Supporting student agency
Supporting student agency
Primary Years Programme
Supporting student agency

Published October 2018
Updated December 2018

Published on behalf of the International Baccalaureate Organization, a not-for-profit educational foundation of 15 Route des Morillons, 1218 Le Grand-Saconnex, Geneva, Switzerland by the

International Baccalaureate Organization (UK) Ltd
Peterson House, Malthouse Avenue, Cardiff Gate
Cardiff, Wales CF23 8GL
United Kingdom
Website: ibo.org

© International Baccalaureate Organization 2018

The International Baccalaureate Organization (known as the IB) offers four high-quality and challenging educational programmes for a worldwide community of schools, aiming to create a better, more peaceful world. This publication is one of a range of materials produced to support these programmes.

The IB may use a variety of sources in its work and checks information to verify accuracy and authenticity, particularly when using community-based knowledge sources such as Wikipedia. The IB respects the principles of intellectual property and makes strenuous efforts to identify and obtain permission before publication from rights holders of all copyright material used. The IB is grateful for permissions received for material used in this publication and will be pleased to correct any errors or omissions at the earliest opportunity.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the IB’s prior written permission, or as expressly permitted by the Rules for use of IB Intellectual Property.

IB merchandise and publications can be purchased through the IB Store (email: sales@ibo.org). Any commercial use of IB publications (whether fee-covered or commercial) by third parties acting in the IB’s ecosystem without a formal relationship with the IB (including but not limited to tutoring organizations, professional development providers, educational publishers and operators of curriculum mapping or teacher resource digital platforms etc) is prohibited and requires a subsequent written license from the IB. License requests should be sent to copyright@ibo.org. More information can be obtained on the IB public website.
IB mission statement

The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.

To this end the organization works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment.

These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.
IB learner profile

The aim of all IB programmes is to develop internationally minded people who, recognizing their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better and more peaceful world.

As IB learners we strive to be:

INQUIRERS
We nurture our curiosity, developing skills for inquiry and research. We know how to learn independently and with others. We learn with enthusiasm and sustain our love of learning throughout life.

KNOWLEDGEABLE
We develop and use conceptual understanding, exploring knowledge across a range of disciplines. We engage with issues and ideas that have local and global significance.

THINKERS
We use critical and creative thinking skills to analyse and take responsible action on complex problems. We exercise initiative in making reasoned, ethical decisions.

COMMUNICATORS
We express ourselves confidently and creatively in more than one language and in many ways. We collaborate effectively, listening carefully to the perspectives of other individuals and groups.

PRINCIPLED
We act with integrity and honesty, with a strong sense of fairness and justice, and with respect for the dignity and rights of people everywhere. We take responsibility for our actions and their consequences.

OPEN-MINDED
We critically appreciate our own cultures and personal histories, as well as the values and traditions of others. We seek and evaluate a range of points of view, and we are willing to grow from the experience.

CARING
We show empathy, compassion and respect. We have a commitment to service, and we act to make a positive difference in the lives of others and in the world around us.

RISK-TAKERS
We approach uncertainty with forethought and determination; we work independently and cooperatively to explore new ideas and innovative strategies. We are resourceful and resilient in the face of challenges and change.

BALANCED
We understand the importance of balancing different aspects of our lives—intellectual, physical, and emotional—to achieve well-being for ourselves and others. We recognize our interdependence with other people and with the world in which we live.

REFLEXIVE
We thoughtfully consider the world and our own ideas and experience. We work to understand our strengths and weaknesses in order to support our learning and personal development.

The IB learner profile represents 10 attributes valued by IB World Schools. We believe these attributes, and others like them, can help individuals and groups become responsible members of local, national and global communities.
Learning goals

To understand how the concept of agency can be supported in a Primary Years Programme (PYP) context.

Learn about

Agency, Assessment

School context

The American International School of Kuwait (AIS), Kuwait

The content has been adapted in collaboration with Taryn and her students to support PYP educators to learn about the concept of agency.

Taryn and her students share examples of how student agency is present in their classroom community. It all started when they were asked to Skype into a PYP workshop to discuss student agency. In preparation, they brainstormed everything that contributed to students experiencing a sense of ownership over their own learning—and they shared their story with the participants of the workshop.

This learning story summarises the feedback that students in this classroom shared with their teacher.
### Setting up the classroom

Students shared that being invited to set up the classroom at the beginning of the year helped them to have a voice in decisions about their learning and how the classroom could be set up to support their learning.

### Choice and trust

Students shared the importance of choice and trust in feeling agentic. Choice in where to learn, how to learn and who to learn with were identified as factors that helped them have agency in their learning. They also shared the importance of having trust from their teacher to test out different options and having space to make mistakes and wrong choices along the way. It was often experiencing choices that blocked or hindered their learning that had the biggest impact on getting to know themselves as learners.

### Making decisions together

Students reflected that being able to participate in decisions usually made by the teacher helped them feel like they had a voice. They specifically pointed out our classroom board—where they could identify problems, ideas and questions. They explained how, during daily morning meetings, the routine of going through the board and collectively solving problems, agreeing on ideas and answering questions helps them experience more control over their lives as students.

### Planning their own day

The one thing that students identified as helping them experience the most agency as learners was the opportunity to plan their own day. This has been an ongoing experiment and has taken many forms along the way—but the main idea is having students write their own day plans.
Students identified the assessment of prior knowledge (or time capsules) we do at the beginning of each unit as playing a role in helping them to own their own learning. They explained that this helps them know themselves and identify what they already know and can do before a unit starts. This helps them know where they are and where they need to go.

One specific version of students planning their own day is “Creativity Thursday”. Students explained that this provided them with the most ownership over their learning because—unlike other days, when they are planning their days around teacher-planned units or the school-chosen curriculum—on Thursdays, they have the ultimate choice over not only when, how and where to learn, but also what to learn. On Thursday, they are able to truly pursue passions, interests and curiosity of their own choosing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment of prior knowledge</th>
<th>Creativity Thursday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students identified the assessment of prior knowledge (or time capsules) we do at the beginning of each unit as playing a role in helping them to own their own learning. They explained that this helps them know themselves and identify what they already know and can do before a unit starts. This helps them know where they are and where they need to go.</td>
<td>One specific version of students planning their own day is “Creativity Thursday”. Students explained that this provided them with the most ownership over their learning because—unlike other days, when they are planning their days around teacher-planned units or the school-chosen curriculum—on Thursdays, they have the ultimate choice over not only when, how and where to learn, but also what to learn. On Thursday, they are able to truly pursue passions, interests and curiosity of their own choosing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Three-way conferences</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students reflected that our approach to three-way conferences also helped support their sense of student agency. Being able to share their thoughts and perspectives about their own learning first—before hearing from their parent or teacher—helped them feel that the learning is theirs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students' perspectives on examples of agency

[Diagram showing Stars and Wishes with categories like Open-minded, Social skills, Communication skills, Tolerance, Respect, Reflective]
Learning about learning

I believe that investing in the first month of school for students to learn about learning and learn about themselves as learners sets the stage well for the rest of the year. Students feel that their community is a place where they have opportunities to voice opinions, where they are consulted in decisions that affect them, where they can make choices and ultimately experience a sense of ownership over their learning.

Assessment

In addition to assessment of prior knowledge, our approach to assessment in general this year has helped students to feel more agency in their learning. Approaching assessment as something you do with students—not to students—has helped them experience more ownership and voice in the process of assessing and evaluating their learning. Students are actively involved in co-constructing success criteria. They use feedback based on these criteria to modify and improve their learning. This supports students’ development of self-efficacy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning plans</th>
<th>Learning from each other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taking the time to purposefully plan their learning, based on personal learning goals, has also helped students be in charge of their learning. By taking data from the assessment of prior knowledge, and then planning what they wanted to learn, how they wanted to learn, how they were going to get feedback and how they will know if they achieved their learning goal, students were put in the driver’s seat of their own learning.</td>
<td>Building a culture where students see one another as valuable sources of learning, assistance and feedback has also helped students to be able to take ownership of pursuing learning through multiple avenues—not only depending on the teacher in the room.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Shifting from mandatory to optional

This year, as much as possible, I have tried to move away from things that are mandatory for students (often decided, organized and arranged by their teacher). I tried to take things that students are usually obliged to participate in, and reimagine a way to make them optional.

Supporting student initiatives

I think it is important to create a culture of trial and initiative. This starts with feelings of belonging, trust and reciprocity within the classroom community. Whether it is an idea to label the garbage cans, the desire for a height poster, a proposal for a field trip or a suggestion for action, I believe that honouring and supporting students’ initiatives, both inside and outside of the classroom, has helped students notice and be aware of their own agency. Knowing that their ideas matter and are listened to is an instrumental part of this process. As a group, we consider consequences, connections and the impact of action.

Teacher transparency

I think it has also been important that I share my goals to develop student agency with my class. I think there should be no “secret teacher business” and that my students, their parents, my colleagues and administrators can all have a part to play in helping me work towards my goal. Being open and honest about my goals was a great first step, but then taking the initiative to ask for feedback about my goals was really what helped me reflect and grow along the way.
First impressions

1. How do you involve students with establishing a classroom community at the beginning of the year?
2. How does agency support children with developing skills and dispositions? Can you give some examples of this in the text?
3. What is your perspective on the idea of “assessment as something you do with students—not to students”?
4. What connections can you make between agency and the “assessment-capable student”?

Deepening your understanding

1. What is your perspective on “Creativity Thursday”?
2. What kind of opportunities do your students have to make independent choices about their learning?
3. Taryn writes that the creation of learning plans puts learners “in the driver’s seat of their own learning”. How do you think this supports students’ sense of agency?
4. What is your perspective on “I tried to take things that students are usually obliged to participate in, and reimagine a way to make them optional”? How could you envision this for your students?

Next steps

As a teaching team, discuss what steps you can take as a result of reading this learning story.

Supporting student agency
The IB wishes to thank the author and school for their time and effort in making this teacher support material.

Appearance of branded products and well-known logos in this TSM is incidental. The IBO disclaims any endorsement by, or any association with the Intellectual property rights owners of these products and logos.