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# THE COORDINATION OF THE MIDDLE YEARS PROGRAMME IN SMALLER INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

**An inquiry into key implementation strategies for MYP Coordinators**

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## **Executive Summary**

Sean Gibb  
The British International  
School of Stavanger, Norway

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## INTRODUCTION

The number of schools offering the International Baccalaureate's Middle Years Programme (MYP) worldwide is growing at an explosive rate. During the first decade of the 21st century, the number of schools globally adopting International Baccalaureate (IB) programmes increased by 400% (Lee et al, 2011). Today, these IB programmes are far reaching; covering six continents and a vast range of different institutions from giant, multi-programme 'world schools', to smaller independent schools of less than 100 students.

The constant, steady expansion of international education has presented the IB with a number of challenges (Thompson, 1998; Lee et al., 2011; Robertson, 2011b; Walker, 2011). It has been stated that schools offering an international education seek to use education as a means to create a harmonious world (Gellar, 2002), but whether this recent growth is ideology driven, or a result of market forces remains to be clarified. Perhaps the most important challenge is what Walker (2011) argues as the need for international education to *'refine its message'* as its influence spreads further into various contexts of a globalising world. Realising the IB mission: *"to create a better world through education"* (IB, 2013) is not only the responsibility of the IB organisation, but also those IB Programme Coordinators, assigned the task of implementing programmes in their respective schools. Considering the growth of the MYP, there are a number of newly appointed MYP Coordinators each year, not to mention those new to international education altogether, who now hold this responsibility.

In order to evaluate the success of the IB in realising its mission, one must contemplate how successfully the aims of the IB Programmes are been realised by smaller international schools, out in the furthest corners of the world. How successful have IB Coordinators been at implementing the programmes in smaller schools? Sadly, there is actually very little research-based literature relating to leadership in international schools (Lee et al, 2011), less relating to leadership in small schools (Jones, 2006), and almost none relating to MYP Coordination (Robertson, 2011b). A recent IB publication: *'Journeys in Implementation'* (IB, 2011c) attempted to capture key strategies for programme implementation, however the schools offered as case studies were all larger schools, leaving little known about the implementation of IB programmes in smaller schools. It is argued here that research into the implementation of IB programmes in smaller schools is well overdue.

The aim of this study is to investigate key strategies for IB Coordinators implementing the MYP in smaller international schools in Norway. The findings of this study will offer an original contribution to the understanding of leadership in IB Programmes, by offering a perspective from a different (though not globally unique) context, and provide useful guidance for MYP Coordinators implementing the programme in smaller international schools, as well as those new to the role.

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# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Opportunities and Constraints of a Small School Setting

The 1990's saw a movement towards 'small schools' in the US (Raywid, 1998), in searching for more effective means of school improvement. Large scale research projects into these schools presented compelling evidence of the academic benefits of smaller schools (Raywid, 1998; Jones, 2006), success that was attributed to a number of factors: small size; unconventional organisational structure, a more human setting that was more like a community, and "that fact that most of them have a focus or coherent mission" (Raywid, 1998). Although these findings were based on a small sample base, within a single national system, purposefully trialling education in small school settings, they do indicate a need to better understand the benefits of education in a small school setting.

Admittedly, not all small schools are intentionally small in size; many remain small due to the constraints of their environment, and in the case of international schools: a reliance on transient populations of expatriate workers. One can expect that unstable populations create challenges for school leaders. The few studies that have focused on leadership in smaller schools present the task as something very challenging indeed (Jones 2006 & 2009; Clarke & Stevens, 2009). These studies identified that the main challenges of leadership in small schools involved:

- Lack of time (due to limited human resources)
- Limited funding and physical resources
- Insufficient training
- Limitations of the small school culture, both socially and professionally
- School leaders also holding significant teaching responsibilities

Head teachers in these studies had adopted various means of collaboration as a key strategy for overcoming these challenges (Jones 2006 & 2009; Clarke & Stevens, 2009). A key feature of their strategy involved extending beyond their own organisations to collaborate with other small schools, pooling resources and knowledge to strengthening what Jones (2009) calls 'a shared expertise'. Yet the success of these schemes relied on the effectiveness of the school leaders themselves.

In summary, there were both opportunities and limitations afforded through small school environments. Despite the potential academic benefits there is surprisingly little literature related to leadership in small schools, and a 'blank spot' when it comes to leadership in smaller international schools.

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## The Roles and Responsibilities of the MYP Coordinator

The MYP, introduced in 1994, has been described as a *cross-breed* programme of disciplinary and interdisciplinary elements (Robertson, 2011a). The MYP curriculum is not a ready to teach syllabus, but is built by the teachers themselves, through a process of creation *'from first principles'* (Thompson, 1998). The IB stresses that the entire syllabus should be *"guided by three fundamental concepts that are rooted in the IB mission statement"* (IB, 2008). These fundamental concepts, holistic learning, intercultural awareness and communication, are expected to take a central role in the syllabus, providing guidance for all teaching and learning through eight separate subject disciplines.

The overall coherence and success of such a curriculum model creates a great responsibility on not only school leaders (Hall et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2011) but also subject teachers, to interpret, understand and implement the 'IB Philosophy' within their schools. Clearly, this type of activity requires a great deal of release time, and illustrates the need for a highly effective MYP Coordinator who:

*"Together with the senior management of the school ... is involved in the whole-school implementation of the MYP and, therefore, has a central function in the organization of the programme. The MYP coordinator maintains contact with area leaders, subject departments and teachers, and with the IB"* (IB, 2011a).

However, despite the MYP having existed for nearly 20 years, empirical research into leadership in IB programmes is alarmingly scarce (Riesbeck, 2008; Robertson, 2011a; Lee et al., 2011). To the author's knowledge, only a handful of studies have been carried out hitherto (IB, 2011c; Lee et al., 2011; Robertson, 2011a). Of these, Robertson's investigation into the roles and functions of MYP Coordinators is most illuminating for the purposes of this study.

Robertson found that, as early adopters of the MYP philosophy within their schools, MYP Coordinators identified one of their key roles was as a coach to other teachers, or a *'guide alongside'* (Robertson, 2011b). This aspect of their role involved modelling good practice, but also navigating the political, social and emotional challenges that come with supporting colleagues struggling with implementing the MYP curriculum. Coordinators highlighted another key role: as an *'administrator'*, but stressed how they felt that asking colleagues to produce planning documents, and attend additional collaborative planning sessions caused stresses in relationships (Robertson, 2011b). Finally, MYP Coordinators identified the third key role: as an *'orchestrator'*, carrying out three major tasks: *"chef (of curriculum elements), pacesetter (of the implementation process) and connector (of people, i.e. staff and other stakeholders)"* (Robertson, 2011b). It was this higher-level process of orchestration that MYP Coordinators found most challenging, as will be discussed in the next section.

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## Managing Complex Educational Change

The implementation of the MYP, particularly for the first time, is a large-scale, complex educational change. Malone and Crowston (1994) define coordination as *"managing dependencies between activities"* (p.90), describing good coordination as something nearly invisible and most often only recognised when it is lacking. With such a central role to play, MYP coordinators have a huge responsibility to ensure the realisation of the IB mission statement, through the successful implementation of the programme in their school.

How can an MYP Coordinator be successful within their role? As shown above, there is very little literature relating to MYP coordination, though one study revealed that MYP Coordinators identified their key function was as an *'orchestrator.'* Wallace (2003) describes this meta-task of orchestration as the act of:

*"steering the complex change process, often at some distance from the sharp end of implementation... instigating, organizing and maintaining oversight of an intricate array of coordinated tasks as the change process unfolds, and coping with this change alongside other work... characterized by behind-the-scenes 'strina pullina'"* (Wallace. 2003. 22).

Wallace acknowledges the challenges of *'coping with complex educational change'*, and characterises successful orchestration through three helpful themes: flexible planning and coordination, culture building and communication, and differentiated support (2003). Although this may provide us with a useful framework for considering the role of an MYP Coordinator, there are limitations, particularly to the extent to which they are reliant on teacher incentives for change (Fullan, 2001; Wallace, 2003); for the MYP coordinator cannot be successful without the support from the teaching staff. Much has been written about educational change (Fullan, 2001), yet perhaps the ideas most insightful to those implementing the MYP can be drawn from Guskey's model of teacher change, where it is suggested that *"practices that are found to work – that is, those that teachers find useful in helping students attain desired learning outcomes – are retained and repeated"* (Guskey, 2002). In order for this kind of thing to occur, MYP Coordinators must provide a flexible environment, through differentiated support, to allow teachers opportunity, incentive and time to change their own classroom practices, and experiment with MYP teaching approaches.

MYP Coordinators are often appointed from the teaching staff (IB, 2011a), and depending on the size of the school, the role often includes teaching responsibilities (Robertson, 2011a). Despite having to attend one workshop in order to receive authorisation, coordinators are required to implement a long *"laundry list of administrative duties"* (Robertson, 2011a), often without the formal authority of a member of the senior management team. MYP Coordinators have an important role to play, however lack of formal leadership training, combined with teaching responsibilities, and an absence of positional authority presents a concerning image of a MYP coordinator as: a teacher placed at the centre of the implementation process, perhaps without the tools for success. What is clearly needed is a greater understanding of what successful MYP coordination actually is.

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## RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND QUESTIONS

The framework for research draws on the findings of the full literature review to present the key themes related to the coordination of the MYP in smaller international schools.

- **Opportunities and Constraints of a Small School Setting:** The literature provides a case for the setting of small schools as one of both constraints and opportunities. The navigation of these factors requires capable leadership. The nature of this role in an international setting is a key area for investigation.
- **The Roles and Responsibilities of the MYP Coordinator:** described by Robertson (2011b) in three main functions: guide alongside, administrator and orchestrator. There is a clear need to further investigate the role of the MYP Coordinator, in the context of smaller international schools.
- **Managing Complex Educational Change:** the literature highlights the importance of, and challenges provided by, the orchestration of the large educational change such as implementation of the MYP. A key area for investigation is the work of MYP Coordinators, their relationship to the implementation process, and the strategies they perceive to be successful for MYP coordination in such a setting.

The research question for this study is:

*“What have been key strategies for coordinators implementing the MYP in smaller international schools?”*

The key questions that guide this investigation are:

1. How has the role of MYP coordinator, as defined by the school, effected the implementation of the programme?
2. What key strategies have been attributed to successful components of implementation?

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## METHODOLOGY

The multi-method research design involved two main stages: a series of interviews; followed by a case study.

### Stage 1

The first stage of research contained four semi-structured exploratory interviews with MYP coordinators from a sample of smaller international schools in Norway. Care was taken to establish a sampling frame that was representative of smaller Norwegian international schools. It was important then that a framework for inquiry was established before the interviews (Cohen et al., 2000). This involved grouping, and loosely linking interview questions to themes already established in the literature review, and piloting these questions in a trial interview.

The systematic approach to questioning based on the framework above ensured that the structured component of the semi-structured interview asked the same key questions. This meant that portions of each interview could be aligned with each other, to apply a framework in order for data to be sorted into themes; "*conceptual links of an expression*" Ryan & Bernard (2003); or what Bell (1999) calls "*categories*". However, the initial approach involved analysing each transcript independently to identify categories within each data set.

### Stage 2

The next stage of research involved identifying one of the interview participants that was most representative of the sample, and providing insight into topics related to the research question. This stage then involved an evaluative case study of that MYP Coordinator, and the implementation of the MYP in their school, in order to expand on the findings of Stage 1. The case-study comprised: a two-day visit to the school, analysis of brochures and internal planning documents, a tour of the campus and classrooms, informal meetings with staff, teachers and students, as well as semi-structured interviews with the MYP coordinator, the principal, and three subordinate members of the MYP teaching team.

By using qualitative mixed-methods, representative sampling, semi-structured interviews based on a research framework, and triangulation through a follow-up case study, the researcher has been able to collect and analyse appropriately valid and reliable data as evidence of the underlying themes uncovered during the research. The participants used in the research are shown below.

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## PARTICIPANTS

There were four participating MYP Coordinators, coming from geographically separate international schools, each containing less than 100 MYP students. An overview of each MYP Coordinator, and their school, appears below:

### Coordinator A

New to MYP coordination, Coordinator A was appointed just after the school received authorisation over a year ago. He leads a group of 10 teaching staff that deliver the MYP programme, and maintains a 45% teaching schedule, as well as responsibilities as Assistant Head.

School A is situated in a small town of approximately 40 000 residents, and was established in the last decade. It has since become a private school, and offers the PYP and MYP, now catering to approximately 60 MYP students.

### Coordinator B\*

An MYP Coordinator for 6 years, Coordinator B has been with the school since it was established nearly a decade ago. She leads a team of 11 teachers who deliver the MYP curriculum, and maintains a 20% teaching schedule, as well as responsibilities as Head of Middle School.

School B is located in a small town of approximately 25 000 residents. The school is 85% state-funded and offers both the PYP and MYP. The MYP department has a student body of approximately 80 students, with a large majority of these host country nationals.

### Coordinator C

An MYP Coordinator for 7 of their 18 years at the school, Coordinator C guides a team of over 15 teachers who deliver the MYP, whilst maintaining an 80% teaching schedule. She does not hold a Senior Manager's position, and reports directly to the Deputy Head.

School C is situated in one of the largest cities in the country, and was established over 30 years ago. It now offers three IB Programmes, and hosts 100 MYP students.

### Coordinator D

An MYP Coordinator for 5 of their 9 years at the school, Coordinator D holds a dual-role as MYP Coordinator and Deputy Head, as well as maintaining a 55% teaching schedule.

School D is situated in a small town with approximately 35 000 residents, and was established in the last decade. This school had recently moved from its original rented premises to new school grounds, and underwent an MYP evaluation visit shortly after the move.

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\* Coordinator B was followed up in greater depth in the second stage of research, through a case study.

## DATA DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

### Opportunities and Constraints of a Small School Setting

The research set out to explore MYP Coordination in smaller international schools. A number of interviewees reported on the ease of working in a small teaching team, and how this enabled collaborative planning.

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| <p><i>"We do take things on as a team, more than might be typical in a larger school or with a larger team, there's a sense of, you know ... we are able to sit around a table and say 'I really want to do this thing', and somebody else will say 'Ah, well that's a good link to what I'm doing', and then suddenly you have an interdisciplinary unit brewing"</i></p> | <p><b>Teacher,<br/>School B</b></p> |
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The staff of the participating schools appreciated the strong sense of community they felt within their working environment. On the other side of the coin however, interviewees cited various cases of *limited resources* as the main challenge they faced. Teachers in School B admitted that they felt "severely under-resourced" and "pretty much have to do everything" themselves. This lack of resourcing was well described by MYP Coordinators, and included: unsuitable or inadequate physical resources, limited social environment, lack of affordable professional development opportunities, and insufficient human resources.

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| <p><i>"We just didn't have the resources of the physical location. And then we moved our library to the basement... low and behold; god intervened and flooded the basement. I'd say about 40% of the books were destroyed... we didn't have many anyway"</i></p>                        | <p><b>MYP<br/>Coordinator,<br/>School D</b></p> |
| <p><i>"Because the social environment is so small ... we actually have a few students that leave because of that, because there's only about 12 to 15 in each class ... They've said that they really like the academic challenges but find the social environment difficult"</i></p>    | <p><b>MYP<br/>Coordinator,<br/>School A</b></p> |
| <p><i>"We have nobody (trained) in the last 5 years, because people have had (IB) Diploma training, or the teachers we've trained have left"</i></p>   | <p><b>MYP<br/>Coordinator,<br/>School C</b></p> |
| <p><i>"It's much more complicated running a small school, then a bigger school, and it's simply because of the resources, human resources ... I think probably most schools out there that are big, think little schools are easy ... I think it's the other way round actually"</i></p> | <p><b>Principal,<br/>School B</b></p>           |

Although the small school setting was seen as an opportunity for easier collaborative planning, better teacher to student ratios, set within a strong sense of community, MYP Coordinators in the sample felt that "to take on that leadership role in a small community (was) a difficult thing" (A). This appeared to be due to the limited resources and something they referred to as working in a "bubble" (A, C, D); referring to both the international school within its national community, or the isolation of the school in relation to the rest of the world.

## The Roles and Responsibilities of the MYP Coordinator

The research aimed to explore how the role of MYP coordinator, as defined by the school, had effected the implementation. The most prevalent theme amongst participants was *facing challenge*. The roles of the participants required them to work with limited resources to implement the programmes, some admitting the year had been “a bit crazy”; “very difficult” (D); or a “rather special” unusual year” (C):

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| <i>“There’s some days I come back in here and I just donk my head of the wall a few times, and then I go back out again”.</i> | <b>MYP<br/>Coordinator,<br/>School D</b> |
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The realities of working in a small school required the MYP Coordinators to regularly adapt and modify their plans, as “things change as you go, and some things pop up” (A), and they had found that planning developments too far in advance “simply cannot be achieved” (B). The MYP Coordinators attempted to set direction primarily through their own self-created development plans, but also managed responses to recommendations from IB MYP Authorisation or Evaluation reports, or school development plans set by the governing body. They set the pace of these developments through scheduling meetings, or collaborative planning time, overall strongly emphasising the need for flexible planning (A, B, D).

The challenges of the role did not appear to stem from the act of MYP Coordination itself, but rather appeared due to the *multiple roles* each MYP Coordinator played within their school. All MYP Coordinators held teaching duties (ranging from 20% to 80%), and three of the four also held dual-roles, with senior management responsibilities, something they saw as directly complicating their work as MYP Coordinators:

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| <i>“I’ve always identified the problems of having too many different hats ... my concern is that sometimes I don’t do what I should be doing properly all the time. I feel I drop the ball, and I don’t like that”.</i>  | <b>MYP<br/>Coordinator,<br/>School D</b> |
| <i>“When you start combining too many organizational managing roles, they kill each other, and you do half way on both, or good enough, but you will never excel”.</i>   | <b>MYP<br/>Coordinator,<br/>School B</b> |
| <i>“There are times when she struggles to do everything she is supposed to do, and there are things that, you know, because she is both the head and the coordinator, she’s got a lot on her plate, and I think some of that is the sad nature of being an MYP coordinator”.</i> | <b>Teacher,<br/>School B</b>             |

On the whole, the MYP Coordinators assumed a number of roles, and carried out a number of functions. Overall, they saw their role as: using the little time available to them to enact a process of “managing the team to get things in place” (B), something that required a great deal of experimentation, flexibility in approach, and as Guskey (2002) suggests: allowing teachers to experience the benefits of educational change in order to discover motivation for continuing developments.

While the MYP Coordinators above were provided the positional authority in order to facilitate these conditions, when this authority was lacking a new set of challenges appeared:

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| <p><i>“You can have these discussions, and you can plan how to move forward, but there’s no authority there to say ‘this is what we are doing’... when you don’t have the authority to take it further, all you can do is just keep presenting it, then, you know, it gets knocked back.”</i></p> | <p><b>MYP Coordinator,<br/>School C</b></p> |
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In summary, the data present the role as a challenging one, though as well as the challenges linked inherently to implementation of the MYP (Robertson, 2011a), these tended to be exacerbated by working with multiple responsibilities and a lack of resources. Despite these challenges, the MYP Coordinators appeared to enjoy their role, and their passion for the programme was evident in all cases.

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| <p><i>“It does attract a certain kind of person: who likes to be thrown into the lion’s den, in a lot of senses, and come out with a smile on their face afterwards, even though bloodied and dirty.”</i></p> | <p><b>MYP Coordinator,<br/>School D</b></p> |
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### Managing Complex Educational Change

The research set out to investigate what key strategies have been attributed to successful components of implementation in the school featured in this study. Each MYP Coordinator adopted varying strategies, tailored to suit their particular context, although there were a number of key strategies, perceived as crucial, that were consistent across all four schools. First and foremost, all MYP Coordinators expressed the importance of creating regular opportunities for professional development (PD). This *“spirit to do it”* (Teacher C) was strongest in School B, where funding was allocated by the administration, which viewed PD as something that created a *“strong team”* by *“investing”* in the teaching staff (MYP Coordinator). The teachers were proud to announce that they had *“been to training every year”* (Teacher A), and a newer member of staff was *“amazed, because I know (the school has) limited money, but I am pretty sure everybody here went out on a training this year”* (Teacher B). The passion for PD was evident in each interview, right up to the principal:

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| <p><i>“It is a very great temptation in schools to try to save money on professional development, but it has to be well funded, and you have to keep on spending the money ... secondly you have to have a very creative view of professional development”</i></p> | <p><b>Principal,<br/>School B</b></p> |
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This creative view of professional development entailed a close relationship with the regional office; sought for opportunities to host or attend piloted ‘cluster events’, and sometimes sent teachers to Northern America to capitalise on more affordable registration fees. Although not all schools could afford the level of PD they intended it was viewed as something *“essential”* (MYP Coordinator C) by all interviewees.

Something that varied greatly between all four schools was the amount of time allocated for collaborative planning and reflection time. Some schools managed a few hours a month, while others described their collaborative planning as "on-going", and "continuous" (B). A range of strategies were employed to either narrow the focus, and "just have one or two things each year to focus on" (C), or to distribute tasks through working committees (A, B), which allowed coordinators to foster teacher ownership of tasks, and tailor responsibilities so to suit the working styles of staff. It was noted by the researcher that the more collaborative planning time a school scheduled, the more confident the MYP Coordinator appeared to be with the level of implementation; this was especially evident in School B:

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| <p><i>"(The MYP Coordinator) is very open towards letting us... getting there with our own ideas, participating in discussion on how things should be, and ... also encourages us to bring new ideas, both for class things, and trips, and excursions".</i></p> | <p><b>Teacher,<br/>School B</b></p> |
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The most innovative conception of collaborative planning was that which extended beyond each school, through the 'Norwegian IB Schools' (NIBS) organisation, of which each school held membership. Annual meetings for coordinators and organised 'Job-alike Days' for subject teachers, attempted to build a 'shared expertise' amongst all Norwegian MYP schools. This was something valued by all MYP Coordinators:

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| <p><i>"We need to look at schools that in similar situations, struggling with the same laws and guidelines that we are. They are similar student make up, they have similar demands in terms of language curriculum, so (other schools are) a very good basis for looking at what is possible".</i></p> | <p><b>MYP<br/>Coordinator,<br/>School C</b></p> |
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MYP Coordinators also conveyed a sense of acceptance of their limitations: "There's not much point in comparing us to Amsterdam, or to Frankfurt, or to big schools with lots of money" (C), some advising that "there's a limit to what you can take on", and to "draw a line in the sand" (D). MYP Coordinators devised their own unique, contextually-dependant strategies for overcoming the challenges of the role. Though these varied in nature, the common thread among them was that they took steps towards strengthening a shared identity. Two of the schools (A, B) had invested time in mapping the personality types of its team, in order to better delegate roles and responsibilities of its team members. This was expressed through the creation of working committees. One school (D) had attempted to resolve the issue of limited physical environment for a library, through the purchase of reading tablets, dedicating funds instead to science labs, an area identified as a strength of the school. Another school (B) was developing a link with local industry that resulted in a work experience programme and an overseas trip, investing a great deal of time and effort into supporting the initiative through the curriculum. These creative solutions accepted limitations, and sought to strengthen a shared identity for the school:

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| <p><i>"We have come to a point where we are proud of what we are, and we made that conscious choice in saying, 'This is what we're good at'; and... very specifically to the parents: 'We are not a (national) school, and if you want to be in a (national) school, feel free to go to a (national) school, because we are an international school'. And I think when we sort of set that confidence in a team, that: 'Yeah, you know, this is what we are, this is our identity'; it gave that sort of, calm feeling amongst the team"</i></p> | <p><b>MYP<br/>Coordinator,<br/>School B</b></p> |
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## Key Findings and discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate key strategies for coordinators implementing the Middle Years Programme (MYP) in smaller international schools.

### Key Findings

1. The challenge of MYP Coordination in small international schools.
2. The value of professional development.
3. The importance of collaborative planning.
4. Key strategies rooted in identity formation.

#### 1. The Challenge of MYP Coordination in Small International Schools

As found in the Robertson study (2011a), the coordination of the MYP is a challenging undertaking. It was anticipated that these challenges might have been magnified in smaller schools, but the roles of the participants described in this study are much more complex than anticipated. These complexities can be better explained by considering the lack of human resources available to small schools (Jones, 2009). Due to limitations of human resources, MYP Coordination in this context was often combined with a senior management and teaching responsibilities, affording those in this position more positional authority, but also dramatically decreasing the time available for MYP Coordination.

The role of coordinators in this study was, put simply, to facilitate implementation; 'managing the team to get things in place' through a process resembling, but not exactly, 'orchestration' as described by Wallace (2003). The main difference is that while orchestration involves 'steering the process of change at a distance', the MYP Coordinators in this study were very much at the centre of the process, facilitating change from within. Successful MYP Coordination appeared to achieve this task whilst navigating constant challenges, and taking advantage of the opportunities afforded by their status of a small school.

There were in fact some benefits to be gained through the small school environment. Despite Coordinators referring to their environment as a 'bubble', and the teachers perceiving that they are 'severely under resourced' and 'had to do everything themselves', opportunities for internal collaboration appeared easier than what has been discovered in larger schools (Lee, et al., 2011). The role of the MYP coordinator in such a setting was to facilitate such opportunities, but also to campaign for professional development of their staff, so that the benefits of this collaborative planning were maximised.

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## 2. The Value of Professional Development

The facilitation of opportunities for professional development was something considered essential by the MYP Coordinators in this study. Although not all schools were able to achieve their ideals due to financial restrictions, the experiences of the coordinators had taught them the value and benefits gained from experiences such as attending an 'MYP workshop'. Factors preventing the schools from providing sufficient professional development opportunities were numerous. The schools were isolated; meaning travel to workshops involved flying from Scandinavia to as far as South Africa. The registration costs of the IB recognised workshops was another factor. For these reasons one school had investigated more affordable opportunities in the US.

Nevertheless, professional development was described as a key strategy for implementation, and these attitudes can be understood when acknowledging the dynamics of a small faculty. When each subject teacher is often the only teacher in their subject department, as was often the case in this study, there were fewer opportunities for collaboration with teachers of the same subject. The quality of provision in smaller schools is therefore much more dependent on the strengths of each individual teacher. When one considers the purpose of professional development as empowering teachers to become skilled and confident practitioners, and the small faculty sizes of smaller international schools, professional developments can be viewed as a means for creating a 'strong team', capable of navigating the challenges of a small school environment.

## 3. The Importance of Collaborative Planning

Working collaboratively was a key theme throughout the data, with MYP Coordinators emphasising the need for team-work. The multiple roles the MYP Coordinators played, combined with additional teaching duties, meant that implementation was not something done 'behind the scenes' but was very much a team effort. Delegation of responsibilities appeared to be a key factor in overcoming a lack of human resources, and through carefully considering the roles that staff members were asked to assume, ownership over ideas and developments could be fostered, striving to build an environment fertile for teacher change.

Considering that "*practices that are found to work – that is, those that teachers find useful in helping students attain desired learning outcomes – are retained and repeated*" (Guskey, 2002), MYP Coordinators at their best had to allow an element of flexibility for teachers 'try-out things'; to capitalise on the benefits of professional development, build confidence within the teaching team. It was this team-work mentality that was more evident in the schools that scheduled regular collaborative planning and reflection, than in those that struggled to get together on a weekly basis.

Furthermore, this 'team-work mentality' was also conducted externally, through the national networking (NIBS) organisation. This was consistent with the collaboration and shared expertise strategies found in earlier studies (Jones 2006 & 2009; Clarke & Stevens, 2009). When one considers the cost of moderation, monitoring of assessment, and sending staff overseas, sending staff to a nearby schools of similar characteristics appears a useful strategy for working outside of the 'bubble' of the smaller international school.

## 4. Key Strategies Rooted in Identity Formation

The strategies adopted by MYP Coordinators were varied in their nature, yet those that were successful often were those that focused on establishing an identity (as a faculty, secondary department, school). This was an unexpected

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feature of the study, though it echoes similar calls to facilitate educational change that is 'school-wide' (Hall et al., 2008), and through 'shared meaning' (Fullan, 2001). The formation of an identity involved accepting the limitations of a small school, and choosing to focus on those aspects that were perceived as strengths of the school, whether they are related to particular skills and strengths of the teaching staff, opportunities of the local environment, or connections to local organisations.

When considering MYP schools that are in early phases of implementation spend the first few years simply 'getting things in place', developing a curriculum 'from first principles' (Thompson, 1998), we can describe schools new to the MYP as being in their 'infancy'. All schools featured in this study were no longer 'infant schools'; having been authorised a number of years earlier, they could be described as 'adolescent schools', seeking to understand themselves, to discover 'who they are' and their 'identity', before they are able to reach 'maturity' as a school. Identity forming solutions were innovative, inspiring, and built confidence in the team.

### **Limitations, Implications and Recommendations**

There are limitations to the applicability of these findings to smaller international schools in other contexts. Issues such as the requirements of the national education system also create a unique context, which limits the generalisability of the findings, and it is accepted that these findings may also have very limited applicability in larger international schools. Regardless of these limitations, the findings of this study do offer us useful insight into the challenges of MYP Coordination in smaller international schools in some contexts, and offer us useful key implementation priorities for consideration.

It is hoped that these findings generate further interest into the role of MYP Coordinator, key implementation priorities, and leadership and management in smaller schools. Principals of smaller international schools ought to consider how the MYP Coordinator relates to the senior management team (Robertson, 2011b). While a dual-role may be advantageous in providing an MYP Coordinator positional authority *early* in the process of implementation, schools should also ensure MYP coordinators receives ample release time to achieve higher levels of implementation later on. Finally, small school leaders ought to consider professional development and collaborative planning as key strategies, and accept the limitations of their schools, and seek to focus on their own strengths in order to best 'reflect' the IB mission statement in their own unique way.

In an under-developed field (Riesbeck, 2008; Robertson, 2011a; Lee et al., 2011), a number of recommendations for further research can be made. More empirical research into MYP coordination is required in order to make a more accurate assessment of successful practices and proven strategies for MYP Coordinators, not only in smaller schools but also as a whole. Further empirical research into schools in the early stages of IB programme implementation, particularly in smaller international schools, would further the understanding of successful leadership practices in schools facing the challenges identified in this study. It is hoped that the findings of this study would indeed encourage such further research.

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## CONCLUSION

The results of this study highlight the challenging nature of MYP Coordination, especially in smaller schools. The roles of the MYP coordinators featured in this study were defined as facilitating MYP implementation through the challenge of limited resources and multiple responsibilities; 'managing the team to get things in place'. Key strategies for coordinators implementing the MYP in this context were based around securing opportunities for professional development, establishing regular and ample time for collaborative planning and reflection amongst staff, and the adoption of creative, small-team solutions, rooted in the school's identity formation.

This study has opened a new door for discussion of the challenges faced by smaller international schools. When considering the rate in which the number of schools offering the MYP is growing, it is clear that a number of newly appointed MYP Coordinators, who have risen from the teaching ranks, are assigned the complex role of coordinating the implementation of this unique 'cross-breed' curriculum for the first time. This creates an urgent need to consider key implementation priorities for schools in such situations. Moreover, when one considers the large-scale changes related to MYP: The Next Chapter (IB, 2011b), issues pertaining to successful coordination and implementation of the MYP are of paramount importance.

The International Baccalaureate undertakes an extensive review system, and produces a plethora of publications aimed at guiding educators implementing their programmes. To date, these guides make little distinction over school size, and examples of best practice are generally drawn from large schools. If the IB is to ensure quality of its programmes, support coordinators implementing them, and ensure that the IB mission statement is realised in full, isn't it about time that we started to take notice of the small schools?

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