



RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

Transcultural capability and the Primary Years Programme

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

Lucas Walsh and Nirajan Casinader
Monash University

Background

Rapid increases in the international movement of people have meant that national populations—and within them, cohorts of school-aged students—are increasingly culturally diverse, creating both challenges and opportunities for teachers in navigating this diversity. As a result, it is increasingly important for teachers to possess the cultural capability to cater to this diversity as a professional attribute. “Transculturalism” sees cultural variation as a positive rather than a negative (Casinader 2016), and as the norm rather than the exception (Rizvi 2011).

This study aimed to understand how well transcultural skills are being developed and utilized by teachers in schools offering the International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Programme (PYP) in Canada and Australia. Specifically, it measured teachers’ degree of transcultural capability at four PYP schools (three in Canada and one in Australia), enabling an evaluation of their transcultural capability, as well as if and how it impacts their teaching of the PYP.

Research design

This study used individual teacher data (n = 38) to analyse the cultural dispositions of thinking (CDTs) that are exemplified and practiced by the teacher communities in the four schools. CDTs (Casinader 2014) are states of mind that reflect a particular cultural approach to specific types of thinking skills.

As shown in figure 1, there are five main CDTs, which are not fixed and do not have clear boundaries. At one end are the more individualistic cultural thinkers (IS, IC); at the other, the more collectively or group-minded (CC, CI). In the middle is the transcultural group (TC)—those who can shift between individual- and community-focused ways of

thinking as the occasion demands, and do not see either approach as being naturally superior.

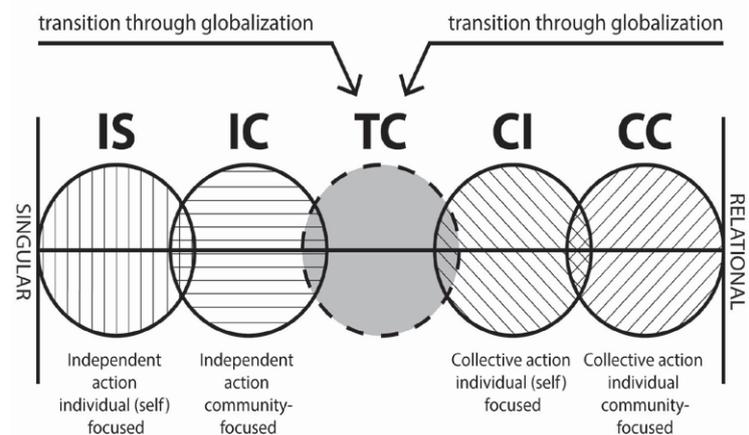


Figure 1. Cultural dispositions of thinking, Casinader 2014

Findings

CDT patterns within schools

A more transcultural approach to teaching reflects a teacher’s willingness to be open to difference and to be far more nuanced in their teaching about difference. All 38 teachers who participated in the study demonstrated some degree of transcultural capability. The dominant pattern across the groups was that the large majority of PYP teachers were either transcultural or one CDT away from it. Half of the teachers interviewed could be said to be transcultural in their approach (TC), with a further quarter (23.7 percent) being more community-centred in their thinking and therefore close to being transcultural (CI). These teachers showed a high degree of personal and professional commitment to the PYP core principles, as well as a high degree of global and cultural awareness.

It is significant, however, that 26.3 percent of the overall cohort can be said to be largely individualistic in their thinking approach—the IC group. It was this particular group that tended to display approaches and attitudes that were less attuned personally to the principles of the PYP, regardless of their professional commitment. However, no teacher across the four schools could be defined as being highly individualistic (IS) or highly group-oriented (CC), which would place them out of sync with the inclusive nature of transculturalism. In general, PYP teachers at all four schools had a cultural mindset that is generally aligned with the openness to difference that is embedded in the IB learner profile and the PYP principles.

Reasons for patterns in transcultural capability

Travel or multicultural teaching experiences

Transcultural teachers tended to have a higher degree of travel experience beyond their location of origin. Significantly, most of the transcultural group had travelled in both personal and professional contexts, highlighting the view that transcultural capability is not just a professional attribute that can be acquired, but more of a personal mindset that needs to be stimulated and nurtured through “globalizing” or multicultural experiences.

Place of birth

Unlike the IC and CI groups, who were all born in one of the two case study countries (Australia and Canada), the transcultural cohort originated in countries that not only included these two countries, but also continental Europe, Africa and South Asia. The teachers in question have undertaken a deeper form of globalizing experience through the act of migration, which may influence transcultural thinking.

PYP convictions

Another measure examined the degree of consistency of the teachers between their reactions to statements on the PYP and transcultural thinking, with rankings in positive numbers reflecting strong support for PYP principles. Teachers in all three CDTs were predominantly in the positive range, and especially so in the transcultural (TC) group. Overall, 80 percent of the cohort was strong in its convictions about the value of the PYP. This indicates a general

affirmation that teachers being employed by PYP schools are personally and professionally invested in the cultural education dimensions included within the programme.

Conclusion

The researchers suggest that the realization of transcultural capability requires a shift in personal attitude, which may or may not result from teaching in multicultural environments. Key to this is the need to move from “thin” experiences and notions of culture to rich transcultural learning and the perception of diversity as a normal state of contemporary life. In the PYP, where the notion of international-mindedness is significant, recruiting and developing teachers with a high degree of transcultural capability can play an important role in developing “inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world” (IB, n.d.).

References

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Rizvi, F. 2011. Diversity within transnationalism. *International Schools Journal*. Vol 13 (Spring). Pp 20–21.

This snapshot 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.

Walsh, L, and Casinader, N. 2018. *Transcultural capability and the Primary Years Programme*. Bethesda, MD, USA. International Baccalaureate Organization.

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