

VERTICAL ARTICULATION

Vertical articulation ensures that what students learn from one year to the next takes form as a coherent and logical process that maximally supports student understanding and progression. Vertical articulation requires that teachers collaborate to align their course material across grade levels for the primary benefit of students. This is reflected in the IB Middle Years Programme (MYP) Standards and Practices (IBO, 2014, updated 2016), which requires that “collaborative planning and reflection addresses vertical and horizontal articulation.”

This report summarizes the findings from the research study by the Claremont Evaluation Centre (CEC) on implementation of vertical articulation as part of the collaborative strategies.

What does vertical articulation look like across the world? *findings from teacher surveys (2017, 2018)*

- On average, teachers are meeting IB expectations for vertical articulation.
- Teachers say they regularly incorporate vertical articulation practices within their own classroom, but fewer apply those aspects that require going beyond their class, such as collaboration with other teachers.
- Almost 20% of teachers said they never meet with teachers outside of their grade-level to share unit plans.

20%

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- Nevertheless, teachers were particularly confident in their ability to design unit plans that:
 - build upon students’ previously learned knowledge and skills and,
 - prepare students for future content. Nearly 95% of teachers met or exceeded IB expectations in this area.
- Student experiences are largely consistent with vertical articulation.

Implementation practices *findings from 2018 schools visits (27 schools)*

Schools display two types of implementation practices, with the vast majority of them falling in b):

- a) No vertical planning occurring
- b) Intentionally engaged with in vertical planning



At a minority of sites staff indicated vertical planning was not occurring. One teacher commented that:

Well we as a grade, we have common assessments; so we create the rubrics and assessments, like in my case, with two other teachers. But up the ladder? No, no.
– MYP Teacher



For schools that provided formal time to engage in vertical planning, meetings varied considerably in terms of frequency (e.g. weekly, monthly, or once a year) and staff composition (e.g. within-subjects, across-departments, or school-wide). More frequent meetings tended to occur within subject group while school-wide planning occurred annually. The focus of these meetings also varied widely. In some instances, within-subject groups teachers held discussions about the sequence and presentation of curriculum content. In other cases, sites held schoolwide discussions around ways to embed MYP implementation strategies (e.g. approaches to learning, global contexts) sequentially so that these skills “built upon one another” over the course of students’ academic careers. This type of broader, cross-departmental planning was often overseen by coordinators at sites where staff were required to post their unit plans to an electronic platform (e.g. ManageBac).

In the words of a MYP coordinator:

But usually what happens is that the whole department looks at the unit plan and the objectives and we go through the... we make sure that we have the global context the way we should have them, that we covered all the ATL skills and that we just make sure that and this is done as an exercise in the whole department, so that grade 6 teacher is aware that in grade 9 this is what her colleagues do, that is why the school do things like that and not like my job is grade 6 and that's it so we try to do it collectively and share expertise – MYP Coordinator



In addition to vertical planning practices, we observed several teachers who drew students’ attention to vertical articulation in the classroom. In these instances, teachers would verbally prompt students to remember previous skills or lessons they had developed or engaged in and how those could be leveraged to help them complete current projects. For instance, one English teacher highlighted the similarities between a character in a book the kids were currently reading and a character from a book they read in the previous unit to help them understand the character’s perspective.



SUPPORT

to the implementation of vertical articulation



School administration allocated **formal time** to vertical planning.



Vertical planning is **required** by an external governing agency.



Schools have **sufficient resourcing** compared to others in their country.

BARRIERS

to the implementation of vertical articulation



Limited teacher understanding of the requirements of vertical planning due to lack of administrative support.



Schools have **insufficient resources**.

Summary

- Majority of schools engaged in and met the expectations for vertical articulation.
- Teachers are clearly frequently referencing material from previous lessons or years when they teach new material.
- Findings that vertical planning is vulnerable to challenges related to teacher collaboration may be explained by teacher accounts that a lack of common prep time adversely impacts this planning. Schools that implemented with higher quality were allotted sufficient time for vertical planning.
- Higher quality vertical articulation practices were also connected to the amount of time a school has been doing the IB. Supporting evidence for this appeared in site visit accounts where staff stated that the time a school has been doing the MYP supports overall implementation.



Background

In mid-2015, the IB commissioned the Claremont Evaluation Center (CEC) to lead a multi-year research project on the MYP: Next chapter's implementation and impact. The CEC study provides a wealth of data about what the implementation of the MYP curriculum looks like around the world in critical curriculum components.

Based on this multi-year research, the IB has identified three themes that categorize nine high-quality implementation strategies for the MYP:

- Collaborative strategies
- Key strategies
- Optional strategies

The IB will disseminate the CEC research findings in form of reports for high-quality implementation strategies and many other resources to support schools in further implementing the MYP programme.
