

The International Baccalaureate Program in International Schools and Big6: A Wonderful Partnership

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As professionally trained librarians, we have both been involved with the International Baccalaureate (IB) program and the Big6/Super3 for several years, albeit in different capacities: Rashmi as an educator and Teacher/Librarian at IB schools and part-time lecturer at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore; Ellen first as a librarian in international schools, and then as the International Specialist presenting workshops for librarians, teachers and IB students in Africa, Asia, Europe and attending regional international school conference on behalf of EBSCO Publishing. As colleagues through the years, we have noted how the IB program (PYP Units of Inquiry, IB Extended Essay) and the Big6/Super3 correlate with one another, and we were anxious to explore aspects of that association.

About IB

The [IB program](#) was founded in 1968 and is currently adopted in approximately 1,876 schools in 124 countries. There are 683 IB World Schools in the United States. The first school was authorized to administer the program in 1971.

There are three programs/grade levels to the IB - the PYP (Primary Years Program), the MYP (Middle Years Program), and the IB (International Baccalaureate program). Schools may offer one, two or all three of the programs. Teachers and administrators are highly trained in the programs in order to deliver the curriculum in accordance with set standards and quality. Librarians and Media Specialists are often on the “periphery” of delivery and involvement, but invariably are proactive in integrating and coordinating with teachers. They are always involved in aspects relating to research at the MYP and IB levels, and work with teachers on the Units of Inquiry (multi disciplinary units) at the PYP levels.

There are established criteria and benchmarks at all levels of the IB program that must be achieved. It is an integrated program, and that is increasingly being adopted by international schools globally for a variety of reasons including a standardized international curriculum for students who are “global nomads.” The program is integrated at the “subject” and “skills” level, but also stresses the “global” citizen with respect to values, attitudes, contributions and community service, etc.

An approximate definition of international schools may include ones that are using English as the medium of instruction for 5-18 year old students, teaching a curriculum other than the national curriculum of a particular country where the actual physical school is located, with predominately expatriate teachers and administrators. Examples may include a school teaching a British curriculum in Singapore, a school teaching an American curriculum in China, a school teaching an IB curriculum in Bangladesh.

The need for Big6 in International Schools

As librarians we are anxious for students to find the answers to their questions, to use reliable resources, and to attain the skills necessary to be confident, motivated, independent users of information. From the schools we’ve visited, we’ve observed that students don’t understand how to

“search” on the internet, how to discriminate reliable from unreliable information and we see increasingly numbers of young people being drawn to the World Wide Web as the “sole” source of information and referencing. However, it is clear, that a firm scope and sequence of information literacy needs to be put in place.

In international schools, the pendulum has swung both ways with respect to library skills. About eighteen years ago, skills were taught in an isolated curriculum of library skills to students in weekly or bi-weekly library periods. Following this, skills were integrated within whole language units, there were no regularly scheduled library sessions, and teachers were encouraged to sign up for library time. Librarians still had the scope and sequence of skills they wanted to convey to students, but they had to interject and incorporate into teacher’s units and projects. It was difficult to keep track of what was actually being learned and taught.

Today, many librarians working in international schools are utilizing - either formally or informally - variations of the Big 6 model for teaching information literacy to students ages 5-18. We like the Big6, because unlike other information problem solving processes, it incorporates a scope and sequence of skills on a conceptual basis that are needed to navigate today’s information arena. What are becoming increasingly evident are the connections and coordination possible between the IB program (PYP & IB) and the Big6 literacy model.

Connections between Big6 and IB/PYP

Big6 and IB are a natural pairing. Both programs concentrate on concepts, thinking, systematic approaches and critical thinking. The IB assumes prior student knowledge and for him/her to utilize it to cross the threshold from not knowing some things and “knowing” more by building on concepts and skills. The Big 6 focuses on problem solving that is driven by an identified step-by-step process. Here is a comparison chart of [Philosophy and Practice between the PYP program and the Big 6](#).

The PYP program utilizes the terminology “inquiry;” the Big 6 - problem solving. In both, students need to want to “know” in order to “inquire,” and once they have, they begin to solve problems propelling them across the knowing/not knowing threshold.

The Unit of Inquiry (UOI) is a multi-disciplinary curricular model used in the PYP. Inquiry takes on a different shape than in traditional knowledge quests, and demands a broader range of skills and attitudes. Much of the education literature highlights now focuses on “learning” rather than teaching - the UOI is one way to accomplish this.

In a UOI, the student has the opportunity to define their question, to make decisions on how to seek the answers, to use the information to respond to the inquiry and to synthesize it into a form that takes them from not knowing to knowing. Topics studied under the Program of Inquiry (POI) (group of individual Units of Inquiry) are carefully selected, taking into account their relevance, interest to student, and significance. Frameworks, scope and sequence and detailed goals determine the overall expectations.

Inquiry is the focus of PYP schools today. Educators like us have acknowledged inquiry in a different form from the traditional ways of knowledge quest. Today inquiry demands a broader range of skills and attitudes towards learning. To compliment traditional research skills that we have learnt at schools, greater opportunities to engage students with topics, which are rigorous and intellectually invigorating, must be created.

The PYP program is concept driven, utilizing form, function, causation, change, connection (very important in information literacy), perspective, responsibility and reflection. Questions in each of these concepts (i.e. what is it like?) may correspond with Task Definition, while connection (i.e. How is it connected to other things?) may correspond with Information seeking strategies.

In one example, grade 5 students led an inquiry towards making books. In Big6 terms, we defined our task (Big6, 1.0) as, “how does one make a book?” Inquiry was encouraged in providing activities on understanding different part of books. During the brainstorm session (Big6, 2.0 and 3.0), students noticed the different formats of books (like toy books, board books, e-books, etc) available in the market today. Activities were tailored to encourage them to introspect on what they already knew. In order to create a context to their inquiry, subject experts like authors, illustrators, and printers were invited to speak to the class. The inquiry led us to explore the physical format of books, content analysis of various forms of literature and genre studies (in some cases, looping back around to Task Definition as we refined the information question). The final outcome of this unit was a poetry book produced by the class. This poetry book provided both Synthesis (Big6, 5.0) and a chance to Evaluate our work (Big6, 6.0). We still have many questions and the inquiry was left open-ended.

One reflection in a journal of a grade 5 student noted, “Sometimes we learn with a book or with somebody explaining things but I learn when I do experiments and see what happens by my eyes.” It is interesting how this student reflected on a high leveled psychological concept of multiple intelligence, as well as engaged in Evaluation (Big6, 6.0) of her own information problem-solving process. In order to cater to the diverse needs of the students, the library needs to maintain a rich collection of information in various formats and languages.

Just as we know that a curious mind creates a powerful Big6er, the PYP maintains that attitude plays an important role in creating a lifelong learner and an international citizen. Storytelling and exposure to children’s literature are excellent vehicles to help young children understand values and attitudes. In one experience, the story of “Little Red Riding Hood” was used with kindergarten children to consider questions like:

- how can our decisions get us into good or bad situations?
- how to be street smart.
- what happens when we entertain strangers?

Our goal was to identify/realize how our actions and behaviors determine reactions and results (causation).

The PYP includes the skills of thinking, communicating and research appropriate for coordination with the Big6. One UOI for grade 7 explored media and its message with the key concepts of perspective and responsibility.

One good example of Big6 integration is a UOI for grades 4/5 entitled “Medieval Times”

In this inquiry, students obtained an understanding on how human communities change over time. Students inquired into the features of medieval society, the changes in the lives of people caused by medieval society and the differences and similarities between life of medieval society and present day. The theme was integrated into the library program with an additional focus on evaluating various web sites. Below are a few glimpses of the library lesson planner-

Step 1 - Brainstorming - what do we know about (Big6, 1.0, Task Definition)

- The internet?
- The resources available at the Internet?
- People who post this information?
- Accuracy of the information?

Step 2 - What do we want to learn from the exercise? How are we going to achieve it? (Information Seeking/Location & Access/Evaluation)

- Learn internet evaluating skills building on previous lessons on website comparisons conducted in computer classes and library sessions)
- Search internet for sites posting information on medieval theme
- Use specified criteria and evaluate the sites, comparing three facts noted on a website with a brief article or book reference provided by the librarian (Use of Information)

On a prepared worksheet students were asked to:

1. Use search engines such as [Google](#), [Yahoo](#), or/and [bing.com](#) to search for kid-appropriate, interesting websites on medieval times.
2. Choose 2 web pages on medieval times they feel are the most reliable and written by experts.
3. Answer a series of questions evaluating the sites.

Another UOI that is an ideal opportunity to put Big6 to work is the IB Extended essay (4000 words), an integral component of the IB diploma and certificate program, and wherein this assignment, the library and its resources play an essential and critical role in the student's success in this portion of the program. It is regarded as preparation for university work as well as a chance to undertake a detailed investigation of an area of interest. The information problem solving process is critical to success in this UOI. Students are required to articulate a research question, and then follow through with a sequential and organized study of the topic. They learn to synthesize, analyze and evaluate, all the while supported by their advisor and the librarian. We have seen great success with students who use Big6 to complete this task. Examples of IB extended essays may be "How will a potential gas pipeline between Bangladesh and India impact opportunities for overseas training of Bangladeshi professionals? Or what effect will global warming having on tropical regions in Southeast Asia?"

To reiterate the connections between the PYP, IB Extended Essay, Big6, and Super3, we have created a [chart](#) that illustrates how they work together.

Final Thoughts

All aspects of information and learning are dynamic, but this may be especially true in the diverse, constantly changing world of international schools. Fortunately, librarians in international schools offering the PYP and Extended Essay (IB) are evaluating the way they have taught skills and are transitioning to a focus on information literacy rather than simply library skills. It is clear that students and educators are responding to an increasingly complex information landscape and are actively seeking ways to meet the rapidly changing information literacy needs of students and programs. The Big6/Super3 is quickly filling that need because it supports a myriad of curricular needs and works!