



MIDDLE MATTERS

SPECIAL ISSUE

IB-MYP AND PRE-AP:

Two Curriculum/Program Options

If your middle school is looking for a curriculum model, pre-AP (Advanced Placement) and IBMYP (International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program) may be worth reviewing. If your high school offers AP courses, the College Board recommends that a district establish a grades 6-12 vertical team to plan appropriately sequenced, correlated and in-depth instruction that helps prepare students to be successful when they get to AP classes. The College Board has professional development materials and workshops for teachers, but does not provide any specific pre-AP curriculum. If your high school offers the International Baccalaureate Program, then the IBMYP may be appropriate. This is an actual five year curriculum for students 11-16 years old. The focus is on interdisciplinary curricula in eight areas designed to foster deep global understanding and strong language abilities. The articles in this issue describe some experiences with these programs.

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Letter from the Co-Chairs

Dear Middle Division Members,

The NAGC division leaders gathered in Washington, DC in March to work on the 2006 program for the annual NAGC conference in Charleston, NC on November 1-5. Thank you to the Middle Grades division reviewers-Diane Heacox, Theresa Jackson, Linda Kubik, Jan Hersh, and Barbara Prichard! Our division had over 40 proposals submitted and 21 of those were chosen for the 2006 program to provide a variety of sessions that we hope will engage all those interested in meeting the needs of gifted students in middle grades. In addition, the Middle Grades Division will host a special Friday evening division event with Dr. Robert Seney and Dr. Susannah Richards featuring recently published quality YA literature and strategies for using these titles with high ability middle grades readers. In terms of the larger conference program, several changes were made to allow for greater interaction among participants, particularly to welcome first-timers. Some changes are also being made in how the main speakers and pre-conference institutes are scheduled. All of these changes are based on feedback from convention attendees and it is hoped that they will contribute to an even better convention in 2006.

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Letter from the Co-Chairs

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What else is new in Middle Grades Gifted? A new technical report, *The Feasibility of High-end Learning in a Diverse Middle School* by Brighton, C. M., Hertberg, H. L., Moon, T. R., & others (05210) is available from the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (www.gifted.uconn.edu). This study was an investigation of staff development programs designed to provide teachers with strategies through which all learners, including gifted, minority, and limited-English proficient students, can be appropriately served in a middle school environment sensitive to diverse learner academic needs. Results suggest that differentiation of instruction and assessment are complex endeavors and should include school realities such as large class sizes, limited resource materials, lack of planning time, and ever-increasing numbers of teacher responsibilities. To read the abstract go to <http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/nrcgt/brighert.html>. The complete report may be ordered for \$30.00 from the NRC/GT.

This issue is focused on the IBMYP and Pre-AP, based on questions from division members and responses to our pre-conference institute last fall. We hope you find it useful information as we continue to develop options for our students in middle grades.

Finally, it is VERY important that all our division members realize that the division, the newsletter, the conference sessions and proposals are only as vital, relevant and alive as the participation of our members. We need to hear from you: topics you'd like to see in the newsletter, ideas you want to share with others, questions you have about serving gifted students in middle schools, materials that you've used that were successful. It's YOUR newsletter and YOUR division. We'll take care of editing, revisions, etc. Just send us your work! Members seem to be particularly interested in programs, curriculum, service models, etc. that are working in various settings. If you have some successful practices, to share, PLEASE DO!

Have a wonderful spring; wherever you are...feel free to contact us with questions, ideas, concerns, feedback. Take good care,

Susan Rakow
susanrakow@earthlink.net

Susannah Richards
susannah@commongroup.net

HOW DO YOU HELP YOUR UNDER-ACHIEVING GIFTED STUDENTS?

Send a sentence, a paragraph, or an entire article on things you do for this special group of gifted and talented middle school children who sometimes fall between the cracks!

Email to jan_hersh@adelphia.net

Finding Interglobal Connections through the Implementation of the International Baccalaureate PYP

Gregory Hayes, M.A.
Exploring Potential Gifted Program
ghayes@litletonaz.org

In the spring of 2003, as a graduate student at Prescott College, I moved to Boulder, Colorado to spend five months taking a close look at the process of implementing the *International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program* at Whittier Elementary School in Boulder, Colorado. In the summer of 2003, this 120 year old school, was authorized as an *IB World School* and changed its name to Whittier International School. Although Whittier had previously experienced a decline in student enrolment because of demographic shifts in Boulder County, the school now enjoys a full student population. In June of 2004, I published Master's thesis at Prescott College titled *Whittier International School: A Culture of Educational Praxis with Global Vision* (2004; this will be available online very soon). My research found that Whittier showed a significant trend toward improved results on standardized assessments. Yet, more interesting to me was the cultural transformation that I witnessed at the school. I believe that it is in the best interest of all of the cultures and people of the Earth to become positively *interglobal* "culture creators as well as culture inheritors" (Fersch, 1993, p. 8). The *IBO* has created a template to accomplish just this. We are, by developing *World Schools*, helping to fashion a new educational culture that is in a constant state of evolution. Within the complex *interglobal* system that is the *IB PYP*, one finds both the old and the new. Through the investigation of an *interglobal* educational culture, there is much to learn.

Is the *IB PYP* the only model in education to support an ideal of positive development within an intercultural orientation toward educational praxis? The *IB PYP* is *not* the only way, but does represent a wise and thoroughly organized educational framework. Many people have, and continue to raise concerns that the *IB* represents a subculture in education that is elitist-oriented and even ethnocentric with its strong orientation – especially in the *IB Diploma* program – toward the traditional academic disciplines. I acknowledge these perceptions, but did not feel any of this elitism while at Whittier in the spring of 2003. What I did feel was a depth of pride, determination, and congruent focus that I think may be relatively rare in elementary schools. At Whittier, the faculty, the students, and the community, all had a synchronized and important purpose in the *IB PYP*. From this purpose many, including myself, found great inspiration. I see no reason why wise educators cannot integrate many of the guiding principles

that are paramount in the implementation of the *IB PYP* framework. However, without the interconnectedness that flows from being integrated into a program with global reach, attempts to replicate the ideals found in this program may well fall short of the possibilities of the intercultural dialogue and educational praxis that I have experienced within the *IB PYP* at Whittier.

In the end, it is not an attachment to a logo or affiliation to a formal group that makes a school great. It is, I believe, that the school has focus, can articulate its views and philosophies, and can attract faculty, staff, parents, and students who are committed to the organization. The end goals must be made visible and be agreed upon by the core community of the school. It is my experience that Whittier has grown to be exceptional because it has become, in Peter Senge's words a "learning community" (1990). In the conscious promotion of intercultural educational praxis with global vision, Whittier has begun to manifest what I consider to be profoundly ideal goals in education.

References:

Fersch, S. (1993). *Integrating the trans-national/cultural dimension*. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa.

Hayes, G. (2004). *Whittier International School: A culture of educational praxis with global vision*. Prescott, AZ: Master's Thesis.

Senge, P. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. New York: Doubleday.

**Primary Years Program (ages 3-12)

In this article, the term *interglobal* is used to describe the complex systems of interconnections between cultures and people that can occur at schools that promote intercultural dialogue and global-oriented inquiry.

LOOK FOR OUR SPECIAL JULY 2006 ISSUE
Focusing on
Underachievement Amongst
Gifted Students
With a special article by
Dr. Sylvia Rimm !!!

INTERNATIONAL CURRICULUM IN PA SPOTLIGHT

By Jennifer C. Yates, Associated Press Writer | March 6, 2006

IB IN THE NEWS.....

HEATED DEBATES? CULTURE WARS? HIDDEN AGENDAS?

You decide....

PITTSBURGH – School board members in a Minnesota district call it anti-American and anti-Christian. In New Jersey, members of one school board argue it's a waste of money. Now, a suburban Pittsburgh school district is abolishing it over questions of politics and cost. Supporters of the increasingly popular college preparatory curriculum known as International Baccalaureate are firing back with some of the same arguments – saying efforts to quash IB are about the beliefs and politics of the program's opponents.

In Upper St. Clair, outside Pittsburgh, parents say they are preparing to fight the school board in court.

"I do think that this is just another example of sort of the culture wars being fought out in classrooms across the country with a potential negative impact on students," said Francisco M. Negron, general counsel of the National School Boards Association.

Started in 1968 in Switzerland, IB's original focus was educating the children of diplomats, who traveled often and needed an education recognized worldwide.

The program is offered to children ages 3 to 19 at more than 1,700 schools in 122 countries, including 677 schools in the United States. The number of IB students worldwide grew 73 percent between 2000 and 2005, to 62,885, according to the International Baccalaureate Organization.

High school students pursuing an IB diploma study subjects from six groups: language, individuals and societies, math and computer science, the arts, experimental sciences and a second language. The core of the curriculum is a 4,000 word-essay, a theory of knowledge class and a community service requirement.

President Bush has called for Advanced Placement and IB programs to be expanded.

Critics, however, have argued that IB's multicultural themes promote values that conflict with traditional Judeo-Christian values. Some opponents have called it Marxist because the International Baccalaureate Organization is a signatory to the Earth Charter, a collection of global principles created in France in 2000.

Last year, two school board members in the Minneapolis suburb of Minnetonka unsuccessfully pushed to get rid of IB because they said it was anti-American and anti-Christian.

IBO director general Jeffrey Beard, a U.S. citizen, said IB emphasizes critical thinking and a global world view and has raised teacher performance and standards. "We've tried to develop a curriculum that is truly international," Beard said.

Most college admissions officers view IB as the "gold standard," said Barmak Nassirian, associate executive director of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers.

IB's curriculum, instruction and assessment can be expensive, though, running into the tens of thousands of dollars.

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That cost, and the idea of giving up local control of school curriculum, upsets some school board members, like Susan Badaracco of Cherry Hill, N.J., where the program has been offered for about seven years.

Badaracco and another board member in Cherry Hill are pushing to get rid of IB, saying they would rather see the money put into other programs or into expanding less costly AP programs.

Outside Pittsburgh, the five of nine school board members in Upper St. Clair who voted last week to abolish IB cited a gamut of reasons, including cost and the IBO's relationship with the Earth Charter.

Parents upset over losing the program have vowed to fight back, and Pennsylvania ACLU legal director Witold

Walczak, who lives in the area and whose child was in IB, has assembled a legal team to challenge the board.

Walczak compared it to the recent court fight over teaching evolution and "intelligent design" in Dover: "You had a majority that ascends to power and runs roughshod over the administration, the teachers and the students to impose its own political agenda."

Katie Lohrenz, 22, an IB diploma graduate and now a sophomore at the University of Kansas, said IB exposed her to perspectives she might not have otherwise considered.

"I suppose bias can leak into certain topics, but for the most part you can't make psychology anti-American or math anti-American," Lohrenz said.

On the Net: <http://www.ibo.org>

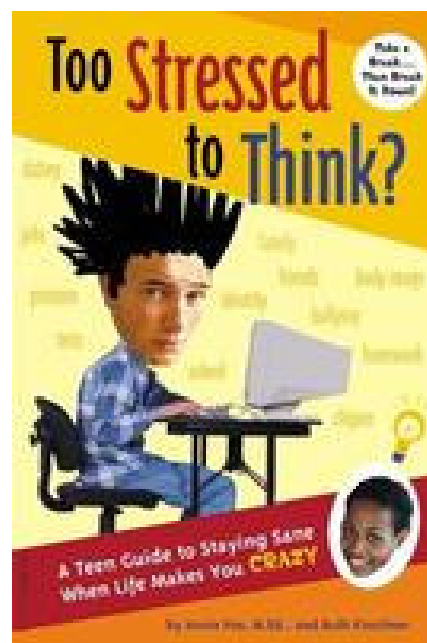
BOOK REVIEW

Too Stressed to Think? A Teen Guide to Staying Sane When Life Makes You Crazy

By Annie Fox and Ruth Kirschner. Free Spirit Publishing
(2005)

One of the biggest complaints of gifted middle school students is "stress." Stress from parents, teachers, friends, school, themselves. This guide for teens presents a variety of solutions to these problems. It is in the same user-friendly format as Perfectionism: What's Wrong with Being Too Good and other Free Spirit titles. While not specifically targeting a gifted audience, a sensitive gifted teacher can help students see themselves in many of the vignettes.

The book is divided into three sections that cover the basics of stress (how it affects the brain and the body), conflicts that cause stress (family, friends, boy-friends/girlfriends, and school, and a final section on how to relax and/or get help. Many additional websites, books, and hotlines are listed in a useful resource section. This is an excellent book for advisory groups or for discussions in gifted classes and pull-outs. A good companion to Fighting Invisible Tigers: A Stress Guide for Teens.



Pre-AP and Gifted Programs: How Do They Mesh?

Barbara Prichard
Director: Gifted/Talented Programs
Fayetteville, AR

One of the continuing challenges in education for gifted students has been implementing appropriate and effective program models and differentiated curriculum for gifted students beyond the elementary years. Recently, with the exploding growth of Advanced Placement (AP) programs and subsequently Pre-AP classes, discussion also has increased about how these offerings and gifted programs augment each other.

Pre-AP came into being as a result of the College Board's commitment to making AP opportunities available to all students. However, in contrast to AP courses that are offered by the College Board with an accompanying national exam, there actually is no such thing as College Board Pre-AP courses. "The College Board does not design, develop, or assess courses labeled Pre-AP. Courses labeled Pre-AP that inappropriately restrict access to AP and other college-level work are inconsistent with the fundamental purpose of the Pre-AP Initiatives of the College Board." Pre-AP is a "suite of K-12 professional development resources and services. The purpose of Pre-AP is to equip all middle and high school teachers with the strategies and tools they need to engage their students in active, high-level learning, thereby ensuring that every middle and high school student develops the skills, habits of mind, and concepts needed to succeed in college. Pre-AP is a key component of the College Board's K-12 Professional Development unit." (Reference: College Board information)

The previously fractious relationship between gifted education and middle school proponents notwithstanding, the entry of

Pre-AP onto the middle school scene presents a new dialogue area. Some discussion thus far appears to suggest that there is possible misinterpretation or misunderstanding about Pre-AP by educators new to the College Board system. Developing an understanding of what Pre-AP is and is not offers an opportunity to clarify for middle school educators when, how, and why Pre-AP is another service to consider in what should be multiple options for gifted students. There are districts using the Pre-AP initiatives as their only offering for gifted students, are restricting access to Pre-AP opportunities to gifted students only, or are gate-keeping enrollment by other means such as restrictive GPA, teacher approval or test scores. All of these are examples of working outside the equity and access position of the College Board. The concept of Pre-AP is to ultimately move a student population to the place where all students have Pre-AP skills, unrestrictive of specific populations or class assignments.

More and more schools nationwide have teachers who have participated in the Pre-AP professional development workshops that focus on classroom strategies with content-specific approaches that promote access to AP for the broadest range of students possible. Another critical element of the Pre-AP initiative is the building of Pre-AP/AP Vertical Teams that include a "group of educators from different grade levels (with an emphasis on middle school participation) from a discipline" who work together on vertical alignment with the purpose of helping students acquire

the academic skills necessary for success in the AP program.

Given this explanation of Pre-AP, where then is the mesh between Pre-AP and gifted programs? Just as there is no College Board position for who should take AP courses other than those students who "are willing to accept the challenge of a rigorous academic curriculum"; there is no expectation or requirement that all students who have acquired, through Pre-AP, the strategies and tools for success in AP **MUST** eventually take AP coursework in high school. However, clearly this is where an expectation for gifted students does come into play. While gifted students should not be required to take the full

complement of AP courses that a high school might offer, it is not an unreasonable expectation that almost every gifted student should be enrolled in at least one or probably many AP courses. Pre-AP courses have the potential to help build the skills necessary to success in AP classes, particularly among middle school minority gifted students who are underrepresented in these high school programs. It therefore behooves educators of gifted students to encourage the participation of their local districts in teacher training available through Pre-AP professional development; and, subsequently to advise and counsel gifted students about the benefits of the AP program as stated in the USDOE study that found "students participating in AP courses were significantly more likely to attain a college degree than those without an AP experience." That preparation for a college degree best begins in the middle school years.



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<http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/whatsnew.htm>
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WHAT'S NEW
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“There is little doubt that educators have been largely negative about the practice of acceleration despite abundant research evidence attesting to its validity. It is difficult to understand the hostility of many educators to this acceleration strategy.” – James T. Gallagher, University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill (2004)

Middle Grades Division of the
National Association for Gifted Children

1707 L Street NW
Suite 550
Washington, DC 20036



MIDDLE DIVISION CO-CHAIRS:

Susan Rakow

susanrakow@earthlink.net

Susannah Richards

susannahr@commongroup.net

NEWSLETTER EDITORS:

Jan Hersh

jan_hersh@adelphia.net

Brian Mays

bmays@northmontschools.com

MISSION STATEMENT

The Middle Grades Division recognizes the unique needs of gifted middle grades learners and educators. Middle school is the level at which gifted students face great challenges to full development of their potential and is a time when a large number of gifted students, particularly girls and minority students, begin to underachieve in response to perceived societal and peer pressures. The division recognizes the need to develop appropriate strategies for working with these students. To address these concerns, the division works in the areas of curriculum, instruction, research, and communication and dissemination, to assist students, teachers, and administrators as they endeavor to make the middle school years a positive and challenging experience for gifted students.

For more information, visit the NAGC
website:

www.nagc.org

MIDDLE MATTERS

- Is **your** Middle Division Newsletter!
- Become part of it by sending items for publication!
- Articles, stories, humor, or anything you'd like to share relating to Middle Level Gifted Education.
- 75—500 words (or more if need be)