYP requires teachers to plan together across the discipline boundaries to engender an **holistic view of knowledge**. Increasingly, teachers are putting this interdisciplinary planning into classroom practice through the sophisticated use of **transdisciplinary guiding questions**. Such techniques are another recognized hallmark of constructivist thinking, and common to PYP and MYP.

Explicitness: the great challenge

In some MYP schools there is still the inescapable paradigm shift that some secondary school teachers face when they arrive with their perception that the MYP somehow attacks subject disciplines. I have tried to demonstrate approaches to counteract such fears. The requirement remains for teachers to translate a general mindset of rigorous academic expectations to manageable classroom assignments, explicit in terms of objectives, metacognitive reflections and assessment criteria (sometimes called task-specific rubrics) adapted to the particular work.

Open-ended guiding or essential questions can allow for some level of differentiation for the most able and somewhat slower learners. Again a clear and explicit approach is required in terms of teachers' unit preparation.

A useful focus of professional development is to help teachers to make the links shown in the Areas of Interaction table sufficiently explicit to pupils. This is just an extension of a basic challenge with MYP: building meaningful, explicit reflection on expanded understanding of the Areas into their assignment work. The process will, I believe, almost automatically elevate the place of the Learner Profile in teachers' thinking.

Pastoral links

The areas of interaction, especially but not exclusively Health and Social Education have important links to the pastoral life of schools; in my school it is the prime responsibility of a class tutor system under the management of a Dean of Students. A current and highly significant challenge is to ensure the seamless integration of pastoral and academic in terms of, for example, issues related to relationships, values clarification sex, drugs and conflict resolution.

The constructivist pedagogy of the PYP and MYP is what makes the programmes a vehicle for promoting a sense of global citizenship; it is what turns the three fundamental concepts of the MYP – *intercultural awareness, communication and holistic learning* – from theory into practice.

I believe that the questioning- and research-based learning of the PYP and MYP provides a fine foundation not only for Diploma and university studies but for a rich life. And that life is not just the future; it is here and now in the richness of relationships, intercultural understanding and the intrinsic satisfaction of rigorous learning.

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