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Crossing Borders towards International Programmes in Primary Schools in Poland

Przekraczając granice w kierunku międzynarodowych programów w szkołach podstawowych w Polsce

KEYWORDS ABSTRACT

international education programmes, international schools, international education, International Baccalaureate, primary schools

The aim of the research in the presented article was to describe and analyze the theoretical premises of the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (IB PYP), and to determine the presence of international schools in Poland, with particular emphasis on primary schools implementing the IB PYP. The article is based on a search for sources, their selection and description. As a result, the facts constituting the subject of the research were interpreted. The analysis of the material was qualitative in nature and included English-language source materials on the IB PYP international education curriculum framework and other documents related to, among other things, the history of the IB PYP international program, the curriculum standards and requirements, assessment system, and teaching methods. The data available on the IB website were used to determine the number of schools implementing the IB international program in Poland. On the basis of the analysis of the IB PYP, we indicated the structure of the program, the key concepts that characterize the program, and the learner profile as the basic element of all international IB programs. Moreover, due to the transdisciplinary nature of the program and the theoretical foundation based on the constructivist theory of learning, the need and possibility of integrating the concepts and standards presented in the IB PYP into the curricula of primary schools in Poland was noted.

SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

edukacyjne
programy
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szkoły
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edukacja
międzynarodowa,
International
Baccalaureate,
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Celem badań w prezentowanym artykule były opis oraz analiza założeń teoretycznych międzynarodowego programu dla szkół podstawowych the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (IB PYP) oraz określenie obecności szkół międzynarodowych w Polsce, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem szkół podstawowych realizujących międzynarodowy program IB PYP. Artykuł powstał na podstawie kwerendy źródeł, ich selekcji i opisu. W efekcie zinterpretowano fakty stanowiące przedmiot badań. Analiza materiału miała charakter jakościowy. Kwerendzie poddane zostały anglojęzyczne materiały źródłowe dotyczące ram programowych międzynarodowej edukacji IB PYP oraz inne dokumenty programowe związane m.in. z historią międzynarodowego programu IB PYP, standardami oraz wymaganiami programowymi, systemem oceniania oraz metodami nauczania. Do opracowania stanu liczby szkół realizujących program międzynarodowy IB w Polsce wykorzystano dane dostępne na stronie internetowej IB. Na podstawie dokonanej analizy programu międzynarodowego IB PYP wskazana została struktura programu, kluczowe pojęcia, które charakteryzują omawiany program, oraz określony został profil ucznia jako podstawowy element wszystkich międzynarodowych programów IB. Ponadto, ze względu na transdyscyplinarny charakter analizowanego programu oraz teoretyczny fundament oparty na konstruktywistycznej teorii uczenia się, zauważa się potrzebę oraz możliwość włączenia koncepcji i standardów prezentowanych w IB PYP do programów kształcenia w szkołach podstawowych w Polsce.

Introduction

International schools and programs have been a growing phenomenon around the world in recent decades. Although the history of international schools is long, never before has their importance been so global and their growth so rapid (Hayden, 2006; Hayden & Thompson, 2008; Bates, 2011; Sayer & Erler, 2012). Some factors that have contributed to the significant increase in the number of international schools in recent years include the opening of borders, the greater mobility of culturally or religiously distinct social groups, and, at the very least, the technologization of everyday life, which is developing at a very rapid pace. Along with changes in the social, economic and cultural spheres, the outlook on education has also evolved. All over the world, the need to revamp education systems is being recognized and new curricula are being explored that, on the one hand, will mold a person who is sensitive, responsible and aware of their potential, and, on the other hand, who will be empowered

with the tools for personal development and competition in the fast-changing job market (Hill, 2012; Harber, 2014; Robinson & Aronica, 2015; Śliwerski, 2015). Given the growing interest in multicultural and intercultural education and the view of the “new” task of education, defined in the Jacques Delors report as “learning to live together with others,” it can be seen that schools and international curricula are becoming laboratories for creating a new dimension of education. Central to this premise is the assumption that the proposed international curricula deal with the education of today’s children, who will soon become adults in a world of many nationalities, cultures, languages and beliefs (Hayden & Thompson, 2008).

From a research standpoint, the importance, functions and development of schools with international education curricula are significant. There is a trend toward an increase in the number of international schools in the non-public school system and, more surprisingly, public schools with international programs. Of course, the issue of education in the context of cultural diversity is widely commented on and analyzed in academic works in Poland. Examples include publications on intercultural education by such authorities as Zbyszko Melosik (2007), Jerzy Nikitorowicz (2009), and Przemysław Grzybowski (2013). The studies of these authors offer an extensive analysis of topics related to culture, identity, borderland and education in a global sense. In recent years, one can also notice a rising interest in the activities of international schools in Poland and the provisions of the international programs they implement. Publications dealing with this topic include the IB International Baccalaureate program and an analysis of the use of the IB international curriculum in public schools (Bem-Wiśniewska, 2013; Żakowska, 2015; Leek, 2020, 2022; Nowak, 2020). In terms of the functioning of international education at the elementary school level, a study was written outlining the IB PYP curriculum framework, with a particular focus on the program’s overarching concept of international mindedness (Waligóra, 2016).

Taking into account the research topics that have already been pursued, but are still underrepresented in the country, namely the functioning of international schools and the international curricula that they implement, the purpose of this article is to show the historical and theoretical background of the organization of international schools and the use of educational international curricula in the world and in Poland. Furthermore, the purpose of this study was to explore and describe the IB PYP international curriculum used in elementary schools, while highlighting those aspects of the curriculum that could be adapted to pedagogical practice in Polish elementary schools. The analysis of the international IB PYP curriculum was based on English-language source materials on the curriculum standards framework for international education, namely: *Making the PYP happen: A curriculum framework for international primary education* (IB PYP, 2007), *The learner* (IB PYP, 2018b), *The Primary Years*

Programme. A basis for practice (IB PYP, 2009), and *Learning and teaching* (IB PYP, 2018a). Data available on the IB website was used to analyze the number of schools implementing the international IB curriculum in Poland.

Theoretical basis

The origins of international education can be traced back to the 17th century pedagogical thought of Jan Amos Comenius. The Czech educator, philosopher and writer is esteemed mainly for his timeless and universal educational ideas, the development of the rudiments of modern didactics and his love of books. The international dimension of education is mainly discussed in Comenius' pansophy, which includes the educational principle of *docere omnes, circa omnia*, that is, to teach everything, about everything, to everyone (Sitarska, 2021). Moreover, Comenius is considered a forerunner of international collaboration in education, science and culture (Piaget, 1993, p. 12). This was to be the purpose of the Collegium Lucis, which was established as a kind of international ministry of education to strengthen international cooperation through the exchange of students, textbooks and innovative teaching methods (Hill, 2012).

Robert Sylvester (2002) argues that a surge of interest in international education could be seen in the mid-19th century at the first world's fair, held in London in 1851. In the following years, education in the global, international and comparative sense was an integral topic at the next fairs in Paris (1855), London (1862), Vienna (1873) and Philadelphia (1876) (Marshall, 2019). The first and only international school in the 19th century was The Spring Grove School in London, which opened in 1866 with the school population made up of students of different nationalities. The originators of the school were three prominent figures of the Victorian era: Richard Cobden, president of the International Educational Society, who staunchly opposed war and imperialism. He believed that a different education system would bring about international harmony and turn citizens of different countries into international ambassadors (Sylvester, 2002); Thomas Huxley, a biologist who advocated the importance of cultivating logical thinking by exploring the relationship between science and society; and Charles Dickens, a writer who believed that creating a network of international schools would develop students' empathy and tolerance for other cultures and nationalities (Walker, 2012). The Spring Grove School was an important educational project that paved the way for more international schools. Sadly, it came to an end in 1889, leaving behind experiences and signposts for "fledgling" international education. International education in the western part of Europe was officially born in 1924, the year when, the International School of Geneva was established out of the needs of a group of parents employed by the League of Nations and the International

Labor Organization in Geneva. From the very beginning, the school was committed to a philosophy of international education. Since then, one can observe the growth of international schools around the world (Hill & Hayden, 2010, p. 18).

When defining international schools and international education, it is difficult to arrive at a uniform terminology, as the history and expansion of these trends in recent decades have been considerable and have developed in different ways. Mary Hayden (2006, p. 11) believes that attempts to define international schools are fraught with risk. She goes on to say that there are many characteristics of international schools, depending on the geographic location, the educational curriculum, and the students and teachers that make up the school community, among other factors. Despite the obstacles to defining international schools, studies are being carried out worldwide that analyze the development of international education and international programs. A 2023 study for The International Schools Consultancy Research (ISC) found that in 2013 there were 8700 international schools worldwide, and by 2023 there were already 13,190. ISC estimated that there are currently 6.5 million students attending international schools. This is a 53% increase from 2013, when the number of students exceeded 4.2 million (ISC Research, 2023).

The International Baccalaureate program in elementary schools in Poland

Doubtless, the rising number of international schools, as well as their diversity and different organization is a highly interesting subject both historically and academically. Nevertheless, one particularly intriguing subject in the field of international education is the use of international programs. With the passage of years, the operation of schools, the activity of people involved in the process of creating and promoting international schools and the desire to standardize the curriculum came the founding of the International Beccalaureate Office (IBO) in 1967. More than 150 countries around the world are members of this organization, including Poland since 1993 (IB, n.d.). The IB offers four programs for different stages of education. The IB Primary Years Program (IB PYP) is implemented for the youngest between the ages of 3 and 12. The organization of the IB and the international programs it offers are some of the most popular among those available in the international education market. Currently, there are 5611 IB World Schools (IB World Schools), of which 2941 are private schools, and 2670 are public schools. In Poland, there is a marked trend of a rapid increase in the number of international schools with the IB program. According to the 2023 IB statistics, there are 65 schools with IB programs in Poland; surprisingly 35 schools are public institutions (IB, n.d.).

In Poland, the IB PYP international elementary school program is implemented in 12 non-public elementary schools, which are located in large urban areas. There are 4 non-public elementary schools with the IB program in Warsaw, 2 in Wrocław, 2 in Szczecin and one school each in Gdańsk, Poznań, Lublin, Krakow and Bydgoszcz (IB, n.d.). The PYP program was designed and made available within the IB organization in 1997 and shares the jointly developed educational concept of all IB programs. Accordingly, the program's overarching goal is to focus on the holistic development of the child, with a special emphasis on developing their international mindedness. The theoretical basis of the program is the constructivist approach to learning. According to this approach, the student is assumed to have beliefs about how the world works, based on their experience and prior knowledge. Beliefs, also known as models or constructs of knowledge, are built, revised and reformulated as a result of the student's own activity and their experiences in the learning process. The PYP program echoes the ideas of Vygotsky, Piaget and Dewey, where, according to exponents of constructivist theory, learning is a process of creating meanings, which are revealed when the student combines new knowledge with existing knowledge (IB PYP, 2009, p. 2). As a consequence, the significant category of inquiry comes to the fore. In a broad sense, it is a process initiated by the student (or teacher) that leads to a change from a starting/baseline level of knowledge to a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon or area. This can mean that the student:

- explores, ponders, questions;
- experiments and considers possibilities;
- makes connections between prior knowledge and current process of learning;
- anticipates and acts deliberately to produce a result;
- collects data and evaluates the findings of the research they conducted;
- creates and tests theories (IB PYP, 2018a).

Inquiry is associated with a student's highly active and engaged attitude, and can take many shapes depending on the degree of curiosity about the world and the student's cognitive needs. The category of inquiry became the starting point in building the structure and educational content of the IB PYP international program. The program consists of three interrelated components, which are expressed as three open-ended questions that support the teacher in reflecting on their practice in relation to student learning.

Table 1 The structure of the IB PYP international program

<i>The written curriculum</i> Teaching content	What do we want to learn?	Definition of the scope of learning content
<i>The taught curriculum</i> Teaching methods	How do we learn best?	Theory and application of learning methods
<i>The assessed curriculum</i> Evaluation criteria and methods	How do we know we have learned?	Theory and application of effective assessment

Based on: IB PYP, 2007, p. 8.

Learning through an international perspective

It is virtually impossible to list and describe all the elements of the analyzed program in this article, so I will only highlight aspects that can become an inspiration for pedagogical practice in Polish schools. First, the learning content (the written curriculum) indicates that the holistic development of the child should be consistent with the simultaneous development of their well-being and civic competencies. It emphasizes the importance of traditional areas of knowledge such as language, mathematics, social sciences, science, art education and physical education. However, the program's authors argue that educating students in strictly defined and separate subjects is insufficient. Ernst Boyer (1995) said that to be truly educated, a student must make connections between disciplines and discover ways to integrate separate areas of knowledge. Boyer's work was groundbreaking in constructing the six transdisciplinary topics that form the core of educational content in the PYP program.

Table 2. Transdisciplinary topics in the IB PYP international program

Transdisciplinary topics	Example areas of knowledge
Who we are	Questions about the nature of self; beliefs, values; mental, physical, social and spiritual health; interpersonal relationships; family, friends, society, culture; what it means to be human.
Where and when we are	Questions about place and time; personal stories, homes and travels; discovery, exploration and migration.

Transdisciplinary topics	Example areas of knowledge
How we express ourselves	Questions about discovering and expressing one's ideas, feelings, culture; ways to consider, expand and admire our creativity.
How the world works	Questions about the natural world and its laws; the relationship between the natural world and humanity.
How we organize ourselves	Questions about the interconnectedness of man-made systems and communities; the structure and functions of organizations.
Sharing the planet	Questions about rights and responsibilities in the struggle to share non-renewable sources with humans and other beings; peace and conflict resolution.

Based on: IB PYP, 2007, p. 12.

The topics are characteristically universal and therefore meaningful to all students from different cultural backgrounds. They allow for the exploration of features of human experience and use knowledge, concepts and skills from traditional subjects to fit in with the transdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning. At this point, it is worth defining the concept of transdisciplinarity, which, according to Basarab Nicolescu, differs from multidisciplinary and interdisciplinarity in its goal of understanding the current world, which cannot be done through disciplinary research (1999, p. 3). In the literature, transdisciplinarity is compared to combining ingredients in a cake. In such a learning process, we can no longer distinguish between the disciplines of knowledge, and the result of this new type of learning is a new, common result. Furthermore, these six topics remain constant throughout the educational cycle (student age 3–12), only the units of inquiry change and become adapted for each class and the individual needs of students and schools. As a result, the student revises and expands the topics many times over the course of their PYP education, so that they ultimately immerse themselves broadly and deeply in these areas of knowledge (IB PYP, 2018a, pp. 2-3).

Another important area worth considering and emulating in terms of educational methods is the special role of the teacher and the student. While the educational content is broad, timeless, and the IB PYP program is general, the teacher must have control over the educational material being taught, the dynamics of the tasks being carried out, and the evaluation of the learning outcomes. The student, in turn, is at the center of the learning process, so he or she inquires, questions, contemplates,

experiences and tests. The student's agency and self-efficacy determine how the learning space is created, what teaching methods are used, and what didactic resources are selected. That is why the IB PYP international program insists that the teacher must have control over the teaching content, while not controlling the students in the process of constructivist acquisition of knowledge and skills (Eaude, 2013, pp. 40–41).

The teacher is the driving force of any school, of the implementation of innovative solutions and the creation of a comfortable environment for students to learn independently. In the IB PYP international program, teacher autonomy is a strong point, as well as a great organizational challenge. The program is heavily steeped in the theory of constructivist learning, so it requires the teacher to have high academic, pedagogical and social competence, and simultaneously to have the freedom to make decisions on the choice of teaching materials, the use of teaching methods, and to be flexible towards the individual needs of the student. In view of this, the IB PYP program stresses that teachers must not assume the role of knowledge providers, instead they are expected to be creators of the curriculum by adapting and exploring interdisciplinary concepts (Hargreaves, 2003).

Among the many interesting aspects of the IB PYP international elementary school program, such as planning the teaching work, assessing student progress, record-keeping, educational leadership, methods of activating students and promoting their involvement, there is the category of the IB Learner Profile (IB PYP). This is a central value of any IB program and constitutes an educational goal in the teaching process. The profile helps the student to develop an international mindset and to actively participate in society. The IB student's profile features ten attitudes that align with the previously mentioned transdisciplinary learning, student proficiency and inquiry in the learning process. An IB international school student is inquisitive, insightful, thoughtful, communicative, principled, free from prejudice, caring, risk-taking, balanced, and reflective. Due to the structure of the IB PYP program, through interaction with students of different cultures, the role of the teacher, and the educational goals, students have opportunities to develop, demonstrate, and reinforce the qualities of the learner profile in their daily activities (IB PYP, 2018b).

Conclusion

In summary, international schools are treated in different ways around the world. On the one hand, these are private schools independent of national policy, attended by the children of foreigners, diplomats and the wealthy. However, there is an emerging trend of international schools being more widely recognized and, in the context of domestic educational policy, becoming an alternative for educating younger

generations through attractive curriculum, innovative teaching methods, the use of a foreign language as a communication tool and an international network of the school community. In addition, it is observed on a global scale that national education systems are reporting demand for the implementation of international curricula, such as the IB, in public schools.

This study shows that The International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program (IB PYP) designed for elementary school is still implemented in Poland on a small scale and only in non-public schools. Nevertheless, given the impact and pace of globalization, increased people migration and, therefore, the growing need for changes in the education system, it can be assumed that the global trends in the development of international education and the experience of international schools in implementing international curricula may become the center of proven and innovative approaches to teaching and learning from an international perspective. The analysis of the structure of the IB PYP program and its key concepts, and the awareness of the challenges faced by the Polish school, lead to the conclusion that there is a need for further research on the application of the IB PYP international program, taking into account the potential of the program's objectives for Polish elementary schools.

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