

Stowers Elementary-an International Baccalaureate School

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During the second week in California, I and other 9 teachers were assigned to observe in Stowers Elementary School. In Stowers, I found it to be a place with hospitality, courtesy and International-mindedness.

What is Stowers special for?

It is a magnet school of International studies.



Stowers Elementary school is one of the magnet schools in ABCUSD (Artesia, Bloomfield, and Carmenita Unified School District). According to *ABC Magnet Schools* website that “A Magnet School is one that is chosen by its district and the federal government to receive extra funding, equipment, teachers, and training to “specialize” in a chosen field or two” (<http://www.abcusdmagnetschools.com/>). And Stowers is a magnet school of International studies.

What is the International program in Stowers?

In Stowers, all students receive the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program (IB-PYP).

IB, founded in Geneva, Switzerland, 1968, is a rigorous program that operates in 141 countries and has three programs for all students aged 3-19. Three programs are: the Primary Years Program (**PYP**) for students aged 3 to 12; the Middle Years Program (**MYP**) for students aged 11 to 16; the Diploma Program (**DP**) for students aged 16 to 19 (<http://www.ibo.org/general/who.cfm>).

IB-PYP

In Stowers, all students receive the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program

(IB-PYP). The IB-PYP has been implemented in Stowers for four years. Stowers is now an IB candidate school. In the following paragraphs, the perspective, attitudes, curriculum, concepts, skills, action, learner profile and assessments in IB-PYP are introduced. Reflection from a lesson plan (Global Warming) designed by sixth grade teachers (Preacely-Garcia, Blum, and Tellez, 2010) in Stowers is presented as an example as well.

Perspective

The perspective of IB is Internationalism. It is to cultivate students into international citizens. In Stowers, all students take Spanish course as a second language. Learning another language also let students understand and empathize with people who speak different languages.

Attitudes

Twelve positive attitudes are addressed in IB program. It is to develop their positive attitudes toward people, the environment, and learning.

1. Appreciation
2. Commitment
3. Confidence
4. Cooperation
5. Creativity
6. Curiosity
7. Empathy
8. Enthusiasm
9. Independence
10. Integrity
11. Respect
12. Tolerance

3. Circle an attitude that helped you learn during this unit.

Appreciation	Commitment	Confidence
Creativity	Curiosity	Empathy
Independence	Integrity	Respect
Cooperation	Enthusiasm	Tolerance

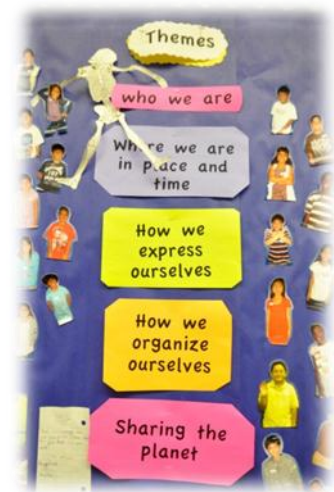
How did it help you learn?

*The unit reflection sheets were given for the 6th graders in Stowers after they learned the unit: Global Warming. Students were asked to circle an attitude that helped them learn during the unit and how that attitude helped them learn. (See Appendix A for the full unit reflection sheet)

Curriculum

The IB curriculum is designed to find significant and universal knowledge for all students in the world. In Stowers, the units are made with the California State Standards and under the six IB themes as shown below. By using the inquiry-based learning strategies, students work together and look for answers together in many ways. By discovering the answers themselves, they would find more questions and answers and become independent thinkers, autonomous learners and international minded citizens.

1. Who we are
2. How the world works
3. Sharing the planet
4. How we organize ourselves
5. How we express ourselves
6. Where we are in time and place



Concepts

Through inquiry-based learning, eight concepts are expressed as key answers to lead students to think deeper about the topic they learn. The concepts and key questions are displayed below.

Concepts:	Questions:	Concepts:	Questions:
Form	→ What is it like?	Perspective	→ What are the points of view?
Function	→ How does it work?	Responsibility	→ What is our responsibility?
Causation	→ Why is it like it is?	Reflection	→ How do we know?
Change	→ How is it changing?		
Connection	→ How is it connected to other things?		

Take the sixth grade PYP in Stowers for example: in the topic of *Global Warming* designed by Preacely-Garcia, Blum, and Tellez (2010), three concepts (*causation, form, function*) are emphasized. According to the teachers' reflection, the students have learned through these three concepts and gained some insights about global warming. The teachers' notes are quoted below.

Key concepts:

1. Causation-Students now understand the causes of global warming.
2. Form-Students explored how global warming happens through research and can explain the consequences for the world.
3. Function-Students learned that there are things they can do like recycling water bottles, conservation, sorting through the trash for biodegradable materials, planting their own garden, and riding bikes or walking to school.

Skills

No matter what subjects the students are learning, they are taught to practice the five transdisciplinary skills:

1. Social skills
2. Communication skills
3. Thinking skills
4. Research skills
5. Self-management skills

4. Give an example of how you used each skill during this unit:

Research skills:

Communication skills:

Social Skills:

Self-management skills:

Thinking Skills:

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Take the sixth grade PYP in Stowers for example: in the topic of *Global Warming*, three skills (*social, communication, self-management*) are developed. The teachers' notes are quoted below (Preacely-Garcia et al., 2010).

Transdisciplinary Skills:

1. Social Skills-Cooperating-Students worked cooperatively in groups on their projects and learned together.
2. Communication Skills-Speaking-Students speaking skills improved especially when they had to present whether an in-class presentation or on the broadcasts.
3. Self-management-Organization-Students learned teamwork, responsibility and open-mindedness when learning about others, which enabled them to do a good job on their broadcasts. Students learned how to do in-depth research.

Action

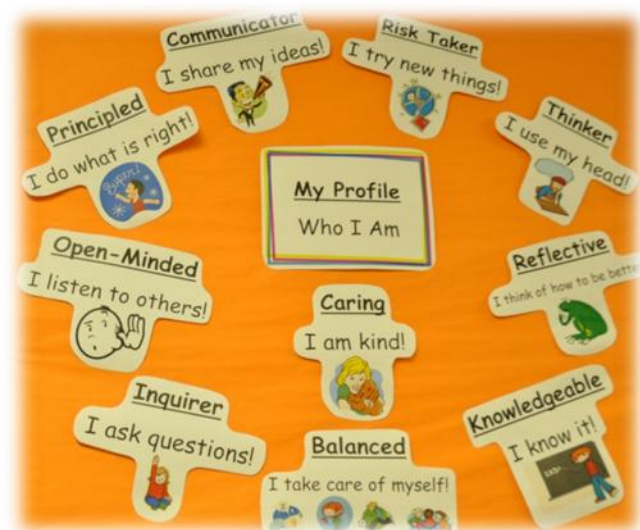
At the end of the unit, students are asked to think about what they can do with what they have learned. They are asked to take action on issues that affect them and the world. It is a cycle of choose, act, and reflect. The **Action Cycle** enables students to practice and contribute to their families, communities and global events for their entire life.



Take the sixth grade PYP in Stowers for example: in the topic of *Global Warming*, the teachers noted that “One student decided to organize a beach cleanup with friends and family.”; “The classroom recycling bin filled up more frequently.”; “Students taught family members about global warming and what they could do.”; “Some students wrote letters to their congressman asking what our state was doing about global warming.”

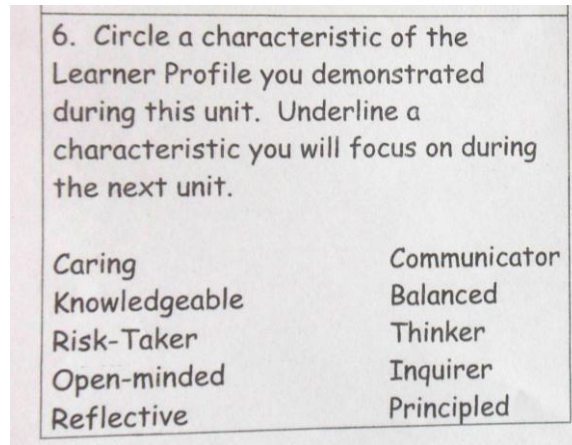
Learner Profile

After taking the PYP, an IB kid is becoming an international minded person with ten traits addressed below.



IB kids will be:

1. Inquirers
2. Thinkers
3. Communicators
4. Risk-takers
5. Knowledgeable
6. Principled
7. Caring
8. Open-minded
9. Balanced
10. Reflective



*The unit reflection sheets were given for the 6th graders after they learned the unit: Global Warming. Students were asked to circle a characteristic of the learner profile they demonstrated during this unit and underline a characteristic they will focus on during the next unit. (See Appendix A for the full unit reflection sheet)

Take the sixth grade PYP in Stowers for example: in the topic of *Global Warming*, three traits (*risk-takers, communicators, inquirers*) are developed. The teachers' notes are quoted below (Preacely-Garcia et al., 2010).

Learner Profile:

1. Risk-takers-Through their research, students were able to take a stance and defend it.
2. Communicators-Students said things like "I need to do more so I won't add to global warming" and "when they cut down trees, they should plant more." Students wanted to have parents come and listen to them explain global warming.
3. Inquirers-Students became active inquirers throughout the unit, asking questions, doing additional research and answering other questions.

Assessments

Besides all the benchmark testing and state-mandated assessments, a required assessment by the PYP is the **exhibition**. Students have to present what they have learned on their final year of the PYP. They are going to use the learned skills to propose solutions for selected worldwide real issues.

After this trip, how were you feeling?

The first impression I have from the students was: “WOW! They are so well-behaved, independent and well-disciplined”.

I was assigned to observe the sixth grade (Room 308). My first impression was that they were so well-behaved. Normally in this class, students have language arts class in the morning and math in the afternoon. When I first got there, they were asked to do the unit reflection as the handout parts I showed above. Everyone was so quiet doing their reports even when the classroom teacher was out. If they had any questions, they would just raise their hands and keep silence. In between the units or activities, they might talk, but they would lower their volume. Mostly, I only heard them whispered to each other.

Besides, students in class were attentive. The teacher didn't have to ask students to pay attention. As I observed, I found that when the teacher was reading a story, the students were really involved! In story time, every student concentrated his/her attention on the story. I could tell from their body movements that though they were sitting on their chairs, all of them tried to move their bodies to be closer to the teacher. After listening to a chapter, the students even asked the teacher if she could read more. Some students couldn't wait and asked if they could borrow the book. It is not only the sixth graders that could be so attentive in class; the third grade students were also focused when their teacher read a story to them, as I observed.

I found that teachers and students treated each other with respect. I didn't hear any shouting or yelling from the teachers. In Room 308, all the teacher has to do to cease the noise is to tell the students to pay respect because she is talking. Students also respect each other. When I accompanied the sixth graders to the library, there was a girl named Laura screamed because she saw a picture in a book that scared her. The other girl, Emily, told me

that she was dramatic. That was her trait. Laura heard that and, immediately, Emily apologized to her and explained to her what she told me. Emily acted so matured and honest. I was so amazed.

The curriculum in Stowers is carried out through inquiry-based learning. Students are asked to work and search together to gain the answers and complete the tasks. In Room 308 that I observed, students just started to learn

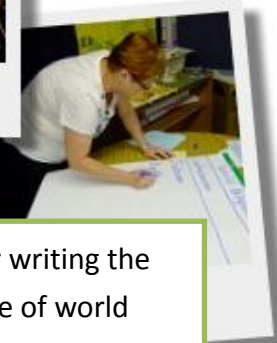
Students searching books in the library



A boy with his world religions flap book



Teacher writing the outline of world religions on the poster



a new unit: world religion. The teacher showed them the outline of the religions and asked them to create a flap book. Students started to work in pairs and look for the answers. I saw a boy reading a book. At first I thought he was just reading his own book. However, after I got closer and asked him, I found that he was searching for relevant books about religions. It was amazing that all students could automatically start their research without keeping asking the teacher for directions or answers. They were truly independent thinkers.

Students in Stowers are so well-disciplined to a degree of astonishment. There was one day when I was sitting in Rm308 and suddenly the fire siren rang out. It was the fire drill. At that time, all students spontaneously lined up by the door and walked

Fire Drill



to the court. When I walked with them, I found that no one was running. Every class walked quietly to the court. After all the students were gathered, the principle timed and said that the total process took only FOUR minutes. After dismissal, all classes went back to their classroom quietly and orderly. It was astonishing that 500 students could act fast and orderly like that.

Have you changed anything in class after the visit?

Yes. I try not to use the microphone in class as far as possible.

Teachers in Stowers don't use microphones in class. I wonder if it is because the students are so well-behaved so that they don't have to yell; or is it because the teachers don't talk loudly so the students are comparatively quieter. I think it must be reciprocal causation. Therefore, after I came back, I try not to use the microphone in class. And when students are noisy, I tell them to pay respect because I am talking. It works most of the time. But sometimes I still need to use the microphone especially when I have 6 sessions in a day.

However, the other reason that the teachers and students talk quietly is because of the uniqueness of the classroom buildings. The classroom buildings in Stowers are like mazes to me. The



A hexagonal learning center inside the classroom building

two single-floored buildings are for the primary and upper graders respectively. Inside the building, there is a hexagonal saloon-like space. The classrooms are built radially around the

space. The more surprising thing is that for some classrooms, there is **NO DOOR** on this side. Isn't it amazing?! According to the principal, the school was built in 1969;



therefore, even he doesn't know why the classrooms are designed like this.

Since the classrooms have no door and all classrooms are connected, teachers and students have to keep their voice down; otherwise they will disturb other classes in the building.

Reflection

John Dewey once said "If we teach today like we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow." After getting a slightly understanding of the IB-PYP, I would like to apply some of the ideas, such as the positive attitudes, the inquiry-based learning

Harvest parade
Students, teachers and we
are all dressed up!



Trunk-or-treat, a night-time activity
Parents decorate their trunks and dress up!

strategies, and the learner profile in my teaching. I want to teach for real life just like what I have felt during the two weeks trip in California: learning English for real life. Hopefully

both my students and I could gain the awareness of being international minded and walk out of the classroom to see how big the world is.

During the five days visiting in Stowers, I've seen some interesting activities such as harvest parade and trunk-or-treat; some programs such as the student ambassadors and the buddy system; and the free teaching styles in class. I also saw some interesting phenomena such as teachers walked through other teachers' classrooms to their own classrooms and the principal visited and checked on each class for at least 3 to 5 times a day... These are phenomena that won't happen in here. I'm so glad and so grateful to join this wonderful trip. I am thankful for every one who helped make this trip happen! I deeply appreciated.

Student Ambassadors



The ambassadors are having a meeting with their teacher. They are the editors of school news.

The ambassadors are serving students in the library.

This ambassador is interviewing me about the schools in Taiwan. She is going to put it in their school news.

Buddy



The Buddy System-the upper graders take care of, teach and accompany the primary ones. In this picture, a sixth grader is teaching a first to count.



First graders come to Rm308 to give their 6th grade buddies a thank you card and snacks.



The sixth grade buddy is accompanying his 1st grade buddy to read a story.

Reference

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Appendix A

Unit Reflection

<p>5. Give an example of how you "took action" in this unit:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>6. Circle a characteristic of the Learner Profile you demonstrated during this unit. Underline a characteristic you will focus on during the next unit.</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Caring</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Communicator</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Knowledgeable</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Balanced</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Risk-Taker</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Thinker</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Open-minded</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Inquirer</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Reflective</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Principled</td> </tr> </table>	Caring	Communicator	Knowledgeable	Balanced	Risk-Taker	Thinker	Open-minded	Inquirer	Reflective	Principled	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <th style="text-align: center; padding: 5px;">Unit Reflection</th> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Unit title:</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Central Idea:</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"> </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"> </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Name:</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Date:</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"> </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">1. Which unit activity did you enjoy the most?</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"> </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Why?</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"> </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"> </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"> </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"> </td> </tr> </table>	Unit Reflection	Unit title:	Central Idea:			Name:	Date:		1. Which unit activity did you enjoy the most?		Why?				
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<p>2. Which activity did you learn the most from?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Why?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>3. Circle an attitude that helped you learn during this unit.</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Appreciation</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Commitment</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Confidence</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Creativity</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Curiosity</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Empathy</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Independence</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Integrity</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Respect</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Cooperation</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Enthusiasm</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Tolerance</td> </tr> </table> <p>How did it help you learn?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	Appreciation	Commitment	Confidence	Creativity	Curiosity	Empathy	Independence	Integrity	Respect	Cooperation	Enthusiasm	Tolerance	<p>4. Give an example of how you used each skill during this unit:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Research skills:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Communication skills:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Social Skills:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Self-management skills:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Thinking Skills:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
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