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Observations and Standards Reflection 1
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Introduction

As my present teaching assignment is at Thomas A. Edison High School in Alexandria, this first observation and standards reflection paper should be considered a synthesis of my observations and practice within the confines of the English department. Part of my job at Edison is to act as a liaison between the IB English faculty and the IB coordinator as well as serve as IB team leader in the department. Because of this, I am responsible for compiling curriculum and assessments in time for IB deadlines, make sure I know all of the students who did not begin their IB programs at Edison, coordinate internal assessments, mentor new teachers who have not had either A1 or A2 training, and generally know what is going on in all of the IB classes. As this is the first year that Edison has also offered IB English A2, I have also found myself learning some of the requirements for that course since it is part of the English department.

I myself teach four of the second level of the English A1 program and generally feel that all of the IB English teachers (both A1 and A2) need to be on the same page regarding the rigor and message we give to the students for those same students to be successful lifelong learners. At the beginning of the school year, our Diploma Coordinator used the Learner Profile as the subject of a back-to-school meeting, encouraging the Edison IB faculty to promote these qualities in our students. I will admit that the hardest one for my own students as they approach the May exams and continually worry about grade point averages is the idea of being risk-takers but I do keep trying even with little things such as discussion questions that are not graded and projects that allow them to try mediums that they may have never considered before.

The following observation and standards reflection you are about to read is based on my own classroom experience in IB English 2 (senior year), as well as classroom observations of IB English 1 (junior year). I also have obtained some information from my colleagues as I we are fortunate at Edison to have departmental lunch. One of the benefits of this is that I can find out what is happening in any of the classes at any time. In addition, over the last couple of weeks, I have been extremely busy with the other two IB English 2 teachers and the IB English A2 teacher as all of us have been completing our World Literature Assessments and internal assessments. I will incorporate some of that information into the reflection as appropriate.

STANDARDS REFLECTION

Section A: philosophy

Standard A1: There is close alignment between the educational beliefs and values of the school and those of the programme.

The IBO mission statement is supported by the mission statement of Edison High School which states, that “Edison’s mission is to maximize achievement and success for all students in a climate which fosters personal responsibility, values learning and respects cultural diversity” (Thomas A. Edison High School Improvement Plan). In the IBO Mission Statement, students are encouraged to “become active, compassionate, and lifelong learners who understand that other people with their differences, can also be right” (IB Mission Statement). Edison’s dedication to a challenging academic environment also blends well with the IBO. One concerted effort at Edison has been to get all students to enroll in at least one IB course during their junior and senior years. Often, that one IB course is English, as the subject has the highest levels of enrollment from year to year, averaging nine sections of IB English 1 (A1) and eight sections of IB English 2 (A1). For this year’s examination, we have 156 IB English A1 candidates. We also have one section of IB English A2 with 13 candidates sitting for the examination. All students may enroll in IB courses if they desire to do so.

Standard A2: The school promotes international-mindedness in the part of the adults and the students in the school community.

The English department promotes international-mindedness in the part of the adults and the students in the school community in several ways. Firstly, the nature of the World Literature requirements within the English A1 curriculum promotes understanding of other cultures and provides access to different nationalities, perspectives, and languages. During the junior year in English A1, students read four World Literature texts, while they read the final World Literature text during their senior year. Some of our selections have included the following:

- *A Doll’s House* by Henrik Ibsen
- *Like Water for Chocolate* by Laura Esquivel
- *Candide* by Voltaire
- *Death and the Maiden* by Ariel Dorfman
- *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* by Alexander Solzhenitsyn
- *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi
- *House of the Spirits* by Isabel Allende
- *Baghdad Sketches* by Freya Stark

From these texts, students also produce two papers for external assessment which then are sent to examiners during the senior year. Literary pieces like these enable the teachers to engage students in discussions and activities that compare and contrast not only literary but social situations of yesterday and today.

In addition, the nature of the A2 course promotes international-mindedness in that many of the students who have enrolled in this course are students who had formerly been ESOL students and previously completed Transitional English 9. The units and curriculum the teacher is using in the class have been developed with attention to the fact that all of these students have come from somewhere else and English is not their first language. There is a secure environment reinforcing ideas of respect and improving skills in reading, writing, and comprehension as the class progresses through the curriculum.

Another way that the English department promotes international-mindedness in adults and students in the school community is through a school activity that is based in the department. In September 2004, a full diploma IB candidate approached me regarding applying for a charter for a chapter of People-to-People International (PTPI). This organization, originally founded by Dwight Eisenhower, has a mission of peace through understanding. The purpose of PTPI “is to enhance international understanding and friendship through educational, cultural and humanitarian activities involving the exchange of ideas and experiences directly among peoples of different countries and diverse cultures” (People to People International).

Students plan and participate in community service activities with a local and international focus. When approached, I thought this would be a wonderful marriage for an IB school and took the program on as the faculty advisor. The chapter was chartered in October 2004 and is the only Washington DC-metro student chapter. In its’ third year, approximately 40 students have collected stuffed animals for local families, fundraised for victims of the school shootings in Beslan, North Ossetia, sold white awareness ribbons for tsunami relief, collected school supplies and packed boxes for Operation Iraqi Children, and provides ongoing support for a community in Uganda by way of providing school and hygiene supplies that are hard to get or expensive in that area of the world. Members are also planning to clean up a courtyard at Edison this spring and are tending three trees they acquired from the Fairfax Re-Leaf Program.

Section B: organization

Standard B1: The school demonstrates ongoing commitment to, and provides support for, the programme through appropriate administrative structures and systems, staffing and resources.

The administrative staff and the Diploma Coordinator of Edison High School are completely supportive of the English department by ensuring that all students have access to the program and that if a problem occurs with an IB English student that the classroom

teacher cannot handle then the Diploma Coordinator will meet with the student, parents, and teacher involved to discuss the situation and reach an appropriate decision that is consistent with IB aims and objectives as well as beneficial for the student. In addition, during examination time, the school does consider the examinations to be serious and gives them such attention.

Faculty in the English Department who teach the IB program courses are all eligible to teach the program but all may not be trained at the time they are teaching it. This is due to a couple of possible scenarios. One, a faculty member may be a new hire. I myself started teaching IB this way five years ago with another one of the IB English 1 instructors who started teaching for Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) at the same time. Both of us had come from other states with previous teaching experience across multiple levels and it was decided that we could be put into IB slots and teach a year before going to training in New Mexico the following summer for English A1 training. When we did go to IB training the following summer, we were very far ahead of the group because we had taught IB that year and the other teachers at Edison including the department chair at the time (now the Diploma Coordinator) had taken us under her wing and unofficially trained us. The other scenario for the lack of training is the lack of teacher retention and that is almost hard to say but our particular department has had quite a bit of turnover in the last few years and almost as soon as we have trained someone, they have left. One person even left *before* they taught IB after being trained so there is sometimes some hesitation, especially if a person may not be thinking of staying more than one more year. In that case, the mentoring works better for the year before sending them to be trained; it also allows the teacher to decide if they even like teaching the assignment since the assignment requires more grading than others and probably more preparation. From my experience, I can say, no one else has four IB English 2 classes. Every other teacher here at Edison has two, with the exception of the department chair who has three.

The requirements in English for teaching IB classes in order of preference are: 1) Master's Degree or at least 15 hours towards a Master's degree; 2) previous teaching experience in an IB school; 3) at least two years teaching experience; and 4) initiative and self-awareness. Since the inception of the IB program at Edison, 19 English teachers have been trained, 12 have left and one has now become the Diploma Coordinator. Retention rates have been problematic but the continual influx of new staff also allows for new ideas with curriculum, pedagogy, and professional development. Of the trained teachers that are still at Edison, three have what is considered Level 3 training. I am one and the other is the department chair. The third person is now the Diploma Coordinator. All other faculty have what is now called Level 2 training. Some of the teachers that have been trained have not been retrained for a number of years and were originally trained before the IBO began naming training levels in English. The current IB English A2 teacher has not yet been trained because a training session is not available until this summer. When the course enrollment was deemed sufficient, last summer's training had already passed.

Within the department, there is what is called the IB English Team of which I am the team leader. I am responsible for holding periodic meetings to discuss issues relevant to the entire team and in addition can have partial team meetings as well such as an IB English 2 team meeting to discuss the predicted grades which we will be completing shortly. This is a time for discussion and collaboration as a smaller group. There are eight teachers who teach IB English overall and our topics of discussion have included how to keep students in IB courses, time management, internal assessments including listening and actually scoring student tapes, and reviewing returned Paper 1 and Paper 2 assessments from previous years. At Edison we have a 4 x 4 block schedule which works on a Day 1/Day 2 plan so IB teachers do not have common planning periods. Because of this, team meetings have been during lunch, after school, and on teacher work days.

Section C: curriculum

Standard C1: A comprehensive, coherent, written curriculum based on the requirements of the programme and developed by the school, is available to all sections of the school community.

With the exception of the IB English A2 teacher whose curriculum is very different, the IB English A1 teachers work in conjunction to make sure that curriculum selections work together to fulfill the correct parts of the IB syllabus. It is part of my responsibilities as team leader and liaison to the Diploma Coordinator to check the various teacher curriculums to make sure they do not violate either the Prescribed Book List (PBL) or the list of Prescribed World Literature (PWL). With the number of English candidates at Edison growing each year, a decision was made to allow different teachers to have their own curriculums with the provision that they would be written correctly for submission to Cardiff. This allows for variation in our program and allows teachers to make decisions about their own pedagogy and inject some of their own personalities into their classrooms. This year, in the new A2 course, the department chair and I worked with the IB English A2 teacher to develop his curriculum. Since students get credit for both English 10 and 11 by taking IB English A2, a combination of traditionally grade 10 and grade 11 texts were chosen keeping in mind the cultural diversity, international aspects, and the thematic nature of that course. All curriculum choices are written up by faculty and made available to parents and students. In addition, Fairfax County Public Schools uses Blackboard and many IB English faculty also have their curricula and syllabi posted there as well. At the end of each year, faculty has the option to review curriculum, discuss what worked and did not, and make changes for the following academic terms. When new teachers are chosen or hired, I have worked with them to select texts that would be easier for newer teachers starting out, especially if they have not been trained or have not taught a large number of the texts on the PBL or PWL.

In my own IB English 2 classroom this year, I have been making significant attempts to continually interject the learner profile into my assignments. Even if my students do not always realize it, I am trying to get them to develop curiosity by forcing them to question what they read, take responsibility for their actions, consider and listen to the viewpoints of others and reflect on their own learning and experience. I have recently finished teaching the play, *Death and the Maiden*, for some students, a brutal play where a female protagonist who had been tortured and raped gets the opportunity to take revenge on the man that she believes was her tormentor. For some students, they look at the surface story of a woman strapping a man in a chair and torturing him while her husband looks on in horror. For others (and this is more of what I want them to see as I get them ready for the Paper 2 exam) this is yes, the story I described above, but more than that, it is a story of what happens when we forget what it is like to be a human being, when we forget that humans have dignity, that people should have respect and compassion towards one another. These are all things in the IB Learner Profile. The Paper 2 examination in English is a thematic essay where students have to write about two of the four works that they study during the spring semester. *Death and the Maiden* gets taught with *Incident at Vichy* by Arthur Miller which is set in 1942 France and *A Man for All Seasons* which is about St. Thomas More. The other play, slightly less connected to these themes but linked by others is *Oleanna* by David Mamet.

Standard C2: The school has implemented a system through which all teachers plan and reflect in collaborative teams.

Through the IB English Team, the entire IB English faculty has the opportunity to work together to review materials, discuss issues, or undergo professional development. In addition, at Edison, the collegial atmosphere within the entire English department (not only among IB English faculty) makes the exchange of ideas and materials much easier. There is a departmental workroom with materials, textbooks, and other supplies as well as two computer stations for those teachers who do not have access to a classroom during planning periods because of shared spaces.

A continual discussion among the team has been the idea that all students can succeed in the IB English program. There is a feeling that all students, regardless of status previously (ESOL, Focus) can succeed in the IB English courses. At Edison, Focus is a ninth-grade program for students not enrolled in any other advanced course. However, in English, all ninth-grade English classes are labeled “Pre-IB”. In Focus, students also take a study skills class called “Success Prep”. They are placed in Focus based on recommendations from their eighth-grade teachers and quite a few students from this program eventually take IB English 1 and IB English 2.

Standard C3: Teaching and learning at the school empowers and encourages students to become lifelong learners, to be responsible towards themselves, their learning, other people, and the environment, and to take appropriate action.

A concerted effort to encourage more students to try IB English as well as other IB courses was the spark for IB Connections – a week-long summer camp in June that exposes underrepresented rising 10th and 11th grade students to IB through TOK-like writing activities and hands-on workshops in various subjects including art, English, physics, film, history, theatre, and Spanish.

With the Diploma Coordinator, I have been running the camp for three years. This year will be our fourth year. Our first year, there was not a singular focus but the teachers involved decided the types of presentations that they wanted to do. I worked with my department chair to do a presentation on heroes and Greek and Roman gods. We also tied that into art since during each camp session the participants did go on a field trip; that year going to the National Gallery of Art was one of the choices. The following year, camp centered on the idea that camper would all go to one place for the field trip – to see an exhibit at the Hirshhorn Museum called “Visual Music.” The faculty involved decided that all the workshop presentations would have something to do with the arts and thus students created musical instruments and discussed the physics of making music, learned about protest poetry, and created collages while studying Willem De Koonig. During the third year, the focus was on overt and covert communication with a field trip to the International Spy Museum. Participants evaluated good and bad spy films, studied surrealism and created surrealistic art, learned about Chinese calligraphy, and made their own iPod speakers. The approach to learning during camp is both hands-on and analytical with students getting up and moving around at times and being reflective and writing during others. An important component of the TOK writing session in the mornings is the sharing time for students where students can discuss how they know what they know and consider ideas of other participants.

During the past two years, full diploma IB candidates have also helped out as counselors, facilitating discussion during the sharing session and assisting faculty during workshops. This year, in addition to being the secondary administrator for the camp, I will work with members of the IB Advisory Council (IBAC), a group of full diploma IB students, to design a student-driven workshop for the camp this year, focused on our theme of “Acculturation from the Inside Out.” The IBAC was an offshoot of the camp as driven full diploma IB students started their own club to provide support and information to other members of the school community about IB. In addition to providing support at camp, members of the IBAC provide information sessions about IB courses during lunches to other students and assisted with one of People to People International’s activities this year.

Standard C4: There is an agreed approach to assessment, and to the recording and reporting of assessment data, which reflects the practices and requirements of the programme.

All IB English teachers use the IB rubrics for the tasks of commentary and written paper 2. In addition, the rubric for the oral component is used as appropriate. A teacher that

is no longer at Edison, matched the IB rubric scoring out of 25 possible points to the Fairfax County Public Schools grading scale in order to produce a conversion chart and a 100-point scale that both the students and the IB English faculty can easily use. This has been widely accepted at Edison. Each year, I reevaluate the conversion chart to make sure that the values are still within acceptable ranges, checking for example the range of score on Paper 1 that received a 4 on the IB examination. The chart has stood up to IB score ranges since I have been checking it.

For tasks that are smaller than an entire IB rubric or when teachers want to work on a singular skill, grades and point values are adjusted or parts of IB rubrics are used. Most teachers feel that continually exposing students to the rubrics as often as possible makes them the most familiar with them and by the time a student gets to the exam they won't even have to think about them.

Section D: the student

Standard D1: Students learn to choose to act, and to reflect on their actions, so that they contribute to their own well-being and that of the community and the environment.

Although not all IB English students are full diploma students, those who are can choose to complete CAS activities with an English bent to them. Through People-to-People International (PTPI), they can choose to participate in some of the activities we advertise or find their own local or international activities. In my own English classes, I ask students to reflect on their own actions and behavior and connect to their reading through journal writing. In one of the IB English 1 classes, while teaching *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, two of the teachers ask students to complete journal prompts that include questions like, "Describe a time when you were the coldest you've ever been" and "Describe a time when you were stuck in one place for a long period of time." Students are then asked to relate them to the text.

Standard D2: In the final year of the programme, all students complete a programme-specific project that allows them to demonstrate a consolidation of their learning, in the case of PYP and MYP, and to demonstrate the extension and development of their learning in the Diploma Programme.

For those students who are full diploma candidates, the Diploma Programme requires completion of the extended essay. This 4000-word research assignment is introduced in the junior year and the continual goal at Edison is to get students to find their mentors, subject, and begin their research before they leave for the summer at the end of their junior year. In the spring, after-school and evening meetings are held for anticipated IB full diploma candidates. However, despite this effort, the extended essay continues to be a problem with many students coming back from summer break having not even begun their essays.

Sometimes, mentors have left the county but more often students have simply not started. This has been a continual discussion among IB faculty in general and two IB English faculty have even taken up the task of coordinating all preliminary extended essay materials, handing out folders to the students with explanations of requirements, directions, and information for parents. They also field questions and hold meetings as well as provide some starting information for mentors.

In regards to support for students, mentors and faculty have been very supportive of the pressure put on diploma candidates, especially in relation to the workload. Time management of students is a concern and an area that needs improvement. A new framework of deadlines had been put into place in order to help students cope with the extended essay with the deadline for the first receipt of extended essays being November 20, however, some extended essays this year were still being tracked down shortly before they needed to be mailed to examiners. The extended essay is a persistent area of concern at Edison. As far as English extended essays go, very few are actually done in this subject area each year, although English faculty does serve as extended essay mentors when asked by students. This year, four teachers in the English department served as mentors.

Conclusion

In regards to the IB English department and faculty, I believe we do a good job of adhering to the program standards and practices of the International Baccalaureate Organization. Edison's mission statement, albeit shorter than I expected to find, complements the mission statement of the IBO.

As I went through each section and standard, I found that some standards are more applicable to diploma candidates and not certificate candidates. I see both types of students in my classes and as educators, I am charged with educating both in my classroom at Edison. I make no distinctions in my instruction towards each but probably all students as if they were diploma candidates with the attitude that they can succeed at anything they are willing to attempt. Although not every student at Edison is a full diploma candidate, all students at Edison benefit from having the IB program here.

Works Cited

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