

## "Creating an IB *Ethos* in an IB World School"

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Good morning, Kalimera!

*Ethos*, is a Greek word that means disposition, character

This *ethos*, I believe, needs to reflect the IBO Mission statement:

**The International Baccalaureate Organization 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 IBO 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.**

On a recent visit to a school, I was touched by the daily practice to create a peaceful world. Posters by students from primary through secondary school decorated the hallways and depicted the horrors of war and that nastiness between people hurts. Pupils, randomly approached, were conversant with statistics of the dead in the war in Iraq and in Dafur, as well as the recent war in Lebanon, and of

how much money the military-industrial complex of various countries make every month selling arms. At assembly, the entire school listened tot the experiences of a child-soldier in Africa, from his own words and songs. The students and teachers were imbued in the world peace movement, an *ethos* that dovetails very well with the IBO mission statement to create a better and more peaceful world.

Another, a European secondary school, impressed me with the way it encouraged students to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners by making sure this *ethos* permeated the entire student body. The students and teachers tackled several daunting projects at once, to improve the world and themselves. A particularly moving one involved a yearlong discussion on world hunger in all their subjects, and including a Hunger Banquet (*explain*) and a campaign to secure funds for travel and food for the entire 2<sup>nd</sup> year Diploma students and their teachers to travel to Maputo. They spent a week cruising the city at night, feeding hungry kids, talking to them. They made commitments to local shelters and agencies to continue the work from home. These active and compassionate students and their teachers embodied the IBO mission statement to help to create a better through intercultural understanding and respect.

As a third example, I can tell you about a boarding school ensconced in rugged, mountainous terrain, hours away from the nearest city, where the students engaged in their Diploma programme with energy and passion. Their teachers, who lived on campus, were enthusiastic and motivated to go beyond the classroom in discussions and analysis that continued over meals or weekend hikes. The academic aspect of the IB *ethos*, with its challenging programme and its rigorous assessment was superbly accomplished here.

I know... Truly inspiring examples and you are no doubt thinking: “How on earth will I be able to create this IB *ethos* in my school?”

I would invite you to take one step at a time, as creating an IB *ethos* in a school, with any of the IB programmes, is a tall order...

My idea this morning, is to share my IB experience as a DP Coordinator, teacher, deputy-chief examiner, workshop leader and lately Associate regional manager for the Diploma at IBAEM in Geneva, and to communicate to you some strategies and thoughts for promoting international-mindedness, creating an enthusiastic IB teaching staff, and generating an exciting learning environment for students. I believe this to be the basis for the critical mass required in truly creating the *ethos* distilled in the IBO mission statement.

In these turbulent times, where war is constantly in the news, a deep awareness of its origins, practices and consequences needs to be part of education. During the recent war in Lebanon, some schools actually looked up the schools in Lebanon in our web page, and communicated with them, to see how they could help. Some were able to help support day camps for children in Beirut, an initiative from some local Diploma students. Your school community can be encouraged in such ventures.

There are naturally other ways to advance international-mindedness in schools at an administrative level. An excellent one is to promote self-taught languages A1. By organizing shared World Literature components with your mainstream Language A1, students nurture their own cultural roots and share them with the rest of their classmates. Parents can be instrumental in supporting this, as self-taught candidates may be tutored by their parents. As a corollary of the language needs of students, it is very important to create a support network for students who are non-native speakers of the working language of the school. Recently, I visited a school that had a full year Academic English programme for foreign students in the year prior to beginning the DP, so that students could develop their English language skills within the sheltered setting of their academic courses. They learned the tenets and jargon of each subject and were able to improve their language skills as well.

Cultivating a spirit of internationalism in a fairly homogenous school can be a special challenge. In various subjects, attention can be given to dealing with genealogy, migration and immigration statistics in the region or country and even the number and reasons for ex-pats in or outside of the school community.

Also at the administrative level, it is possible to widen links through local associations of schools. In our region, IBAEM, these have been formed in Kenya, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the UK, and also a sub regional association, MEIBA, for schools in the Middle East. Forming ties between these associations can only help in promoting international-mindedness that will translate into cultural, CAS or other exchanges between countries in the region. In addition, the associations can share valuable information for their students by creating databases, such as school to university transition studies and statistical studies of student results. Friendly agreements of a practical nature can also be made, such as the

willingness to accept Retake candidates from other schools in the region.

But I believe cultivating an enthusiastic IB teaching staff is paramount in generating an exciting learning environment for students. By setting a standard of excellence that is high, by sharing responsibility for the programme with teachers, so that both administration and teachers are accountable, by having clear objectives and goals for the programme in the school, the success of the programme and the creation of an IB *ethos* in the school is far more likely.

It is also important to reflect upon the IB DP teacher's role and status in a school. Under no circumstances should DP teachers form an *elite* within a school staff, as this situation can only breed negative feelings. Teachers who do not teach DP subjects can and should also participate in supervising Extended Essays, for example. In fact, teachers throughout the school, if it is a primary

and secondary school, may do so. In my school, we had a 3rd grade teacher who was a WWI buff and was eminently capable of supervising history EE's on that subject. It is worthwhile for DP Coordinators to send out a questionnaire about the areas of knowledge of the entire staff. It also builds the IB *ethos* in the entire school, creating a team approach.

Speaking of schools that include primary and secondary schools, I would like to share another personal experience in this regard. At one point, when my children were little, I chose to teach 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade mornings only in a school very close to my home a few years, instead of continuing at the far away International School. This school was just coming into the IB DP. I will never forget that the school's headmaster came to the primary school staff meeting to tell us that we, as primary school teachers, were vital in beginning to develop in the children the cognitive thinking skills necessary to create analytical and critical thinkers for the DP later on. In those years (the '80's) there was no PYP, of course, or IB

learner's profile, but clearly these last two would feed on these skills. I was thrilled, as a teacher, to be able to form part of such a project, and promptly set about having my 7 year old 2<sup>nd</sup> graders research and write about local birds and their habits, in order to build bird boxes for them. By researching the diameters of the entrances to these bird boxes, we were able to cater to diverse birds. Last time I drove by the school, about a year ago, the bird boxes were still being used by wrens, swallows and other birds. Later I was invited to the graduation of these students, who still remember having discovered bibliographies at that tender young age, since they were asked to list two sources in their research! They also remembered being asked to think WHY at all times and to defend their opinions and knowledge.

One of the biggest attractions of the IB programmes to IB teachers, is the continuing professional development it affords. It improves the quality of teaching and the life of teachers. Regarding DP teachers, for instance, in addition to required teacher workshops,

teachers with some IB DP experience can become assistant examiners. I remember the feeling very well, when a travelling Chief Examiner came to give a workshop in my country, in the very far southern cone of the Americas, and told me about applying to become an assistant examiner in History. His words were: “It’ll make you a better teacher.” He was so right! And of course I shared my assessment knowledge with my colleagues at school and with my students, so there is a definite ripple effect. It is also wise to take advantage of the opportunity for teachers to be observers at curriculum development and grade awards meetings at IBCA, and eventually, to apply for workshop leader training. From a teacher’s point of view, I can only recommend this heartily, having had the opportunity to engage in all of these wonderful instances for professional growth.

A valued teacher, who becomes convinced of the high standards, moral and academic, of the IBO, can only enhance the IB *ethos* in a school.

Finally, I would also like to share one last important experience that can strengthen all your programmes, but especially the DP. This is about the library and the librarian. Every year huge gaps are revealed in the extended essay reports, in areas such as the research process, choice of sources and resources, evaluation of materials and sources, citing and referencing, bibliographies, plagiarism and its avoidance, general presentation. Comments are made, year after year after year, in subject after subject after subject, not only in extended essays, but also in internal assessments. These areas are not the exclusive role of the librarian, of course, as teachers supervise extended essays and IA's. Yet librarians are information specialists and do have expertise in these areas – and if librarians are not involved in filling the gaps, then it could be that nobody is – and the students suffer, often throwing away extended essay marks unnecessarily, as well as making for harder, catch-up work in the future, at university and in the work-place. The message here is that

librarians need to be cultivated and included as part of the staff. For schools that include a primary and a secondary school, the librarian can teach process skills, study skills, learning skills, academic survival skills, and life skills, also at MYP and PYP level. Librarians can also be instrumental in helping students and teachers to gather information about other countries, about current events, about wars and their cost to humanity, contributing to create an IB *ethos* in your school.

I have shared a few pointers and thoughts based upon my observations, which I hope will provide material for reflection and discussion in your schools. Ultimately, no rote or mechanical imposition of measures will prosper, unless the IB philosophy dovetails with the school's and is incorporated into the *ethos* of the school.

It IS possible. I encourage you to take up the challenge!

I now invite you sit in silence for a little while and reflect a bit,  
then jot down some comments or questions for discussion.

Ideas, and experiences in implementing mission statement at your  
school?

HUNGER BANQUET?

Retake candidates?