

The incorporation of the International Baccalaureate learner profile in Chicago Public Schools' Middle Years Programmes

Summary developed by IB Research based on a report prepared by:

Ann Marie Ryan, Charles Tocci, David Ensminger, Catur Rismiati and Ahlam Moughania
Loyola University Chicago



Background

The International Baccalaureate (IB) learner profile articulates ten attributes, including both academic and social-emotional traits, that students develop through their educational experiences. The development of learner profile attributes is a central goal of an IB education. As with all of the IB programme models, the learner profile is situated at the centre of the Middle Years Programme (MYP) model (figure 1).

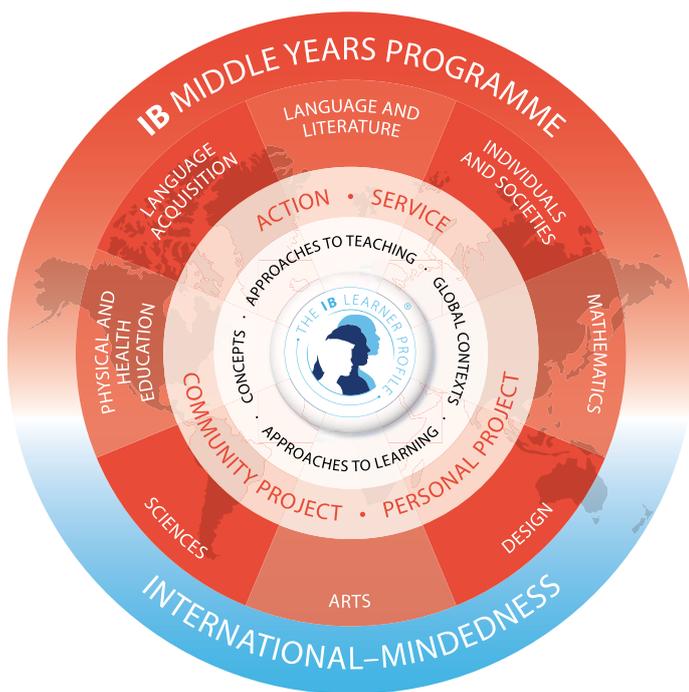


Figure 1: The MYP model

This study explores how teachers understand the learner profile and integrate it into their teaching practice. Specifically, the study examines how the learner profile is incorporated into instructional practice within the context of the MYP in Chicago Public Schools (CPS).

Research design

This study involved a multi-phase, mixed-methods research design. In phase 1 of the study, all CPS MYP teachers and coordinators were surveyed about their incorporation of the learner profile. Phase 2 consisted of four case studies, which were carried out in order to gather in-depth qualitative data about learner profile incorporation by MYP teachers and schools. Research methods included interviews with MYP coordinators and administrators, focus groups with teachers, classroom observations and a review of curriculum materials. To reflect the diversity of the MYP across the district, two of

the programmes were in middle schools (MYP years 1–3) and two were in high schools (MYP years 4–5).

Findings

The data collected through this study presented a wide range of findings about the ways in which the learner profile is incorporated into the MYP in CPS. This section highlights both quantitative findings from the survey and qualitative findings from the case study schools.

Teacher understanding of the learner profile

- Although teachers, coordinators and administrators varied somewhat in how they understood the role of the learner profile, they saw the learner profile as a central component of the programme. Across schools, the purpose of the learner profile was often connected to helping students develop holistically. As one coordinator explained:

"I think the IB learner profile works ... to develop characteristics of the whole student to ensure that they will be successful lifelong learners ... profile traits really focus on specific areas to ensure student success".

- Teachers across the MYP in CPS indicated a high level of familiarity with the learner profile overall, and with each attribute (figure 2). In the survey, the average familiarity score with the learner profile was 4.27 (on a scale of 1–5), which can be interpreted as "very familiar".
- In spite of considerable variation in practice, teachers expressed confidence in their ability to incorporate learner profile attributes into teaching, and reported doing so frequently (figure 2). The mean confidence score was 3.86, which suggests a fairly high level of confidence (using a scale from 1 = "almost not at all confident" to 5 = "extremely confident"). This incorporation can be characterised generally as seeking opportunities within regular classroom practice to identify or integrate attributes.
- Staff at the case study schools believed they were able to influence students' development of learner profile attributes, although this ability seemed to depend at times on certain factors, such as student age. Some teachers felt that students in the later years of the MYP brought with them varying levels of attribute development.

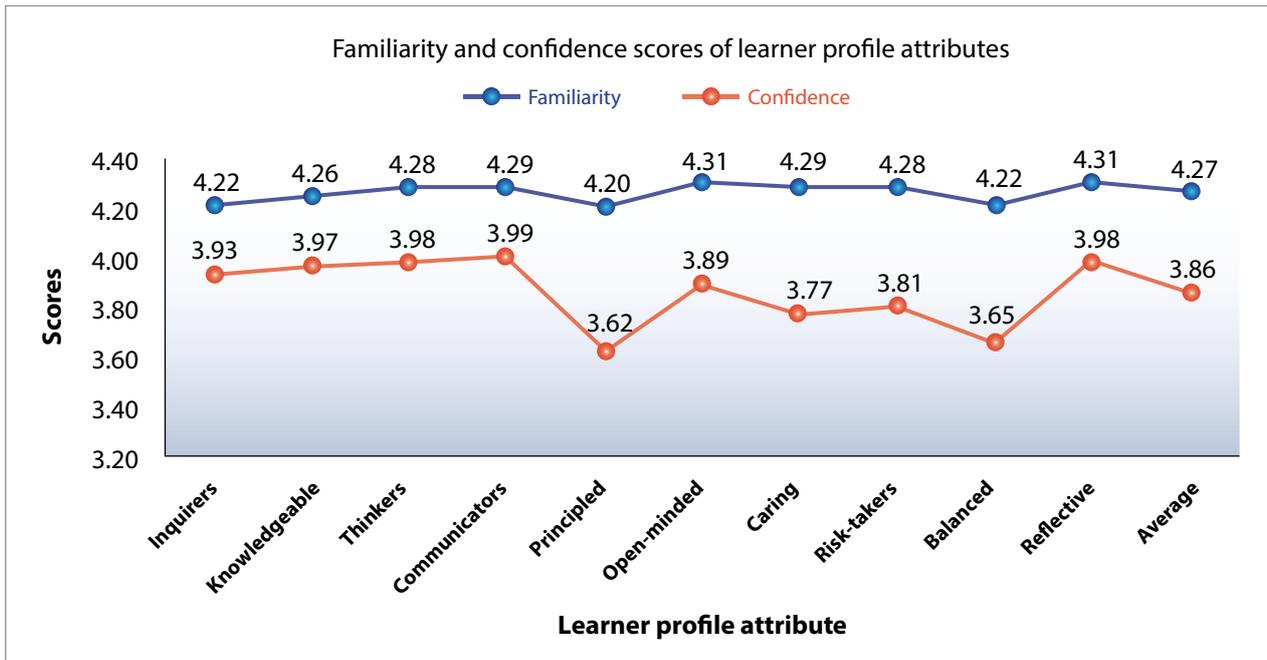


Figure 2: Familiarity and confidence scores of learner profile attributes (survey findings)

Incorporation of the learner profile into teaching practice

- Across the district, the researchers found wide variation in the incorporation of the learner profile, which was often based on differing understandings of the learner profile and its purposes.
- Teachers noted that some attributes were easier than others to integrate. In the survey, teachers reported that “knowledgeable” was the easiest attribute for them to incorporate into practice, while “risk-takers” was the least likely to be integrated. Interestingly, the interview and focus group data pointed to different attributes being easier or more challenging to integrate. For example, “caring” was noted in interviews as an easier attribute to highlight in the classroom. This discrepancy between the survey and interview data could suggest that educators have diverging ideas about the meaning of each attribute and how the learner profile functions.
- Teachers commonly talked about the content of their subject area as lending itself to learner profile incorporation. One language and literature teacher noted:

“When we have characters, oftentimes I’ll ask students to identify learner profile traits of the characters, perhaps where a character fell short in achieving that [attribute] based on a choice that they made. I find that I’m able to really nicely integrate it into the content in a way that the students can kind of connect to in a meaningful way”.

- In the classroom observations, researchers found little evidence of the explicit use of the language of the learner profile. In further conversations, however, teachers and coordinators did describe strategies and efforts to promote awareness of the learner profile among students. A common strategy across the case study schools was some form of “student of the month” or other type of student recognition aligned to the attributes. Another common strategy was the use of reflection activities or prompts at the end of units.
- Some teachers experienced challenges in incorporating the learner profile into their teaching—particularly new teachers who were struggling to implement multiple components of the programme framework simultaneously. Clearly, this challenge is compounded when there is high teacher turnover. Additionally, students entering the MYP without prior experience of IB programmes was perceived as another implementation barrier.

Support and resources for incorporating the learner profile

- The survey indicated that three types of support were used most frequently, and were found to be the most useful by teachers: “IB-authored guides and materials”, “school MYP workshops and meetings” and “ongoing coaching from fellow teachers”. Teachers and coordinators generally perceived school-based and district-based training and resources to be the most helpful.

- There was wide agreement among teachers from all schools that the MYP coordinator plays a key role in supporting teachers' learning and incorporation of the learner profile. In turn, coordinators noted that their own learning about the learner profile originates from their professional development experiences, for example, being part of the IB Educator Network (IBEN) or participating in district-wide meetings for coordinators.
- Many teachers expressed the need for further support and opportunities to learn about the learner profile and each of the attributes. While the IB-authored guides were noted as useful, one consistent call across schools was for more detailed examples of attributes being incorporated into practice. Some teachers suggested that videos demonstrating effective incorporation of the learner profile, as well as peer observation, could be very useful.
- Consider providing more curricular guidance on how to create opportunities and activities that allow students to develop learner profile attributes. Ideally, this guidance would help schools to develop attributes in students by building on their intellectual capabilities and cultural assets within their local context, while also making global connections. Clearer connections could also be made between the learner profile and international mindedness.
- Cultivate more local resources to support school- and district-planned incorporations of the learner profile into practice. Additionally, given the pivotal role of coordinators, the IB could consider ways to further support the professional development of coordinators with regard to the learner profile.

Recommendations

Based on findings and analysis from the study, the researchers have provided the following recommendations for consideration.

- Consider developing support materials that further explain, situate and articulate the purpose and function of the learner profile.

This summary was developed by the IB Research department. A copy of the full report is available at ibo.org/en/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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