

RESEARCH SUMMARY

“Caring” across the International Baccalaureate continuum

Summary developed by the IB Research department, based on a report prepared by:

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Background

This study aimed to develop a better understanding of the role of “caring” across the continuum of IB programmes. Caring is one of the ten attributes which comprise the International Baccalaureate’s (IB) learner profile. The IB defines the learner profile as “the IB mission statement translated into a set of learning outcomes of the 21st century” (IBO, 2014). The caring learner profile attribute states that:

“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” (IBO, 2013).

This study had two broad objectives. First, it aimed to establish the extent to which students in IB World Schools are caring, and secondly, it sought to understand how IB World Schools attempt to develop a disposition of caring among their students.

Research design

Data for this study was generated from a mixed methods research design with data collected from several sources. Research methods included student

surveys (N = 2,155), website analysis, focus groups with staff (N = 56) and students (N = 218) and interviews with various staff members in the case study schools (N = 93). The student survey was designed to measure several dimensions of caring and pro-social behaviour as well as the impact of the pupils’ school on behaviour.

The schools participating in this research were all continuum schools, meaning—for the purposes of this study—that they offered the Primary Years Programme (PYP), Middle Years Programme (MYP) and Diploma Programme (DP). All schools were international schools and included schools from South-east Asia, Europe and the Middle East/North Africa.

Findings

Student survey results

The table below details the number of participants as well as demographic information for the six schools that participated in the student survey.

Overall findings

Survey data showed that students scored highly when rated on the extent to which they demonstrated

| School | Number of respondents | Gender | | Religion | | | Languages |
|---------------------|-----------------------|------------|------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| | N (% of sample) | Male | Female | No religious belief | Religious belief but not member | Member of a religion | Average no. spoken |
| Alpha | 672 (31%) | 48% | 52% | 36% | 14% | 50% | 2.3 |
| Beta | 252 (12%) | 46% | 54% | 34% | 20% | 46% | 2.2 |
| Gamma | 291 (14%) | 48% | 52% | 1% | 4% | 95% | 2.9 |
| Delta | 224 (10%) | 47% | 53% | 4% | 10% | 86% | 2.5 |
| Epsilon | 447 (21%) | 45% | 55% | 26% | 17% | 57% | 2.4 |
| Zeta | 269 (12%) | 43% | 57% | 38% | 17% | 45% | 3.2 |
| Total sample | 2,155 | 46% | 54% | 25% | 14% | 61% | 2.4 |

Table 1. Descriptive information for survey sample

perspective taking, empathic concern and a range of attitudes and behaviours linked to caring. While the report does not make comparisons to non-IB students, the evidence suggests that students in the case study schools display an ethic of care. Moreover, the vast majority of students agreed or strongly agreed that their school teaches them to be more caring.

Between programme differences

Scores were largely consistent across IB programmes, with little evidence to suggest that students in different programmes are inclined to be more or less caring. The survey did suggest that students in the DP were less likely to score highly on perspective taking or on the degree to which their school “taught” them to be caring. This may reflect some age-related issues whereby students at this stage in their schooling necessarily become focused on a narrower conception of academic success.

Between school differences

Differences between individual schools were more notable than differences between programmes. Among the six schools that participated in the survey, students from two schools (Alpha and Beta) had higher self-ratings in relation to both caring dispositions and the factors that might contribute to an increased disposition to care (Tables 2 and 3). Both schools were examined in subsequent case studies to more closely explore school practices that may account for these differences, while also investigating understandings

and enactments of caring practices at the four other case study schools.

School practices that may encourage caring

Building on the quantitative survey, the qualitative case studies draw attention to particular actions and practices of both schools, and the IB, to consider which may encourage caring behaviour. Some of these practices are summarized below.

Creating a culture of caring

One of the features that emerged most strongly from this study is that a caring disposition among young people is best developed in schools where caring is woven into the fabric of the institution. This emerged very strongly in all of the schools that participated in the study. Caring was seen as fundamental to learning, a pre-condition without which effective learning was much less likely to take place. As one teacher noted:

“I feel that with these little kids that they really do need to have that feeling of being ‘cared’ for ... and ‘caring’ for others before they can really ... you know feel comfortable enough to learn academically ... and so you have to kind of establish that ... that level of ‘caring’ ... just in order to be able to move on through the school”.

Additionally, interview participants emphasized the importance of leadership and the need for school leaders to foster a caring culture. Principally, this involved the modelling of caring as well as practical actions. Leaders have a critical role in setting the tone

| | Alpha | | Beta | | Gamma | | Delta | | Epsilon | | Zeta | | F |
|----------------------------------|-----------|------|------------|------|-----------|------|-------------|------|------------|------|------------|------|----------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | |
| Perspective taking | 3.24 | 0.53 | 3.24 | 0.48 | 3.24 | 0.50 | 3.21 | 0.49 | 3.18 | 0.51 | 3.18 | 0.54 | 1.25 |
| Empathic concern | 3.07 | 0.47 | 3.07 | 0.45 | 3.11 | 0.46 | 3.09 | 0.47 | 3.08 | 0.44 | 3.03 | 0.53 | 0.86 |
| Caring behaviour | 3.59 c | 0.65 | 3.58 c | 0.65 | 3.22 c | 0.61 | 3.28 ab | 0.66 | 3.43 bd | 0.66 | 3.48 cd | 0.77 | 17.86*** |
| Caring school environment | 3.66 a | 0.85 | 3.69 a | 0.80 | 3.23 b | 0.84 | 3.26 b | 0.86 | 3.36 b | 0.92 | 3.31 b | 0.98 | 19.44*** |
| Taught caring | 4.02 a | 0.79 | 4.05 ab | 0.79 | 3.8 bc | 0.81 | 3.89 abc | 0.83 | 3.72 cd | 0.87 | 3.54 d | 1.01 | 19.97*** |

Table 2. Average caring “scores” for each dimension by school

Note. In table 2, mean values for items are based on a 5-point scale. ***p<0.001 **p<0.01 *p<0.05. Means sharing the same letters are not significantly different from one another (Tukey post hoc, p<0.05).

| | Alpha | Beta | Gamma | Delta | Epsilon | Zeta | χ ² |
|-----------------------------------|-------|------|-------|-------|---------|------|----------------|
| Caring behaviour in school | 2031 | 774 | 837 | 672 | 1298 | 708 | 45.49*** |
| Pro-social behaviour | 2889 | 1164 | 1238 | 989 | 1932 | 1159 | 21.97*** |

Table 3. Number of students engaging in caring acts and pro-social behaviour

Note. ***p<0.001.

within their institution, and leadership emerged as a key factor in creating the conditions in which caring cultures can flourish. Although school principals are critical to fostering a caring culture, leadership in this case means all those who may be considered to have leadership roles, whether formal or informal.

Modelling

As noted above, modelling was identified across all case study schools as nurturing caring behaviour. In every school, teachers spoke of the importance of modelling caring conduct to students, but in many of these instances, it was assumed that students would learn from this modelling through a process of osmosis. For instance, a principal articulated the view that simply “doing” is enough, and that caring was “caught” rather than “taught”. In “accidental modelling”, the student is constructed as an observer, as passive and as an absorber of knowledge and skills that are transmitted by the teacher. In “conscious modelling”, the student is constructed as a co-participant, and as actively engaged with constructing knowledge and skills alongside the teacher. The researchers suggest that frameworks for more effective conscious modelling could be provided by the IB.

A language of care

The researchers further noted that in several schools, teachers believed that in some contexts synonyms for caring needed to be adopted that were more culturally appropriate. In addition, they wanted more nuanced language that allows more room for cultural interpretation than does the current IB definition of caring. While the overwhelming majority of teachers were clear that they did not want the IB to prescribe practice for caring, the report authors suggest that there is an opportunity for the IB to offer a richer language for discussing this learner profile attribute, and to provide some guidance on effective frameworks for doing so.

Leveraging the curriculum to develop caring students

Lastly, many of those interviewed in this study believed that the IB curriculum offers opportunities to make caring a central concern of schooling. The position of caring within the learner profile affords a status and privilege that encourages teachers to place caring at the core of their teaching. Indeed, the survey data suggests that IB programmes may be more likely to encourage formal caring activities within the curriculum. Caring in the curriculum, however, is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for a caring school ethos, although it can be a useful catalyst. Both teachers and older

students expressed the views that the relationship between thought and action was essential for caring, that the IB curriculum emphasized caring and that the IB curriculum was special in paying attention to community service. The research highlighted the need for teachers to exploit the opportunities provided by IB programmes to ensure that a commitment to caring is central to learning and underlined that it is important to “protect” this dimension of the curriculum, particularly in later years when academic pressures intensify.

Conclusions

Caring as the heart of teaching and learning

The pedagogical principles that underpin IB programmes recognize, and indeed emphasize, that learning is a social process. Such learning must be underpinned by an ethic of care in which all those involved as teachers and students share an interest in supporting the learning of each other. This study has highlighted the importance of creating cultures in schools that have at their foundation an ethic of care.

However, care is not something that flows in one direction from teacher to student, but should be seen as an aspect of the organizational culture that radiates in all directions. Caring makes a difference when everyone in a community recognizes their responsibility to care for everyone else. The authors argue that “caring” should be reframed in the context of social solidarity in which individual self-interest is underpinned by a commitment to reciprocity and the common good.

The schools in this study valued the emphasis the IB places on holistic education in general, and pro-social learning in particular, through the learner profile. They also valued the flexibility they are given to enact this philosophy in their own community, and saw the importance of school leadership in enabling them to respond flexibly to cultural differences at the national and school level. While it is clear that schools do not want detailed prescriptions about how to incorporate caring into their curriculum, further advice and guidance from the IB in this area could be beneficial. Additionally, schools could benefit from further guidance on effective modelling and dialogue, and a richer language for ensuring continuity in discussing caring behaviour across the programmes.

References

IBO (International Baccalaureate Organization) (2013). IB learner profile available online at <http://www.ibo.org/contentassets/fd82f70643ef4086b7d3f292cc214962/learner-profile-en.pdf>. Accessed 16th May 2015.

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This summary was developed by the IB Research department. A copy of the full report is available at ibo.org/en/about-the-ib/research/. For more information on this study or other IB research, please email research@ibo.org.

To cite the full report, please use the following:

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