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Becoming an International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program: Perspectives of Teachers, Students, and Administrators

Mark Storz¹ and Amy Hoffman¹

Abstract

As an urban middle school begins to implement the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program, this study explores the process of experiencing a curricular change from the perspective of the teachers and students themselves. Through the use of a mixed methods approach, key administrators, teachers, and students were interviewed in the first year of implementation. During the second year, teachers were surveyed as a means of tracking the change over time that teachers may have been experiencing. Themes emerged in the areas of instructional practice, professional experiences, and student experiences. Most interestingly and not expected was a theme related to whether IB was a “good fit” for the students in this particular school. Participants’ ability to highlight the successes and challenges inherent in a change process is discussed in light of future planning.

Keywords

International Baccalaureate, middle school, change process, urban schools, voice

Reflecting on the implementation of an International Baccalaureate (IB) Program at an urban middle school, one teacher commented,

We don’t always want to take risks or come out of our comfort zone and this is not comfortable for a lot of teachers . . . but slowly but surely there are people who are beginning to come along. (J. Wright, personal communication, November 10, 2012)

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This statement is representative of one of many challenges inherent in curricular change. The topic of educational reform or change efforts, often detailing issues which limit their success, has received considerable attention in the educational literature in recent years (see Aladjem & Borman, 2006; Desimone, 2002). If the goal of such change is improved school and classroom learning and increased student outcomes (M. Berends, Bodilly, & Kirby, 2002), and if educators' acceptance of a change is essential to its success (Bailey, 2000), then finding ways to include educators in a change process is vital.

Many educators are often resistant to change; an attitude that can often serve as an obstacle to change efforts (Zimmerman, 2006). A second challenge when introducing a curricular change is how we assess its success. Certainly, measuring its impact on student learning through testing data is one approach; however, given that the emphasis on state- and district-mandated test scores is often not well received by the educators, this means of assessment may only contribute to teachers' resistance (M. Berends et al., 2002). This study sought to examine how teachers and students at one urban middle school perceived the implementation of an IB Middle Years Program (MYP). We wanted to tap into the unique culture and challenges of this urban public school to explore what the opportunities and challenges might be in the area of teachers' pedagogical practices and professional satisfaction as a result of implementing the IB Program. The study was guided by the following research questions:

- In what ways does the process of becoming an IB school impact teachers' instructional practices (i.e., planning and teaching)?
- In what ways does the process of becoming an IB school impact teachers' professional experiences (i.e., leadership, collegiality, satisfaction)?
- In what ways does the process of becoming an IB school impact students' experiences (i.e., student learning, attitudes)?

Literature Review

Teachers' Role in Curricular Change

The focus of the study was on the experiences of those involved in the implementation of IB MYP during the candidacy phase, the two or more year period before IB approval can be granted. Teachers are key participants in the implementation of any type of curricular change, and like students, their voices have been missing in the development and implementation of innovations (Bailey, 2000). Often as a result of being a key participant, teachers experience a range of emotions, stressors, and coping mechanisms. Although teachers often work alone with their students in their classrooms, they are also part of social networks with their colleagues. These social networks can be leveraged to work toward positive change or they can thwart the desired outcomes associated with change (Datnow, 2012).

Research shows that teachers tend to react emotionally to the comprehensive school change efforts they are asked to implement and the degree and type of reaction can

differ for more or less structured types of school reforms (Schmidt & Datnow, 2005). Schmidt and Datnow conclude, however, that for all types of reform, emotional support from colleagues and administrators is essential for teachers to embrace change without focusing on the risks and consequences. When teachers feel overwhelmed by the pressures of implementing change in their school environment, they may develop coping behaviors that are counterproductive, such as believing “this too shall pass” or just posting keywords around the room, rather than changing their instruction (Martin & Kragler, 2009). Principals are advised to understand the difficulties teachers may face when asked to implement change. It is important that they clearly communicate to the teachers the reasons for the changes, create a plan of action, establish support systems, involve all teachers, and encourage risk-taking by allowing teachers to fail (Thomas, 2014). School leaders are also advised to differentiate the support they provide teachers undertaking school change, recognizing the varied levels of teachers’ experiences as well as their philosophical perspectives (Brezicha, Bergmark, & Mitra, 2015). In addition, school leaders need to be flexible with staff when implementing change and they need to seek ways of utilizing teacher leaders and other teachers who embrace the change to assist those who are finding it more difficult.

A Focus on Student Voice

This study sought to include student perceptions of how curricular reform efforts underway in their school affect them as they, along with their teachers, are the primary ones who are being most affected by the change. We were particularly interested in their perceptions of how the implementation of IB might impact teachers’ pedagogical practices. While the underlying purpose of any curricular change is the enhancement of student learning, as Jagersma and Parsons (2011) suggest, the voice of the learner is typically excluded from the design and implementation process. This work builds on the growing body of literature on student voice that recognizes the absence of this perspective in the educational research. This view attempts to privilege student voice and to argue that students’ lived experiences in school should enjoy a more prominent place in the literature (Cook-Sather, 2002). Students’ perceptions and experiences have the potential of impacting not only the efforts of teachers but should be considered more directly in the process of school change. Lee (1999) adds that “when the voices of students are routinely unsolicited or ignored amid reform planning and implementation, the directions assumed by teachers and administrators can be misguided” (p. 215).

Ngussa and Makewa (2014) have theorized that students acquire specific knowledge through the teaching and learning process that provides them the capability to participate in the curricular change process. In a study we conducted, for example, to assess the implementation of a One-to-One Computer Initiative in an urban middle school, we found that students were able to provide valuable insights into the impact of that initiative on their learning and overall school experience (Storz & Hoffman, 2013). A variety of studies have been conducted by educational researchers that privilege students’ educational experiences as a means of providing a firsthand account of

both effective and noneffective school practices (Kruse, 2000). Some of this research has been conducted to illuminate students' perceptions on urban school reform (Friend & Caruthers, 2015), curriculum relevance (Scott, 2015), bullying in middle schools (Shriberg et al., 2017) and have served to introduce students' perceptions as a catalyst for change.

There have been studies conducted examining students' perspectives on their experiences in IB Programs as well. In one study, researchers explored the academic and psychosocial well-being of students enrolled at an IB high school (Shaunessy, Suldo, Hardesty, & Shaffer, 2006). It was found that these students provided positive perceptions of school culture and increased levels of self-efficacy. In a similar study conducted by Furst, Hertberg-Davis, and Callahan (2009), the social/emotional implications of participating in IB were explored. In this study, using the voices of students, the researchers found consistency in the students' perceptions of the advantages of IB; however, their perceptions of disadvantages were more varied and shared with less intensity. Hinrichs (2003) surveyed high school juniors and seniors to uncover their perceptions of international understandings as a result of participating in an IB program. In a quasi-experimental study, Hinrichs found that students who attended an IB high school had higher levels of international understanding than students in a control group who had not. In each of these examples, we increase our understanding of the impact of IB on students through the perspectives of the students themselves.

IB as Curricular Change

To better appreciate and understand the curricular change this school was trying to implement, it was important to gain an understanding of the IB beliefs, practices and how it has evolved over the years. The IB Program originated in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1968 to serve children from families with internationally affiliated professions. Initially, IB offered its Diploma Program (DP) to high-school-aged youth in a handful of private schools, focusing on promoting international understanding. IB earned a reputation as a high-quality educational program, consistent across settings, and was recognized by colleges and universities as providing strong academic preparation. In 1994, IB created the MYP for students aged 11 to 16 years and in 1997 the Primary Years Program (PYP) for students aged 3 to 12 years. Today, IB programs are offered worldwide in over 4,000 schools; more than 60% of IB programs are in the Americas and 90% of IB programs in the United States are in public schools, with about 30% of those receiving Title I funding (Bunnell, 2011a, 2011b; Cech, 2007). Schools that wish to become IB approved must undergo an extensive candidacy period during which they demonstrate alignment with the organization's philosophical, curricular, assessment, and administrative support requirements. There is required professional development (PD) and external review as part of this process (see www.ibo.org/become/index.cfm). Required PD includes participation by some teachers at sessions held at established, successful IB schools; in-house sessions led by IB personnel; and regular in-house sessions led by teachers and administrators. Teacher professional collaboration is a

required element of IB approval (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2015). The school we researched was in the first year of the candidacy phase.

One of IB's foundational concepts focuses on teaching and learning in context, especially from a global perspective of "common humanity" and "shared guardianship of the planet." It also embraces approaches to instruction that lead to independent learning, application of knowledge and community service. In addition, IB MYP recognizes and allows for implementation of mandated legal requirements around inclusion and diverse learning needs within its curriculum (see www.ibo.org/programs/middle-yearsprogramme/curriculum/).

The MYP is viewed as nonprescriptive in that schools can choose objectives, content material, and assessments that align with their needs (Sperandio, 2010). However, teachers are required to develop and teach instructional units using a prescribed MYP unit planner format and move toward interdisciplinary instruction and with carefully documented formative and summative assessments. The disciplines to be taught in the MYP are Language and Literature, Individuals and Societies, Mathematics, Design, Arts, Sciences, Physical and Health Education, and Language Acquisition. Students are to develop both a community and a personal project.

As noted above, the IB model was developed for a specific population; however, more recently, the model is being applied more broadly, particularly in urban settings. As this growth is relatively recent, there is not much research yet to document IB's impact in the urban context. There is a growing body of literature that does reveal some interesting insights. Kobylinski-Fehrman's (2013) work did not find stronger reading and math gains for MYP students in an urban public school, but in focus group discussions, teachers expressed positive feelings about student achievement and teacher pedagogy. Mills (2013) studied the effects of PYP implementation process on teachers in a low-income urban public school. Specifically, she looked at how teachers tried to navigate the complex and conflicting requirements of No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and IB PYP. These teachers were committed to the IB philosophy but differed in the degree to which they resisted the state-mandated decontextualized curriculum as they attempted to implement the more challenging, relevant curriculum provided by the PYP Program. Some resisted; others conformed with state mandates because they did not believe they could question authority; still others made a conscious choice to conform even though they personally disagreed with these state mandates.

What makes a successful implementation was studied by Mayer (2010) who explored how one urban high school implemented the IB program. Using strategies that research has found essential to encourage teachers and others to embrace curricular change, Mayer found that coaching and administrative support, in the form of the IB coordinator and teacher leaders, were two of the key practices that, among others, led to successful implementation of the IB Program in a low performing schools. Each of these studies discussed the pressures and stress teachers feel to narrow the achievement gap of their low-income urban public school students and how that demand intersects with the focus and requirements of the MYP and PYP programs.

It is important to note that IB was not initially designed to bring about widespread change in schools. More recently, however, given its reputation for high-quality and

rigorous education, the IB Program has become a compelling educational reform effort (Siskin & Weinstein, 2008). While there is no definitive answer as to why this change is occurring, the fact that IB MYP is more of a framework than a prescriptive curriculum makes it more accessible to all types of schools (Hill, 2006, p. 21).

Authors' Voice

We have intentionally chosen to write this article in first person. Given our interest in utilizing student and teacher voice in our research, it seems only consistent then that we would include our voice in reporting the research. The use of first person reflects our beliefs and values as teacher educators and researchers. We believe that interacting on a personal level with our students enhances the learning of the students as well as our own. Amir (2005) also talks about how the use of first person invites the reader into the work and allows him or her to be more engaged in the process. Both of us have been involved with this particular school and district on multiple levels. Both have supervised student teachers in the district. We conducted a research project at another middle school in the district when they implemented a one-to-one technology initiative. We were involved in an initiative to establish a PD school, and one of us participated in the design and implementation of an early college program at the district's high school. While we understand that our involvement in this district does result in some level of bias, our knowledge of the school and district enhances the overall understanding of the opportunities and challenges this reform effort provided the administrators, teachers, and students.

Method

This study used a mixed method approach that combined both qualitative and quantitative research methods (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Our work included semi-structured interviews that explored the daily life experiences of the participants who were intimately involved in this reform effort. Listening to the voices of students and teachers helped to provide insights into how this curricular change was experienced and understood by those directly affected (Bartell, 2001; Friend & Caruthers, 2015; Gratch, 2000). The approach allowed us to utilize the qualitative data from the interviews to develop a survey instrument that would elicit the quantitative data we were seeking (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The mixed methods approach provided a means of confirming, challenging, and validating results from the different methods. In addition, the approach allowed for elaboration and further illustration of the key patterns we observed in the data.

Context of the Study

Our study took place in a middle school composed of Grades 6, 7, and 8 and located in an urban Midwestern school district serving approximately 6,000 students. The middle school we researched had an average daily enrollment of approximately 450

students: 65% of the students were African American and 65% were economically disadvantaged. Recently, the district, as part of its strategic planning process, determined that the middle schools and targeted elementary schools would pursue IB candidacy to earn IB authorization. This move to IB was aligned in part with the district's vision that all students would experience a rigorous and relevant education that would prepare them for success in a global economy. As a result, all students had access to the IB program; however, as you will see, not all students were thought to benefit from it equally. This ran counter to the goals of the district administration's rationale for implementing the program. At the time of the study, the school was in the candidacy phase of implementing the MYP Program.

Participants

Administrators, teachers, and students were interviewed for this study. We interviewed three key administrators: the Director of Curriculum and Instruction who coordinated the strategic planning efforts for the district; the Middle School Principal leading the effort to gain IB authorization; and the IB Coordinator, a former elementary school teacher in the district who was charged with working with individual and teams of teachers in developing and implementing the various components of IB. The director of curriculum has led a number of initiatives in the district including a one-to-one initiative at the middle school, a district-wide school transformation plan, and an early college program. He is a veteran administrator of over 30 years, having served as principal and superintendent in other local districts. The principal and the IB coordinator were committed to IB and the successful implementation of it at this school. The principal was in his second year at the school having served as principal for over 15 years in other districts. The IB coordinator was in her second year in this position and was shared between an IB elementary school and the middle school. They were both knowledgeable and well prepared to lead this effort having gone through extensive training with the IB program. The principal had previous experience leading curricular change in another building and felt quite comfortable in that role. We believed that these individuals, given their leadership roles in implementing the district initiative, would be able to provide the richest data in terms of the rationale for this particular change effort, the infrastructure in place to develop and implement it, and assessment of the school's progress in reaching the ultimate goal of IB authorization.

Given that the teachers would be ultimately responsible for implementing the program, we wanted to know how the change process would affect their professional experiences and instructional practices. Of the 21 seventh and eighth grade teachers invited to be interviewed, 16 volunteered representing a cross section of years of experience and years at this particular school. Three of the teachers were African American women, one White male, and the others White women. Thirteen of the teachers came from the humanities, math, and science; three came from foreign language, art, and technology; and most were veteran teachers in the building with 7 or more years of experience at the school. None of the teachers had any experience with IB programs. Three of the teachers, all from the humanities, had participated in a

teacher leader program at our University and had led parts of the implementation process in the first year. On the advice of the school's principal, we did not invite sixth grade teachers to participate given that in addition to the implementation of IB, they were also undergoing another change effort that significantly impacted their classroom space and their pedagogical practice. We also did not invite the physical education teachers and intervention specialists as they were not involved in the implementation process at this point.

We believe that students, when given the opportunity, can provide profound descriptions of what is happening in their classrooms. During the spring of the first year of our study, we invited all seventh and eighth grade students to participate in the study and interviewed the 16 students who returned their consent forms. Teachers reviewed the list of student participants and indicated they were a reasonable cross section of students reflecting the demographics of the school. The students were predominantly African American; two were honors students and three were special education. We had an equal number of boys and girls from the seventh and eighth grades.

Procedures

In the first year of the study, we attended a number of the in-house PD sessions, faculty, and department meetings, so we could better understand what was occurring at the school and become more known to and trusted by the teachers. During this same time period, district and school administrators, teachers, and students participated in semistructured interviews. Together we interviewed each of the three administrators (see Appendix A for interview protocol). These interviews were conducted in the administrators' offices and lasted approximately 60 to 75 min. Teacher interviews during the fall and winter of the first year of the study focused on (a) changes in pedagogical practices; (b) impact of the IB process on collaboration and professional satisfaction; (c) impact on students' experiences; and (d) quality and quantity of PD opportunities during the initial phase of implementation (see Appendix B for interview protocol). In most cases, we both interviewed the teachers jointly for approximately 45 to 60 min in their classrooms.

Both researchers jointly interviewed groups of 4 to 5 students for approximately 30 to 45 min. We chose to utilize focus groups with the students given the advantages of that particular methodology (Shoaf & Shoaf, 2006). We believed that providing the opportunity for student interaction had the potential for enhancing student participation and building on the responses of other group members. We also believed that talking with them in groups might make them more comfortable given their unfamiliarity with both researchers. Students were interviewed during the school day in the library. Interviews focused on (a) students' shared understanding of IB, (b) impact of IB on their teachers' pedagogical practice, and (c) changes in their educational experiences based on their understanding of IB (see Appendix C for interview protocol).

We were obviously disappointed by the very low participation rate of the students. It is difficult to account for this low return rate. We have done research with students in this particular district in the past and have been more successful in interviewing

larger percentages of the students. We relied on the teachers to encourage participation, and it could be that given the many initiatives that were occurring at the time, not the least of which was the IB implementation, the level of support was minimal. We did not invite sixth graders to participate for the same reason we did not invite the sixth grade teachers. It should be noted that due to the small number of students interviewed, we in no way suggest that the perspectives we provide are representative of the student body as a whole. Although there was, according to the teachers, a good representation of different types of students, the fact that these students volunteered to participate results in an inherent bias in what we heard. Their perspectives, as limited as they may be, do provide another layer of understanding of the process. Although we might have left these data out of our reporting of the research, we decided to include their responses, despite the small sample size, so as not to lose the students' voice in this process. We interviewed them. We told them they were part of a research study that would be published and that their ideas would be included. As Hargreaves (1996) has stated, "The voices of those who are managed and assigned meaning by others deserve to be heard with attentiveness and sincerity lest researchers misassign meaning to their actions and policymakers mismanage their lives" (p. 16), and so we feel compelled to include them here.

In the second year of the study, we conducted a survey that was designed to track teachers, as a group, in terms of how they were experiencing the process of becoming an IB MYP school over the course of the implementation process. Utilizing Survey Monkey, a 20-item Likert-type-Scale survey was developed that explored issues that had been raised in the teacher interviews in the previous year as well as items the school's administration requested for their ongoing assessment. Teachers' perceptions of their developing knowledge of IB, their progress in implementing various components of IB, and the impact of the process on their students and their own practice were explored. In addition to the Likert-type items, teachers were invited to share additional comments in each of the areas (see Appendix D for survey items). Surveys were sent to 51 teachers including the sixth grade teachers and specialists. Although the interviews only included particular seventh and eighth grade teachers as described above, the survey was sent to all teachers at the request of the principal. He was interested in how his staff was accepting the change and wanted to use what we found to enhance the PD that was being provided. Thirty-one teachers completed the online survey: 10 teachers from the humanities, nine from math and science, and the remaining from special education and the unified arts (language, music, art, and physical education), which resulted in a 61% return rate.

Analytic Approach

All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Following each interview, we discussed the conversations, highlighting nuances, similarities, differences, and additional questions that might be asked in subsequent sessions. Our analysis involved both of us individually reviewing the interview transcripts and reflecting on them, identifying patterns that seemed to illuminate the various aspects of our research questions. This was

a progressive coding process of sorting through the data and defining patterns or categories. Most of the data fell easily under the major categories that emerged. Some additional categories were added as we scoured through the transcripts lifting excerpts that represented these categories. We then came together, shared our observations, and discussed the categories that had emerged for each of us individually. This approach was consistent with techniques described by Glesne (2011).

In analyzing the results of the surveys, we first looked to validate the data by being certain that most, if not all, of the participants responded to each of the Likert-type items seeking to limit the extent of bias in the responses. We analyzed the data both as a whole group and by subgroups based on subjects taught, with a particular focus on humanities, math, and science teachers. We had this focus due to the fact that most of the teachers we interviewed were from these subgroups. Tables of the data were created for each item and for both the whole group and subgroups to provide for visual representation that would allow us to see how the data compared. For the purposes of this analysis, we combined participants responding with 1 (“strongly disagree”), 2, and 3 as disagreeing; and participants responding 5, 6, 7 as agreeing; a response of 4 was considered neutral for this analysis. In our analysis, we looked for points of convergence, corroboration, clarification, contradictions, and expansion with the qualitative data provided by the interviews (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989 as cited in Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). When analyzing the survey data, we looked at the percentage of teachers who agreed and disagreed with particular items.

Time is a major factor in the acquisition of trustworthy data. Over the course of the year, we spent significant amounts of time in the school observing faculty meetings and work sessions and interviewing students and teachers. Multiple stakeholders in the implementation of IB at this school were included in our research which provided opportunities for corroboration as well as challenge to the credibility of the data. The use of two coders also contributed to the trustworthiness of this work. According to L. Berends and Johnston (2004), having two coders adds multiple perspectives to the process and the opportunity to discuss coding disagreements to refine the coding system. There are of course limitations to the analysis. We know that we did not have available to us all of the key players among the faculty and that our student sample was limited in size. There were teachers, particularly sixth grade teachers whose voices were not heard in the interviews, but who did participate in the survey. There were also site peculiarities that may have influenced our analysis. There were multiple initiatives being implemented at the same time. There was a sense on the part of many teachers that the implementation of IB might be another district initiative that would go away like many others. And there were teacher leaders whose investment in the implementation of IB would be influential in their contributions to the research.

Results

We were interested in examining a change process that was meant to promote advanced levels of academic achievement aligned with the district’s strategic planning goals through the experiences of the participants. Teachers, and to some extent students,

spoke to the various implications of choosing to embrace a school reform effort such as IB. The themes that emerged were identified in areas where we found some degree of consensus among the teachers, and in some cases, areas where we found substantial disagreement. In this section, we will first provide an overview of the main themes that emerged, followed by a more in-depth discussion of what we heard from the participants. All quotations come from our interviews with the administrators, teachers, and students, using the participants' actual words without substantive editing to illustrate these themes. In some cases, we create what we call "fictionalized conversations" (Storz, 1998). These are similar in intent and style to Richardson's (1994) ethnographic fictional representations and Tanaka's (1997) idea of fictionalized timing. We believe that this alternate form for presenting our data provides the reader an accessible means of understanding what we heard from our participants. To create these conversations, we sifted through all of the interview data looking for specific themes that we wanted to illustrate. In constructing the conversations, we chose not to substantially edit the participants' words, but we do rearrange the material and add some transitional pieces to build the conversations and insure readability. We are careful not to take the participants' words out of context in any way that might change their initial meanings. In all cases, the names that are used are pseudonyms.

Survey data are integrated into the narrative throughout as it relates to the particular themes that emerged from the initial interviews given that the survey was constructed in large part based on the interview data. These data are meant to corroborate and challenge where appropriate the themes that emerged from the qualitative data.

Teachers' Experiences—Instructional Practices

Collaborating with colleagues. In our interviews with teachers about how the IB process impacted their pedagogical practices, almost all teachers described an increased focus on systematic instructional planning with their peers. Teachers seemed to embrace this practice and found it a positive experience for the most part. This fictionalized conversation of two teachers talking about how IB has changed the way they plan is reflective of this theme:

Ms. Wright: It was stuff that we all want to do but now sort of in a way of doing it more mindfully. It forces us in a good way to really be more mindful about planning (Wright, 2012).

Mr. Green: I agree. IB has helped me become more purposeful and systematic in how I actually plan the lessons in writing (J. Green, personal communication, November 10, 2012).

Ms. Wright: And it is making me more cognizant of the way I put lesson plans together. It just makes you want to add more and more to what you do (Wright, 2012).

Some of the teachers highlighted the collaboration that resulted from the implementation of IB:

The IB has changed our teaching because we meet so much more. We spend so much more time together. We work a lot more with common assessment. We talk a lot more about what we want to teach and how we want to teach it. (L. King, personal communication, November 15, 2012)

Another teacher stated that

I have always felt professionally challenged but I think the collegial piece of being able to work more with others is huge. That piece has definitely been something we have seen an increase in. Literally, we probably meet every day to really do the planning. We are at the point where we are all very open and honest with each other. It isn't just following the pacing guide. (M. Scott, personal communication, November 18, 2012)

Much of the planning was cross-disciplinary as a result of the requirement to teach at least one integrated unit. As one teacher noted There is a team of us making our lesson planner right now. We are doing a cross curriculum unit through science, humanities, and math. Professionally it is nice to have the opportunity to have some collaboration across content areas through the IB. (Z. Mangell, personal communication, December 4, 2012)

It appears that the implementation of IB encouraged teamwork, which many of the teachers embraced:

Ms. Kennie: I have been working with a group of people and it is the first time I have ever even wanted to depend on someone else to get me through writing a unit (G. Kennie, personal communication, November 12, 2012).

Mr. Green: It's true. If I get stuck or stop, the whole collaboration piece and having the IB coordinator here; I definitely have the resources to go and seek help. I think that just the teamwork will allow me to create the IB units (Green, 2012).

Ms. Kennie: That happened for me as well. She [the IB coordinator] took off and we were right there with her. Not behind her, but right alongside and each person was bringing in parts and pieces to enhance the different areas of that unit (Kennie, 2012).

Despite the overall agreement among the teachers, there were some who found that opportunities for collaboration focused mostly on working with other teachers in their discipline, rather than cross-disciplinary efforts, as they worked to write their initial IB instructional units. There was a desire for more interdisciplinary planning as reflected by the teacher who stated "I think there is a lot more collaboration within our department. I would like to see more collaboration across departments" (N. Strong, personal communication, November 18, 2012). In addition, there was one teacher who actually stated that

I personally think that if anything it [IB candidacy] has deteriorated that [collegiality—professional satisfaction]. The only person in the building that I can really develop a unit

with is Ms. Bell. She is the only one in the building that has the same kids that I have. (M. Brady, personal communication, November 15, 2012)

Although only one teacher expressed this concern in the interviews, survey data from the second year of the study appear to support this perception, indicating that the majority of teachers did not agree that IB had increased opportunities for collaboration. Twenty-one of the 31 respondents reported that they disagreed with the statement, with 10 of these respondents choosing strongly disagree. We think it is important to note that this school had been known for the effectiveness of their teaming and were exemplars of this middle school practice.

Teaching the learner profile traits. The Learner Profile Traits are central to the MYP Program, believing that learners should strive to be inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced, and reflective (see www.ibo.org/learner-profile). Teaching of the IB Learner Profile Traits was frequently mentioned as an instructional focus resulting from the school's candidate status, especially, but not only, for humanities teachers. This was probably the one element of this change effort that most, if not all teachers and students could embrace. As one teacher shared with us, "The learner profiles, those ten, are what unite the whole building right now. It is probably our biggest piece" (D. Ashby, personal communication, December 2, 2012). Teaching the Learner Profile Traits provided the building, teams, and individual teachers a concrete element of IB that was easily integrated in the everyday of teaching and learning. According to this same teacher, it gave teachers "a different way of talking to [my] students" (Ashby, 2012). As another stated, "Any time we have an opportunity to fit that into a conversation or topic we are learning about, open mindedness, risk-taking, then I put that out there and try to talk about the IB program to them" (Strong, 2012). These new conversations allowed teachers the opportunity to have their students reflect on themselves as well as on the curriculum.

Teachers used the Learner Profile Traits in a variety of ways. One team

Gave [the students] a packet of different celebrities and political figures and gave them a picture and bio of the person. We had the kids first do it individually and then in a group. Place all of those people into one of the Learner Profile Traits and then justify why they thought that. We also had them focus on themselves too and which are their strengths and what they need to work on. When we do novels or when we talk about historical figures we also apply the learner traits. It has been great incorporating them in novels and political figures. (D. Coleman, personal communication, December 4, 2012)

Two teachers took it a step further and used the Learner Profile Traits as a way of including themselves in the discussion. Ms. Cole stated that "When I have the kids identify their strengths and weaknesses, I also share mine with them. So it definitely makes you think about it, which makes you reflect" (F. Cole, personal communication, December 2, 2012). Similarly,

When I started off my lesson today I said that I am a risk taker because I'm doing something that I haven't done before. I am using this technology and showing you what it feels like to be a new learner. I am teaching you a lesson that I am uncomfortable with but I am excited about. (R. White, personal communication, December 10, 2012)

Many teachers recognized that the Learner Profile Traits were having a positive effect on their students:

Very often the students will make comments about the traits more frequently than I might so I will have a student that will say "oh that's very principled" and I'll think "oh I should have had that I my lesson plan" or "I should have thought of that." They are very mindful about it and have embraced it. (Cole, 2012)

As the Learner Profile Traits were an element of the IB implementation that most, if not all, of the teachers found salient, we included an item on the survey asking teachers in the second year of implementation if they felt competent at integrating the IB Learner Profile Traits into teaching and learning. Forty percent of the respondents indicated that they agreed with the statement at some level, while almost 26% gave a neutral response. In a related question asking teachers if, compared to last year, they were using the language and vocabulary of IB in their teaching, 54% reported that they were using it more to some degree.

Teachers' Experiences—Professional Experience and Satisfaction

Alignment with personal philosophy. Teachers' responses to questions related to changes in their professional experience and satisfaction as a result of the implementation ran the gamut of exhilarated to overwhelmed to unaffected. We heard teachers enthusiastically say that IB validated their long-standing values and beliefs as reflected by Ms. Bean who stated "Once being introduced to IB, I was like, and well that's me! It's great when you have a perfect fit" (B. Bean, personal communication, November 12, 2012). Similarly, Ms. Brown told us that

I like the program [IB] and embrace its tenets because that is the way I was taught as a child as well and I think it opens up a person to be a little bit more sophisticated and inclusive in their thinking. I am excited. I have been waiting 20 years for this! (C. Brown, personal communication, December 15, 2012)

As one might expect, not all agreed with these positive sentiments. One teacher reflecting on the resistance displayed by some teachers illustrated the fact that while some teachers might be experiencing excitement over IB, other teachers were much less enthusiastic:

It [IB] is a different mindset and it is something new and we don't like changing the way we do things. So I think you are finding some teachers fighting back. It doesn't necessarily conform with their teaching styles or how they put units together or what they are

comfortable with and it's different. (F. Lawrence, personal communication, December 6, 2012)

Some felt rather strongly about this, "IB is really nothing more spectacular than what we are doing in the classroom right now" (N. Stevens, personal communication, December 6, 2012).

Survey data the following year appeared to affirm those who were less enthusiastic on this point. When asked if IB aligns with or affirmed a teacher's personal philosophy of teaching and learning, the most frequent response was a neutral one (39%), with only 24% indicating that they agreed to some degree.

Professional development. A significant area of discussion revolved around PD in preparation for an ongoing implementation of the program. Like with other areas of inquiry, teachers' perspectives on PD varied to the extreme. Some teachers acknowledged the district's financial commitment to send faculty to various IB sponsored PD sessions around the country, bring IB experts to the school to lead PD sessions, and take groups of teachers to IB schools in the area. The district-level administrator confirmed that the district was committing "tens of thousands of dollars getting people trained. We are sending them to the full IB training because it has the Good Housekeeping seal of approval" (J. Meyers, personal communication, February 5, 2013). The principal shared with us that when he speaks with other principals and IB coordinators, and tells them that "half of his staff has been trained or ready to get trained, and you are only a year in, that blows them away" (P. Dunbar, personal communication, December 20, 2012). It seemed clear that at least at the district level there was a sense that they were providing more than sufficient PD in implementing IB. The district administrator noted,

By IB standards, requirements for professional development are so much less than what our district is committed to. The district believes in PD and sees the merit behind the program. So they have been more than willing to train anyone who wants to give up their weekend. (Meyer, 2013)

Many teachers appreciated these efforts and saw them as particularly helpful. One newer teacher commented on how lucky she felt coming from a district that really had no PD: "you come here and it is just great to be part of this" (King, 2012). There were a number of teachers who commented positively on the training that was being received at the national level:

Another math teacher had gone to California and had gone through training there. When he came back he talked a lot about it and had his books and examples. He was able to communicate that to our team of math teachers. (Scott, 2012)

Similarly, a teacher who was sent for training in New York told us her experience allowed her to "actually see what a unit looks like, how to plan a unit. It didn't feel

like doing something extra. It was something that made a lot of sense” (Ashby, 2012).

Many teachers, however, had less positive views about their PD experiences both in terms of access and the content. This fictionalized conversation provides a glimpse into what many of the teachers were saying:

Mr. King: I think for most people it is really overwhelming. The amount of information, and I think part of that is the way it has been presented to us. It is all top down. Here’s what you need to do. Read this book. We are going to bring in somebody who is going to come in and talk at you. (King, 2012)

Ms. Brady: It is overwhelming. I thought I came back [from out of town PD] with a lot of useful information that was somewhat easy to share. But the more we sat down and discussed it as a department and talked to my colleagues, the more difficult I found it to be because it really is a program that if you are not hearing it first hand from the people delivering the information it can be difficult to interpret. (Brady, 2012)

Ms. Scott: I have to agree. I went for my first training in Atlanta this past summer. It was the most overwhelming experience of my life! I am not young anymore, so to be introduced to something completely different I need to know why we are doing this. I need time to put my head around it. I’m not opposed to it. I just feel I need more training. (Scott, 2012)

Ms. Brady: I really think there needs to be some differentiated PD depending on the topic and on comfort level. (Brady, 2012)

Interestingly when asked about any kind of follow-up on the PD teachers have received, the IB coordinator responded

I will be 100 percent honest. It has been horrible. There really is no follow through. The great thing about IB PD is that it is ongoing but for our part, when teachers get back we have really said “how was it? Good? Did you have a good time?” A huge piece is missing. (M. Gregory, personal communication, February 7, 2013)

Survey responses showed that after an additional year of IB candidacy, teachers continued to have mixed reviews of the PD they were receiving. The majority of teachers (45%) disagreed with the statement that in-house PD experiences had been helpful. Similarly, 50% of the respondents ($n = 28$) disagreed that PD opportunities at other schools or out-of-state conferences had been helpful. In both cases, the math/science teachers expressed unanimous dissatisfaction.

Administrative support is key. Another area that was clearly important to the teachers was the support, or lack thereof, that they received from various levels of the administration. An important element in teacher satisfaction and performance is in part related to the support teachers receive from their administrators. It was no less important for the teachers we interviewed. In general, teachers acknowledged the administrative support they received from their principal and the IB coordinator was key to the

success of the implementation of this change. The following fictionalized conversation gives a flavor of what many of the teachers expressed:

Mr. Strong: They keep encouraging us to stick with it and give us resources and help and everything we need. (Strong, 2012)

Ms. Bean: Our principal has an IB focus and every staff meeting he does something. So it's becoming more clear what is expected of the teachers. (Bean, 2012)

Mr. Strong: Yes, the principal makes the difference. Our principal really does a lot with it. He really talks about it and says a lot on the announcements about it. He's like I think we have an IB trait for the month and he always tells us to try to be that trait during the day. (Strong, 2012)

Ms. Bean: The announcements, the emails, the weekly updates on how IB fits in with even the Common Core . . . he has got the leadership drive because this is his baby. (Bean, 2012)

Ms. Wright: So this is something that looks like [the principal], the teacher leaders and [the IB Coordinator] have all committed to and it seems like this is going to happen. It's not one of those things that we aren't doing any more after next year. (Wright, 2012)

The principal confirmed this sentiment. He clearly did have an IB focus. He was committed to the change and worked diligently to assist the teachers in implementing every aspect of it. As an example, he shared with us that

I do a weekly update every week. I mail it out on Sunday and there is always a reading attached. The reading I try to connect to whatever work we are doing . . . I will have teachers that will come up to me and tell me they liked the article or made them think. (Dunbar, 2012)

Unlike Ms. Wright in the conversation above, many teachers talked about the district's history of moving from one reform initiative to another and therefore questioned the district's support in the long term. There was a "wait and see" attitude as to whether the district was fully committed to IB. This concern is reflected in the comments of two teachers, one who said,

[This district] has a history of jumping on whatever is new and let's try it and see what happens, without doing a whole lot of background and really figuring out if it is good for the group of students we have. (Coleman, 2012)

I don't think I have a negative attitude towards the [IB] process, I just think I'm being realistic. The trends that I see in the district is that it just seems they are doing a lot of things at once and throwing things at people. I just think there's a lot of money being wasted. I hope it pans out, but we'll see. (White, 2012)

Interestingly, in our conversation with the district administrators, in responding to a question about change, he confirmed these teachers' concerns: "The other part is the

consistency. In our district we have been especially guilty of that. This is the fad, we implement it, it doesn't show results in two weeks we throw it out" (Meyer, 2013).

Survey results clearly confirmed this concern raised by a majority of the teachers. Forty-nine percent of the respondents disagreed with the statement that the district is committed to supporting the school as an IB school in the long term, with almost 30% taking a neutral stance. Humanities teachers most strongly disagreed in that none of the Humanities teachers believed the district would support this initiative in the long term.

An area of discussion among many of the teachers related to the administration's focus on what we considered to be obstacles to implementing the program. There were other initiatives and structures in place during the candidacy phase of IB implementation that were seen as problematic by the teachers. For example, one teacher complained that "We are implementing so many things right now with the Common Core, and the assessment cycle" (Coleman, 2012). Another echoed these sentiments when she told us "Our district has too many initiatives always going on at the same time. We can take on too much. Just take on a little bit at a time" (Lawrence, 2012). In addition to the Common Core and a new state assessment system, teaching assignments were changing. Teachers were no longer teaching language arts and social studies as separate courses, but rather as an integrated humanities course. While the teachers were required to meet in interdisciplinary teams to create the IB units, scheduling did not allow for this to occur sufficiently during the school day. In addition to all of this, the sixth grade team was undergoing a total restructuring of the physical space in their designated part of the building requiring a major shift in their pedagogical practices.

Student Experience

Because it was early in the process of becoming an IB school when we interviewed the students, and because the number of students volunteering to be interviewed was small, no clear themes emerged from these interviews. Despite this fact we want to insure that students' perspectives on the change to IB are heard in this conversation. There were instances when multiple groups and/or multiple students within groups did share similar perspectives.

They learned the traits. All 16 students were aware of the Learner Profile Traits. As one student so clearly articulated, "obviously international baccalaureate is built upon a series of attributes that are posted in pretty much every classroom now. So to be part of an IB school is to follow those and to live by those traits" (Student focus group, May 13, 2013). They had written about the traits and they could identify some of the traits. They were aware of the students of the month and how that selection was connected to the trait of the month. They also talked about how some of their teachers had applied the Learner Profile Traits to literary and historical figures, which the teachers noted as well. When we asked the principal what he hoped we would hear from the students he replied, "The only tangible evidence is the student of the month certificates

for January's attribute, inquirer. This year the big thing that most teachers have been doing are what does an IB student look like" (Dunbar, 2012). Similarly, the IB coordinator, when asked the same question, said, "I would hope you would hear something about the Learner Profile Traits" (Gregory, 2013).

The following fictionalized conversation reflects what we heard from the students. Here they are talking about the Learner Profile Traits and how the study and application of these affect them as learners.

Jason: Having the traits motivates you to want to be that trait or to get your picture up on the wall [student of the month] because you are that trait. (Student focus group, May 13, 2013)

Tanesha: It's just like when you get up on the wall you feel proud. It's like wait a second subconsciously, I'm acting in a way that's making me a better learner and therefore helping other people learn better and make me a better person in this world by learning to exemplify these things. (Student focus group, May 13, 2013)

Angelique: I just look at the trait of the month and I go OK I'm going to try to be that: And then I feel like I need to try to be that trait. Like whenever I see my teacher like "Oh I'm a risk taker just to let you know". But you should just know the trait. Just be yourself and then probably you are that trait because you are a good student. (Student focus group, May 17, 2013)

Tanesha: I'm going to do my best and I'm going to be knowledgeable, I'm going to be a thinker, I'm going to be a risk taker. And I'm going to be reflective. . . (Student focus group, May 13, 2013)

An understanding of a global perspective. When asked to explain what IB was, seven of 16 students talked about the global aspect of the curriculum. As noted by this short exchange between two students, there was something about a sister school that they had heard about:

Joseph: There's a sister school or something. I don't know where it is if we do . . . (Student focus group, May 13, 2013)

Max: I don't know why they're our sister school. I don't know what they do . . . (Student focus group, May 13, 2013)

Lenny: We have a sister school in Beijing I think. (Student focus group, May 17, 2013)

A second fictionalized conversation reflects this notion that the students had some sense that IB had an international component and that this element had a positive impact on their learning.

Mike: I like the concept that we're learning what everybody else in the world is learning and it gives us the ability and the knowledge to go anywhere in the world and have the skills we need . . . (Student focus group, May 17, 2013)

Angelique: And you realize that the entire world has the same problems and they're not all that different. They just have different small ingredients that aren't completely the same. (Student focus group, May 17, 2013)

Chris: So I think it also helps to realize that everything is interconnected. (Student focus group, May 13, 2013)

Joseph: People are saying China and Japan have so much better education but when you're learning IB you're actually at the same level as them or at least we're trying to be. It gives you the knowledge that you can go anywhere in the world and you are prepared to do whatever you need to do to live your life successfully. (Student focus group, May 13, 2013)

Mike: I think the whole thing with IB is that we're learning at the same standard as other people around the world. (Student focus group, May 17, 2013)

It was not clear from our interviews with teachers that much emphasis was being placed on the global aspect at this stage of implementation. Obviously given that this was a salient issue for the students, the school in some way was communicating this message. We did have three of the teachers mention this element of IB. One saw it as a way to get the students to think more about the community and social justice. Similarly another shared with us that "You have kids talking and thinking about how they fit in the world so it kind of puts it in a framework which is helpful" (Brown, 2012). A third teacher was quite excited about this element and integrating a global perspective was having an impact on her as well as on the students. In her words:

I go to a workshop and I immediately start thinking how can I make global connections, how can I bring this into my classroom or make it universal and still make it relevant. When we are reading an article I am always wanting the kids to think about it from another perspective—how is it relevant to people in another part of the world. So instead of being an American educator, I think I am evolving more into a citizen of the world. (Green, 2012)

Teachers' views on the survey when asked if they were including a global perspective more now in their teaching were somewhat mixed: 14 teachers (46%) agreed to some degree, while 35% disagreed, and 6 respondents (19%) gave a neutral response.

Alignment of IB with student population. There was a belief among many of those we interviewed that the majority of their students would not benefit from this curricular model. This was a surprising theme that we had not anticipated when we began the research. When asked a general question about IB, a teacher commented, "I think that IB is going to be a good fit for about 25-30% of the students in the district, but not for everyone else" (Green, 2012). Although not explicitly stating the obvious, 25% to 30% in this school would be made up of the White, middle, and upper middle class students. Other teachers shared similar sentiments without direct references in our questions related to the student population. Some believed that IB would not benefit their minority students as reflected in this teacher's comment:

I was concerned what it [IB] would mean for the minority population. I had a lot of concerns for the minority population because I have been in this building long enough to see this building's population change tremendously. There would be some children that would get lost. (Ashby, 2012)

Others were concerned about their low-income students:

I think with this type of socioeconomic population we are going to have students who maybe don't value the education system as strongly as they should or as strongly as we hoped. Maybe they don't have the support at home. Maybe they are with grandma and don't have parental support. (Scott, 2012)

Although the district understood IB as adding rigor and relevance for all of the children, many of the teachers we interviewed had a different perspective.

Teachers expressed concern based on the skill level of their students. There was a belief that IB benefits the advanced students and would pose significant challenges for others. As one teacher noted, "It is going to benefit like I said the few that we have that literally belong in Honors classes (Scott, 2012). Similarly, another teacher stated that

A lot of these kids are coming from a place where they don't have the foundation. They don't have that and it's going to be difficult for them. But some kids, the more advanced kids, they do have that and they do have that desire to learn and they want to just go. (R. Gray, personal communication, December 10, 2012)

It should be noted that as with many schools, the honors classes, as well as the more advanced classes in the school, were made up primarily of the White, middle class students.

Because so many of the teachers in our interviews mentioned this idea of fit, we included an item on the survey to see if these concerns were shared by others. We asked if IB is the right fit for all of the school's students. Of the 31 respondents, only 3 agreed with the statement. Twenty-three teachers disagreed, with five responding with a neutral response. We also included an item that referenced the homogeneous grouping that the school had been using for some time. Here, we asked teachers to respond to the statement: "IB is appropriate for 'approaching grade level' students" (the school's term for lower level students). Twenty-three of the 30 respondents (77%) disagreed to one degree or another. Only three respondents agreed. Given that this response was held by the majority of the teachers in both the interviews and the survey, we asked the three administrators if they thought IB was a good fit for their students. The principal thought yes. In his words:

I think IB is a good fit for any school because when you look and read all of the literature it is based off of best practices. They (IB) have always made it so you can integrate your local curricular needs in the MYP. (Dunbar, 2012)

The coordinator of the program also responded in the affirmative:

It's perfect. It's for everyone. You need to have a balanced approach. If you are drill and kill all day every day in all subjects, in every part of that student's day, no wonder they sit there and hate school. No wonder you have behavior problems. If you are not getting the kids to be more involved and asking question, I would say what makes you say that this is not for your child because everything about it is great teaching. (Gregory, 2013)

The district administrator admitted having heard of this issue “secondhand”:

“You know it won't work for these kids. My kids need skills.” This is a perpetual attitude. And it comes down to management. Kids need to be in seats so they behave. So there is definitely that perception and that is not necessarily a racial perception. And again, that is part of being an urban district. Socioeconomic perception. It really comes down to some really hard moral issues, but our alignment of vision mission and strategy is for all kids. (Meyer, 2013)

Discussion

Our focus on teacher and student voice in this research project provided us with a firsthand account of how those most affected by the process of implementing a curricular change like the IB program experienced and perceived such a change. The administrators provided important contextual understanding in the analysis of the teachers and students' experiences. As has been suggested by Stillisano, Waxman, Hostrup, and Rollins (2011) and O'Boyle (2009) we found that our participants were clearly able to highlight the successes and the obstacles inherent in this particular implementation process.

Planning and Teaching

Although the IB-required planning tasks, specifically creating interdisciplinary units, seemed pretty clear and manageable for most teachers, the impact of IB MYP on their teaching appeared to be more challenging. IB uses a complex unit planning framework but it is broken down into easy-to-follow sections, such as guiding questions, assessments, and learning tasks. IB, however, is less prescriptive pedagogically, espousing more of a philosophical framework than specific teaching methods, curriculum, or materials. Teachers, and perhaps also the administration, seemed to deal with this ambiguity by embracing one mandated curricular piece that was more explicit—the Learner Profile Traits. Nearly all teachers taught these 10 terms/concepts in multiple contexts. We believe that this practice links closely with a coping behavior described by Martin and Kragler (2009) where teachers who were overwhelmed with new educational initiatives posted signs in their classrooms naming key terms associated with the change. Martin and Kragler suggest that this behavior was more likely a signal to observers that they were aligned with the change, rather than any real shift in their teaching.

We found that the math and science teachers did not connect with the IB MYP to the extent that the humanities teachers did, and both groups of teachers actually became more negative in the second year of our study. This is quite an interesting

finding given that IB's design places equal emphasis on all disciplines. As humanities teachers, responsible for both language arts and social studies, they were already attuned to interdisciplinary connections. They also could easily connect the IB Learner Profile Traits to literary or historical characters that they were teaching. Many math and science teachers taught just one subject and did not have the opportunity nor the intent to integrate the disciplines. The math teachers we interviewed were highly focused on preparing their students for the state assessments which took precedence over the philosophy and requirements of IB (Mills, 2013). Similarly, the science curricular areas required by the standards for these grades may not have had easy connections with language arts or social studies topics taught at these levels. Many of the teachers most engaged in the implementation of IB, including the building IB coordinator, had participated in a teacher leadership program (state license endorsement; 15 graduate credits with internship) at our university. Interestingly, all of these teachers taught humanities. These were the teachers who were the first to complete their integrated units, and as part of their leadership program's internship, they led PD in the creation of these units. We would expect them to have a much more positive outlook on the process than others due to their personal investment. In addition, these teachers had developed through their work together a social network that they could leverage to guide their participation in the curricular change (Datnow, 2012).

We expected to hear from the teachers, in both the interviews and survey, about their collaborative planning experiences, and we did. The mixed reactions we heard could be, in part, a reflection on the makeup of the teams of teachers at each grade level. Some teams seemed more comfortable than others working together. In addition, as the first IB unit work focused more on learning the unit structure than on interdisciplinary connections, some teachers seemed to miss their collaborative relationships with teachers from other disciplines that they had forged in the past. A perceived lack of emotional support from colleagues could have impacted how teachers perceived their collaborative experiences (Schmidt & Datnow, 2005).

Professional Experience

We were struck by the wide range of reactions to the implementation of IB MYP that teachers expressed in the interviews. For some, particularly but not entirely the more seasoned teachers, IB seemed to represent ideas and practices that they recalled from their own teacher education programs. This was a more holistic and creative view of education, before the current focus on accountability and high stakes test results. They expressed feelings of validation that their views were being honored. Others expressed quite negative feelings, coupled with frustration. Those teachers, again in general but not entirely, were teachers who worked with struggling students or who lacked confidence that this reform effort would fare any better than others they had seen come and go. They questioned whether they would still be able to provide the structured, skill-based curriculum that they felt helped their students. Some questioned the worth of investing energy in something that might be short-lived. These concerns reflect teachers' need for the emotional support necessary to take risks while not focusing on the potential consequences (Schmidt & Datnow, 2005).

We also were surprised to find more negative feeling relating to professional experience in the second year of our study. However, before jumping to conclusions that this educational change effort was in a downward spiral, it is important to consider differences in the Year 1 and Year 2 data. Year 1 was interview data, and although teachers were assured that their responses would be anonymous, there is still the possibility that this format affected what they told us. Year 2 data was collected from an online survey, so teachers may have felt more freedom to express negative feelings. Year 1 we interviewed only seventh and eighth grade teachers who taught subjects most affected by the IB implementation effort. At the principal's request, the survey in Year 2 was sent to seventh and eighth grade teachers as well as groups of teachers who were not part of the year 1 study; sixth grade teachers who were implementing IB and structural changes; and physical education and special education teachers who were not as directly involved in the implementation process. Adding the sixth grade and others not included in the interviews has both positive and negative implications for the study. Survey data become more representative of the faculty as a whole and it adds a new dimension to the teachers' perspectives. The down side is that this group of teachers may have had a different experience in the first year given their unique situation, and therefore, their perceptions in the second year vary from seventh and eighth grade teachers represented in both years of the study. Comparing Year 1 and Year 2 data is not a clear-cut task. Perhaps in the first year of the study, the elements being implemented were less intrusive than those in the second year. As noted earlier, teachers overall embraced the teaching of the Learner Profile Traits in Year 1. Also in Year 1, teachers developed one integrated unit which was a practice with which they were already accustomed. In Year 2 with the addition of the various assessments and additional integrated units, teachers may have found this more burdensome and less aligned with previous practice. Another explanation could be the perceived freedom to be more candid in an online versus a face-to-face format. The seventh and eighth grade teachers in Year 1 gave us some very rich data that helped us to construct the survey for Year 2. The teachers in Year 2 who completed the survey provided data that both confirmed and challenged what we had heard in the interviews.

According to the guidelines set forth by IB for PD, it appears that the district and the school provided the required quantity and quality of PD, and in the words of the principal, they actually went well beyond those requirements. Many teachers participated in sessions at already established and successful schools around the country. IB professional consultants were brought to the school to provide in-house PD on the various principles and required components of the program. In addition, the principal, IB coordinator, and teacher leaders supported their colleagues in developing units and creating assessments through faculty and team meetings on a regular basis. Despite the coaching and administrative support necessary for successful implementation of IB, there was little consensus among the teachers about the quality of the experiences and how successful those experiences were in assisting the teachers in the implementation process (Mayer, 2010). In fact, their dissatisfaction was made clear in the survey results in the second year of the study. Both by whom and in what manner PD is provided can impact teachers' acceptance of the change effort and even create tensions

among teachers. Teachers did not comment specifically on the staff developer assigned to the building by the IB organization, so it is not clear if this individual was seen as a colleague or agent of the administration. Teachers did perceive the PD as being imposed from the top as opposed to a more organic process, driven from the group up (Craig, 2009). It may well be that as noted by Kobylinski-Fehrman (2013), teachers working in urban schools, with a predominantly low-income student body, and facing the challenges of new state tests and other structural changes, find implementing a curricular change such as IB particularly challenging. The PD the teachers received was traditional in its focus on IB without exploring the impact that context might have on implementation. As reported by the teachers we talked to, the schools visited both nationally and locally did not closely resemble the context of their school. Similarly, the in-house PD and faculty meetings did not focus on the urban context. In addition to learning about IB and its principles and practices, having more focused PD on how an IB program might “look” in their particular context, an urban context, may have a positive impact on how the program is perceived, accepted, and implemented so that all students might benefit. In a sense what we’re suggesting is the notion of differentiated PD, which was also suggested by one of the teachers. As noted by Martin and Kragler (2009), the PD needs to be “tailored” to the needs of teachers, in this case, teachers who are somewhat overwhelmed with new initiatives, skeptical of ongoing district support, and working in an environment different from those being held as exemplars. Such PD, as suggested by Brezicha et al. (2015), can serve to enhance teachers’ understanding of the change and provide the resources to successfully implement it. It could be that such PD might have also, in part, mitigated some of the teachers’ concerns about IB being a “right fit” for their students.

A Good Fit

Teachers’ concern over whether the curriculum and pedagogy that was part of the IB program met the needs of low-income, minority students, many of whom were performing below grade level expectations was a dramatic and surprising finding, particularly as the IB model finds its way into more urban schools. Many of the teachers we interviewed believed in holistic learning, intercultural awareness, and good communication and critical thinking skills; all part of the MYP framework. However, at the same time, they shared this concern that the program was not the right fit for the majority of their students. Based on what the teachers told us, it would appear that those who expressed these concerns may have held lower expectations of their minority and low-income students. They differentiated students’ value of education, home support, and skill levels to explain their rationale for questioning whether this was in fact an appropriate curriculum change for some of their students. Teachers’ expectations of their minority and low-income students have a powerful impact on students’ educational experiences (Tenebaum & Ruck, 2007). The use of homogeneous grouping in this school might have led teachers to believe that IB was better suited to more advanced learners as it was reported that IB lessons went better with those classes. It may be that teachers were concerned that if they are teaching economically disadvantaged urban

students who have struggled with low test scores that IB may not be appropriate. Similarly, if these teachers were concerned about how their students, their school, and they will be judged by the scores, they might well worry about implementing the IB model. Associating IB with higher order thinking, self-motivation, creativity, and rigor may cause teachers to think that the model may or may not adequately prepare the students to perform satisfactorily on required examinations.

Student Experiences

Because our student focus groups took place early in the implementation process, and because the number of students who agreed to be interviewed was rather small, we are not able to discuss in any depth how the students were experiencing this curricular change or offer perspectives representative of the entire student population. There are a few interesting points we would like to raise. Certainly, the students embraced the Learner Profile Traits and confirmed much of what the teachers shared about this element of the IB framework. This is not surprising as this was one of the more salient elements of IB embraced by the teachers as well and one of the more successful aspects of the program implemented early in this phase of candidacy. Interestingly, the school administration's expectation was that if nothing else students would be able to talk about the traits.

The students also seemed to suggest that the Learner Profile Traits motivated them to "be that trait" or to be "a better learner" or to succeed by "getting your picture up on the wall." Teachers did not talk about the traits in the same way. They seemed to understand them solely as a curricular element; something to be taught. If they were aware of the traits as motivation for learning, they did not express this in the interviews. Here is an example of when listening to the students' perceptions can help guide teachers in their thinking about their curriculum.

Some of the students self-reported as honor students. It seemed as though these particular students were more articulate about IB than others. They were able to go beyond talking about just the Learner Profile Traits and comment on some of the other elements as well. They also talked about learning about IB at home and the interest their parents had expressed in the program. In addition, they were not necessarily in favor of this change because it was eliminating the gifted pull out programs which they all found very beneficial. This struck us as interesting because these views in part were aligning with some of the sentiments being shared by teachers about "fit." So, interestingly, some academically strong students are complaining that IB is limiting them by eliminating gifted programs and encouraging heterogeneous grouping. At the same time, teachers complain that IB favors the academically stronger students because it does not focus on the skill development and behavior management that the less academically talented students need.

Reflections

Examining the effects of a curricular change typically focuses solely on the impact on student learning and typically as measured by standardized tests. This study, however,

provides a deeper and more personal picture of the process, honoring the voices of the participants. This study identified some key opportunities and challenges encountered by teachers in the IB adoption process. It is clear that administrative support is key. Administrators who understand the process are flexible and supportive in its implementation and provide teachers the direction and the emotional and professional support required for the implementation of change. Quality and appropriate PD are essential; it cannot be “a one size fits all” endeavor. It needs to address the local context and the various stakeholders. Teachers need the opportunity to collaborate to make a successful transition to the new initiative. Time is needed for teachers to discuss the implications of a given change, particularly how that change might explicitly or otherwise affect students.

The results of this very preliminary study may also have uncovered in this particular context an underlying skepticism as to whether a model like IB is appropriate for urban public school students. It raised questions for us as to whether the intense pressure urban public school teachers experience to raise high stakes test scores make them hesitant to try this model. Do the IB ideals and instructional design mesh with perceptions of some about how lower socioeconomic status (SES) and minority students best learn? Do urban schools choose IB for its educational practices or for other, noneducational reasons? Do teachers’ attitudes and expectations for minority, low-income students impact the implementation of such a change? Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) challenges us when she states that “we must not legitimate the inequity that exists in the nation’s schools, but attempt to delegitimize it by placing it under scrutiny” (p. 130). Although we did not set out to address inequity, the issue surfaced and it is certainly worth future research as it is central to the challenges teachers face in closing the achievement gap and to the growing interest in IB in the urban context.

Appendix A

Interview Protocol for Principal and IB Coordinator

1. What was your reaction when you learned that the school would be an IB candidate?
2. Do you think IB is a good fit for your school’s population?
3. How has IB impacted your role as principal?
4. How has IB affected your level of professional satisfaction?
5. What goals do you have for yourself in terms of IB candidacy?
6. Do you feel you have enough background knowledge about IB to bring about change?
7. What do you see as the benefits of IB for professional satisfaction of teachers? (both potentially and already realized)
8. Do you think the IB experience has promoted teacher leadership in the building?
9. Have you seen any tangible results for students such as how teachers teach or evidence of student learning?

-
10. What are your goals for the school?
 11. Do you have a master PD plan for achieving IB approval?
 12. What kinds of support has the district provided for you and your school?
 13. What goals have you set for this year, next year, the year after? Where do you see?
 14. Roxboro 5 years from now?

Interview Protocol for District Administrator

Note that this was an unstructured interview and the questions you see below emerged from the flow of the conversation.

1. Let's talk about the implementation of the IB MYP program at the middle school. To get us started, from your perspective, what was the impetus for seeking IB candidacy at the middle level?
2. How did you translate the district's vision into practice so that educators actually implemented the change?
3. Change is difficult for the teachers. How do you help the teachers overcome their resistance to change? And what type of change do you hope to see?
4. What is the district's plan for implementation of this change? What role does professional development play in meeting this plan?
5. What should we be expecting to hear from students that would be some indication that some of the work around IB is coming to fruition?
6. During the district's initial conversations about implementing IB, was there any thought about how the IB philosophy and principles aligned with your district's student population?
7. What do you hope for the middle school over the next 5 years?

Appendix B

Interview Protocol for Teachers

1. What was your reaction when you learned that your school would be an IB candidate?
2. Has IB changed your teaching? If so, how?
3. Has IB candidacy affected your level of professional satisfaction (which might include things like collegiality, job satisfaction, leadership)?
4. Do you feel you have enough background knowledge for writing IB units?
5. What professional goals do you have for yourself in terms of IB candidacy?
6. Has the IB experience promoted teacher leadership in the building?

For participants who have completed or enrolled in the University's Teacher Leader Endorsement Program:

7. What was your motivation for enrolling in the TLE program?
8. You have taken a leadership role in the IB process. Did the TLE program provide you with the knowledge and skills required for this role?
9. Has taking a leadership role in this project had an impact on your level of professional satisfaction?

Appendix C

Interview Protocol for Students

What is it like to be a student at your school?

1. Can you talk about a time when your teachers combined their subjects such as language arts and social studies or math and science and focused both subjects around some big idea or theme? Let's talk about what it was like for you.
2. Tell us what it means to be an IB school?
3. Can you identify or talk about any changes that have occurred in your school this year because it is becoming an IB school? What are some of the positive and negative changes?

Appendix D

Teacher Survey

This scale will apply to the 17 items under it and appear under each item

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

1. My expertise in the IB philosophy is increasing.
2. I feel competent at integrating the IB Learner Profile Traits into teaching and learning.
3. I expect to teach one IB unit this year.
4. I expect to teach two (or more) IB units this year.
5. I can understand the IB assessment expectations.
6. I am implementing the IB assessment expectations.
7. I am including global perspectives more now in my teaching.
8. IB has enhanced my ability to reflect on my planning and teaching.
9. IB aligns with or affirms my personal philosophy of teaching and learning.
10. IB seems more aligned with Humanities classes than with Math/Science or UA.
11. IB has increased the opportunities teachers have for collaboration.

Questions 12 to 20 provided space for additional comments

12. The professional development opportunities (in house) about IB have been helpful.
13. The professional development opportunities (at other schools or other cities) have been helpful.
14. The process of becoming an IB school is having a positive impact on our students.
15. IB is appropriate for “approaching grade level” students.
16. IB is the right fit for all of Roxboro’s students.
17. I think the district is committed to supporting Roxboro as an IB school in the long term.

This scale could be used for the last 3 items and would appear under each item.

Less	Same	A little More	More	A Lot More
1	2	3	4	5

18. Compared with last year, the degree to which I am conscious of using IB in my instructional planning.
19. Compared with last year, the degree to which I am using the language and vocabulary of IB in my teaching.
20. Compared with last year, the degree to which I am basing choices of instructional methods and materials on IB.

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