

**Supporting Neurodivergent Learners of the Middle Years Program in
International Baccalaureate Schools in British Columbia**

by

Kirsten G. Brazier

BA (History), University of Victoria, 2006

Graduate Diploma (Inclusive Education), Vancouver Island University, 2025

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

Faculty of Education
© Kirsten Brazier, 2026
Vancouver Island University

All rights reserved. This work may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without permission of the author.

With respectful acknowledgement that Vancouver Island University is located on the unceded traditional territories of the Coast Salish Peoples and that this research was conducted on the territories of the x^wsepsəm or Kosapsam (Esquimalt) Nation and Songhees Nation. VIU appreciates and respects the lands of Snuneymuxw First Nation, Tla'amin First Nation, Cowichan and Snaw-naw-as First Nation.

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard.

Emily Baker, L. Sch. Psych.

Date:

Thesis Faculty Supervisor

Faculty of Education

Vancouver Island University

Rachel Moll, PhD

Date:

Dean

Faculty of Education

Vancouver Island University

Abstract

International Baccalaureate (IB) schools are well known worldwide for providing students with an academically rigorous program through a model of inquiry-based learning with a focus on international-mindedness. Through the IB framework, students experience a challenging but rewarding education that places an emphasis on personal development and community service. In British Columbia (BC), a number of neurodiverse students attend schools offering the IB program. This study examined how neurodivergent learners of the Middle Years Program (MYP) are being supported in International Baccalaureate Schools in British Columbia. For the purpose of this study, a survey of IB schools in BC offering the MYP was conducted. An online survey was circulated to relevant schools, and the results were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Study findings highlighted the flexibility of the IB framework that allows neurodiverse learners to be supported through an inquiry-based approach to learning. The survey results also pointed to areas where further advancements can be made in addressing how modifications to assessment processes, and in the explicit teaching of self-advocacy to students. The study also highlights the need to move towards a clearly defined set of policies at the organizational and school levels.

Keywords: neurodiversity, inclusive education, International Baccalaureate, special education, British Columbia, Middle Years Program

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the community of educators, family, and friends that have supported me throughout this project. I would like to acknowledge my supervisor, Emily Baker, for her guidance and enthusiasm for this research project. I am also grateful to my colleagues at Glenlyon Norfolk School for their support, and to Gina Simpson for her time and assistance with the research survey. Thank you to the exceptional team at New Heights Equestrian who have spent many hours counselling me in the barn aisle throughout this process, and for the flexibility and support that has allowed me to see this journey through. Thank you to my family (the Neilsons, Braziers and Plantes) who have supported me returning to my studies. And to the Birds for their support and encouragement, and for stoking the fire of inclusive education in my life.

And to my exceptional husband, Daniel. Thank you for being along for this ride and for supporting me at every step. Every dinner, late night word of encouragement and cup of coffee to keep me going has meant the world to me. I am so grateful for you.

Dedication

To Jean, for being an inspiration from the first day of school.

“Education is the best weapon for peace.”

- Dr. Maria Montessori

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	4
Dedication.....	5
Chapter One: Introduction	11
Researcher Context	11
Purpose of Study	12
Justification of Study.....	13
Glossary.....	14
Study Overview.....	16
Chapter Two: Literature Review	16
A History of the International Baccalaureate Organization	17
The International Baccalaureate Middle Years Framework	20
Inclusion Within the International Baccalaureate Framework.....	20
Neurodiversity in the IB Framework	22
Summary of Research in the Field.....	23
Challenges and Opportunities within the IB Framework.....	24
Gaps in the Research.....	26
Conclusion.....	27
Chapter Three: Research Methods.....	29
Methodology	29
Participants.....	30
Study Sample Population	30

Study Design	31
Ethical Considerations	32
Data Collection.....	32
Data Analysis and Interpretation.....	33
Thematic Analysis	33
Summary	35
Chapter Four: Findings or Findings and Results	35
Introduction	35
Theme 1: Collaboration and Student Supports	36
Theme 2: Meeting the Challenge of Academic Rigour.....	38
Theme 3: Policies and Practices.....	40
Conclusion.....	43
Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions	44
Study Summary.....	44
Discussion	44
Limitations	50
Implications and Recommendations	50
Significance.....	52
Suggestions for Further Research	53
Conclusion.....	53
References.....	54
Appendix A.....	60

List of Figures

Figure 1. From *MYP: From Principles in Practice*. International Baccalaureate Organization.

(2022)18

Chapter One: Introduction

The International Baccalaureate (IB) program offers a globally recognized educational setting which provides a curriculum for students ages 3 to 19 that aims “to develop internationally minded people who, recognizing their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better and more peaceful world” (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2019). IB schools emphasize the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical well-being of their students. The IB philosophy has embraced inclusion in its schools. Proponents of the program believe that the learner profile attributes, student-directed learning, collaborative work with peers and the inquiry process of an IB education provide excellent support for the neurodiverse student. As the number of neurodiverse students increases in IB schools across the province, many schools grapple with how to meet these learners' needs while continuing to deliver a robust, academically rigorous program within the scope of the IB framework.

Researcher Context

During my childhood, I attended both Montessori and IB schools in my elementary years. These experiences instilled in me a love of experiential and inquiry-based learning. As a university student, I worked for many years as an inclusion support worker in out-of-school care and summer camp programs. My time working with children with a range of abilities was transformative and led me to pursue postgraduate Montessori teacher training. In the years that have followed, and through my role as a Learning Support teacher, I have worked closely with students and their families to support a diverse range of learners. Many of the students that I have

taught over the years are neurodiverse learners. Each student I have worked with has provided me with further insight into how best to support a spectrum of neurodiverse learners.

Through my work at IB schools, I have become interested in examining how neurodivergent students are supported in their learning journeys through the rigour of the inquiry-based IB learning curriculum. It is my belief that, as IB schools become more adaptive in meeting the needs of diverse learners, much can be learned by surveying schools to understand how these approaches help students achieve their educational goals. My hope is that this research will provide insight into how the needs of neurodivergent learners are being met within the Middle Years Program of the IB framework and provide examples of how these students are being supported to meet the rigour of the IB program.

Purpose of Study

The IB framework is rooted in inquiry-based learning, transdisciplinary thinking, and holistic development. Although some research exists on IB's approach to meeting the needs of neurodiverse learners (Bush, 2005; Preschern, 2021), this body of work is small and largely limited to general overviews of how inclusion and differentiation are addressed in IB schools. In the province of British Columbia (BC), there are currently 27 IB schools offering the Middle Years Program (BCAIBWS, 2025). The British Columbia Association of International Baccalaureate World Schools is the body that represents the IB program to the Ministry of Education. These schools fall under the Independent Schools Act (1996), which outlines the requirements for schools to meet the needs of students with “disabilities or diverse abilities”, which includes neurodivergent learners. Given the limited availability of studies and papers, the

number of BC schools offering the MYP, and my own experiences supporting neurodiverse learners within the IB framework, I believe a deeper examination of how the MYP supports neurodiverse learners in BC is warranted.

Justification of Study

This study will examine how IB schools in British Columbia are adapting their curricula to provide pathways to accessible inquiry-based learning and to support neurodiverse students in meeting the academic rigour standards of the IB program. Recently, the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) published an article on its website entitled “A Global Milestone in Supporting Autistic Learners” by Gemma Dexter, Assistant Headteacher of The Cavendish School UK. In this article, Dexter provides a rationale for adapting the IB principles to create an environment of success for their neurodiverse students (Dexter, 2025). They note that the inquiry-based approach allows students to research areas of personal interest and encourages them to make connections and engage with the learning material.

The Learner Profile, which is described by the IBO as representing “a broad range of human dispositions, capacities and traits that encompass intellectual, personal, emotional and social growth” (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2019), is seen as a framework that can be adapted to meet the needs of neurodiverse students (Bush,2025). The Personal Learning Plan (PLP), also known as the Inclusive Education Plan (IEP), allows for a student’s learning to be tailored to their individual needs and interests within the IB framework. These plans are essential to the educational experiences of neurodiverse learners.

Inquiry Question

The purpose of this study is to investigate the question: *How are neurodivergent learners of the Middle Years Program being supported in International Baccalaureate Schools in British Columbia?* Through this line of inquiry, my aim is to discover how teachers are adapting the program to meet the specific needs of their neurodivergent students and the role that PLPs play in this process. I want to examine how teachers are differentiating instruction for neurodiverse learners in their classroom and to look for similarities, patterns, and differences in their approaches. Additionally, this study will explore how the IB framework can best support neurodivergent learners and their journey in a rigorous academic program.

A research goal was to survey IB schools across British Columbia to identify patterns in approaches used to support neurodiversity within the inquiry-based framework. From my experience working in an IB classroom and from speaking with teachers, it is evident that there is work to be done in each school as they design an approach that best fits the needs of their communities and students. Through this line of inquiry, there was a desire to identify connections in areas where teachers and educational professionals in BC have successfully worked with their neurodiverse students in the IB MYP, and to highlight areas where further examination of approaches may be warranted.

Glossary

In this section, key concepts that form an integral part of this research paper are discussed.

Approaches to Learning

Approaches to learning are a set of skills that are “designed to enable students in the IB Middle Years Program (MYP) to “learn how to learn.” They are intended to apply across curriculum requirements and provide a common language for teachers and students to use when reflecting and building on the process of learning.” (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2019)

Inclusion

Inclusion is “an ongoing process that aims to increase access and engagement in learning for all students by identifying and removing barriers” (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2020).

Neurodiversity

The term *neurodiversity* “refers to the diversity of all people, but it is often used in the context of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as well as other neurological or developmental conditions such as ADHD or learning disabilities (Baumer & Frueh, 2021).

Universal Design for Learning

A set of principles for curriculum development that gives all individuals equal opportunities to learn and provides a blueprint for creating instructional goals, methods, materials and assessments that work for everyone—not a single, one-size-fits-all solution but rather flexible approaches that can be customized and adjusted for individual needs (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2019).

Study Overview

Throughout my teaching career, I have had the opportunity to work with students in a number of independent school settings. These experiences have led me to my current role working with neurodiverse learners who are enrolled in the International Baccalaureate (IB) program in British Columbia. My work with students in this setting highlighted the advantages of the IB approach for students and also led me to wonder how neurodiverse students are being accommodated within the IB framework in schools across my province. To explore the research goals of this project, a literature review was conducted.

This review indicated that there existed a somewhat limited body of research that has been completed on the IB program regarding inclusion and accommodation of learning challenges. In order to fill this gap, a research survey was circulated to IB schools offering the MYP in British Columbia. A thematic analysis of the responses was undertaken, and the results of the survey were analyzed. Three main themes emerged from the qualitative data collected during this study which focused on collaboration and student supports, meeting the challenge of academic rigour in the IB program, and the policies and practices employed by schools to meet the needs of neurodivergent learners.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) believes that by implementing an inclusive approach to education, every student will have the opportunity to fully participate in and learn through the International Baccalaureate (IB) programs. The Access and Inclusion

Policy, written by the IBO, aims to establish standards and best practices in access and inclusion in IB World Schools. “All IB schools are expected to draw upon the principles and practice of provision of access arrangements from this policy to formulate their internal school inclusion policy and practice for learning, teaching and assessment.” (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2022). As a teacher at an IB school, I have been part of a whole-staff process to develop an inclusion policy for our school that will meet the needs of the diverse learners in our inquiry-based program. Each IB school has been mandated to set their policies that best fit the student population, while ensuring that all teaching staff are involved in a whole-school approach to inclusion. During the process of gathering literature for this review, it became evident that there is a gap in the body of work that studies the IB approach to neurodiversity in the IB Middle Years Program (MYP). Parallel articles are available, as are several theses and dissertations whose findings are pertinent to the discussion. This literature review explores the question of “How are neurodivergent learners being accommodated in the Middle Years Program in International Baccalaureate schools in British Columbia?” The themes that have arisen from this research are: how inclusion is currently being addressed within the IB framework; an overview of what is working and what is not; and trends and opportunities for schools to make changes to meet the needs of their learners.

A History of the International Baccalaureate Organization

The overarching goal of an IB education is to enable students to “make sense of the complexities of the world around them, as well as equipping them with the skills and dispositions needed for taking responsible action for the future.” (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2019). First established in 1968, the IB educational framework aims to provide students with “an

internationally recognized university-entrance qualification” (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2019) that began with the development of the Diploma Program (DP) for high school students. The continuum was then expanded into the Middle Years Program in 1994, the Primary Years program (PYP) in 1997) and the Career-related Program (CP) in 2012. The foundational elements that are woven into each of the programs are international mindedness, the IB learner profile, a balanced, conceptual and connected curriculum, and approaches to teaching and learning. Additionally, service as action is highlighted through inquiry-based community service and the culminating personal project. “The MYP offers students opportunities to develop their potential, to explore their own learning preferences, to take appropriate risks, and to reflect on, and develop, a strong sense of personal identity.” (MYP: From Principles into Practice, 2022).

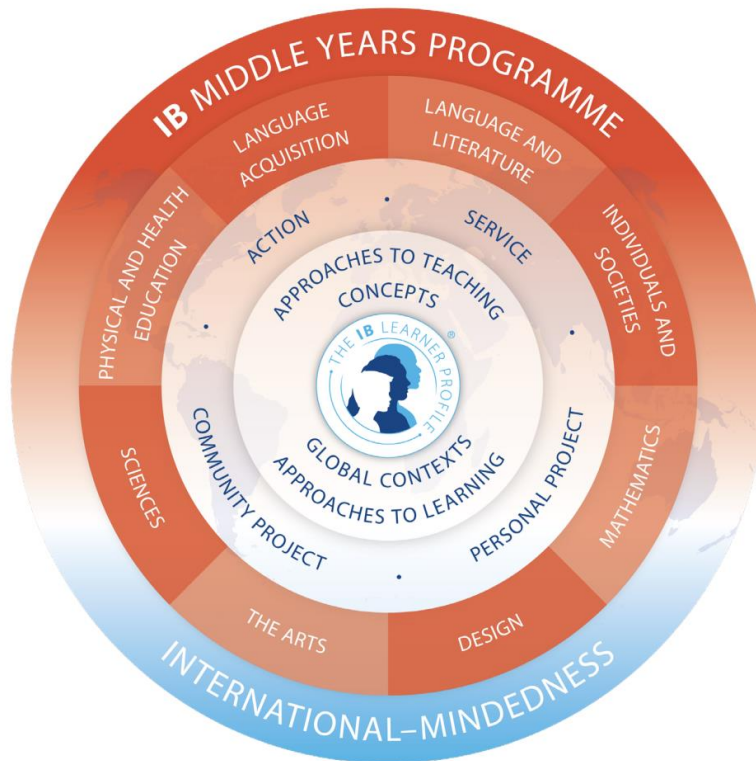


Figure 1
The programme model

Figure 1

MYP Program Model (International Baccalaureate Organization. MYP: From Principles in Practice, 2022).

The IB Learner Profile is at the heart of each of the IB programs. An IB education focuses on learner profile attributes of students as inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced and reflective. (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2013).

The MYP is focused on students from the ages of 11 to 16 years. In the IB continuum, this program is flanked by the Primary Years Program for elementary school students and the

Diploma Program for high school students. As such, the MYP is a hybrid of both of these models. By carrying forward the Approaches to Learning (ATL) skill and the concepts learned in the primary program and introducing the criterion and rubric-based assessment of the Diploma Program, the MYP is situated in the center of the IB framework.

The International Baccalaureate Middle Years Framework

The framework of the MYP focuses on eight subject areas (Language and Literature, Language Acquisition, Individuals and Societies, Sciences, Mathematics, Arts, Physical Health & Education, Design) which align with the provincial curriculum. In IB MYP classrooms, key concepts are used to encourage the transfer of ideas across all subjects. Students are encouraged to develop their thinking by connecting lines of inquiry across subject areas. They then develop a global context “lens” that allows them to place relevance and meaning into their areas of study. “Students demonstrate interdisciplinary understanding of a particular topic when they can bring together concepts, methods or forms of communication from two or more disciplines or established areas of expertise to explain a phenomenon, solve a problem, create a product or raise a new question in ways that would have been unlikely through single disciplinary means.” (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2022).

Inclusion Within the International Baccalaureate Framework

As noted by Logli (2016), the IBO is committed to ensuring that inclusive education is practiced in IB schools worldwide. Researchers who studied the IB approach to educating students with learning challenges have observed that the IB framework offers six strategies to meet the needs of neurodiverse learners. These strategies include creating optimal learning

environments that embrace the diversity of all learners, using technology that is accessible to all, developing collaborative learning activities that involve all members of the school community, promoting approaches to learning that develop affective and metacognitive skills, creating accessible assessments in terms of design, content and medium, and teaching to variability (Preschern, 2021). Additionally, the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach has been intentionally incorporated into the IB curriculum framework (Preschern, 2021; Fangel-Lloyd, 2023). Similarly, the Learner Profile (a set of attributes that IB schools expect students to develop) equips students with empathy skills that help classrooms build a culture of inclusion (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2013).

Despite evidence of its commitment to inclusion, the IB model also has some uncertainties, especially regarding practitioners' perspectives. In discussions with teachers, the themes of uncertainty about what would be considered success and accountability in special education in IB schools surfaced in many studies. As indicated by Hall (2025), this “makes it difficult for international schools to assess if they have reached their goal of inclusion and high standards of education for those with disabilities” (pg.19). Teachers expressed varying viewpoints of what inclusion means in their classrooms and schools, and confusion of how they are expected to cater to the needs of special education students was evident. Hesitancy as to how best to support designated students was a repeating theme in the literature (Hall, 2019. Sveen, 2020. Cowie, 2020). In a recent article focusing on approaches to teaching students with autism in the Primary Years Program (PYP) in Latin America, researcher Bush (2025) observed that many teachers involved in their study did not participate in the implementation of Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

IB schools are also under pressure to produce learners who will be competitive in the global market (Hall, 2019. Donaldson, 2020). For this reason, it was the overall perception of teachers that IB schools struggle to offer the services required to enhance inclusion while still providing a high-quality preparatory education to the student population.

Neurodiversity in the IB Framework

Taking a closer look at how the needs of neurodiverse students are being met within the IB framework, the literature reveals insights into the perceptions of educators who view the IB approach as being a support to these students, and barriers to learning at the same time. While the inquiry-based process of self-directed learning is often highlighted as an advantage to special education students (Fangel-Lloyd, 2023), the regular and collaborative group work is often an area of challenge for neurodiverse learners who may be weak in their communication and social skills. Studies show that neurodiverse students can benefit from explicit instruction (Pelter, 2024) before embarking on self-directed learning. Ultimately, well-educated and well-supported teachers will be able to blend components from both approaches to meet the needs of their students in their MYP classrooms (Bush, 2025).

The ATL skills taught in IB MYP schools are organized into ten categories. A key category of this framework are reflection skills, where students are asked to identify their strengths and weaknesses as a form of self-assessment and are encouraged to try new skills and evaluate their effectiveness. Researchers note that the IB program is “unlike other programs, due to its multi-disciplinary approach and its emphasis on developing students’ perspective, responsibility and reflection” (Alford, 2013, p. 3). This multi-disciplinary approach provides students with opportunities for spaced practice, which allows students to build memory and a

conceptual understanding inquiry-based settings for all students. Proponents of the ATL skills framework point to the horizontal and vertical articulation in a structured approach that offers benefits for inclusion in the classroom. Differentiation planning can be achieved through open-ended lessons for some students and a fixed set of playful activities for students who benefit from the structure (Fangel-Llyod, 2023). While reflections and skill-building are an integral part of the IB framework, this is an area where many neurodiverse students struggle and can become frustrated with their schoolwork.

Assessments in the MYP setting are based on a number of strategies. Both formative (teachers gather, analyze, interpret and use a variety of evidence to improve student learning) and summative (evaluating student achievement using required MYP subject-group-specific assessment criteria) assessments are used to ascertain the achievement levels of students (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2022). The MYP model is based on criterion-referenced assessment, where a student's results and performance are measured against standards. Self-assessment and peer-assessment are part of a student's ongoing exchange of information about their progress and levels of achievement (Assessment | Abbotsford Middle). For many diverse learners, these assessment practices are helpful as the students learn to identify the areas in which they need support. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning by communicating with teachers and staff to ask for assistance in the areas where their skills are continuing to develop or require additional support.

Summary of Research in the Field

From the perspective of educators participating in the studies reviewed, the literature tells a story of uncertainty about how to meet the needs of diverse learners in the classroom, as well

as frustration with a lack of information about policy and assessment (Preschern, 2021. Sven, 2020. Cowie, 2020). In a dissertation that focused on how IB schools conceptualized their inclusion practice in a state-run IB school in Norway, researcher Sveen (2020) concluded that for many educators “The problem is that despite having a curriculum that encourages teachers to practice inclusion, there is no clear guidelines as to how to implement it” (pg. 3). For example, Preschern (2021) noted that the participants in their study reported that a lack of specific policies for inclusion created barriers for how teachers could effectively meet the needs of students. Similarly, Hall (2019) found that the lack of agreed-upon measures for special education policies in IB schools makes it difficult to assess whether inclusion for these students has been met alongside the high standards for academic success that are an essential component of the IB framework. While some schools have leveraged professional development for teachers to address the uncertainty of incorporating inclusion into the IB framework, many point out the difficulties caused by a lack of clear policy in this area. Additionally, to meet the rigorous curriculum that is part of the IB pedagogy, educators struggle to find time to effectively plan differentiation in their lessons and to provide tier one and tier two interventions for students in their classrooms.

Challenges and Opportunities within the IB Framework

It is interesting to note that several of the works reviewed for this study discussed the lack of information that teachers receive about their students as a barrier to inclusive education (Cowie, 2020). Many teachers shared that, as they were not fully informed about their students' backgrounds, needs, diagnoses (if applicable), past accommodations, and paraprofessional services that many have received, this information was lacking. The research shows that many

staff “do not feel sufficiently empowered to enact the principles of inclusive pedagogy due to a lack of information” (Cowie, 2020, p. 85). A number of educators who participated in these studies stated that they were not informed of the specific diagnosis for students in their class or were unaware of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that was in place for designated students (Bush, 2025).

Another issue raised by educators was the lack of available collaboration time for teachers (Fangel-Llyod, 2023). Many participants noted this as a barrier to creating a more inclusive and effective classroom environment for neurodiverse students (Hall, 2019). Additionally, many teachers voiced a desire to be able to observe other classrooms to see how their colleagues were approaching differentiation within their school. “In general, there simply seems to be a lack of information and resources about the concept of inclusion in school and more so in IB schools” (Sveen, 2000, p. 7).

In addition to the previous challenges discussed above, the literature also highlights opportunities to better support neurodivergent learners in the IB program. Teachers who provide relevant adaptations and modifications to neurodiverse learners through the IB ATL skills framework can have a large impact on student success. As noted by Fangel-Llyod et al., “...the framework also allows for both horizontal and vertical articulation as its own curriculum aim and as integrated across subjects” (2023, p. 44). This spaced retrieval practice offers diverse learners and opportunity to build their active recall skills and improve memory retention (Carpenter & Argwal, 2020), skills that have been noted to be a big advantage of the multi-disciplinary learning approach.

The features of the inclusive nature of ATL skills include planning and collaboration around curriculum, allowing for teachers to plan ahead for specific skills that are being taught, facilitating academic priming and allowing for differentiation planning (International Baccalaureate, n.d.). As MYP students become resilient through the development of these ATL skills, they evolve into self-regulated learners who can set learning goals, ask good questions, and reflect on their own learning. An overarching goal would be for students to have the ability to adapt their own learning process to meet their needs. These skills are essential for learners who benefit from differentiated instruction and also provide students with opportunities to develop self-advocacy skills. When considering the needs of neurodivergent learners in an inquiry-based model, Bush (2025) noted that it is important to build a considerable amount of structure into each of the steps of inquiry in a unit, and that the Units of Inquiry offered in an IB setting are often appealing to neurodivergent students as they can focus their inquiry on a topic of special interest to themselves.

Gaps in the Research

As this researcher embarked on a literature review for this topic, it was quickly evident that there is a gap in the research when applying the lens of neurodiversity in the MYP. The little research that does exist on neurodiversity in IB programs focuses on the Diploma program and the PYP (Preschern, 2021). To the best of my knowledge, there are no studies that currently examine the approaches to inclusion for neurodiversity in the IB MYP. There is a gap in current research regarding the MYP and how the curriculum is being adapted and modified to meet the needs of neurodiverse learners. As the transition to a middle school program can often be a challenge for students, special consideration should be given when planning for and

accommodating these students in the IB program. Further research into how neurodivergent learners are being accommodated in the Middle Years Program in International Baccalaureate schools in British Columbia would help to fill this gap in the literature.

In this study, I sought to explore how I could improve my practice of working with neurodivergent learners in the IB Middle Years Program. Additionally, I wanted to leverage my learnings in order to develop new approaches to help students manage the rigour of the IB framework, while serving as a resource to both students and colleagues alike in my school. It is my hope that this study will provide a basis to deepen my understanding and chart a pathway forward in my work supporting neurodivergent learners.

Conclusion

This literature review examines how the IB program responds to neurodivergent students throughout the framework that spans Kindergarten to Grade Twelve. Strategies employed by educators who are currently adapting the IB framework to meet the needs of their students were considered, as were the benefits of the Learner Profile prevalent in IB classrooms. The strengths of the IB framework and how it can be adapted to benefit students were noted, as were the challenges that are often posed by a rigorous program with high achievement outcomes. As noted by researchers, because many schools lack a Special Education policy, teachers are challenged to define the measures of success for their students. Finally, this paper discusses the current pedagogical approach of how IB schools meet the needs of neurodiverse learners and will identify opportunities for further research. This literature review has provided an overview of the somewhat limited body of research that has been completed on the IB program regarding inclusion and accommodation of learning challenges.

Chapter Three: Research Methods

This study has sought to explore support for neurodiverse students in the Middle Years Program through the question: How are the educational needs of neurodiverse students met within *the framework of the Middle Years Program of International Baccalaureate schools in British Columbia*? The research aimed to fill in the current gap in the literature by focusing on teachers' perceptions of their experiences in supporting neurodiverse students amongst the rigour of the IB program. A lack of available studies for comparison is what lead me to believe that there is a gap in the research. By engaging in this study, the researcher sought to contribute to the current knowledge base of this topic in British Columbia.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was chosen for this exploratory study. This research sought to investigate how teachers are adapting the IB framework and provincial curriculum to meet the needs of neurodivergent learners in the IB Middle Years Program (MYP) in British Columbia. As IB schools have become more adaptive in their approach to meeting the needs of diverse learners, much can be learned by surveying schools to understand how these approaches are helping students achieve their educational goals and objectives. Given the current gap in the literature on this topic, I determined that the timing of this study was appropriate (Leavy, 2017, p. 127), as many IB schools in BC were in the process of refining their inclusion policies. Gathering information and collecting the perspectives of teachers was essential to the process of exploring the research question. Qualitative analysis provided both the context for teacher's experiences and perspectives, as well as the opportunity to synthesize information to uncover the challenges of meeting the needs of neurodiverse students in IB classrooms.

In researching the question of “How are neurodivergent learners being accommodated in the Middle Years Program in International Baccalaureate schools in British Columbia?”, I used an open-ended survey and subsequent thematic analysis to explore the perspectives of teachers working in IB schools and to examine how neurodiversity is being supported in their classrooms through the IB framework. The aim is to discover how they are adapting the IB program to meet the specific needs of their neurodivergent students, discover various ways in which they are providing relevant accommodations for their students, and seek their input on how the IB program of inquiry and assessments could be changed to meet the needs of neurodivergent learners. Through the process of sharing best practices and areas in which schools are focusing on to improve supports for students, the social constructivist viewpoint that knowledge is to be shared by a group of people (Saeem, Kausar & Deeba, 2021) is brought to the forefront of this study.

Participants

Participants in this study were teachers in British Columbia who were working in the Middle Years Program of International Baccalaureate schools with neurodiverse learners.

Study Sample Population

The study population consisted of teachers who are working in the Middle Years Program of IB schools in British Columbia. They were recruited by email and were provided with the link to the online survey to complete. Written consent was obtained at the outset of the survey and only those participants who agreed to the consent question were able to progress in the form to answer the qualitative research questions. Participation in the survey was completely voluntary. No incentives were offered for participants to complete the questionnaire.

Study Design

The hypothesis for this qualitative research study was that there is among IB educators in BC some frustration and a lack of clarity about how the needs of neurodiverse students are being met within the IB program in Middle Years classrooms. Through this research I sought to gain insight into how various schools were approaching the needs of their neurodiverse students through the IB framework by asking the following qualitative questions:

- Looking at the IB framework, how do you feel that IB schools are currently meeting the needs of neurodivergent learners in the Middle Years program?
- In what areas could the IB framework be improved upon to better meet the needs of neurodivergent students in the Middle Years Program?
- What are some of the best practices that your school has implemented to support diverse learners within the IB context?
- What are your thoughts on how neurodivergent learners can be best supported to manage the rigour of the IB Middle Years Program?
- As the International Baccalaureate Organization has mandated that individual schools develop Inclusive Education policies that best meet the needs of their school populations, what steps has your school taken to develop this internal policy and approach?
- How are Personal Learning Plans/Individual Education Plans being used in your school to meet the needs of neurodiverse students?
- Do you feel that your current school is currently meeting the needs of neurodivergent learners?

- How is your teaching practice currently informed by the balance of meeting IB Middle Years framework requirements, the provincial curriculum, and the needs of diverse learners?

These qualitative questions were designed to capture a snapshot of the experiences of teachers in MYP classrooms, to gain a better understanding of school culture through this lens, and to look for ways in which various schools are supporting their neurodiverse learners.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations of the study included the assurance that the identity of respondents would remain anonymous, as well as preserving the confidentiality of the answers received. Data was collected through a Microsoft Forms survey that was hosted on Vancouver Island University's (VIU) secure servers.

The application for ethics approval was first submitted on November 25, 2025 (File Number 103810 and a request for revision was received on November 27, 2025. The revisions were resubmitted on December 10, 2025. Further revisions were then requested on December 15, 2025, and the researcher submitted the requested changes on December 19, 2025. The research study was approved by VIU's Research Ethics Board (REB) on December 22, 2025.

Data Collection

Upon receiving approval from VIU's REB, the researcher sent out a recruitment email to the Executive Director of the BC Association of International Baccalaureate World Schools, who was kind enough to circulate the recruitment email with the questionnaire link to schools offering the MYP in the province (see Appendix A for the recruitment email text). Additionally, a colleague of the researcher also sent out the recruitment email to the Program Coordinators of

MYP programs who are members of the BC Association of IB World Schools. Individuals were asked to complete a 14-question questionnaire. Participants could answer any number of questions and submit their responses. A total of 7 responses were received between January 6 and February 27, 2026.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Responses to the research questionnaire resulted in qualitative data being collected. The responses were collected from Microsoft Forms, and I collated the data into a table that allowed me to more easily work with the data. Once the organization of data was complete, I began to further analyze the responses to look for emerging themes.

Thematic Analysis

The responses to the survey were analyzed to identify themes and to look for patterns using the Thematic Analysis (TA) approach. As noted by Braun and Clarke (2006), “thematic analysis should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis.” This method was chosen as it is often considered to be one of the first methods of qualitative analysis that researchers learn, and is a tool known for its flexibility and has the potential to “provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data.” (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I utilized this approach to process survey responses, and themes were identified that contributed to my understanding of teachers' experiences and perspectives of how their neurodiverse students are managing the rigour of the IB curriculum.

The process of TA starts as the researcher begins to notice patterns of meaning in the data. Analysis of the data takes place over six phases. For this study, the researcher followed the guidelines suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) to engage in the analysis.

Phase 1: Familiarizing Yourself with the Data. In this phase, I carefully read through survey responses and made notes about codes that could be developed. I then marked areas that I might want to come back to as the analysis progress through the following phases.

Phase 2: Generate Initial Codes. Once I was sufficiently familiar with the survey data, I began to look for possible codes that could be applied to the raw data. During this process I was careful to, “Work systematically through the entire data set, giving full and equal attention to each data item, and identify interesting aspects in the data items that may form the basis of repeated patterns (themes) across the data set.” (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In this phase I highlighted key data and made notes on the areas that related to my research question. Six key areas that arose from the survey responses, and each was assigned a unique code.

Phase 3: Search for themes. Once the codes were identified throughout the data set, I read through the data set to begin to look for possible themes. The overarching goal for this phase was to end with a collection of themes and sub-themes that the codes could be organized under (Braun and Clarke, 2006). As I worked through this phase, connections between the codes began to emerge, and I began the process of considering how they might be connected to themes that would speak to the research question.

Phase 4: Review Potential Themes. As noted by Braun and Clarke (2006), “Data within themes should cohere together meaningfully, while there should be clear and identifiable distinctions between themes.” For this phase, I reviewed the data to ensure that relevant responses were correctly coded and were assigned to the appropriate theme.

Phase 5: Define and Name Themes. In this phase, I set out to more clearly outline the specifics of each theme. With the data allocated under each theme, I set out to flag the interesting

points raised and flagged any sub-themes as they arose. As noted by Braun and Clarke (2006), sub-themes “can be useful for giving structure to a particularly large and complex theme, and also for demonstrating the hierarchy of meaning within the data.” For each of the three themes, I considered their connection back to the overarching research question and how the data told the story of teacher’s experiences with neurodivergence in the MYP.

Phase 6: Producing the Report. The final phase of TA was to create a report that illustrates a compelling story about the data and how it related to the research question. This analysis was helpful to “capture the essence of the point” (Braun and Clarke, 2006) of the responses.

Summary

This study aims to discover how neurodivergence is being addressed in IB schools in British Columbia. Using a survey that was distributed to schools offering the MYP, qualitative data was collected, and thematic analysis provided the basis for an analysis of the responses.

Chapter Four: Findings or Findings and Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the question: *How are the educational needs of neurodiverse students met within the framework of the Middle Years Program of International Baccalaureate schools in British Columbia?* Data was collected through an online survey that was circulated to teachers in the MYP of IB schools in the province of British Columbia. The grade levels taught by respondents ranged from Grade 4 to Grade 12, with the majority falling in the Middle Years range of Grades 7 to 9. The subject areas taught by participants ranged across the IB curriculum from Humanities and Design to Science and Math. One respondent held the

role of the MYP Coordinator at their school. The participants had experience teaching in IB schools in Canada, while two participants noted additional international teaching experiences in Jordan, Kuwait and China. All the respondents indicated that they were currently working with neurodiverse learners. Participants were asked eight questions related to their experiences supporting neurodiverse learners within the IB framework. This chapter will discuss the themes that emerged from the survey. Data obtained from the survey was coded and analyzed for themes that related to the research question. The three themes emerging from the findings were:

1. *Collaboration and Student Supports*
2. *Meeting the Challenge of Academic Rigour*
3. *Policies and Practices*

The remainder of this chapter will focus on a discussion and analysis of these themes and conclude with a discussion of the findings.

Theme 1: Collaboration and Student Supports

Over the course of a number of questions asked in the survey, respondents noted many opportunities to collaborate with colleagues to identify, develop and share best practices for supporting neurodiverse learners. Participants 1, 2 and 4 responded that they see collaboration with their colleagues as a relative strength of their schools. Participant 3 noted that collaboration in their teaching practice also extends to students and their families as they use personal learning plans and IEPs as an opportunity four times a year to spend time planning and evaluating the student's program with the goal of providing high levels of support throughout the year. Survey Participant 4 mentioned the importance of clubs at their school and how the connections made during these activities allow students to develop a feeling of belonging in the larger school

community. This participant also noted that through collaboration with their colleagues, “I add something new to the toolbox that ideally will allow me to better access and engage with diverse learners.” Similarly, Participant 4 noted the importance of “significant collaboration among departments and with the inclusive education department” were key to meeting student needs. Beyond collaborations with colleagues, the school’s culture was identified as essential to staff feeling they can support neurodivergent learners in a meaningful way.

Several of the respondents noted that the flexibility offered within the IB framework lends itself to collaboration amongst faculty members, support staff, and school administration. Participant 3 noted that “significant collaboration among departments and with the inclusive education department, drafted and revised by MYP coordinators based on feedback from all the individual groups.” As noted by Participant 1, “We have a really collaborative teaching faculty, which is amazing to help support neurodivergent learners and to support their learning needs and their IEP goals and accommodations.”

Student supports that are enabled through the IB framework were noted by participants as key to the success of neurodivergent learners in the program. Participant 2 commented that “extra information from support staff is what best helps inform me as a teacher and the specific needs of that student”. Respondent 3 pointed to several areas where their staff have adjusted for student accommodations. “We have adjusted schedules, seating, assignments, modifications, variation in assessment and time to complete”.

Beyond the IB framework and collaborations with colleagues, the culture of the school was identified as being essential to staff feeling that they are able to support neurodivergent learners in a meaningful way. As noted by Participant 2, “a school culture that truly values and

continually reflects on diversity and inclusion” supports teachers in being able to adapt their approaches to meet student needs while holding up the academic rigour for which the IB framework is well known.

When asked to identify areas where the IB framework falls short in terms of flexibility to meet the needs of identified students, participants noted that unit planning as an area that could be improved upon. Participant 4 mentioned that it can be “difficult to initially create unit plans that ‘tick all the required boxes’.” They also noted that having access to a collaborative team who is all on board as a key to success when supporting students. As Participant 4 responded, “This would be impossible as a solo teacher but with the support of a department and like-minded teachers it becomes manageable. Particularly because we are all teaching the same units with the same assessments, so when one of us makes a new access point for diverse learners and shares it with every one it benefits the whole school community.”

Theme 2: Meeting the Challenge of Academic Rigour

On the question of “What are your thoughts on how neurodivergent learners can be best supported to manage the rigour of the IB Middle Years Program?”, the theme of utilizing the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach to support executive functioning skills was noted by most survey respondents. A number of participants responded that they have seen success when support for executive functioning has been integrated in both classrooms and the culture of the school. Participant 2 noted that the IB encourages the use of UDL in classrooms and that this provides teacher with tangible “entry point into different learner needs.” Similarly, Participants, 4, 6 and 7 identified UDL as a practice that was also used in their schools, and which their neurodiverse students benefit from.

Other themes that arose from the survey question about best practices for supporting neurodiverse learners included specific training for teachers in UDL, and the inclusion of support staff (such as specialist teachers and educational assistants) to assist with differentiating instruction and to support the development of executive functioning skills. Participant 3 responded that a comprehensive response to supporting neurodivergence can be found in a “support team that can connect teachers and workload, and a school culture that truly values and continually reflects on diversity and inclusion”. They also responded that inclusive education policies that were “drafted and revised by MYP coordinators based on feedback from all the individual groups” had allowed their school to move towards greater inclusion and support for a diverse range of students. The best practices that were mentioned in survey responses were smaller class sizes, offering students pathways to alternative expression, teaching and supporting self-management, establishing clear routines, chunking work, using learning walls, and check-ins.

In response to the survey question of supporting neurodivergence and the rigour of the IB program, respondents noted a number of strategies that they felt assisted neurodivergent learners to meet the academic rigour of the program. Participant 7 responded that “Neurodivergent learners can be best supported in the MYP by providing consistent structure, clear routines, and predictable expectations, while still allowing flexibility in how they access learning and demonstrate understanding.” They also felt that strong support for EF skills was “essential, along with scaffolding, chunking tasks, and regular check-ins.” Two participants noted that flexible assessment opportunities allow students to demonstrate their learning in a

variety of ways. Participant 7 responded that, “We also prioritize consistent formative feedback, provide learning support services and accommodations.”

Areas that respondents pointed out as barriers to success were the summative criteria and some of the ATL skills. Participant 3 noted that “Sometimes summative that bring a number of criteria together can be challenging. Some ATL skills can be challenging for neurodiverse students, e.g. communication”. Participant 4 pointed out that the number of criterion assessments could be reduced. “Perhaps one assessment from each criterion instead of 2. Every student in every course is very different.” In terms of where IB could offer more explicit teaching strategies for neurodivergent students, Participant 2 noted that summative assessments that bring a number of criteria together can be challenging for some students. “Some ATL skills can be challenging for neurodiverse students (e.g. communication)”.

Another reduction that Participant 4 noted would be helpful was a “reduction of second language requirement to allow focus on core courses”. The IB programs place an emphasis on the development of writing and presentation skills. This often can be an area where neurodivergent students struggle. As noted by Participant 5, focusing on writing and presentation skills can be difficult. “[The] IB curriculum is quite focused on presentation and writing skills, which could be hard for learner[s] that are not excellent [in these areas].”

Theme 3: Policies and Practices

In response to the survey questions regarding the IB framework, special education policies and best practices, a variety of responses were received that highlighted the successes of IB in BC schools, and identified areas where participants felt that improvement is needed. A number of examples of best practices were mentioned. Participant 3 noted that the inquiry-based

framework, “allows students to be challenged at different levels and asks teachers are asked to differentiate their lessons, assessments, and support student agency to meet the need of their students.”

Other respondents conveyed a mixed response as to how the framework supports these students. Participant 7 responded that, “I think IB schools are in a strong position to meet the needs of neurodivergent learners, because the program is built around student-centered learning, conceptual understanding, ATL skill development, and multiple ways of demonstrating learning. In theory, the MYP naturally supports differentiation because it encourages flexibility in teaching strategies, inquiry-based learning, and formative feedback cycles.” It does appear that the “how” of implementation of the framework at different schools is where respondents saw barriers arise. Participant 7 also commented that, “IB schools are meeting neurodivergent learners’ needs inconsistently. How well schools meet these needs is inconsistent and often depends on teacher training, learning support systems, and school culture. In some cases, neurodivergent students still struggle due to workload demands, executive functioning expectations, and traditional assessment practices.”

On the topic of best practices in IB schools, a range of responses were received. When asked the question “In what areas could the IB framework be improved upon to better meet the needs of neurodivergent students in the Middle Years Program?”, Participant 2 responded that in order to support neurodiverse learners, “training modules that outline best practice for teachers would be helpful.” The theme of strategies to further support students within the IB framework was echoed by Participant 3, who noted that the “IB could offer more explicit teaching strategies for neurodivergent students.” Furthermore, Participant 1 responded that the framework could be

improved on by promoting “Additional flexibility would be good to continue supporting neurodivergent learners.” Participant 7 offered the following on this topic,

“The IB MYP framework could better support neurodivergent learners by being more explicit about neurodiversity-informed differentiation, especially around executive functioning supports like planning, organization, and workload support. It could also improve with clearer expectations for universal design for learning (UDL) practices, and stronger guidance on reducing barriers related to sensory overload, processing time, and communication differences.”

It was observed that while the structure of IB is set up to support neurodivergent learners (a collaborative faculty, the use of IEPs and UDL, learning support services, Educational Assistants, alternative assessment, and formative feedback) that there is inconsistency across schools in their approach to differentiating and providing supports. Participant 7 further observed, “How well schools meet these needs is inconsistent and often depends on teacher training, learning support systems, and school culture. In some cases, neurodivergent students still struggle due to workload demands, executive functioning expectations, and traditional assessment practices.”

In response to the survey question about schools developing Inclusive Education policies that best meet the needs of their school populations, a range of responses were received. Participant 2 noted that, “We have a very wordy and lengthy inclusion policy that does not give clear instructions for best practice to teachers.” By contrast, Participant 3 responded that, “Our team works with the support team, teachers, and leaders to develop and refine these policies yearly with ministry and IB requirements, as well as lived experience of students.” Collaboration

around the development of policies was echoed by Participant 4 who responded that their schools' policies were developed through “significant collaboration among departments and with the inclusive education department.

According to survey respondents, the application and implementation of these policies also reflected how IEPs are being used in schools. For example, Participant 7 noted that, “In theory, yes, my school has strong systems in place to support neurodivergent learners, especially through PLPs and IEPs that outline accommodations and learning needs.

However, in practice, the support can feel inconsistent. Although these plans are shared with teachers, it sometimes seems that not all staff are regularly reading or applying them in day-to-day classroom practice. Additionally, the Learning Support team appears stretched thin, which makes it difficult to consistently meet the level of support that the school’s current needs require. Overall, the structures exist, but the implementation does not always match the intention.”

Conclusion

The three main themes that emerged from the qualitative data collected during this study focused on collaboration and student supports, meeting the challenge of academic rigour in the IB program, and the policies and practices employed by schools to meet the needs of neurodivergent learners. It was interesting to note that the responses to the question regarding IEPs were fairly similar, with only one respondent noting that teachers view them on an “as-needed basis”. The results of the study align with the themes identified in the literature that there are many strengths inherent in the IB program that are well-positioned to support neurodiverse learners.

Unsurprisingly, survey participants reported challenges when assisting students with the rigour

of the IB framework and identified areas where best practices could be refined and explicitly taught to staff. The following final chapter will discuss the results of the three themes that emerged from this research.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions

The IB framework is known for offering an inquiry-based learning program, transdisciplinary thinking, and holistic development of students. At the same time, the program is heralded for the academic rigour that produces graduates who are well-positioned to take on the challenges of post-secondary studies. The limited body of research that currently exists examines how the MYP is being adapted to meet the needs of neurodiverse students in British Columbia, Canada.

Study Summary

This study used a thematic analysis approach to examine how the needs of neurodiverse learners are being met within the IB framework. The literature review conducted focused on the limited body of work available, examining how the MYP was being implemented and adapted to benefit students. A research survey, comprised of qualitative questions, was circulated to schools offering the IB MYP in British Columbia. The following chapter discusses the findings of this study, reflects the strengths and weaknesses identified, and provides suggestions for further research.

Discussion

Theme 1, *Collaboration and Student Supports*, indicates that collaboration among teachers enhances the services and experiences that students are receiving in IB classrooms. While five respondents mentioned collaboration amongst staff members was happening in their

schools regularly, other areas of collaboration were noted. These included collaboration between teachers and departments, students and their families, as well as the collaborative nature of clubs and teams which provide opportunities for students to be supported in areas outside of the classroom. The culture of a school was also identified by the respondents as being a key factor for teachers in terms of supporting neurodivergent students. Participant 2 noted that, “a school culture that truly values and continually reflects on diversity and inclusion” is at the heart of supporting neurodiverse students and amplifies the impact of differentiated instruction.

A key finding from this study was the impact of support enabled through the IB framework. As noted by Participant 7, the framework is “built around student-centered learning, conceptual understanding, ATL skill development, and multiple ways of demonstrating learning”. The flexibility of the framework allows students to be accommodated in a variety of ways, and in a manner with best suits their individual learning needs. Respondent 3 noted a number of ways that the student-centered approach in the IB framework benefits their students “We have adjusted schedules, seating, assignments, modifications, variation in assessment and time to complete”. As no one system can offer the perfect balance of supports, the survey revealed that some teachers view the IB framework as falling short in the areas of unit planning as it can be difficult to develop units that ‘tick all the required boxes’.

As mentioned in chapter four, the survey results point to the importance of collaboration and school culture as an interconnected and integral piece of supporting neurodiverse learners in IB classrooms. This researcher has witnessed the importance of the broad network of supports that are embedded in the culture of a school and the commitment of staff to collaboration. This leads to students being able to recognize where the supports that will lead them to success can be

found on campus, both in and out of the classroom. Another key learning for these students is the ability to self-advocate for supports as they are needed and as their IEP or personal learning plan allows. The skill of self-advocacy may need to be explicitly taught to neurodiverse learners. A supportive and well-connected learning strategies department who are active both in and out of the classroom can be an avenue to support students through explicit instruction of these skills. The impact of students learning these skills in the MYP can have a life-long impact on self-esteem and how a student views themselves as a learner in school and beyond.

Theme 2, *Meeting the Challenge of Academic Rigour*, revealed that explicit instruction in UDL skills can help teachers to find an “entry point into different learner needs.” A number of responses mentioned that the use of UDL in IB classrooms is a practice that is of direct benefit to neurodiverse students. Another finding emerging from this theme was the importance of supportive staff who can connect students to support both in and out of the classroom to assist with the development of the necessary skills that help to meet the challenge of rigour in the IB program. An area of challenge that was uncovered in this study was the discussion of how IB assessment is often not the best fit for neuro learners. This researcher has wondered what inroads could be made in this area. As educators, we understand that best practices dictate that assessment be adapted to allow identified students to be able to demonstrate their understanding in an accessible and meaningful way. This could be achieved by including lessons in self-advocacy into the classes that focus on executive functioning skills for all students. This would serve to “level the playing field” for neurodiverse learners as they work to develop these skills alongside their classmates.

Another area of consideration is to take a closer look into how adaptations in inquiry-based learning impact the IB framework and therefore challenge traditional assessment practices that measure the outcome of student learning in an academically rigorous program. The topic of summative assessment was raised in the survey responses. Teachers responded that assessments that are required to bring together a number of the ATL skills (particularly writing and speaking) can be difficult for some students. This is an area where many teachers can struggle to differentiate instruction and modify assessments within the IB framework. Several respondents noted that instruction or professional development in how to best modify assessments so that they are meeting the needs of their students and the curriculum would be well received. This could be achieved by further instruction and programming being developed and distributed by the IBO to member schools. Additionally, a school-wide, collaborative approach could be taken to workshop best-practices on modifying assessments while meeting the outcomes and objectives of the IB framework.

A key finding in Theme 3 was how the flexibility of the IB framework allows teachers to deliver the modifications and supports to meet the needs of neurodivergent learners through best practices. Some participants felt that the framework allowed for a good degree of flexibility to meet student needs. However, other respondents noted an inconsistency across schools in their approach to differentiating and providing support. Participant 3 noted that the “IB could offer more explicit teaching strategies for neurodivergent students.” A similar sentiment was echoed by Participant 7 who wrote that “IB schools are meeting neurodivergent learners’ needs inconsistently. How well schools meet these needs is inconsistent and often depends on teacher training, learning support systems, and school culture.” These responses echo the findings of

both theme one and theme two, which serves to highlight the interconnectedness of collaboration and the impact of school culture as educators plan and adapt to meet the needs of students. The survey findings show that there are variations in how the IB framework is being implemented in schools. As noted in Chapter Two, each IB school is a unique community of educators and students, and the flexibility of the framework allows for administrators and staff to develop a tailored program of instruction that meet the needs of the culture of individual schools.

Participants who had experience teaching in a number of IB schools often commented on the differences of how the framework was being utilized in different schools, and that a lack of consistency in approaches often left some students requiring varying degrees of differentiation and support. Further professional development could be developed by the IBO and schools themselves to assist teaching staff in finding new pathways to differentiation and teaching executive functioning skills to neurodiverse students within the structure and rigour of the IB framework.

One avenue to support teachers to meet their students' needs could come in the form of training modules for how to best support neurodivergent learners within the IB framework and on how to approach differentiation of instruction. This could be offered amongst the professional development opportunities on the IB Exchange website (<https://ibo.my.site.com/ibp>) as a microcredential. This flexible learning opportunity would allow educators to access "self-directed and evidence-based forms of competency-based recognition aimed at validating educators' professional learning." (Ecctis, 2024). The microcredential format of learning is already in place within the current training offerings from the IBO. The addition of a microcredential that is focused on neurodivergence in the MYP would allow educators and schools to

access flexible learning pathways that can easily be updated so that the information would stay relevant and current to the ever-changing landscape of inclusive education within the IB framework.

In response to the question of how policies are being used to support neurodivergent students, study participants revealed that an investment in staff training and clearer guidelines would be of benefit to teachers and students. Policies (developed by both the IBO and individual schools) need to be accessible and clearly defined. The implementation of these policies are more likely to be effectively integrated into the culture of individual schools when staff are provided with the opportunity to workshop new policies and strategic approaches as a team. A scheduled roll out of collaborative professional development times that are specifically dedicated to best practices for supporting neurodivergent learners would be an effective way to engage MYP staff. It would be essential that these collaborative opportunities be followed up with an expected timeline for implementation, and then again with a scheduled series of reviews of the effectiveness of the revised policies and approaches. The development of guidelines to assist with the implementation of instructional approaches and supports could be more clearly defined. The rollout of this staff collaboration and implementation could be overseen by the MYP Coordinators and department heads with support from the administrative team. This would enable schools to promote the adoption of best practices across all departments in the MYP and would enable a culture of inclusive support across campus.

Limitations

Due to the nature of this study, its small scale and qualitative responses make it so that the findings cannot be generalized. The small sample size of respondents coupled with a low response rate and short time for data collection will have affected the result of this study.

Other limitations include the possibility of a biased sample of respondents, and this study was circulated to teachers who have chosen a career path in the IB system. The majority of IB schools in this province are classified under the Independent Schools category and require that teachers are trained in delivering curriculum that has been developed through the IB lens.

Reflecting back on this study, there are a number of things that I believe could be improved on. As a novice researcher, this was my first time developing qualitative questions for a survey. Now that the data has been analyzed, there are some survey questions that were somewhat similar or did not result in as detailed a response as this researcher would have liked. Secondly, the small sample size of seven respondents was smaller in scope than anticipated. Due to the time constraints that surrounded this research period, a longer period of time to circulate the survey may have proven to be more fruitful and could have added more depth to the variety of responses received.

Implications and Recommendations

The following best practices and recommendations are areas for consideration where the MYP program might be made more accessible to neurodiverse learners. The findings of this study suggest that the International Baccalaureate Organization and IB schools should be working towards refining a range of supports for neurodiverse learners in the MYP. A key recommendation is that schools need to consider the importance of the link between

collaboration and school culture as they look to provide an inclusive environment for all learners. There is important work to be done to break down barriers created by silos (departments) and to craft inclusive strategies that can be applied to all areas of school life and in each classroom. The utilization of Learning Strategies teachers and Educational Assistants both in and out of the classroom, to teach and reinforce self-advocacy skills, should be given further consideration. An effective strategy to support neurodiverse students in small group or one-on-one settings can be implemented by these staff members who are well-positioned to deliver tailored instruction in self-advocacy within each school, as they understand the supports and key contacts on campus that support student success within the IB framework.

Collaborative professional development in how to modify summative assessment to meet the needs of neurodiverse students while still assessing according to the IB framework and necessary rubrics is recommended. A lack of clarity in this area was a recurring theme amongst the survey responses. In order for neurodiverse students to meet the requirements of rigour in the MYP, it would be highly beneficial for educators to have clarity on how assessments can be modified according to the needs of designated students. A key aspect of this recommendation is that the modifications must be applied to assessments in all subject areas of a student's curriculum for consistency and to meet the desired outcomes of inclusive education.

The development of micro credentials that educators can complete as a part of their professional development is recommended. As the IBO hosts trainings that can be applied to IB schools worldwide, curriculum and certifications in how to meet the needs of neurodiverse learners in the MYP. The development and flexible delivery of competency-based training in the area could be implemented in schools, with the expectations that all faculty would complete this

training in order to achieve a school culture of responsiveness to the needs of students in the ever-changing landscape of inclusive education in the province and worldwide.

Finally, the results of this study highlight the need for policy development and implementation that is collaborative and inclusive of all educators and support staff. Policies that address supports for neurodivergent students can be initiated at the IBO level, with further policy development to take place in member schools. This would result in a pathway forward to outline supports that reflect the culture of each individual school, and would make the most effective use of the resources and supports available on campus.

Significance

This study is significant as it addresses the gap in the current literature that examines neurodiversity in the Middle Years Program of International Baccalaureate schools from a BC context. The opinions and viewpoints of the survey participants give evidence to the value that neurodivergent students gain from the IB framework yet also highlight areas of challenges and opportunities for growth. This information may be valuable to individual IB schools and to the IBO itself as many schools are currently developing inclusive education policies that reflect the values of their school culture and the goals of the IB framework. Findings from this survey demonstrate that teachers view the IB curriculum as meeting the needs of a diverse range of students. This challenges the view that “academic rigour” can be incompatible with diverse learning needs. However, there are still improvements to be made to ensure that neurodiverse learners can be accommodated within the framework to achieve their true potential.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study has highlighted the many advantages of how the IB MYP can meet the needs of diverse learners. As with any approach to teaching, the needs of students are best met when educators adopt an outlook of collaboration and continue to move forward in their understanding of best practices in inclusive education. Further research is recommended in how adaptations in inquiry-based learning impact the IB framework and therefore challenge traditional assessment practices that measure the outcome of student learning in an academically rigorous program.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the question of *How are neurodivergent learners of the Middle Years Program being supported in International Baccalaureate Schools in British Columbia?* This study conducted a survey of teachers working in the MYP of IB schools in British Columbia. The responses from participants highlight the many ways in which the IB framework is supportive of a diverse range of students through an inquiry-based approach to learning. The survey findings also pointed to areas where further advancements can be made in addressing how modifications to assessment processes, the explicit teaching of self-advocacy to students, and the need to move towards a clearly defined set of policies at the organizational and school levels.

References

- Alford, B. L., Rollins, K. B., Stillisano, J. R., & Waxman, H. C. (2013). Observing Classroom Instruction in Schools Implementing the International Baccalaureate Programme. *Current Issues in Education*, 16(2). <https://cie.asu.edu/ojs/index.php/cieatasu/article/view/1161>
- Agarwal, P. K., Roediger III, H. L., & McDaniel, M. A. (2020). *How to Use Retrieval Practice to Improve Learning*. retrievalpractice.org.
<https://pdf.retrievalpractice.org/RetrievalPracticeGuide.pdf>
- Baumer, N. M., & Frueh, J.M. (2021, November 23). What is neurodiversity?. Harvard Health.
<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/what-is-neurodiversity-202111232645>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, Victoria. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 20206, 3, 77-101.
<https://doiorg.ezproxy.viu.ca/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Bush, R. (2025). “Educating children with autism spectrum disorder within the Primary Years Programme framework: The Latin American perspective”
<https://www.ibo.org/contentassets/8cefladee86046cb902d930a17da1e56/educating-children-with-asd-in-the-pyp-en.pdf>
- Carpenter, S. K., & Argwal, P. K. (2020). *How to Use Spaced Retrieval Practice to Boost Learning*. retrievalpractice.org. <https://pdf.retrievalpractice.org/SpacingGuide.pdf>

Carrington, S., Tangen, Donna, & Beutel, D. (2019). Inclusive education in the Asia Indo-Pacific region. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 23(1), 1–6.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1514727>

Cowie, G. (2020). Towards improving the inclusion of a student with autism and ADHD in an International school. *Asia Pacific Journal of Developmental Differences* Vol. 7 No. 1 January 2020. <https://das.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/APJDD-7-1-2020-p73-97-COWIE.pdf>

Donaldson, K. (2017). *The Implementation of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program: Equity, Access, and Effectively Maintained Inequality*. University of Notre Dame. Thesis. <https://doi.org/10.7274/p5547p90x1b>

Ecctis. (2024). *Micro-credentials Processes Research Study*. Micro-credentials Processes. <https://www.ibo.org/globalassets/new-structure/research/pdfs/micro-credentials-processes-final-report.pdf>

Fangel-Lloyd, L. (2023). Inclusive playful learning: a realistic means of adapting the role of the teacher and framework to improve playful learning for students with Executive Dysfunction. <http://www.theseus.fi/handle/10024/808781>

Grant-Watt, C. D. (2024). *Championing Belonging: A Community Where Students Can Flourish*. The Dissertation in Practice at Western University, 448. <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/oip/448>

- Hall, M. S. (2019). Inclusion in International Schools: Achieving Academic Excellence and Education for All [Doctoral dissertation, Bethel University]. Spark Repository. <https://spark.bethel.edu/etd/258>
- Freeman-Green, S., Test, D. W., & Holzberg, D. (2018). Participation of students with disabilities in college-ready programs. *International Journal of Special Education*, 33(3), 715–731.
- International Baccalaureate Organization (2023). *Access and Inclusion Policy*. <https://www.ibo.org/globalassets/new-structure/programmes/dp/pdfs/access-and-inclusion-policy-en.pdf>
- International Baccalaureate Organization (2025). *A global milestone in supporting autistic learners*. International Baccalaureate®. <https://www.ibo.org/news/news-about-the-ib/a-global-milestone-in-supporting-autistic-learners/>
- International Baccalaureate Organization (2023). Approaches to Learning and Approaches to Teaching in the Middle Years Program. https://resources.ibo.org/myp/works/myp_11162-425069?lang=en
- International Baccalaureate Organization (2025). Assessment Principles and Practices – Quality Assessments in a Digital Age. https://resources.ibo.org/ib/works/edu_11162-47165?lang=en
- International Baccalaureate Organization (2017). *Learner Profile*. <https://www.ibo.org/contentassets/fd82f70643ef4086b7d3f292cc214962/learner-profile-en.pdf>

International Baccalaureate Organization (2020). *IB Programme Standards and Practices*.

<https://ibo.org/globalassets/new-structure/become-an-ib-school/pdfs/programme-standards-and-practices-2020-en.pdf>

International Baccalaureate Organization (2020). *Meeting student learning diversity in the classroom: Removing barriers to learning*. https://resources.ibo.org/ib/works/edu_11162-412405?1.6.2.6.5&lang=en

International Baccalaureate Organization (2019). *The IB guide to inclusive education: a resource for whole school development*. https://resources.ibo.org/ib/works/edu_11162-37963?

International Baccalaureate Organization (2016). *Using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in the IB Classroom*. https://resources.ibo.org/data/g_x_senxx_csn_1612_1_e.pdf

International Baccalaureate Organization (2019). *What is an IB education?*

https://resources.ibo.org/ib/works/edu_11162-58229?

Leavy, P. (2017). *Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods, Arts-Based, and Community-Based Participatory Research Approaches*. Guilford Publications.

<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/viu/detail.action?docID=4832778>

Leppard, J. (2014). *Toward a More Just and Truly International Education*. MYP

interdisciplinary study. International Baccalaureate®.

<https://www.ibo.org/programmes/middle-years-programme/curriculum/interdisciplinary/>

Logli, C. (2016). *UDL and inclusive practices in IB schools worldwide*. CAST report.

https://www.academia.edu/45587630/UDL_and_Inclusive_Practices_in_IB_Schools_Worldwide

- Pearce, R. (2021). The role of culture and identity in international education: A functional approach to some prospective problems. *Interpreting International Education*. Routledge.
- Peltier, C. (2024). Explicit Instruction – What Students With Disabilities Need Most. *Oklahoma Education Journal*, 2(3). <https://oej.scholasticahq.com/article/116648-explicit-instruction-what-students-with-disabilities-need-most>
- Preschern, J. (2021). "International Baccalaureate Primary Years Teachers' Perceptions On Educating Students With Dyslexia". Theses and Dissertations. 286.”
https://scholar.stjohns.edu/theses_dissertations/286
- Richardson, J. W. (2019). *Bringing Innovative Practices to Your School: Lessons from International Schools*. Routledge.
- Rohrer, D., Dedrick, R., & Agarwal, P. (2017). Interleaved Mathematics Practice.
http://uweb.cas.usf.edu/~drohrer/pdfs/Interleaved_Mathematics_Practice_Guide.pdf
- Sames, E. L. (2023, June 7). *Barriers to Inclusion at International Schools*.
<https://www.proquest.com/openview/745c7fc251e7fdbe8ca68026203d2e34/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>
- Schwartz, A., Hopkins, B., Stiefel, L. (2019). The Effects of Special Education on the Academic Performance of Students with Learning Disabilities. Ed Working Paper, 19-86.
Annenberg Institute at Brown University: <http://www.edworkingpapers.com/ai19-86>

- Sveen, K. (2020). "An Interview Study with teachers in the International Baccalaureate programme in a state-owned IB school in Norway." Master's Thesis. <http://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-87457>
- Wade, J., Wolanin, N., & McGaughey, T. (2015). *A Study of Critical Thinking Skills in the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme*. <https://ibo.org/globalassets/new-structure/research/pdfs/myp-critical-thinking-report.pdf>
- Williams, T. D. (2024). *Examining the Impact of a Professional Learning Community on Teachers' Awareness of Neurodiversity in the Classroom*. <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=8724&context=etd>

Appendix A

Supporting Neurodivergent Learners of the Middle Years Program in International Baccalaureate Schools in British Columbia - Research Survey

Principal Investigator: Emily Baker, L. Sch. Psych. Vancouver Island University.

Emily.Baker@viu.ca

Secondary Researcher: Kirsten Brazier, Student. Master of Education, Special Education.

Vancouver Island University. xxx@xxx

Purpose

I am a student in the Master of Education in Special Education program at Vancouver Island University (VIU). I would like to invite you to take part in my study, entitled “Supporting Neurodivergent Learners of the Middle Years Program in International Baccalaureate schools in British Columbia”, which aims to learn more about how teachers in British Columbia are meeting the needs of neurodivergent learners within International Baccalaureate (IB) schools. My hope is that my re-search will provide insight into how the needs of neurodivergent learners are being met within the IB framework, and look at how these students are being supported to meet the rigour of the program.

Description

You are being asked to voluntarily complete this anonymous online survey. The survey includes questions on topics such as where you teach, what you teach, who you teach, teaching neurodivergent learners in IB schools, and current practices in meeting the needs of diverse learners. The survey would take about 20 minutes to complete.

Use of Research Information

The results of this study will be presented in a final report required for completion of my degree and may also be used for professional presentations in my workplace and/or in other locations in British Columbia (for example, at a provincial conference). Products of the research will include only aggregate data. Should you wish to receive a copy of the research data and/or the completed master's thesis, please contact Kirsten Brazier xxx@xxx on or after April 30, 2026.

Potential direct benefits and risk of harm to participants

There is no direct benefit to you in taking part in this study. It is hoped that the research will contribute to the body of work supporting neurodivergent learners in IB schools in British Columbia. There is a risk that some of the survey questions may make you uncomfortable. To mitigate this risk, you are free to decline to answer any question you do not wish to answer, or you may withdraw from participation at any time by closing your browser. If you close your browser prior to clicking the 'submit' button at the end of the survey, the information you provide will not be used in the study. The survey is anonymous – that is, no personally identifiable information will be collected. Please do not include your name or contextual information that might directly or indirectly identify you. If you agree to be quoted in the

products of the research (see checkbox below) quotes will be attributed to a pseudonym or code (e.g., 'participant #3').

Management of Research Information/Data

All research data, particularly personal or sensitive information, will be collected, stored, and managed using Microsoft 365 services (e.g., OneDrive, SharePoint) provided by Vancouver Island University. VIU has conducted a Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) for its Microsoft 365 environment, confirming its adherence to relevant privacy legislation, including British Columbia's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) and the principles of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2 (2022)). The PIA ensures that appropriate technical, administrative, and physical safeguards are in place to protect the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of data.

Research data will be stored on VIU's Microsoft 365 cloud storage (OneDrive/SharePoint), which utilizes industry-standard encryption protocols for data at rest and in transit. Access to research files will be restricted to authorized research team members through VIU's secure login credentials, with permissions managed by the Principal Investigator. Access to identifiable research data within Microsoft 365 will be granted only to individuals explicitly listed on the REB-approved protocol.

Access will be managed through Microsoft 365's robust permission settings, ensuring that only necessary personnel have access to specific data sets.

Your research data will be stored securely on Vancouver Island University's Microsoft 365 platform, which is protected by institutional security measures and privacy protocols. Your data will be kept confidential and used only for the purposes outlined in this study. Upon completion of the research project and consistent with VIU's research data retention policies, identifiable data stored within Microsoft 365 will be securely disposed of according to VIU's data retention schedule and privacy guidelines. Any anonymized data intended for long-term retention or sharing will be stored in an appropriate, secure repository as outlined in the data management plan.

Participation and withdrawal

Your participation is completely voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect or change any pre-existing relationship with the primary investigator or faculty supervisor, prevent the success of the project, or the primary investigator's graduation. As your personal identity will not be collected, withdrawal from the study would not be possible once you click on the 'submit' button at the end of the survey.

Contact information about this study

We would be pleased to answer any inquiries regarding this study. Should you have any questions, please direct them to Emily Baker or Kirsten Brazier at the contact information provided at the top of this form.

Concerns about Treatment in the Research

If you have any concerns about your treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the Vancouver Island University Research Ethics Board by email at xxx@xxx

1. I consent to participate in this research in accordance with the conditions described above.

* Mark only one.

Yes

No

2. I consent to being quoted in the products of the research.

* Mark only one.

Yes

No

3. What grade(s)/level(s) do you work with?

4. What subject area(s) do you teach, or what is your role?

5. Have you taught in other IB schools? If so, in what area of the world did you teach?

6. Do you currently work with neurodivergent learners?

Mark only one.

Yes

No

7. How do you feel the IB framework is currently meeting the needs of neurodivergent learners in the Middle Years program?
8. In what areas could the IB framework be improved upon to better meet the needs of neurodivergent students in the Middle Years Program?
9. What are some of the best practices that your school has implemented to support diverse learners within the IB context?
10. What are your thoughts on how neurodivergent learners can be best supported to manage the rigour of the IB Middle Years Program?
11. As the International Baccalaureate Organization has mandated that individual schools develop Inclusive Education policies that best meet the needs of their school populations, what steps has your school taken to develop this internal policy and approach?
12. How are Personal Learning Plans/Individual Education Plans being used in your school to meet the needs of neurodiverse students?

