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International education in a national context: Introducing the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme in Dutch public schools

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Abstract

Some bilingual secondary schools in the Netherlands have introduced or are introducing the International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle Years Programme (MYP). The implementation of this international scheme at (semi-) public national Dutch schools proves anything but unproblematic. Based on a series of questionnaires filled out by school managers and MYP coordinators at other national schools offering IB programmes worldwide, the author has tried to gain insight into some of the conditions under which international education could become a success in (Dutch) national schools.

Keywords

bilingual education, International Baccalaureate, Middle Years Programme

Introduction

Over the past 18 years a growing number of Dutch (semi-)public schools have introduced a bilingual, Dutch and English, curriculum for students in higher forms of secondary education. Apart from offering a challenge for the gifted student, bilingual education provides the ambitious student with a better preparation for a life in a globalized, predominantly English-speaking world (Europees Platform, 2009). Bilingual education was thought, and has proved to be, an effective means to add to a school's educational profile, helping it to bind, attract or regain talented students from the educated classes (Weenink, 2007). As the number of Dutch secondary schools offering bilingual programmes has by now risen to over 100, bilingual education as such no longer constitutes a benchmark for exceptional education. That at least is one of the reasons why a number of bilingual schools in the Netherlands are defining new standards for what bilingual education is and ought to be. In order to reinvigorate 'true' bilingual education, a number of schools have introduced the International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle Years Programme (MYP), or are preparing to do so.

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Introduced by the International Baccalaureate Organization in 1995, the MYP provides a model for the education of 11–16-year-olds attending international schools. As at March 2010, 603 schools officially adhere to the principles of the MYP, with a considerable number of them being non-international, both public and private schools in the developed and developing world. Such schools are to be found especially in the USA, Canada and Australia, but also in countries including China, the Russian Federation and The Netherlands, and interest in the MYP is steadily growing (Drake 2004; IBO, 2009). Due to the nature of its international background and focus, the MYP is less of a traditional programme with educational goals and a corresponding curriculum than a regulative scheme: theoretically at least, any (national) curriculum could be taught according to the principles of the MYP. Still, as conceived, guided and controlled by the IB, a full implementation of the MYP affects not only the organization of a school but also its pedagogical outlook or direction. Taken seriously, teaching according to the principles of the MYP involves a variety of didactical skills and measures, not to mention the meticulous administration that goes along with the specific type of assessment that is used.

The question underpinning the research upon which this article was based was how the aims and aspirations of the IB as made explicit in the MYP can, within the context of public schools in the Netherlands, be done justice to – in principle as well as in practice. Having decided to investigate this matter, a decision was taken to focus on the institutional side: 'what steps can or ought to be taken by a (Dutch) national school in order to implement the international MYP?'. In order to get preliminary answers to this rather broad question a series of interviews was firstly undertaken with school managers and MYP Coordinators working at accredited Dutch MYP schools. As there were at the time only two such schools, a set of questionnaires were also developed to be filled out by administrators, coordinators and humanities teachers affiliated to non-international, mostly public MYP schools in Australia, Canada and the USA to enable consideration of the Dutch context to be informed by experiences elsewhere. For reasons of constraint and comparability, the only (high) schools taken into consideration were those that offer not only the MYP but also the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (IBDP).

Independent scholarly research on the IBMYP, either historical or empirical, has been rare and is not easy to access (Willcoxon, 2005). Considering the success of the MYP as a means of educational reform, such a state of affairs is surprising. Within the framework of a small research-project, this gap will not be filled. As only very few colleagues filled in the questionnaires, the aim and scope of this research has necessarily become rather narrow. Despite this, it is hoped that it adds to a scholarly discussion about the MYP as an educational model. In order to do so seminally the MYP has been taken as an educational scheme in three aspects: Philosophy and Pedagogy, Teaching and Assessment, and School Organization. For each of these topics the basic assets of the MYP (as prescribed by the IBO) will be described, the problems Dutch schools could and do have with their introduction will be analysed, and data will be interpreted so as to show how other national schools worldwide may have coped with them. In doing so, it is hoped that insight will be provided into some of the conditions under which international education could become a success in (Dutch) national schools.

Thought: philosophy and pedagogy

Philosophy?

The IBMYP stands out as an ambitious and intricate educational model that seeks to reach certain pedagogical ideals by simultaneously working at the levels of context (school organization), content (curriculum) and form (didactics), addressing not only students and teachers but also parents

and school management. Conceived and controlled by the Geneva-based IB, the philosophy that permeates and gives coherence to this programme clearly bears the signature of this cosmopolitan city. The programme leaves no doubt about its international character, nor about its aim to help produce responsible citizens of the world: '[The MYP] is a programme of international education designed to help students develop the knowledge, understanding, attitudes and skills necessary to participate actively and responsibly in a changing world' (IBO, 2009). Characteristic of MYP is that it offers what is called holistic education: children should not merely be made to know about disparate facts but should also learn to understand complex wholes, develop a range of skills and foster a certain set of attitudes (Hare, 2006). One means of achieving the old enlightened ideal of *éducation intégrale* are the Areas of Interaction (AoI). In 'MYP speak', AoI are five 'broad' concepts and a given set of skills that should be studied and practised over the whole range of four or five middle school years in different subjects and contexts. Looking at their own small world or the big one from the perspective of one or more of these AoI, children are taught to develop a deepened understanding of concepts and developments, using a variety of skills to answer complex questions and solve interdisciplinary issues. The AoI thus helps to integrate subjects without actually merging them, to match knowledge with skills and to closely attach both of them to specific values to be internalized. Integration of 'head, hand and heart' is also brought about by the rather complicated system of assessment that comes along with the MYP. Teachers have to repeatedly assess different subject-specific and general skills, and are encouraged to employ a variety of didactic instruments that address different types of learners and learning styles. So, as much as the MYP may be made to fit to any (international) school within any curriculum, a full introduction does have an impact: apart from content that has to be adjusted or added upon to introduce the AoI and other pedagogical aims, implementation of the model may ask teachers to seriously question their professional habits and styles.

'Doing MYP' does not necessarily mean, but certainly implies, adopting learner-centred means and methods. Developed and monitored by teachers, the programme has adopted some elements of modern educational topics such as problem-based or question-based education, competency-based and cooperative learning, life-long learning and 'learning-to-learn', self-evaluation and peer-assessment, pupils' portfolios and critical information literacy (IBO, 2005). Unfortunately, the choices made for these approaches – for the content and form of MYP as such – are not explicitly justified, neither theoretically nor empirically. On the one hand, it seems to be *praxis*, the fact that the MYP has been functioning successfully for more than 14 years, that serves to validate the scheme. On the other hand, there is a specific 'MYP speak' with its very own acronyms and neologisms that gives meaning and structure to the optimistic expectations of progressivism. Axiomatic for this 'pedagogy-speak', that in the end proves less analytic than self-referential, is enthusiasm, a profound faith in the power of education as well as in children's intrinsic will to learn (Oelkers, 2005). It is this aura of idealism, the expectation that the best of intentions will necessarily give the best of outcomes, that constitutes much of the appeal and strength of the MYP as a programme. At the same time it shows its philosophy to be in a strict sense rather non-philosophical.

School profile and school culture

Due to a history of religious strife and pluriformity, Dutch schools are in the extraordinary position of being free to teach what and how they choose. Within boundaries strictly set by a central state, every school can claim the constitutional 'freedom of direction' (= denomination) as well as the freedom of organization (= educational profile). Hence, any group of 60 parents can found a school with a particular religious and/or pedagogical profile. All schools, whether public or private, are

equally subsidized by local authorities on the basis of enrolment (De Haan, 2006). Due to this unusual and rather generous arrangement, the Dutch school-system offers considerable room not only for religious but also for pedagogical pluriformity to flourish. Given these conditions, there seems to be no problem for any Dutch bilingual school that wishes to introduce the IBMYP. The current political context, however, as well as some aspects of the culture reigning in Dutch schools, do not seem very favourable for such an ambitious programme. Without going into great details about these complex matters, we do need to find out what prevents a Dutch bilingual secondary school from introducing the MYP as an educational philosophy and what steps they could take to anticipate possible problems. Thriving on the aforementioned freedom of education, Dutch schools are presently encouraged to compete with each other as if they were suppliers of services in a (semi-)free market. Particular schools situated in densely populated areas are forced to take on a certain profile – be it denominational or pedagogical, with a focus on, for instance, language, theatre, sports, science and/or technology. As stipulated above, the growing 'movement' for bilingual education in the Netherlands originates in this very same urge to differentiate, as does the further step to link up with the IB and the MYP (Hettema, 2007).

Asked about their interest in the MYP, the Dutch school managers and MYP coordinators interviewed first of all hoped that it would add 'something extra' to their programme as compared to other schools. Second, they expected the MYP to enhance the coherence and thus the quality of education at their schools. The philosophy of the MYP was mentioned as a reason for choosing the programme, but only in third place. To those interviewed, it was either the philosophy as such or the strong components of social education covered by 'Community and Service' that seemed appealing. MYP coordinators considered this philosophy more important, but stressed the fact that it is instrumental for the programme as a means of regulating educational reforms.

Asked for the principal reasons why their schools had introduced MYP, 11 out of 21 MYP coordinators from Australia, Canada and the USA mentioned the educational philosophy of the scheme, followed by its connectedness with the IBDP (7 responses). 'Profiling' was mentioned far less often (3), ranking behind the 'opportunity to become part of an educational network' (4) and the MYP as a 'model to give structure to our attempts at educational reform' (4). Asked what the MYP meant for them personally, the same group claimed to value the programme first of all for 'becoming part of a network' (10), for being 'simply the best way of middle school education' (9) as well as for unspecified other reasons (7). Asked what they deemed the most important aspects of the programme, it was again the whole philosophy permeating MYP that was chosen most often (12), followed at some distance by the fact that the programme fits those who work in heterogeneous classes (6) and stresses student-centred didactics (3). Doubtless, these figures were influenced by the sample taken, by regional or national peculiarities as well as by the fact that those giving these responses were clearly stakeholders in the MYP. Still, the data suggest that, in the Anglo-Saxon world, MYP educators firmly believe that the programme cannot do without the philosophy that has given it shape and substance.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Dutch secondary schools saw no fewer than three major educational reforms, all of which by now seem to have failed (Dijsselbloem, 2008). In an atmosphere that, for these and other reasons, has recently turned highly critical of, if not outright hostile to, progressive school-reform (Oers, 2007; Visser 2008), it could prove to be not so easy to make Dutch teachers fully subscribe to MYP philosophy. The whole idea of an intellectually heterogeneous Middle School comes close to being a Dutch national trauma and a national taboo (Schlüsser, 2006). Because of that, Dutch parents, teachers and governments can and will associate MYP philosophy with ideology: as many MYP schools as there may be in the world, neither theory nor praxis are (as yet) really *evidence based*.

Asked for the ways in which they had made the MYP a success at their school, coordinators in the sample all mentioned their teachers being 'highly involved', 'well trained in/knowledgeable about the MYP' and, last but not least, 'working truly as a team'. Despite the fact that teacher-training institutions and school managers have been stressing the need for teamwork for more than 20 years now, or indeed because of that, influential opinion makers in the Netherlands now idealize 'old-fashioned' teachers that are 'kings' in their classrooms (Verbrugge and Verbrugge, 2006). The invocation of this icon of autonomy reflects and reinvigorates a strong trait in Dutch school culture that has effectively barred educational reforms in the recent past (Lensen, 2007). At the same time, reforms have proven to be the most effective means to change aspects of school culture, including teacher cooperation (Wessum, 1997). So, even if the current political climate and the dominant school culture do not provide the optimum context for educational reform, successful reform might be able to change both. Then especially in education it is indeed praxis, not mere words or intentions, that really counts (Visser, 2008).

MYP in action: teaching and assessment

Curriculum

As an international model, the MYP was developed in order to dovetail into any curriculum offered anywhere. The focus on the AoI may add a bit of content and ask for some reshuffling of the traditional programme, but all in all that need not be a major problem. In fact, among the features of the MYP that were seen as relatively easy to introduce, the 'development of a coherent MYP curriculum' was mentioned most often (14) by our international respondents. In essence, there is no such thing as a Dutch national curriculum. Still, after eight years of primary education, almost 85 per cent of children are tested so as to predict their chances in certain types of secondary education. Likewise, these secondary routes end in a series of nationwide tests that allow students to enter certain types of tertiary education. Without directives as to how to reach such high stake – largely cognitive – aims, Dutch educational practices have since long been influenced, if not shaped, by specialized textbooks produced by an oligarchy of educational publishers. Only over the past two decades have some of these textbooks started to incorporate more of an Anglo-Saxon, integrated and skills-based approach to learning. Still, 'doing MYP' would force Dutch (bilingual education) teachers to think beyond their textbooks and to develop educational materials that suit both the requirements of Dutch 'national IQ tests' and the formats given by the IBO.

Hardly any of the Anglo-Saxon respondents (2) felt that '[lack of] time to develop MYP-proof materials' was a serious threat to their attempts at educational reform. Asked which part of the MYP proved most easy to implement, 'adjustment of the curriculum' was mentioned eight times and 'the development of new, MYP-proof materials' three times. At the same time, 'pressure of time among staff and administration' was mentioned most often (11) as harming the process of implementation. So, as much as stress may be a fact of teacher life on both sides of the Atlantic, the development of an MYP curriculum with suitable materials seems not necessarily to add too much to teacher stress levels. Either Anglo-Saxon textbooks are more in line with the holistic demands of the MYP or English-speaking teachers are better trained, or more used to developing their own materials, or possibly both.

All in all, there seems to be no principal reason why Dutch teachers could not do the same and simply readjust their curriculum and their materials to meet MYP demands. Considering the double leap that has to be made from the tradition of content-based textbooks dictating the rhythm of instruction to cooperative creation, a Dutch MYP school could consider providing teachers and

subject groups with ample time for (re)adjustment and (re)development. Due to new legislation, Dutch schools are forced to organize 'free' books for all of their students. Since books never are really free, schools could consider giving financial incentives for teachers to develop such (MYP) materials that could supplant them.

Classes and size

A model for international education, the MYP was thought to serve relatively small schools with small classes, serving the educational needs of a culturally and intellectually heterogeneous population. With its focus on multifarious didactic approaches simultaneously to serve different educational levels and learning styles, as well as the need meticulously to monitor the progress of every single student, small communities of teachers coaching a small variety of learners still seems to be a norm, if not a necessary precondition for MYP to succeed. In general, however, Dutch secondary schools are rather voluminous institutions (approximately 1300 students on average), with a culturally heterogeneous population spread over comparably large (around 29) but intellectually homogeneous classes. At bilingual schools, groups tend to be even more homogeneous, socio-economically – but none the less organized en masse. Whereas the homogeneity of Dutch and especially bilingual education classes makes the introduction of the MYP much less of a didactic challenge for teachers, the sheer size to be mastered seems to outweigh this benefit by imposing an extraordinarily high *administrative* burden upon them.

While many Dutch teachers may lament this state of affairs, American MYP schools seem to have to work within roughly the same conditions. In the sample taken for this study, class sizes ranged from 15 to 30 children, 25 being the average. Public MYP schools in the USA provide for between 270 and 2400 children (average 1407). Taking into account that American teachers earn considerably less than their Dutch counterparts for approximately the same amount of work, undertaken in somewhat smaller but mostly heterogeneous groups, class size as such may prove to be only a secondary problem. Still, in order to come to terms with the demands of the MYP, especially concerning the monitoring of individual learners' development, it seems advisable for any school to reduce class size to a maximum of 25. If that proves impossible – as in the Netherlands – one could think of ways to reduce the administrative burden, for instance by replacing the mandatory written comments by a system of standardized remarks.

Assessment

Probably the most difficult, and for a Dutch observer the most problematic, aspect of the MYP is the system of assessment that comes along with it. The IB prescribes that within the MYP, students have to be repeatedly assessed on different aspects or skills within every subject (area), using so-called criterion-referenced assessment ('rubrics') on the basis of which students get an indication of their 'level of achievement' on a scale from 1 to 7, that is, a grade that is not meant to be a grade, but a reasonable and – if necessary – reasoned assessment of a student's progress and abilities in a certain subject (area) as observed by the subject teacher. Every one of these demands may easily be at odds with long-established practices in Dutch education, focused on 'objective' summative assessment of only knowledge, based on statistical averages of grades 1 to 10 (to one decimal place). From the 1990s onwards, criterion-referenced assessment has come to be seen in educational circles as a means not only to assess student work but at the same time to enhance their knowledge and understanding (Davis, 1995). Having become something of a norm in the Anglo-Saxon world, as well as in Scandinavia, the results of assessing with the help of 'rubrics' seem now

to be ambiguous. Freeman and Miller (2001) claimed to have found strong evidence in favour of criterion-referenced assessment. As early as 1992, Ratcliffe (1992) observed positive effects of criterion-referenced assessment, but only if done very carefully by experienced teachers. Wikstroem (2005) recently found evidence of serious forms of grade inflation at 'the top': because of 'rubrics', relatively good students tend to get a mark of being excellent.

Colleagues working at the MYP schools in this study indicated that they struggle with the topic of assessment. Notwithstanding their experience with 'rubrics', 9 out of 21 MYP coordinators noted that the development of MYP assessment had been a 'difficult' process, with seven feeling that this part was therefore 'still under construction'. At the same time, no less than six coordinators from abroad as well as two Dutch colleagues deemed assessment 'the best part of the package'. Independent from each other, three experienced MYP coordinators from three different continents gave pretty much the same advice: 'Start with developing the most difficult part, which is assessment. If you start with the report-card system, the rest of the program will automatically follow from it.' Considering the huge leap Dutch teachers, students and parents have to take in organizing and getting used to more differentiated, less mathematical and (apparently) less 'objective' ways of assessing student work, there seems much to say for this advice. For the time being, we could envisage teachers working with two systems in parallel: the 'mathematical' decimal Dutch system of grades and the more 'subjective' assessment of levels of achievement. In the end, however, schools that opt for MYP authorization will have to find ways of integrating both systems; that is, criterion referenced assessment of the 'whole' student and a determination of his or her chances of passing the highly cognitive national tests. Whether this final choice will be for a scale of 7 or 10 is of less importance than the fact that, especially in a Dutch context, the criteria separating grade boundaries need to be transparent and consistent, based on more or less objective (that is, measurable) data collected by a group of teachers. Otherwise, introduction of the MYP could be likely not so much to foster learning and understanding as to contribute to the growing antagonism between teachers and parents, and the further legalization of their mutual relationships.

Didactics

The IB has not developed criteria, either for the curriculum or for the didactic regime of any MYP school. If its criteria for assessing students are taken seriously, however, the MYP clearly presupposes and promulgates a certain amount of didactic training and agility on the part of the teaching staff. How else could the ensemble of subject-specific and general knowledge, learning styles and skills of a variety of students be measured and administered if teachers were not able to vary and to differentiate? Theoretically, Dutch teachers are quite well trained to show such diversity in didactic approaches. In practice, however, openness towards 'new' didactic approaches seems to be rather unevenly spread over different schools and school types. As much as vocational schools may in general show more pedagogic and didactic flexibility than is shown by those offering (higher) general education, it is the vocational schools that suffer most from the shortage in qualified teachers that presently burdens the educational system.

Influential lobbyists have recently voiced the scepticism of teachers towards 'modern', more skills-based didactics and actively plea for 'more content' (Haperen, 2007; Visser, 2008). Typically, native speakers working in bilingual and/or Dutch international schools consider this a false dilemma: skills-based education cannot do without content, in the same way that content-based education presupposes skills. That might not, however, be a shared view in the whole of the Anglo-Saxon world: in this sample, 4 out of 21 MYP coordinators considered it 'difficult' to

make sure MYP was taught appropriately in their schools, four noting that this was 'still under construction'. For the other 13, didactics seemed to be no problem at all or, as in the case of four schools, a relatively unproblematic aspect. Of course these data cannot be easily 'translated', textbooks, teacher training and educational traditions showing strong cultural and/or national peculiarities. Doubtless, however, Dutch MYP teachers could benefit from the experiences and the material of their English-speaking counterparts, though that may not always prove very practicable. As they have to develop a 'Dutch' MYP, it appears more practical and rewarding for them to concentrate upon the strengths and resources that are hidden and at hand in any team of teachers. Internal and external (MYP) teachers' training and especially the fostering (stimulating and facilitating) of a culture of cooperation, peer discussion, and team building could help teachers to expand their own and each other's repertoire, meanwhile establishing a culture of work that could contribute to the 'spirit' of the MYP reigning within the school.

MYP-form: system and organization

Ideally, the IBMYP is not 'only' a scheme for educational reform in the first years of secondary education, but is also a 'worldview' that is shared by teachers and school management, children and parents alike (MYP, 2005). In order to make such a community, merely reshuffling the curriculum and reorganizing the system of assessment is not enough: in MYP schools this philosophy ought to be visible in the whole of the school. In fact, in order for the IBMYP to be introduced, the organization of the school might be in need of adjustment, not always easy to realize in a Dutch environment.

System and organization

The MYP was devised for children aged 11 to 16 completing five or four years of secondary international education. In these years they are supposed to develop those attitudes and skills, as well as such knowledge and awareness, that will enable them success to enter primarily content-based higher levels of general education such as the IB Diploma Programme (IBDP). In these five years, children study eight subjects, two of which are – ideally – integrated clusters of related subject areas ('science' and 'humanities'). In addition they must complete the 'personal project', something like a 'masterpiece' with which students finish their middle years studies. In every one of these subjects, including the personal project, due attention should be paid to the AoI. To make sure that these concepts or foci become part of the vocabulary of teachers and students alike, every AoI is taken care of by an 'area leader'. He or she supervises the ways in which his or her AoI is treated in the different subjects or subject groups and is responsible for organizing projects, days, weeks, educational festivities and extra-curricular activities that are centred around (a clear topic within) the AoI. In addition to those five area leaders there ought to be a personal project coordinator as well as an overall MYP Coordinator. The latter presides over the MYP group or MYP committee, and is responsible for the implementation and further development of the MYP at a school, including the mandatory teacher training organized by the IB.

As strict as the IB might be when it comes to some of its standards, it is as lenient and pragmatic with curricular and organizational problems. Since Dutch secondary education starts at the age of 12, not 11, the MYP cannot possibly be taught for five years. Neither that, nor the fact that most Dutch schools in general teach a lot more, mostly separated, subjects seems to cause concern. Real problems on the organizational level seem mostly due to the specificities of the Dutch national curriculum as well as to the structure of Dutch bilingual schools.

After four or five years of separated bilingual education, to take the most obvious of problems, Dutch students entering advanced levels will necessarily attend classes together with 'regular' (non-bilingual) colleagues. As long as the Dutch state bars bilingual schools from developing their own English tests and does not really facilitate the introduction of the IBDP, students who have completed four years of the MYP should still have attained roughly the same level of knowledge and skills as those participating in 'regular' Dutch education. This will prove especially problematic in the bilingual Higher General Education (HAVO), where students in Form 4/MYP 5 are supposed to be busy preparing for essentially pure cognitive tests. Problems such as these could be tackled at three different levels: by teachers, by MYP coordinators and by school leaders. As long as the final tests are still in Dutch, bilingual *and* non-bilingual teachers working at (future) MYP schools should set standards as to which skills and which levels of knowledge and understanding they expect students in Form 4 and/or 5 to have attained, and make sure MYP is taught in such a way that these standards are met by both non-MYP and MYP students. If the MYP proves indeed powerful enough to reach these common goals while adding something more, individual teachers and schools could consider introducing the MYP in 'regular' Dutch education as well.

In the eyes of many of the study's informants, school reform is a serious but rewarding challenge. In order to achieve it while conforming to the guidelines of the MYP one needs a strong team of well-trained and motivated teachers (according to 7 out of 21 respondents), who are given enough time to develop teaching and materials (6) and possibly have some experience with the type of education that is aimed at (4). Apart from that, strong, inspiring leadership seems to be beneficial (5), as well as a clear position of the MYP coordinator (3). It is worth noting that at almost half the schools that provided information about this topic, the MYP coordinator is part of the school administration/management team (6 out of 14) or works directly under the deputy head of a school department (4). Keeping an overview over the whole reform by measuring hundreds of actual practices against a given set of IB guidelines and IB rules, his or her role seems so essential that it would be advisable to bestow the function of a MYP coordinator with enough status and decision-making power to ensure some pace in the process. As a member of, or at least on the same level as, the management team, he or she should be willing and able to express clearly the school's vision and explain to teachers, students and parents how and especially why the MYP is being implemented. On its part, the management would be wise to leave no doubt about how reform of the Middle Years fits into their vision of the whole of the school's educational mission and endeavours, and to take clear action upon the latter to ensure it is fully achieved. In the context of Dutch bilingual education, that could mean that they would put their political weight behind the acknowledgement of English final tests, or indeed that the IBDP should become a real and affordable alternative to a Dutch (T)VWO-degree.

MYP and the community

In the language of the MYP, the concept of 'community' seems to be used in two distinct contexts. By means of the AoI 'Community and Service', students in their Middle Years should not only gradually realize which community or communities they themselves belong to, but should also be brought actively to engage in activities that benefit one of those communities ('services'). A standard element of IB international education, this type of 'Community Action' seems to echo at least half of John Dewey's old ideal of the school transforming itself into a social centre for its neighbourhood (Dewey, 1976; Visser, 2006). Sometimes, however, the school itself is referred to as a community – be it a community of learners or a larger community encompassing students, teachers, parents and management alike. From this angle, a community is something like a group

of people inhabiting or using a certain space, who (therefore) share a certain set of beliefs, values and attitudes that together offer them senses of stability, security, belonging and meaning. According to the German sociologist Ferdinand Toennies, such communities are groups that typically belong to pre-modern, pre-industrialized societies. That is why, in continental Europe at least, the invocation of this particular concept of community in political and/or educational discourse long had and still has strongly romantic, if not rather conservative, connotations (Binder, 2003).

Interestingly, the first concept of the school in relation to the community has made a spectacular comeback in Dutch educational discourse. Under the influence of American debates and examples, local Dutch school authorities have over the past decades conceived and built so-called 'broad schools', schools that indeed offer a variety of educational, (para)medical, social and psychological services and leisure activities for students, parents and the neighbourhood (Studulski, 2002; Visser, 2006). Recently, the Christian democratic government has decided to make MYP-like 'Community and Service' a mandatory element of the civic education of every Dutch child in the upper grades. In particular the introduction of this so-called 'social internship' has given Dutch MYP schools a strategic head start over other Dutch schools: trained by their MYP teachers to engage in 'Community and Service' already in their middle years, higher level students will have quite some experience in finding and doing such an internship, using the network the school has already built within its 'community'.

When it comes to the idea of the school as a (normative) community, there are reasons to persist with a healthy dose of Dutch scepticism. Willingly or even unwillingly, every school develops its own culture and identity, which all the stakeholders will necessarily take from and add to. Overt moralism may, however, all too easily collide with the staunch individualism of Dutch students, teachers and parents and, especially in public schools, could interfere with standards of openness and neutrality. Besides, it will be very hard if not impossible actually to measure the extent to which a school has made children fit the IB learner profile and become aware of the full implications of holistic education, intercultural awareness and communication. That does not mean, however, that nothing should or could be done about the MYP identity of a Dutch bilingual school: its undergraduate body. A clear and transparent communication – to students, parents and teachers – about the aims of a school in transformation, and the steps taken to reach them, certainly is a minimum. For the IBO, an equal minimum seems to be that the language, the concepts and the structure of the MYP are ostentatiously visible within the school building, if not in every classroom. Even in huge Dutch schools with a tiny bilingual MYP department, that type of community-building could be within practical reach. With respect to community, the MYP schools and coordinators in the sample mentioned 'being part of a network' as one of the prime reasons for the school (3) and especially for themselves (9) introducing the MYP in the first place. During the research, it was noted that teachers at the few Dutch schools that are as yet working with the MYP all felt as though they were having to 'reinvent the wheel'. Intensifying their contacts with other MYP schools could well ease their concerns and reduce their burden. Since the Dutch (bilingual) educational context is so radically different from other countries, international networking might prove interesting, but not necessarily rewarding. More effort could be made to assure the further development of a practically functioning network of Dutch (would-be) MYP schools, a network that actually brings teachers together.

Conclusion

Due to a combination of a unique historical development and more recent neo-liberal market-oriented policies, Dutch schools have been forced to compete with each other. Within this 'school market',

bilingual English–Dutch education has proved to be so successful a 'brand' that, by 2010, more than 100 Dutch schools offer it. In order to achieve an even more international and special profile, some of the 'older' Dutch bilingual schools have introduced or are currently introducing the internationally acclaimed IBMYP. This article has been based on a relatively small comparative, qualitative and quantitative piece of research, asking what steps can or ought to be taken by a (Dutch) national school in order to implement the MYP. On the basis of studying relevant historical and theoretical literature about school reform in general and the MYP in particular, some doubts have been raised about the philosophical basis of this particular program. Particularly given the current 'backlash' against all too drastic reforms, there are reasons to question whether Dutch teachers and parents will wholeheartedly support a progressive scheme such as the MYP. If so, it will not be the philosophy but facts, evidence of success in advancing academic standards, that might convince the critical Dutch audience.

On the basis of experiences of MYP educators in the Netherlands as well as in Australia, Canada and the USA, an attempt has been made to develop a more pragmatic view on how elements of the MYP could be made to fit into a Dutch bilingual context. From that point of view, there seemed to be relatively few problems. In implementing the scheme, however, Dutch national schools need to find practical ways to use the didactic forms and formalities of the MYP to reach the goals set by an educational system focused on content and cognition. A well-organized school board and strict, powerful and inspiring MYP coordination should pave the way that teachers cooperatively have to take, making sure they are well trained and have ample time collectively to work out curricula, materials and assessment criteria that fit both the Dutch educational system and the MYP. As the particular assessment that accompanies the MYP is likely to prove the most 'strange' and difficult element, it seems sensible to start with this, both in terms of teacher training and in communication with students and their parents, as well as – possibly – the 'public sphere'.

Before teachers start changing their 'ordinary' bilingual teaching based on textbooks into 'real' MYP teaching that breaks with this and other routines, an individual school needs to make up its mind about the curricula, especially (THAVO) Form 4/MYP 5. Collectively, Dutch MYP schools should intensify their lobbying for the admission of English examinations and/or a (bilingual) IB Diploma. The introduction of such a complex international programme as the MYP in an already complicated educational context only makes sense if it clearly and explicitly fits into a broader idea of what bilingual education in the Netherlands is, will be and could possibly lead to.

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