

Mind the Gap

Furthering international mindedness of Dutch pupils by incorporating IB-elements into an existing Dutch bilingual curriculum.

By

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Abstract

A secondary school in the Netherlands with a long history in bilingual education and strong interest in internationalization efforts is looking into the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (IBMYP) to find out what elements are suitable to implement within the Dutch educational system and curriculum. The school believes that the IB elements can provide a way to make learning more meaningful to their students. In practice, its focus is on providing the students with the means to connect the knowledge learned in school to the student's personal world and the "real" world outside of school. The implicit goal in this process is to increase students' intrinsic motivation for learning. Based on interviews with team leaders and teachers complemented by a student survey, recommendations are formulated on how the IBMYP can be useful to Dutch schools and which elements need to be included in order to make learning more meaningful to students in an international context.

Introduction

An increasing number of Dutch secondary schools is interested in the concept of internationalization, as the ever growing number of bilingual departments and special exchange programmes show (Visser, 2010). According to this author, many schools opt for an international profile to stand out from other schools and attract new students (2010, p. 56). The International Baccalaureate Organizations (IBO) can provide such a profile and its document *MYP: From Principles Into Practice* (2008) clearly states that the Middle Years Programme's principles "[are] deeply rooted in international education" (IBO, p.7), which are subsequently recast in terms of the concept of "international mindedness." (p.7) In line with the Dutch school acknowledged need to make education more internationally focused¹ this research charts the school's current level of internationalization and analyzes the findings in relation to the concept of international mindedness as a curricular and pedagogical view of the IBMYP.

The secondary school, which is at the centre of our research, has a long history in bilingual education, however, the school organisation indicates that internationalization efforts, particularly through projects, are not automatically appreciated and recognized by students as opportunities for meaningful learning. Subsequently, the school finds that intrinsic motivation is not dramatically increased by these opportunities offered to students. The IBMYP, with its longstanding research in and development of, programmes of international education and its focus on what it terms 'thoughtful learning' (IBO, 2002) is perceived as a useful tool to increase the degree of internationalization.

Relevance

Unfortunately, as Alderik Visser (2010) points out in recent work, independent scholarly research on the IBMYP is rare and hard to access. This means that interested coordinators of the research school, and other Dutch schools, will have difficulty to find relevant theoretical discussions on how to implement parts of the IBMYP programme at their school. This exploratory research intends to bridge this gap and examine the possibilities and difficulties

¹ On its website, the school states their view on internationalization. The following is our translation of that statement: "Borders slowly dissolve. Doing internships (for both shorter and longer periods of time) and studying in a foreign country is increasingly common. English plays an increasingly important role in both further education and careers. The distances between different cultures steadily diminishes. See: <http://www.capellen.nl/Lassuslaan/Algemeen/TweetaligOnderwijs/Internationalisering/tabid/345/Default.aspx>

that can be expected when the pupil-centred MYP educational philosophy is transferred into a Dutch national school with a long history of content and cognition centred learning. More specifically, the research tries to shed light on ways to use elements of the IBMYP within a national educational framework as a way to increase international mindedness in students and focuses on project-based education as a preliminary step.

Theoretical Framework

International Education, Internationalization and International Mindedness

The IBMYP has been developed within the framework and needs of international education, which might raise the question of how such a programme can be of relevance to national curricula. In order to answer this question, it is important to take a closer look at recent developments in the theory and philosophy of international education.

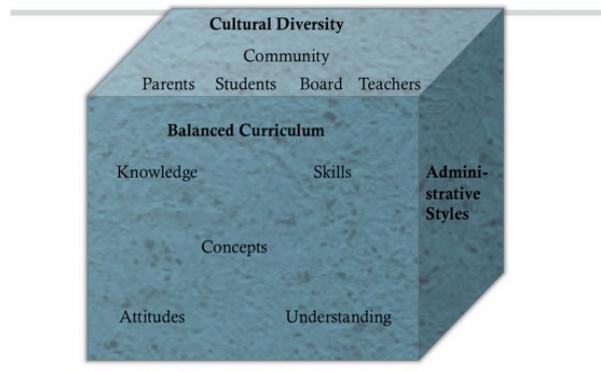
One may assume that international education only, and inherently, takes place in international schools; those institutions where students from various nations who are (temporarily) dislocated from their home country meet and are offered a curriculum that allows them to follow a consistent educational programme. During the past decade, international education has taken on a broader meaning. Mary Hayden, one of the leading scholars on international education, argues in one of her many books that international education should no longer be understood in a narrow manner, but that it has come to designate:

“...a form of education which not only [teaches] pragmatic skills for international adult life, but also the more ideologically-focused skills which will enable [students] to be good international citizens, promoting global understanding, respecting their fellow citizens and having a tolerant and open attitude” (Hayden 2006, p. 138).

Additionally, she maintains that the essence of international education lies thus not so much in its association with a particular location, but rather “in association with the crossing of frontiers be they physical or intellectual” (Hayden and Thompson in Stobie 2007, p.143). As such, the theories concerned with international education have become highly relevant to schools with a national curriculum interested in offering internationally oriented programmes.

Jeff Thompson’s often cited ‘A,B,C’ model of a learning environment for international education provides a valuable framework to chart the degree of internationalization of a particular school. Thompson maintains that international education occurs in an environment including administrative styles (A), a balanced curriculum (B) and cultural diversity (C). In this research, his model is used to direct our analysis and link it to existing theory. This model is important to take into consideration because it already suggests that ‘international’ refers to much more than only an international student or teacher body. Likewise, it is also much more than a formal (academic) curriculum (Stobie 2007, p.143).

Thompson's 'A,B,C, Model of a learning environment for international education



Source: Hayden 2006, p.139

Because national schools might not have as much influence on the cultural diversity of the school or even the administrative styles, and because the aim is to chart which elements of a particular form of international education - namely the IBMYP- are suitable, the emphasis of this research is on the curriculum. The latter, though, is in immediate relation to the other elements that make up the environment for international education, by making the distinction between an intended, implemented and learned curriculum. These concepts will be explained more in-depth in a later section of this paper. Visser (2010) concludes that in order to create an environment that is conducive of a balanced curriculum, a *well-organized* school board and team coordination, and *well trained* staff who are provided *adequate time* to *collectively* work out materials and assessment need to be in place.

The IBO fully identifies with the relatively recent conceptualization of international education, as is evidenced by the notion of “international mindedness”, which forms the ideal foundation and essence of the programme on which the IBO attempts to formulate its practice. The IBO mission statement’s emphasis on the development of “young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect” and “lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right” is of particular interest to this research. This mission implies the development of an attitude in students – that of international mindedness – and the type of appreciation of meaningful learning through international activities that national schools such as our research school seek as well. In this context, we take a closer look at the IBMYP in order to determine how it formulates the path to international mindedness, and moreover, to develop a useful framework from which to chart the degree of internationalization at a particular school which will help to indicate areas for change.

IBMYP Philosophy

The IBMYP profiles itself by explicating three fundamental concepts of its programme, namely *holistic learning*, *intercultural awareness* and *communication*. Additionally, in line with recent trends in international education, the curriculum is not viewed as a body of knowledge, but instead as “meeting the needs of the whole person” (IBO 2008, p. 10). Holistic learning is subsequently subdivided into “understanding of concepts”, “mastery of skills”, and “the development of attitudes” (all these elements also make up Thompson’s curriculum in international education). It is important to observe the dynamic between these three elements as they function within the IBMYP. Attitudes are difficult to measure and one could argue that “international mindedness” is foremost an attitude. Hill notes that the three elements of holistic learning as identified by the IBO are regarded as a three-tier continuum (in Hayden, Thomson and Walker 2002).

Based on earlier research James A. Beane (1990) proposes cooperative learning as a working format to nurture these three elements. He points out that: “when [students] talk about themselves in positive terms within the school context, they frequently explain that contributing experiences involve opportunities to work with peers, particularly friends” (1990, p. 146). As group work unfolds, participants may come to see the ways in which diverse ideas combine to create more complete and thorough projects. Moreover, as group members help one another, the concept of caring comes to life in whatever activity is undertaken” (1990, p.147). This finding is also part of the IBMYP view, as is expressed by the emphasis on *communication* as one of the three fundamental concepts of the program.

The IBMYP acknowledges the impossibility to give a clear definition of international mindedness and instead provides a “learner profile” of nine attributes ‘from which international mindedness will develop and flourish’ (IBO 2008, p. 8).² In this research these attributes are used to analyze the degree of internationalization in terms of the implemented and learned curriculum in greater detail (see variables). It can be argued that the learner profile particularly stresses reflection as an attribute, since terms such as metacognition and reflections as an essential element of effective learning are recurrent in IBO documents. Reflection is subsequently linked to what the MYP identifies as “thoughtful” learning, which in turn connects to the objective of the Dutch school central to our study ‘to make learning more meaningful to students’.

Thoughtful Learning

The IBMYP’s conceptualization of thoughtful learning is predominantly informed by constructivist theorists such as Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner but also owes to later pedagogical insights and theories. Relevant in this context are Wiggins and McTighe’s (1998) six ‘facets of understanding’ defined as: explain, interpret, apply, have perspective, empathize, have self-knowledge. These theorists aim at higher-level learning focused on the ‘*why question*’ that students might naturally be inclined to ask, namely; “Why are we learning this?” To take this question seriously and place it at the centre of teaching and learning has proven to increase student motivation (Dornyei 1994, Nunan 1999). It requires transparency in learning objectives and a connection to the real world, preferably through authentic activities.

While the IBMYP uses Wiggins and McTighe’s work to design coherent learning units that are centred around such why questions, David Perkins and similar theorists interested in thoughtful and meaningful learning constitute the central argument to stress the significance of reflection to the acquisition of higher level thinking and increased intrinsic motivation. ‘Student inquiry’ embodies these notions within the IBMYP as the following figure illustrates:

² The IBO lists the following attributes: 1) Knowledgeable 2) Thinkers 3) Communicators 4) Principled 5) Open-minded 6) Caring 7) Risk-takers 8) Balanced 9) Reflective.

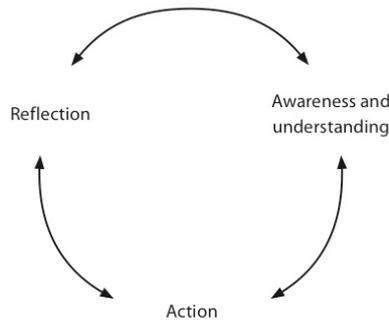


Figure 4
The inquiry cycle

Source: IBO 2008: p. 21

Because content is placed into context (the why), students are more likely to become aware of *connections* and develop further awareness and understanding (higher level thinking). Continuous reflection and re-evaluations and the aforementioned increased understanding is then to lead to more positive and thoughtful action (change in attitudes and affect and a higher motivation to learn).

Because of the importance of reflection to the IBMYP programme and the connection between reflection and meaningful learning, this research intends to analyze to what extent this model of inquiry is part of the current curriculum and to what extent it can possibly be further implemented in a Dutch cognitive-centred curriculum.

Assessment

Assessment could prove to be the most difficult part for the implementation of the IBMYP in a Dutch curriculum. While the latter is rather fixed and prescriptive due to both frequent and mostly summative standardized examinations, the former demands an authentic and open-ended style of assessment. This form of assessment is deemed essential by the IBMYP because it is congruent with the holistic approach. Furthermore, earlier research on motivation has demonstrated that authentic assignments - which also provides the opportunity for continuous feedback from teachers and peers (effective and thoughtful learning) - contribute to the development of intrinsic motivation (Beane 1990, Stepien and Gallagher 1993, Brophy 2010). In order to establish manners to incorporate elements of the IBMYP in the national curriculum, it is of crucial importance to identify opportunities to change the traditional form of assessment.

Research Question, Variables, Context

In order to focus our research, the following central question was designed:

How can the IBMYP philosophy of competence-based learning and the performance-based Dutch curriculum be linked in order to produce a workable continuum that increases students' international mindedness in a Dutch school?

In order to answer this question, three sub-questions were formulated: *How does the school formulate its internationalization objectives? How do the teachers involved in the projects translate the internationalization objective in their teaching programme? What do pupils express they have learned during an international project?*

Variables: Intended, Implemented and Learned Curriculum

The MYP curriculum is considered to be highly holistic and flexible, it is also deemed to be a very coherent curriculum that functions in its continuity (Stobie 2007). Coherency and continuity should here be understood as a form that transcends different age groups and of which all elements together add up to a meaningful. This again suggests possible difficulties schools might encounter, if they want to implement only parts of the IBMYP. In order to chart the current coherency and various elements of the school of this case-study and so as to be able to indicate possible areas of change, this study further categorizes the curriculum. Hayden refers to Robitaille to maintain that categorization to analyze the dimensions of the curriculum is to make a distinction between the designed or intended curriculum (planned by the *school board and coordinators*), the implemented curriculum (taught by the *teaching staff*) and the learned curriculum (experienced by the *student*) (Hayden 2006).

Context

The school subject to this research is a large comprehensive secondary school offering programmes of education from pre-vocation to pre-university through diverse pathways such as the bilingual stream and various ‘talent streams’. This study focuses primarily on the higher-level students (Atheneum) of the bilingual stream.

In terms of the intended curriculum, the school focuses its internationalization efforts on *projects* which take place in a limited time period of consecutive days across disciplines. The events of the project are sometimes preceded by a period of preparation to orientate the students on the activities. Exchanges involving host-families form the central part of these projects. In addition to the projects, the school offers EIO³ hours (1 hour per week), mentor-hours and “band-uren”⁴, which are sometimes used as preparation for the projects.

Research Methodology

The specific question from the school and the limited time frame to carry out the research resulted in our choice for a case-study design. We decided to focus on the exchange project with an Italian school organized for the 3rd form bilingual Atheneum classes (3AT1 & 3AT2). In order to increase the construct validity of our research, we opted for methodological triangulation: searching converging findings through different research methods (‘t Hart 1998, p. 271). By looking at the same topic from different angles, one is able to detect mistakes and distortions and to verify data obtained through one of the other methods.

Semi-structured interviews with members of the management were conducted to find answers to our first sub-question dealing with the intended curriculum. Next, we approached teachers involved in the project to learn more about the outlines of the implemented curriculum. In order to explore the experiences, ideas and feelings of the learners, i.e. the learned curriculum, we designed a questionnaire corresponding to the topics discussed in the teacher interviews. Finally, through participant observation, we collected field notes during two days of exchange activities with the Italian guests on two locations in the Netherlands.

³ EIO stands for European International Orientation and is an interdisciplinary subject The syllabus for this subject is based on recommendations by the Common Framework For Europe Competence

⁴ “band-uren” are hours left in schedules of students who do not take on any extra course work through the talent and bilingual stream.

Research Group

Based on information about existing projects and the names of the people involved, we scheduled interviews with six teachers and the coordinator for the junior bilingual programme. In order to get a good idea of the different experiences of learners involved in the special projects, we handed out questionnaires to the learners of grade 2 and 3 who had participated in the special internationalization projects this year. Because of the limited number of students in the classes, we did not apply any sampling techniques. The learners who were absent during the two days we visited the school to hand out the questionnaire are subsequently not included in the research group.

Instruments

Topic list

Due to the descriptive character of our research, a topic list was designed for carrying out semi-structured interviews. 5 topics matching the educational theories discussed above were selected in order to explore if or in which way concepts based on the IB philosophy, such as holistic learning, intercultural awareness and communication, have a place in the implemented curriculum. The respondents were asked to reflect on the purpose of the project, the central learning objectives, learner's reflection and assessment, skills and attitudes and the evaluation of the project.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was designed to explore the outlines of the learned curriculum as experienced by the students. Based on the 5 interview topics, 23 questions were formulated. Small sets of different questions on one topic were meant to get the most complete information as possible, at the same time enhancing the validity of the answers ('t Hart, 1998: 262). In order to test the level of the questions and increase its quality, a small pilot with 5 learners from the 3AT class was organized and the feedback was used to improve the questionnaire. Overall, 38 pupils from the two bilingual Athenaeum classes (16 pupils from 3AT1 and 22 pupils from 3AT2 respectively) returned a complete questionnaire.

Methods of analysis

Following the methodological triangulation, we also used a variety of analytical methods. Aiming to arrive at a descriptive framework for organizing the case study, our analysis focused on the three dimensions of the curriculum; the *intended*, *implemented* and the *learned* curriculum.

For the first and second category, seven interviews were transcribed into text documents. The transcripts were systematically ordered by putting labels on the relevant lines/paragraphs resulting in a 'code tree'. Having all the relevant data on one topic grouped together allowed for a reliable analysis of the similarities and differences that occur within the answers given by the respondents (Boeije 2010).

To analyse the learned curriculum, the results of the questionnaires were systematically analyzed. Different categories of answers for each topic were identified. For some questions the categories were pretty much straightforward: *Positive/Negative/I don't know, it depends* or *More/Less/I don't know, it depends*. Those categories were also suitable for quantification. We were also interested in a quantification of each type of answer because this provided us with an insight regarding the most significant aspects of our inquiry.

Finally, the notes (and pictures) taken during the observation sessions were ordered and attached to the relevant codes of the transcribed interviews. Taking observation notes

completed the triangular structure of our data gathering to enhance internal validity. During our analysis, the notes served as a back up for the teacher's reflections in the interviews and the learner's reflections in the questionnaires.

Results

The research findings will be presented along the lines of the three interconnected levels of curriculum, which tie in with the sub-questions outlined in the introduction. Starting at the level of the intended curriculum, we present our findings along the structure of the five topics central to our interviews and the questionnaire. For the purpose of coherence, we reformulated the initial topics into *focus of the project & learning goals, preparation for the exchange, activities & assessment, communication, and reflection & evaluation*.

Internationalization in theory: The intended curriculum

Focus of the projects and learning goals

The team-leader for grades 2 and 3 distinguishes between three main elements of the school's internationalization program; the official Comenius programme funded by the European Union to 'help young people and educational staff better understand the range of European cultures, languages and values' (European Commission), the language departments, and projects focusing on exchanges and experiencing different customs in a social setting. The school strives to incorporate the international into the national curriculum and views it as an important element of education because 'borders are disappearing, politicians vocalize many statements and students need to learn how to perceive all this in a different manner'.

The coordinator of the junior bilingual department identified several objectives in relation to the projects that are part of the curriculum. First of all, the school wants students to experience and become familiar with another culture 'simply by being there'. Secondly, the school wants to offer activities that enable the student 'to broaden his or her horizons'. Thirdly, the coordinator pointed out that, as a school, "*We find it very important that students learn both within and outside of school.*" Finally, the objective of the projects is to make students aware of the connection between various subjects and experiences, for example the practical application of knowing how to calculate an area, so as to make learning more meaningful to students.

Preparation

In terms of preparation, the team-leader stated that a task force has been formed to apply for funding for Comenius related projects. In relation to preparing students for exchanges both the coordinator and the team-leader stated that the school had no documents or protocols formulating necessary elements or approaches.

Activities and Assessment

The coordinator stated that the detailed content of projects is the responsibility of the teachers, while the coordinator usually overlooks the structural elements. The coordinator establishes a task force and overlooks the structural continuity and coherence of the (exchange) projects from the first until the final grade.

Assessment is required for several projects, especially in the first grade where students receive a separate grade for the project on their report card. The chosen form of assessment is the responsibility of teachers and is not prescribed by the school board.

Communication

In relation to the exchanges organized by the school, the coordinator for the junior bilingual department stressed that they do not want to work with a system of commercial host-families because they feel that there is often little communication between the learner(s) and the host(s). Instead, the school's selection of partner schools is based on the latter's willingness and capability to host the Dutch students in the families of their peers, i.e. the students of the partner schools.

Reflection and Evaluation

The coordinator stated that the existence of a team is very important when it comes to planning a project. At the moment, no structural elements are in place for reflection and evaluation, but it was outlined that meetings are set-up after the projects have been carried out, depending on when all parties involved are available. During these meetings, teachers introduce topics and encounter issues. Assessment has been a topic of discussion and team members have expressed that it would be very nice to assess by way of rubrics. The school is interested in the use of rubrics, but has not (yet) organized a workshop to familiarize teachers with this form of assessment.

Internationalization in practice: The implemented curriculum

Focus of the projects and learning goals

When asked about the focus of the exchange project with Italy, the teachers gave similar answers. They pointed out that there is a strong cultural component to the exchange accompanied by a focus on the English language. According to the teachers, the exchange programme is foremost meant to offer their learners the opportunity to 'getting in touch' with other people and their cultures. This getting in touch takes place during the times Dutch learners spend with their Italian host families⁵ and when they are hosting an Italian peer, and during visits to the highlights of each others cities. One teacher put a specific emphasis on the learners experiencing differences, as is reflected in this quote:

'They [the learners] have seen it [the country] during holidays on the camping but it is different if you are in an Italian host family. That's really important, to experience that it is different over there, that there is a difference'.

As far as the language component is concerned, the teachers agree that it is important to offer their learners a 'real life' opportunity to practice speaking English by 'confronting' them with the language and to have them work together with the Italians '*so they can train in English*'.

When asked about the learning goals of the exchange project, the teachers pointed out that there were no explicit learning goals set on paper. As one of them explained:

⁵ Each individual Dutch pupil stays with the family of one Italian learner during the exchange.

“And I think it is not really important...if you are there and they are in the exchange and they are mixed with the Italian students they will learn lots of things at the moment. You don’t have to check it all at the moment.... and yes, automatically I think they learn a lot.”

According to one of the teachers there are many educational elements in the programme but in the end, he stated that when it comes to the purpose of the project: ‘...95% is meeting the Italians, the culture’.

Preparation

There are different ways in which the learners are prepared for the exchange. All teachers reflect that this is not something that is thoroughly done. Teachers design a number of assignments for the learners during the exchange but little is done in preparation other than finding some general information on differences in food, art or language. One of the teachers elaborated that he ‘pays some attention to Italy’ when the exchange is approaching, because it matches with his subject geography. However, this is not specifically asked for or planned by the management and one of the reasons he spend time on it last year was because his form class was going. The preparation, he stated, is ‘*nothing very special*’.

Activities and Assessment

Various activities are organised during the exchange programme. Dutch and Italian learners have to prepare presentations together and participate in a tour answering questions in little groups about the city they are visiting. As the teachers reflected, when the Dutch learners go to Italy, the focus of the activities is generally on sightseeing. Here the Italian learners have to guide their Dutch guests through their town and tell them something about the buildings, statues and highlights, as one teacher recalled.

The teachers stated that there is no formal assessment component in the exchange project. One teacher explained that this ties in with the focus on the experience of ‘being in another culture’ and meeting other people. A less desirable effect of this approach, especially when the Dutch learners go to Italy, he said, is that pupils perceive of the trip as ‘being on a holiday’. This is something he accepts.

Communication

“What you often see is that Dutch students tend to communicate with the Dutch students, the Italians with the Italians, that’s easier. During the week, it mixes a little bit more, but most of the time they just communicate with each other”.

This observation by one of the teachers reflects a problem which all of the teachers mentioned when asked about the dynamics of communication between Dutch and Italian learners during the project. Despite the fact that they organise activities for little groups, learners eventually find ways to work together in a linguistically homogenous group. Teachers see themselves confronted with the question of whether or not to force students to communicate in English amongst each other but find this difficult.

During the two participant observation sessions, we were able to observe the dilemma described above in full detail. We joined a group of Dutch and Italian learners on their sightseeing quiz through Amsterdam. The following notes were taken:

The Dutch and the Italian pupils seem to have very different interests: while the four Dutch boys take the lead with the map and the quiz in their hands, the three

Italians follow with their cameras, taking lots of pictures of each other and the canals. There is no interaction between the Dutch and Italian learner. We observe one moment of interaction as one of the Italian girls asks the Dutch boys 'can I see the map?' The Dutch boy gives it to her and starts explaining where they are now. She looks at him shortly and says 'I only want to know where is the Hard Rock café?'

Reflection and evaluation

The teachers spoken to understand the concept of reflection as talking about difficulties or highlights experienced by the learners during the exchange. When asked if there are moments to reflect on certain processes with the whole class, they replied that this was not done so formally. When problems arise, the teachers are willing to help, if possible. Common problems they encounter relate to difficulties adapting to the new environment, the food, or getting up.

An evaluation of the exchange project takes place after each trip but, as one teacher pointed out, *'it's not a big thing'*. He stated that during these evaluations, it's mostly the organisational aspects that are evaluated, not so much the content. In addition to a reflection on the project between the organising teachers, there is also a central moment of evaluation with the coordinator at the end of the year. One of the difficulties with evaluating the project and making changes is the fact that the teams organising it change per year; it all depends on the planning and how many hours they have to spend on it. The teachers spoken to mentioned one project which runs for a longer period of time and with the same people involved and they see it as a very solid project, whereas the exchange with Italy is still fairly inconsistent.

Internationalization experienced: The learned curriculum

We were interested in the way the purpose of the exchange was experienced by the students and how important this experience to them. When asked what the project was about, nearly all the students related it to culture (74%) and/or to practice English. However, their interpretations of culture were expressed at different levels. For one learner it was *"about learning how people in other countries live, and see what their habits are"*, one considered it was about *"learning about cultural differences"*, while another student referred to focus of the project to be *"understanding the different cultures"*. The rest of the pupils (26%) saw it mainly as *"an exchange"*, of *"making a bigger social network, international"* or as an opportunity to *"go to Italy"*.

The majority of the pupils (74%) considered that it was important for them to participate in the project. They justified their answers by different reasons, mainly connected to culture and language: *"Yes, it's important to know how people live in other countries and it is fun to go with your class to Italy"* or *"Yes, it helped to practice English..."* For some students the experience was significant because it allowed them to meet other people, make new friends and be independent.

Relevance of the project to the world of the learners

When asked if they considered they had used any knowledge they had learned previously in class, one pupil was able to link his/her experiments with a classroom topic: *"Yes, we had to search the way. Like we learn at Geography"*. In addition, 71% of the pupils recognized the use of English or other foreign languages as the link to what was previously learnt in the classroom. The other 28% reflected that they used no previously learnt knowledge during the project.

When asked if they learnt something *new*, in order to discover if the learners see a connection between their regular subjects and the project, 66% of the pupils answered affirmatively: 45% related this to Italian culture and language. Most of their answers were general, without specific examples or arguments: *“I learned that in Italy there is a different culture so we also don’t like each other “ , “Not really, maybe a bit of Italian language”*.

Category	Number of students
Italian culture and cultural differences	10
Italian words	7
The Dutch culture and history	1
About ships	2
How to read a map	1
World press photo	2
Communicate with the hands	1
Live in another family	1
Nothing	13

These numbers show that 16 % of the pupils referred to some specific activities they were involved in during the exchange program. Some pupils reckoned that they learnt aspects like reading a map, some history of Holland and about old Dutch ships. Two pupils referred to the World Press Photo Exhibition. One of them stated: *“Yes, maybe at the world press photo, I learned more about the world.”*

We tried to investigate pupils’ opinion concerning the utility of what they have learned during the project for their life outside school. 47% of the pupils considered the new gained information or skills useful in their daily life, giving different types of reasons such as: *“Yes, in case I go to Italy”*, or *“Yes, it helps to make contact and to become independent”*. On the other hand, 47% of the pupils either thought they had not learned anything useful -*“No, I had a lot of fun but didn’t learn anything useful”* - or they were not able to see the applicability in the real-life world: *“I don’t think so. Because VOC ships aren’t used in daily lives ”*. The remaining 6% of the pupils didn’t give answers connected to the questions.

What have you learnt during the project?

We asked the pupils to name three important things they learnt to gain insight into how they look at their own learning process. Except for one pupil who considered he/she had learnt nothing, almost every pupil presented the notion of culture, language or elements of lifestyle and language as the main knowledge acquired during the project. Their answers illustrate different interests and levels of understanding. One pupil considered that one of the most important things he/she learned was *“to accept other traditions and learn about them”* and another pupil concluded in his /her answer that he had learned that *“everywhere in the world people live in another way”*. Some pupils referred to some elements strictly related to their own experiences, such as *“Italians smoke very much”*, *“Italians eat less during breakfast, more at dinner”* and *“Italians can’t cycle”*.

Finally, we asked the pupils what they learnt from working together in a small group with pupils from another country. From the theory on international mindedness, it is argued that cooperative learning increases ‘affect’ and thus develops learners’ attitudes. As became apparent, 37% of the pupils considered they learned nothing from working in groups with others. Many linked this to the fact that Italian pupils could not speak English very well or because they were not that motivated and involved in the collaboration process.

Conclusions and discussion

The school central to this case study envisions various levels of internationalization in the intended curriculum. The fundamental idea of ‘broadening students’ horizons’ is translated into general aims ranging from experiencing a different culture by being confronted with it to generating critical thinking capacities in students that will enable the latter to take on multiple perspectives when looking at the world. In conclusion, this shows that the school’s notion of internationalization is very close to the IBMYP concept of international mindedness. The school’s insistence on non-commercial host families further indicates a vision focused on connections and communication between students from various countries in order to generate more in-depth understanding of other cultures.

The intended and implemented curriculum: consistencies & discrepancies

While the structure to conduct international projects is in place and the ideas summarized before were expressed comprehensively, we found that they are not recorded as clear objectives in school-wide documents nor subsequently clearly communicated to the teaching staff. Several teams of teachers work on various internationalization tasks in the school, but they appear to meet infrequently and teachers are not structurally supported to work together.

On the level of the implemented curriculum, the school’s desire to bring students into contact with another culture is taken up by the teachers. Teachers place much emphasis on letting students experience different customs to their own - and therefore appear to follow a social constructivist notion of pedagogy also at the foundation of the IBMYP - but do not seem to guide this process actively. The critical thinking capacities that are important to the coordinators are not explicitly focused on during the exchange project. Instead, the focus is mainly on giving mixed-group presentations and authentic *experiences* embodied by visiting the cultural highlights of the region.

As has become clear from both the interviews and questionnaires, the assignments and activities are not distinctly authentic and often remain on a level of sightseeing. In relation to this, teachers do not seem to consistently formulate learning objectives tied to a “why-question” that could strengthen the coherency, which is – as can be learned from Wiggins and McTighe’s work – a very important element of the IBMYP approach. Activities based on a “why-question” strengthen the overall authenticity of the exchange, thus contributing to triggering more learning motivation.

Our research findings on the topic of communication indicate that the concept takes on a different meaning on the implemented level when compared to the intended level; the emphasis appears to shift mainly to a linguistic focus. On the level of the implemented curriculum, the main focus communicated to the students is practicing English and working together. Consequently, the objective to trigger communication between the students on a cultural level - conveyed primarily by creating groups of an equal balance of Italian and Dutch students - remains implicit. While students are required to work in groups, the success of assignments does not depend on them working together as a group. This leads us to conclude that the benefits of cooperative learning as argued by Beane (1990), which we have connected to the international mindedness’ nurturing element of communication in the IBMYP, are not yet explicitly addressed and incorporated in the grade 3 exchange program with Italy. This leaves room for this particular IB element to be implemented.

The implemented and the learned curriculum: implemented seems to be learned

In the implemented curriculum, the learning goals were to “*get in touch with another culture*” and “*to work together and speak English*”. Our findings show that most elements of the implemented curriculum are mirrored in the learned curriculum. Mostly all the students understood that the unique purpose of the project was to learn about another culture, to speak English, to visit Italy and to meet Italian people. At the same time, it was difficult for students

to identify significant elements of the other culture.

We also conclude that the learners do not see the assignments and activities as a source of knowledge. Except for the incidental comment, virtually all students could not comment on a connection between the things they learned in class and experiences during the projects. Moreover, when some students acknowledged they had learned something new, they could not determine its use in the real world. The following quote, found as an answer to the question of whether the learner learned something relevant to his/her life, illustrates this finding: *“I don’t think so. Because VOC ships aren’t used in daily lives.”*

While the answers in the questionnaires indicate a basic level of intercultural awareness, the number of students who talk about understanding or accepting another culture is too small to conclude that international mindedness is present at the level of the learned curriculum. The absence of clear acceptance could possibly be informed by the focus on the English language, which was taken up by the students as a learning objective. Because the Italian students level of English was relatively low, Dutch students experienced that objective as a failure, which subsequently implies a negative connotation in regards to cooperation.

Based on these outcomes, we conclude that the learned curriculum largely reflects the implemented in terms of *explicitly* stated objectives and learning outcomes, but that the implemented curriculum reflects few elements of the intended. At the same time, the structure provided by project-based education is interdisciplinary, provides for authentic experiences and offers clear opportunities for the strong coherence and continuity that is so important to the creation of a successful learning environment. The discrepancies observed seem to suggest that more emphasis on strong direction regarding the exchange project and clear and explicit communication of objectives between all levels of curricula will be of key importance to ensure that intended principles of internationalization – and subsequently international mindedness – will be both implemented and learned. When these elements are observed, projects can serve as an excellent first trial to make the IBMYP part of a Dutch curriculum.

Recommendations

It is important to note that the outcomes of this conducted case study are primarily valid for the research school. Due to the limited number of informants, both teachers and students, the results are not suitable for generalisation to other Dutch schools with a bilingual department. However, the carefully designed research instruments, including a pilot phase, and the methodological triangulation have safeguarded the internal validity of the research and ensure that the results of the research are valid and reliable for the specific research school.

Based on our conclusions, we have formulated a set of recommendations that may be implemented at both the intended and the implemented curriculum.

The establishment of more specific goals at each level could be a great asset in bringing the intended, implemented and learned curriculum closer together at the research school. Clear objectives instituted by the school may serve as a starting point in creating explicit learning goals at the level of the implemented curriculum. These goals should be connected to the assignments and activities and should be clearly communicated to the learners. In this way, they are supported to become more aware of their learning process and this will help them to see the relevance and learning opportunities present in the assignments and activities incorporated into the program.

At the same time, teachers may be guided by the “why – question” when objectives for the project are determined. As the theory suggests, this will accentuate the relevance of the activities and the project to the learners and hence increase their motivation. Inserting more cooperative learning elements in the program may reduce the communication problems between the Dutch and Italian students. The cooperative learning theories stress the importance of common goals and shared responsibilities in the group work. Increasing the dependency between the success of their assignments (giving clear directions for assessment

etc.) and the collaboration of the students involved could lead to a better interaction between the Dutch and Italian students.

In order to increase intercultural awareness, learning activities should try to move beyond the focus on the *differences* between cultures. In stead, attention must be paid to the principles of understanding and accepting these differences and a quest for similarities. This will not only increase the level of intercultural awareness, but might also influence the students to develop a positive attitude towards the Italian culture in particular and other cultures in general.

Incorporating moments of assessment and reflection at the level of the implemented curriculum may prove useful to determine to which extend the learning goals were achieved. A valuable tool for measuring the learning outcomes could be a rubric, including different components such as active participation during group work, use of language, research skills and originality. Making these specific learning objectives transparent to the learners encourages them to take responsibility for their learning process. Moments of reflection could also be implemented at the level of the learned curriculum. Besides developing the students' reflective skills - an important attribute of an internationally minded learner - a reflection session might also provide important feedback regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of the project.

Finally, the continuity of the project and its embeddings in the existing curriculum could be enhanced if some extra attention is paid to the communication between actors active at the level of the intended and implemented curriculum. This will help to overcome existing discrepancies, to improve the program together and to make the 3rd grade exchange project a truly unforgettable and internationally minded experience for both the teachers and learners involved.

Further research

Since our investigations have specifically focused on an exchange project on one school, we believe that it will be of great interest to take a closer look at a similar project at a similar type of school in order to find out more about how internationalization is organized in Dutch bilingual schools and compare in which way these schools have more or less room to implement elements of the International Baccalaureate program in their existing curricula. Furthermore, collecting more extensive data on the intended curriculum is necessary to get a more complete picture of how Dutch schools are currently organizing their internationalization efforts.

Reflection on the research process

The process of designing and carrying out a practice based research project has provided the research team with great opportunities to become more familiar with current debates in (inter) national education and to train and apply our research skills in a highly relevant real-life context. Tracking down who is involved in which activity and why, organizing interview sessions with various people from across the educational landscape and looking for ways to connect our findings to previously found data have greatly facilitated our learning and enriched our perspectives on our future work field. Our experiences have helped us to consolidate a research-like and investigative approach to education that will be useful and hopefully inspire our colleagues and learners when we use it to improve the quality of education on various levels. Despite our different backgrounds in academic training, we managed to find each others strengths and learned to combine them in such a way that our collective product became better. We believe that carrying out practice based research is a vital tool for every educator that aims to further (bilingual and international) education for it allows one to slow down the hectic everyday practice of teaching and rethink important principles and visions that can serve as the new foundations for innovative and effective learning.

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