

LEARNING STORIES

Learning stories share examples of effective practice from IB World Schools to promote inquiry, action and reflection by educators and school learning communities. School samples in this series represent a range of development and application of IB programme standards and practices by illustrating *areas of programme development*. For more information on how to develop *areas of programme development*, please refer to the *Guide to programme evaluation*.

Language development: Language and culture explorations—student-driven, school-supported

Area of programme development: Story

Plymouth Whitemarsh High School is a comprehensive public high school that received authorization to offer the Career-related Programme (CP) in June 2020 amid the pandemic. The first year was online and hybrid, and we are currently teaching face to face.

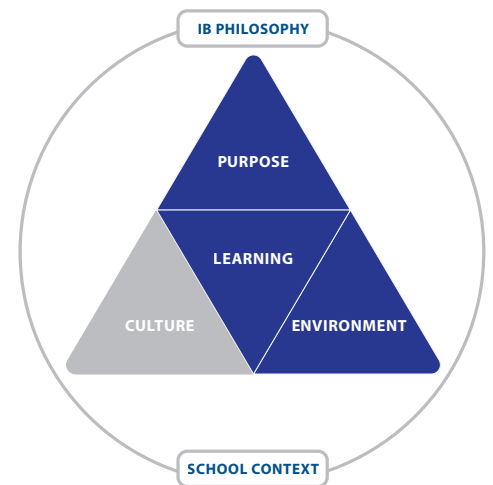
As we developed our mission statement, we knew we wanted all components to “support students’ personal growth by helping them to discover their unique career-related study and providing authentic experiences to develop and apply personal and professional skills, such as leadership, collaboration, and self-reflection”.

To that end, we wanted to create a language development (LD) component that engages students in authentic experiences, while providing **choice** and opportunities to build **connections** to the other CP core components, their career-related study (CRS) and Diploma Programme (DP) subjects. To do this, we knew we needed to provide guidance and support, while fostering student **agency**. We aim to find this **balance** of student-directed learning and school support in our programme.

Why did the school implement the area of programme development? (Why)

In designing and implementing the LD component, we draw on best practices. In particular, we follow Lýdia Machová’s four “secrets” to learning a new language. These are:

- enjoyment (finding joy in the process)
- methods (the mode in which you engage in language)
- a system (dedicated time and place to explore language)
- patience (reflecting on growth over time).



Plymouth Whitemarsh High School
Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania, USA

Type of school: Comprehensive public
high school (grades 9–12)

Size: 1,514

Languages of instruction: English

Programmes: CP

Why

Practice illustrated

- Lifelong learners 7: Students pursue opportunities to explore and develop their personal and cultural identities. (0402-07)

Developmental question considered

- How are students involved in their own learning?

Indicators that the practices are highly developed

- The school can show how it listens to the voices of all members of the community.
- Students are empowered to define relevant personal learning journeys.

For this reason, it was critical to us that students did not simply rely on websites and textbooks, but would rather engage in **authentic**, self-driven activities and tasks with **support**.

We built our programme to be student-centred, with students empowered to choose their focus for LD and set individual goals and learning plans, while also putting in place systems that enable structural guidance and support from teachers and collaboration with peers.

The language that I will be exploring is French. While French is a complex and difficult language to learn, there are many reasons why it can be beneficial. Gaining knowledge on another culture and their way of communication [...] will open my mind to rituals and norms [that] other people participate in, further developing my ability to think anthropologically. Some of my strengths that will guide me along the way will be my determination and motivation to learn about a different culture [...] in order to form connections with other people easily. Additionally, with my strong desire to pursue a career in business, communicating with individuals from different backgrounds is a huge part of this occupation. Being exposed to several different cultures and different types of people will facilitate communication in my career pathway.

Current student's language and culture goals reflection

What made it possible for the school to begin its area of development? (Conditions)

One critical aspect that makes our programme work is that we, as a CP team, have a clear vision. Guided by the IB mission and the approaches to learning and teaching, we have developed our vision and shared understanding of how we want to approach our programme. We frequently review and assess our approaches against both mission statements (IB and school) to determine if practice is honouring them.

We conduct a tremendous amount of collaboration as a CP core team, meeting every other week to discuss potential connections and ideas. Moreover, the CP coordinator and the LD advisor meet weekly to evaluate practices and student work, and to determine next steps. This is made possible by the LD advisor having dedicated time in her schedule.

While most of the students' exploration is self-directed, they benefit from guidance in identifying ways to reach their goals or connect with specific tasks independently. To provide structural guidance to support students' learning journeys, we have expanded our core timetable to run every other day for two years for a total of 180 hours. This provides

Conditions

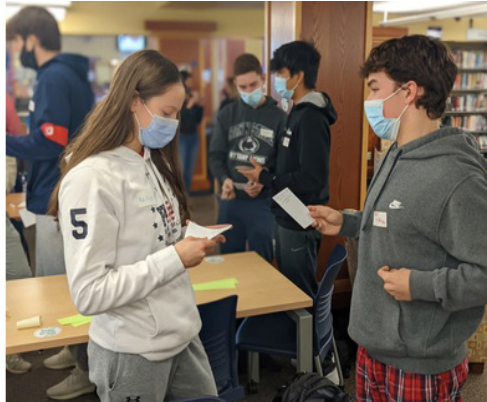
Practices illustrated

- Purpose 2: The school's pedagogical leadership team embraces educational approaches that encourage students to become active, compassionate lifelong learners. (0101-02)
- Leadership 3: The school organizes time for learning and teaching that provides a broad, balanced and connected curriculum and serves the changing needs of its community. (0201-03)

Developmental questions considered

- How can the school move from a philosophical agreement on the purpose of collaboration to specific actions that make that philosophy visible?
- How can the school be innovative with its use and allocation of time and staff to allow for learning and collaboration through and across disciplines and areas?

time not only for personal and professional skills (PPS), but also for LD and other core lessons, and allows the LD advisor to build relationships with students, provide guidance and inspiration, and hold the students accountable for their work. It also allows for in-depth lessons on language and culture, which help generate ideas, promote collaboration among students and build motivation to determine authentic ways to engage in their language. For example, a lesson exploring the ways in which different cultures express themselves through body language has catapulted several students into researching and exploring the ways that body language is used in conjunction with verbal language in their target language.



Creating a learning environment that balances school support and student agency, guidance and accountability, individual and collaborative learning

Who were the people largely responsible for creating and maintaining the school's area of programme development? (Who)

The LD advisor is most directly responsible for the health of LD. She works very closely with the CP coordinator and the other core teachers, and strives to find ways to balance school support with student self-direction.

The LD advisor has created a handbook that communicates the various ways to approach the LD component. She generates, updates and manages resources to support relevant language and culture learning experiences. She encourages students to engage with the community and attend culturally relevant events, and to reflect on their experiences.

Conditions (continued)

Indicators that the practices are highly developed

- The pedagogical leadership team develops and uses processes for ongoing critical reflection and revision, responsive to changing circumstances and emerging needs.
- The school's timetable reflects its commitment to specific areas of development.
- The school regularly reviews its timetable and allocation of student and staff time in order to find creative ways to allow for learning and collaboration through and across disciplines and areas.

Who

Practice illustrated

- Approaches to teaching 5: Teachers remove barriers to learning to enable every student to develop, pursue and achieve challenging personal learning goals. (0403-05)

Developmental question considered

- How do teachers provide learners with multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement to promote learning?

The LD advisor also supports the student-driven process of selecting a mentor by communicating expectations to students and to the mentors identified by students, and by providing examples of the ways that mentors can support the students. The LD advisor also checks in with the mentors a couple of times during the programme to address any questions and to see how students are utilizing their support.

In addition, through informal check-ins and formal interviews, she monitors students' progress in identifying and working towards their language and culture goals, and encourages them to take on additional opportunities.

The LD advisor also develops and facilitates lessons to engage students in language and culture activities and discussions, and builds on student input and interest. These lessons tap into students' interests, help deepen understandings, and enable students to bring their personal journeys into the community of learners.

Who (continued)

Indicators that the practice is highly developed

- The school presents content in different ways—providing students with different modes to engage in learning and different ways to express their learning—to stimulate interest and motivation for learning.
- Learners are resourceful, knowledgeable, strategic, goal-directed, purposeful and motivated, and there are artefacts to evidence this.

EXPERIENCIA

Agencia Judía de Ayuda, Filadelfia, PA — *Voluntario*

Junio de 2017 - PRESENTE

- Empacó y entregó cajas de alimentos y suministros a personas y familias de bajos ingresos en el área metropolitana de Filadelfia
- Se entregaron rutas de 18-20 cajas por entrega mensual directamente desde el almacén a los hogares de los destinatarios.

Tiendas de Alimentos de Giant, Conshohocken, PA — *Cajero*

Junio de 2019 - Agosto de 2019

- Transacciones de punto de venta procesadas, incluidos cheques, efectivo y compras a crédito
- Embolsó cuidadosamente los productos comprados para los clientes mientras se procesan simultáneamente sus transacciones
- Promovió la lealtad del cliente y las ventas consistentes al brindar un servicio amigable y una asistencia experta.

Club de Campo Green Valley, Lafayette Hill, PA — *Caddie*

Abril de 2019 - Junio 2019

- Trabajé directamente con el jugador de golf para ayudarlo con las reglas del golf, brindó consejos perspicaces, ayudó con la estrategia y la planificación del siguiente golpe, actualicé las distancias entre el jugador y el hoyo, almacené nuevas pelotas de golf en todo momento, brindó apoyo moral
- Relaciones interactuadas y construidas con un grupo diverso de personas de gran éxito.
- Carritos de golf dispuestos y transportados antes de los turnos

EDUCACIÓN

Colegio de Plymouth Whitemarsh,

Reunión de Plymouth, PA — *Diploma*

Septiembre de 2018 - Junio anticipado de 2022

- Se mantuvo 4.0 sin modificar / 4.7 GPA modificado
- Participó en la primera cohorte del Programa IBCP de PWHS
- Tomó todas las clases de honores cuando estén disponibles
- Activo en clubes y actividades escolares

HABILIDADES

Muy competente en muchos tipos de software.

Escritor fuerte

Altamente organizado

Fuertes habilidades de gestión del tiempo.

Fuertes habilidades de comunicación

Siempre curioso

Fuertes habilidades de pensamiento crítico

PREMIOS/PAPELES

Miembro de la Sociedad Nacional de Honor de PWHS

Vicepresidente de capítulo de Yitzhak Rabin AZA de BBYO

Miembro de la Academia de Liderazgo Global Leven de BBYO

Miembro de la Clase de Confirmación de BTBJ de 2020

Miembro activo de la Unión de Estudiantes Judíos de PWHS

Copresidente del Club de Historia de PWHS

IDIOMAS

Inglés, Español intermedio

Task example of a student resume in their selected language

How did the school create activities and opportunities to fulfil the area of programme development? (How)

Students have a tremendous amount of choice and autonomy over their direction, but are also held accountable for their progress with expectations of evidence, reflections and interviews with the LD advisor. It is this balance, intentionally created by applying Machová's four principles, that enables students to be successful in LD.

Enjoyment: To increase enjoyment, students have choice in their selection of language, goals, mentor, mode of study, tasks and activities, and ways to show their learning.

Students can choose to explore a language and culture from four options.

1. Continuation of the language they have been studying as a course
2. A new language course
3. Self-study of a language
4. Work as a peer mentor with an English language learner in the school

Regardless of their choice, students seek out a mentor who will support their learning. Mentors may be teachers, family members, friends, bilingual peers, community members or professionals in their career-related field. Students develop an ongoing relationship with their mentor; they share their learning and receive informal feedback, encouragement and opportunities for new learning experiences. The mentor provides support, but the initiative lies with the student.

For example, one student, who is studying Hebrew, formed a mentor relationship with a counsellor from his summer camp in Israel. He plans and participates in virtual check-ins with his mentor, which provides him with a rewarding and authentic language experience. We have found that working with mentors outside the school helps students gain more autonomy and enjoyment, and furthers their learning in authentic ways.

Method: Students investigate differentiated, authentic learning tasks and activities, from watching videos in their target language to developing web pages in their target language that are accessible to various language proficiency levels. Students are also invited to explore the relationship between culture and community, for example, through planning and realizing a cultural gathering, visiting a community festival or museum, or attending a language or cultural lecture series at a local library or college.

Students grow both through independent learning tasks and activities as well as through lessons that encourage them to bring their language and culture lens into whole-class discourse and make connections between LD and the rest of the programme.

How

Practices illustrated

- Coherent curriculum 1: The school plans and implements a coherent curriculum that organizes learning and teaching within and across the years of its IB programme(s). (0401-01)
- Lifelong learners 6: Students take ownership of their learning by setting challenging goals and pursuing personal inquiries. (0402-06)

Developmental questions considered

- How does the school use systems and processes to accommodate vertical and horizontal articulation of the curriculum, to create opportunities for students to make connections across their learning, and to create a balanced learning experience?
- How does the school support students to initiate, manage and direct their own learning?
- How does the school help students to set learning goals and recognize when they have succeeded in achieving these goals?

Indicators that the practices are highly developed

- The school has evaluated the processes and systems that work best in their context, and the learning environment has been co-designed to support ways for students to build on and connect their learning and have a rich and balanced learning experience.
- Students can share examples of how they are actively shaping their own futures by making appropriate choices and taking responsibility for their learning and actions.

For example, students have engaged in a lesson exploring the inquiry question, “To what extent should a nation change its language to accommodate gender neutrality?”, which links language and ethics. Students identified and explored various resources from various cultures, and applied their own thinking and connections from other courses in a Socratic seminar. This connects meaningfully to PPS and could provide inspiration for the reflective project (RP).

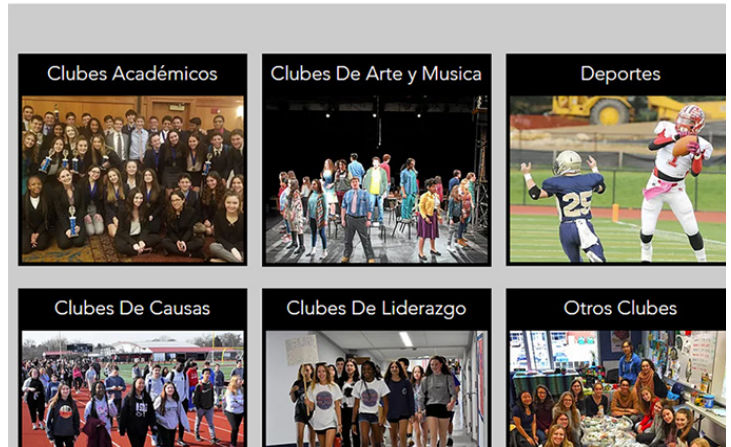
System: The system balances support structures and student agency, guidance and accountability, as well as individual and collaborative learning, to ensure students are progressing towards their individual goals.

The timetable is structured to allow for whole-class lessons in addition to individual tasks and mentor meetings. This enables students to explore language and culture collaboratively, informing and supporting their personal learning journeys.

For example, we introduce the LD component by engaging students in a lesson that explores the role of language in our personal and professional lives. Students grapple, discuss and inquire around the relationship between language, identity and society. This sparks interest and provides a springboard for students to identify personally relevant goals.

Students can use the “Bonus Block” (a weekly advisory period) to check in with the LD advisor or they can use that time to work on their language learning tasks and activities. Students are also provided some dedicated time to work on LD during “Momentum Month”, and they participate in three formal interviews with the LD advisor in which they are challenged to reflect deeply on their learning and growth.

Patience: LD is the first of the core components to be launched to students, which provides them with two full years to reach their goals. Students are required to reflect informally on each task they complete and more formally three times over the course of the two years. We consistently reinforce the idea that learning a language is a process that takes time and dedication. We do not expect students to achieve mastery proficiency of a level, but we do insist that they make strides towards their goals, reflect, and make connections to the other elements of the programme.



Sample task from a current student: building web pages for our website to engage Spanish-speaking students and families in our community

I found this task to be helpful because it gave me real-world experience in terms of what vocabulary news outlets use. Culture can sometimes affect the tone of how the information is presented. If the author has more of a connection to a certain issue, there is more empathy in the diction incorporated by the author. Additionally, the political stance on an issue can taint the facts the reader receives and ultimately change the way they perceive the event in the end. I learned that it is best to read global events from a variety of sources to formulate an objective and well-developed position on an issue. Part of being a knowledgeable language learner in the future is to be reflective about what one is reading and to identify possible biases. Reading articles that are written in the culture of where the event occurred or is taking place is a good starting point because that communicates how the people most involved feel.

Student reflection on a task to find and evaluate various newspaper or internet news articles about current events in the target language