What does it mean to ‘take action’ in the PYP Exhibition?

An inquiry into the experiences of three Latin American schools.

Executive Summary

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Pamela Curtin

Colegio Roosevelt – The American School of Lima, Peru
Formerly: St Nicholas School, Sao Paulo, Brazil

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Disclaimer:

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Abstract

This study explores understandings of 'action' as well as pedagogical processes leading to action, the implications of taking action and the impact of student action as part of the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (PYP) Exhibition in three IB schools in Latin America. These actions are examined in terms of *action as service* and action as a means for student self-actualisation, as students apply what they have learnt through research. Two waves of data were collected to provide initial insights into students' perspectives at the time of the Exhibition through online surveys (*N*=102) and subsequent follow-up with students, teachers, mentors and administrators through onsite interviews and focus groups (*N*=128), offering opportunities for reflection through retrospection and identification of potential enduring understandings. The main issues that emerged reflect the different pedagogical and philosophical approaches and the Exhibition structure in each school. Some systems and interactions promoted student empowerment and active citizenship while others constrained students' levels of participation. Overall the majority of students felt they were able to take action with varying degrees of success, and findings suggest that the Exhibition research, as well as the action taken, have the potential to impact others.

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"Action means taking a stand for a problem. You have to do what you think is right and help the people by improving the world we live in."
- Luisa, aged 11.

Introduction

As part of the International Baccalaureate's (IB) Primary Years' Programme (PYP) Exhibition, students are expected to be active citizens and to take action to show understanding, to apply knowledge and skills, to reflect, and often to make a contribution to a cause or stimulate positive change. How this action happens and what impact it has on the target group of those being served, beyond the learning of the students themselves, have been relatively unexplored in primary school age students. In secondary schools, Phillips (2011) defines an active citizen as, "a social agent expressing opinions, making decisions, and enacting social actions as an expression of civic responsibility" (p. 778). This concept of 'active citizenship' is often bound to, or is a foundation for 'service learning' (Birdwell, Scott & Horley, 2013; Jerome, 2012), whereby students engage in service projects building on issues investigated at school either through direct action, indirect action, advocacy or research (Berger-Kaye, 2003). However, there is little research into how students in the primary years take action and what pedagogical approaches shape their actions beyond teacher 'how-to' manuals such as Farber (2011), Lake and Jones (2012) and Berger-Kaye (2003), nor is there any research on the impact of their action on those being served. More critical theories towards how to lead students to take action as active citizens and concerns regarding socio-cultural and economic implications of action (see for example, Cipolle, 2010; Hoops, 2011; and Case, 2013) are also rare or non-existent.
I report here on findings carried out in three PYP schools in Latin America during and after each school's Exhibition. The Exhibition is normally developed over several weeks in the last year of primary school and involves an open inquiry into a major concern or local/global issue as well as the undertaking of action. Students usually work in groups and are supported by a mentor (usually one of the teachers or administrators in the school), their class teacher, the PYP coordinator and primary school administrators. Information generated through this study sheds light on students' understandings of action, what actions were taken and the perceived benefits and limitations of these actions. I argue that outcomes from the Exhibition process in terms of student action reflect the pedagogical discourses and the framing of educational knowledge, as articulated by Bernstein (1971), and that these appear to be embedded within each school's philosophy and practice. I elaborate initially on interpretations of action and active citizenship and the drive for pedagogies that incorporate students as actors of change for sustainability, service, social justice and global citizenship, then on how the schools involved in the study are situated within these contexts. I explore insights into students' understandings of action, the processes they engage in, the perceived outcomes and the

teaching and learning approaches in place with the hope that they may generate discussion and provide opportunities to share what taking action can mean for students of this age.

Literature review

Interpretations of Action

Action is embedded in the philosophy of the IB and is promoted throughout all its curricular programmes. In the PYP, action is considered to be both an application of learning and an opportunity for students to engage in a form of contribution or service. It is considered an 'essential element', but action-as-service is understood to be voluntary - a choice to act for the prevention of, and in response to, problems in their home, school, community and perhaps beyond. It involves an ongoing cycle of reflecting, choosing and acting, and it is anticipated the teachers will model different forms of action, providing tangible experiences through age-appropriate central ideas that can lead to student-initiated action, as mentioned below.

> "In the PYP it is believed that not only is it possible for students to identify appropriate action, but also that teachers have a responsibility to enable them to choose their action carefully, to facilitate this action, and to encourage them to reflect on the action they undertake. This is viewed as an important part of students' active participation in their own learning" (IBO, 2009, p. 26).

Much has been said about the benefits for those who engage in active citizenship through service learning as it extends down from secondary through to the younger primary years (Berger Kaye, 2003; Einfeld & Collins, 2008; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Roberts, 2011). The IB seeks to explain how it can be developed and supported by stating that action "[is] most beneficial to the students when they are able to witness the outcomes…[it] usually begins in a small way and arises from genuine care and commitment…[and] should include anticipation of consequences, and accepting of responsibility and may require appropriate adult support in order to facilitate students' efforts and to provide them with alternatives and choices" (IBO, 2009, p. 26). These approaches and expectations suggest that a transformative pedagogy needs to happen whereby learners have the opportunity, and the scaffolding, to engage as participants and drivers of social change. This in turn aligns with the core conceptual dimensions (cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioural) of global citizenship education as defined by UNESCO (2015, p. 15).

Pedagogical approaches and the construction of 'action'

There has been an increasing shift to include global citizenship, sustainability, social justice and service in the curriculum. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, was an early proponent of child/youth involvement as active citizens and brought about the Earth Charter[1] for schools. More recently, UNESCO's post-2015 development agenda has outlined Target 4.7, in *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, for governments, school systems and those working with children and young people in other contexts to ensure curricula address education for sustainability and global citizenship education.

> "By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development; including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development" (UN, 2015, P.21).

This push for curriculum to incorporate learning of this kind needs to be seen in light of the context of the school, their vision and mission and in the day-to-day practice of the educators. Bernstein (1971) spoke of 'frames' that govern schools. Those with 'strong frames' persist with pre-determined knowledge and set skills to be acquired. The 'weak frames', however, are less rigid and teacher-driven and represent an inquiry approach, with knowledge constructed by the learner, driven by their interest and with a flexible pace and sequencing according to the needs of the learner.

Bernstein (1977) also described the culture of schools as functioning from either 'instrumental' or 'expressive standpoints'. The former focuses on specific knowledge and skills and emphasizes streaming, ranking and a competitive environment, while the latter looks to import moral codes, values and norms and develop character with the purpose of building a community of learners. It could be argued that in international schools in Latin America, at least, we are now looking at a blending of both of these functions within schools. On one side, there is a perceived need to create citizens of the world with specific values, and on the other, many schools still thrive on a competitive sense of achievement, marked often by standardized testing and emphasis on upskilling for future employment. Many IB schools are potentially caught in this bind between legitimating knowledge production and enforcing values and seeking to create change-makers who are also well-equipped to lead in a complex world. In IB Pre-K–12 private schools, many parents are concerned about getting their children into the right university, and educators are mindful of vertical curricula alignment based on a top-down approach to ensure all learning leads to an IB Diploma. Yet, if structured well, and if these

[1] See details in the Earth Charter here: http://earthcharter.org/

pressures are eased, opportunities for authentic inquiry and problem-based learning can occur in an organic way. This means educators can operate from Bernstein's (1971) 'weak frame', with students able to explore real-world problems while making connections with conceptual understandings and to develop at their own pace. With appropriate scaffolding and guidance by teachers, students can build skills in research, thinking, social, communication and self-management, while being intellectually challenged and able to make insightful reflections. As part of the process it is then envisaged that students will choose to engage in meaningful action.

Ultimately, we need to keep in mind that the Exhibition is a celebration of learning and a demonstration of the understandings, knowledge, skills and attitudes that students have acquired, along with the action they demonstrate. According to the PYP Exhibition Guidelines (2008), students are expected to "demonstrate an understanding of the five essential elements - knowledge, concepts, skills, attitudes and action…demonstrate an ability to reflect on and apply their learning to choose appropriate courses of action and carry them out…[and that these] may take the form of…service-oriented action." (pp. 2-3).

Student participation and self-actualisation

The teacher's role in the Exhibition in terms of action is to "empower the students to feel able to take action as a result of the Exhibition" (IBO, 2008, p. 3). Interpretations of 'empowerment' are broad and diverse so I rein it in to connect empowerment with participation. Effective and empowered participation, using a model like Hart's ladder (1992) and the various versions of it that followed, can be identified if the ultimate level of participation is not the child alone at the top, but the child supported by an invested adult. This then enables the child to be confident with ideas and direction, while perhaps needing the teacher to open doors on occasion, provide advice and be present. By being on that top rung of Hart's ladder, the child can believe that he/she is able to contribute and make a difference, has the confidence to do so, and can have some level of success in his/her endeavours. The Sustainable Schools' Initiative Earth Citizenship model, developed by the New South Wales government in 2009, placed at the centre of the circle 'well-being' as the core to being and becoming an agent of change. This could be seen as similar to Maslow's (1943) 'hierarchy of needs' in that one must first have physiological and other basic needs met before one can eventually reach a stage of self-actualisation. Therefore, it is important to consider that perhaps first a child needs to belong, feel part of something bigger and know that they are supported as they reach out and take risks to make a difference in their own and others' lives (Hill, 2012). The teacher is central to this process, both as partner and as guide, which is articulated clearly in UNESCO's (2015) report on Global Citizenship Education's learning objectives and which correlates well with the PYP understanding:

> "Global citizenship education requires skilled educators who have a good understanding of transformative and participatory teaching and learning. The main role of the educator is to be a guide and facilitator, encouraging learners to engage in critical inquiry and supporting the development of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that promote positive personal and social change" (p. 51).

Background to the study

This study aimed to look at trends and interpretations of action within the context of three Latin American-based schools, specifically because many IB schools are private and elite institutions in this area of the world where poverty is common and the drive to take action is often built into the curriculum. The studies took place in schools in Mexico City, Sao Paulo and Lima. Each of these cities has marked socioeconomic divisions and high-density populations and is located in a country with similar ranking on the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2013).

The three selected schools (randomly referred to here as School A, B and C) are well-established PYP pre-kindergarten to Year 12 institutions with British roots and have a predominant number (between 60-80%) of local rather than foreign students who usually come from the economic elite, if they are not teachers' children on scholarships. The schools tend to differ in the following ways:

- School A: there are a greater number of middle class children of academics or artists.
- School B: the most expensive of the three and attracts a largely liberal set of parents, some of whom are diplomats, while others work for international NGOs and a number are established artists or athletes.
- School C: has a large number of children from single income (dual parent) families from the corporate sector.

Such variables have the potential to impact how schools view themselves, and how they choose to meet the vision of the majority of the parent community. In turn, this can affect how action is conceived and how much social change is encouraged in children, or how an education for social justice might be accepted or reinforced at home. However, in spite of these possible contentions, the heads of all three schools and many of their faculty had engaged in professional development in service learning and sustainability and these were highly promoted through projects and curriculum across the school.

It is important to acknowledge the 'positionality' of the researcher (Madison, 2005). My knowledge of these schools is not impartial. I worked in two of these schools as a PYP Coordinator, one during the initial part of the study, and the other school I was familiar with

through having worked closely with its teachers. I am conscious of the bias that this imposes, and that as a researcher in schools where I have worked or where I have collegial connections, relationships can affect which stories are told, how they are recalled, relived and narrated and the way I perceive and reconstruct them. However, it was through my work within and in connection to these schools that I began to search for effective ways to engage students in action that implemented strong inquiry-based models and allowed for authentic participation by the students. Having known each of these schools, I was confident that they offered good examples of this type of pedagogy and were constantly innovating their approaches and actively provoking social and environmental problematizing through curriculum and service in many ways.

Objectives

Three objectives structured this research:

1. to investigate the types of action students engage in as part of their PYP Exhibition;
2. to explore the process of taking action and student motivations and understandings of action; and,
3. to evaluate the impact this action has on the school and/or community.

The initial research questions were:

- In what ways do PYP Exhibition students take action and why?
- How does this action benefit the school and/or local community?

However, during the research process I found that the driving questions that appeared to be more pertinent were these:

- How is student action shaped, scaffolded and supported?
- How does the PYP Exhibition structure learning for action to happen effectively?

Both the former and the latter questions were addressed in the study and findings and discussions concerning these are presented below.

Methodology and research design

The research followed a mixed method approach, using both quantitative and qualitative strategies and analyses. This methodology allowed the different paradigms to work in tandem to provide detailed information that could be collected from a number of sources. It also meant I could categorise data more easily and through cross-referencing could validate apparent themes. This study was not intended to generalise but to share insights from the experiences of three schools. It is recognised that quantitative data provides limited information and that qualitative inquiry can be constrained by contextual factors, bias and partiality. As a researcher, known within these schools, I was constantly reflecting on how information was interpreted and

clarifications with participants were made throughout the process.

At each school, all students who had participated in the Exhibition were invited to participate as a voluntary exercise. Altogether, across all schools, 102 students responded to the online surveys and 128 participated in the student focus group sessions. They were mostly aged between 10-11 years at the time of the Exhibition, and parental permission and student consent and ethics forms were provided and signed. Focus groups were conducted in groups of 4-6 students at each school and one larger group of students in the following year group to generate information through student recollections of the Exhibition and to evaluate potential impact of action.

Quantitative data collection

The same online survey was used with all students in each school as part of their Exhibition reflection. It was offered in English and Spanish to the bilingual schools in Peru and Mexico directly before or after the Exhibition took place. The school in Brazil operates a full immersion English program and students were all confident reading and responding to a survey in English. It incorporated ten multiple choice and open-ended questions relating to the following:

- goals of their action including identification of their target group and reasons for it
- steps taken to achieve their goal
- support needed
- problems encountered as they implemented the action
- possibilities regarding what could have been done differently
- perceived levels of success.

Qualitative data collection

Using a case study approach, individual and focus group interviews were held with a sample of Exhibition students from each school and their Head of Primary, PYP coordinator, class teachers and their target groups (students within school in the lower year group), six-eight months after the Exhibition took place. The main purpose for this was to allow for retrospection and to assess impact by checking for enduring understandings within the target group. Questioning techniques were interpretive and hypothetical, following an inductive approach, recognising common themes as they arose. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and notes were taken when reviewing Exhibition portfolios or other relevant pieces.

Data analysis

Statistical analysis was used to evaluate survey responses, with a number of codes used to categorize common themes. In the follow-up interviews, data collection and analysis began in

tandem as insights into patterns and themes during the preliminary analysis gave way to further sub-questions. Please note that all names have been changed in the data below as part of the confidentiality agreement with each school.

Results

The number of students in each school in the year group involved in the Exhibition varied. As such, the number of those who volunteered and had parental approval to participate in the online survey also differed. In School A, 33 participated in the survey, in School B, 23 participated and in School C, 46 students participated. These numbers reflect approximately 50% of all Exhibition students that year in each school, and these numbers need to be recognised as only partially representative of the population of each Exhibition cohort. In questions marked with an asterisk, students were able to respond to more than one answer. Data presented below shows evidence of the most common and highest rating that each cohort selected and also draws attentions to responses that seem unusual in each context.

Interview and focus group data have been added under each of the survey questions when it can add clarifying and/or additional information and insights. Further information gathered from these face-to-face sessions, particularly with the adults, is detailed below the survey findings under the main themes of: *Culture and school understandings of action*, *Exhibition structure* and *Students and Self-actualisation.*

Understandings of action

What do you think 'action' means in the PYP Exhibition?*	Application of Learning	Making a difference or change	To do something; to act	Help or support a cause	Raise awareness
School A	28%		25%	13%	
School B		27%		27%	45%
School C	35%	42%		19%	

All ranked in the top three the understanding of action as 'helping or supporting a cause'. Two schools strongly identified with 'application of learning' and two strongly identified with 'making a difference or change'. School B had a large number that identified strongly with action as 'raising awareness'; this was reinforced in the focus group conversations. In the focus group sessions with students six-eight months after the Exhibition, more ideas about action were added, including, "action symbolises your PYP Exhibition," "it keeps people's attention", "it is the project you are going to do that relates to your topic, like saving the forests," "it means you

can do projects with other schools," or, as Sofia points out,

> "Action is trying to make an impact on the problem. Maybe a small impact, maybe on the people around you or on your community."

In School A's case, Lorenzo said that,

> "It's about taking what you learn and using it in life to help you."

Types of action

Explain in a few sentences what you did for your action.*	Change own behaviour	Develop new skills	Raise own awareness	Raised awareness in others	Donations or fundraising	Teaching/ Presenting	Service (direct or indirect action)	Designed and engaged others in social activity + reflection
School A	23%	27%	27%					
School B				65%		25%		15%
School C				57%	15%		26%	

School A's focus was largely on developing one's own awareness and skills whilst Schools B and C tended towards carrying out actions that raised awareness in others. Not all reached their full objective but they were, overall, quite happy with the project they selected, as Frankie mentions,

> "I created an online petition trying to get censorship to be a little bit more accurate in the movies. I didn't get 10,000 signatures but it was more about raising awareness."

School B also focused on teaching others and creating events or activities in order to engage target groups in personal reflection about behaviour, attitudes or beliefs, or as one student articulated, "to change their perception of the world". Tom and his team were studying oppressive forms of government, in particular dictatorships, and decided to teach the younger students in the primary section about what it could be like. They took over the assembly, dressed in military uniforms and ran the school for half the day, creating havoc by banning regular student activities such as computer games at lunch and the exchanging of football cards. The younger students then rebelled and the 'military coup' was quickly dissolved. Tom recalled the event vividly,

> "We took over the school as dictators. It was a new experience and it was an interesting way to teach the [primary] students."

School C created a number of projects involving direct action (active participation in the community – largely for the school community) or indirect service, such as raising money or collecting donations for community organisations, donating trees with instructions on how to

plant and care for them and selling jewellery on behalf of a local organisation that worked with an emerging economic community. With any sales, their PYP coordinator did clarify that,

> "If they were selling a product they had to have a rationale to justify why and how."

Choice of action

Did you choose what type of action you wanted to do?	Yes.	My teacher/ mentor suggested some ideas.	My teacher/ mentor gave me options to choose.	No, I was told what action I could do.
School A	42.42%	33.33%	9.09%	15.15%
School B	30.43%	56.52%	13.04%	0%
School C	73.91%	17.39%	6.52%	2.17%

As can be seen above, students in two of the three schools agreed that yes, they were able to choose their action. Later, in the focus groups, some students claimed that while they were able to choose their action, it had to be cleared or approved by teachers and was sometimes denied or changed. This was particularly evident in School C where 73% of those surveyed said they were able to choose their project, but, in the interviews, some from School C referred to the teacher or mentor as a gate keeper – one who could approve or deny an action. Lou explained it this way,

> "After we came up with an idea and had a plan we had to get it approved by our tutor [class teacher] and then by the mentor."

Max said,

> "We had to say it to the mentor and the mentor was like, "no, no". The mentor decided but we didn't want to do it. The action was still successful but I really didn't like it."

Not all felt this way, however. Jimena and her group were content with how things progressed with mentor and teacher input:

> "We took the ideas to them and they were like 'okay but maybe you could also do it this way', and that helped us."

In School B only a third said yes with over half saying their teacher or mentor suggested ideas, although School B was also the only school where those who responded to the survey felt that no-one had told them what action to do.

Why did you choose this type of action?*	It was interesting.	I would gain from the experience.	It was something needing change.	It was the best option.	It helped to support a cause.	I wanted the change.	It would have the most impact.
School A	25%	11%	14%				
School B				22%	28%		39%
School C				18%	60%	18%	31%

School C ranked particularly highly that the action they developed was to support a cause, and, along with School B, that their action was designed to have the most impact. Interestingly, only 9 out of 102 survey participants said that they chose an action based on it being the easiest to do. Many were 'passion projects' that students selected based on a personal connection they had with the issue. For example, in School B, Marco explained how his family was into sports and his father had been to the Paralympics. Marco became determined for others to see athletes with a disability as being "normal athletes". This became the focus of his Exhibition within a group that looked at sports issues. His action was then to inform and raise awareness. Another student had a younger sister in the school's early childhood section with Down syndrome. Her action was to provide professional development to teachers in a primary school staff meeting regarding how those with the syndrome learn best and what they can do well, offering teaching tips to teachers.

In the case of Tara, whose sister had had anorexia, she was determined to know more about it:

> "My parents were surprised by my choice to do it for Exhibition but they were fine about it. My sister wasn't totally comfortable helping me at the beginning – it was painful for her but after she was interested. I'm really glad I did it. I learned a lot about what my sister went through and hopefully raised awareness for others about it."

Target group

Who were you trying to help?	Teachers	Secondary students	Primary students	School community	Parents
School A	35.48%		41.94%		58.06%
School B	43.48%		56.52%	52.17%	
School C	24.44%		40%	33.33%	24.44%

All schools ranked teachers and primary students highly as their target group while the school community was also ranked as a target group for School B (52%) and School C (33%). School A identified 'parents' as their biggest target group. Even though none of the cohorts said they directly supported their local community in general (beyond school), 17% and 9% from Schools

B and C respectively did say they had supported a community organisation or charity.

Action process

How easy was it to think of an action?	I knew from the beginning what I wanted to do.	After I did my research I had a few different ideas.	I had an idea but I needed to talk it over with my teacher/mentor or my parents.	It took a while to think of something I could do.	It was hard and I needed to get ideas from others.
School A	0%	56.25%	25%	15.63%	3.13%
School B	8.7%	21.74%	30.43%	21.74%	17.39%
School C	28.26%	41.3%	19.57%	10.87%	0%

In School C's case, nearly a third felt they knew what action they hoped to take before the research began and none indicated that they had to get ideas from others, although for School C and also for School A, a large number of students believed that ideas for action came after they had researched quite a bit. This also came through in the focus group sessions when many said that knowing their topic well had helped them make choices for taking action. For a student from School A, research followed by action was easy and driven by a natural curiosity:

> "I really like knowing about what happens in other places in the world. So it really just came to me."

Marina, from School B, was also very enthusiastic when recalling her experience:

> "I really liked my action. I found it easy because I knew a lot about my topic. I adopted a turtle. It had the same name as me. These were turtles from Australia and if people didn't adopt them so they could live in a sanctuary they had to let them into the wild and 80% of them that get let go don't survive."

Stefan was driven because of a personal interest, or as he refers to it, an addiction:

> "I am quite addicted to phones. I got a cell phone and the next year a new phone was made and it was really different and I was shocked. I wanted to know what that meant for people and how technology affects us. Then I raised awareness about it."

How easy was it to implement your action?	Everything went according to plan.	Most things went well but it took longer than expected.	I had a few challenges but I could overcome them.	I was able to carry out my action but I needed a lot of help.	There were too many problems and I couldn't complete my action.
School A	23.33%	43.33%	30%	0%	3.33%
School B	22.73%	36.36%	22.73%	13.64%	4.55%
School C	39.13%	32.61%	26.09%	2.17%	0%

School C demonstrated confidence in their decisions and actions. At the time of the Exhibition, nearly 40% indicated that the action was achieved as anticipated and no-one felt that their action couldn't be achieved. This was explored further during the focus groups and there was some difference of opinion during the discussions regarding the success of each project. Time, or lack of it, was identified by all groups as an issue, and this was also a point of contention in the focus groups. According to Brendan,

> "It was sometimes hard to keep up with all the work that we had to do in such a small time."

Having the right resources made it easier. Those who managed to arrange visits and gain access to places, usually through connections, seemed to have a greater motivation with both research and action. This was illustrated in their conversations during their focus group about a visit to the stadium to meet members of a well-known team, and for another student it was when she knew she would meet with the governor of the city. She not only met with him but gave him the letter she had written about the plight of bees, asked him to read it and engaged in a lengthy discussion with him about it.

What would you do differently if you could do this action again?*	Be better at…(skill/attitude)	Do a different action or make different decisions.	Get more information first.	Change how we delivered/ presented the action.	Have more time.	Make a bigger impact (larger target group).	Do more.	The same. It worked.
School A	16%	13%	16%					
School B		20%		15%	20%			
School C		10%				36%	10%	26%

School A, perhaps given that their action was largely aligned with self-awareness and consciousness-raising, was the only cohort to indicate that they would like to improve in a skill area, or improve their attitude. School B indicated they would need more time for action if done again and School C was keen to extend their projects and make a greater impact.

If you did this action again what would you need?*	More teacher/ mentor/ parent support.	More money (to develop projects)	More time.	More confidence in myself to be able to do it.	Other.
School A	44.44%	7.41%	48.15%	37.04%	0%
School B	9%	4.55%	81.82%	40.91%	13.64%
School C	13.95%	6.98%	67.44%	13.95%	6.98%

As mentioned above, an overwhelming number of students identified requiring more time as the greatest need, 41% of School B students felt they needed more confidence to know they could carry out an action, and nearly half of the students who responded to the survey from

School A felt they needed more teacher, mentor and/or parent support. This was discussed with regard to action in the focus groups and some identified missed opportunities for action.

Impact of action

Do you think this action has made, or eventually will make, a difference?	Yes, definitely.	Probably.	Maybe a little.	Not much.	Not at all.
School A	25.81%	41.94%	19.35%	9.68%	3.23%
School B	31.82%	36.36%	13.64%	13.64%	4.55%
School C	34.78%	54.35%	10.87%	0%	0%

Again, while the majority of all students who participated in the survey said "probably", the confidence of School C students when contemplating if their action made a difference is evident with over a third convinced that it did, and no-one indicating that it did not make a difference. Yet when reflecting on their action projects during the focus group sessions, there were mixed opinions about whether their action led to mind-shifts or behavioural change as demonstrated in the two conversations below:

> Harry: "By doing a football match with another school, they learned that sport doesn't have to be about gender or what country you are from."
>
> Luca: "I think they felt good, playing football without thinking about race."

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> Joaquin: "I think the kids memorise the facts and tell us on our surveys but I don't think they really learned about what the problem of violence is. I think they still play video games."
>
> Izzy: "Kids nowadays they don't follow the good things. They say "yeah, yeah" when they hear about it but they don't do it."

In spite of the Exhibition students' beliefs or doubts regarding their impact on their target groups, findings relating to the perceptions of the year group below tell their own story.

Lived experiences seemed to have a big impact on these younger students. In focus group sessions they spoke of playing ball games when blindfolded to learn about sports, discrimination and difficulties experienced if you are blind. In terms of the dictatorship event mentioned above, the younger students spoke of this, with one saying,

> "I learned that there are some people in the world who are not as free as we are."

And another said,

> "We learned how to protest and demand our rights!"

Raquel talked about the bees and their near extinction and how the activity she experienced when engaging with the previous year's Exhibition groups involved looking at "lots of good food" and being ready to eat it then having it taken away "because we won't have that food if there are no bees."

A simple act that one Exhibition student had doubted, saying in hindsight, "I don't think having a walk around the school and selling ribbons to raise awareness [of autism, obesity and Down's syndrome] was a good idea", worked to the contrary. Several younger students recalled this event eight months later, with one saying,

> "Everybody did the walk to raise awareness and we wore the ribbons to remember those children that [sic] have difficulty learning or might feel left out."

Other actions were recalled because they were novel or had a 'wow factor' - something that stood out from the norm and impressed them in some way, such as these:

> "I remember that the contamination group went to clean the beach."

> "One group made pencils and at the top there was a seed so you could plant a tree."

> "There were these girls who cut off all their hair to raise awareness and they gave their hair for kids with cancer."

Most evident in the focus groups with these younger students, was that they were able to recall a large number of facts, details and big issues from the Exhibition presentations themselves. Many of these, they said, had inspired them to research something similar in their own future Exhibition.

School culture and understandings of action

In each of the three schools, the administrators (which includes heads of school, heads and deputy heads of primary and PYP coordinators) spoke in depth about being part of a school culture that embraces education for (and through) sustainability, service, community engagement and student voice and participation, particularly when it feeds into or emerges from the curriculum and student learning. Different forms of action were acknowledged including action as application of learning, day-to-day demonstration of a 'caring culture', a mindset that action begins with one's own behaviours, student-initiated action and/or whole school action as articulated below:

> "Action can be everyday events. Being nice, kind, helpful around your school community. Or it can be a larger event, supporting a particular institution, or responding to a particular world event. I think the former is sometimes more important. It creates a climate which hopefully supports larger action events." – Head of School

> "I'm a big believer that a lot of meaningful action is in the day to day actions, the attitudes students are adopting, possibly seen through the Learner Profile attributes. The way they treat each other – their social skills. I think there is a lot of daily evidence of that happening." – Head of Primary

> "We've learned over the years that action doesn't have to happen at the end of a unit. It happens as a result of learning when they are ready to apply it, even in small ways. They also learn the responsibility of sharing knowledge and that can be action too." – Deputy Head of Primary

In terms of allowing for and enabling student-initiated action, there appear to be some difficulties regarding how this type of action can be fully supported and how to balance between structuring and over-structuring action. In the comments below, the head of primary talks of less structure while the head of school (at the same institution) speaks of a need for more structure:

> "Student initiated action requires quite a degree of scaffolding. What we have tried to do more is to have students come up with things that are their own initiatives, higher up in Hart's ladder, and I think that has been quite successful. I think we have been able to give them more ownership. I think perhaps before we were over-structuring it." – Head of Primary

> "We are trying to get students to have a stronger voice and through their voice initiate activities that are more systemic and are more sustainable over time…but we need now to structure all their initiatives." – Head of School

Dilemmas associated with partnering, guiding and scaffolding student-initiated action are common across all three schools where students have become more engaged in service and action:

> "The focus on ESD [Education for Sustainable Development] has helped by bringing the issues to the forefront...and they are a very amenable way for children to take action. I think the problem at the moment is that because kids are coming up with so many ideas, they are saying 'we want to do this, we want to do that, or we want to do the other'. And we've had to say 'well we can't

actually do that because it will cost too much to do, or because other groups are doing them'." – Head of Primary

According to the teachers, these projects take time and the structuring of action, communication of action and fulfilling objectives are still in development.

> "I see a lot of potential action but how much is fed back into the school and how much we know about it, is, I think not enough yet. We've got the action and the ideas for it and the kids certainly do it with great heart and great willingness but I'm not sure if we follow through enough yet. I think it's still growing." – Class teacher (Exhibition year group)

Many student-initiated actions are addressed and supported through systems such as Student Councils, Action Committees, Service Learning, ESD, or whole school CAS [Creativity, Activity and Service] coordinators. Often students are expected to be able to explain and justify the need for the type of action and create a plan to carry it out. In one school this includes reflecting on the "triple bottom line," which a primary student explained as "projects have to help the environment, the community and make or save money for people."
When it comes to the Exhibition, some actions also go through these systems in order to receive the necessary support, depending on the type of action it is. However, as we have seen in the students' comments and survey results above, and given the number of actions happening simultaneously, many mentors and class teachers are involved in deciding which action happens and how it takes place.

What has changed for all schools, has been the focus on fundraising as a form of action:

> "[There has been] definitely a move away from one-off fundraising with an organization towards more outreach in terms of trying to visit and build a relationship and understand the work of an organisation and then maybe educating others and promoting that cause, more than trying to raise money."
> – PYP Coordinator.

> "The Exhibition used to be crammed full of sales to raise money, and now there are more lessons to raise awareness." – Head of Primary

> "Before we thought of fundraising as action, now we believe it's about how the students change and grow, what they value and how they see their own contribution in the world." – Head of School

> "The shift came about when we felt the children were talking about raising funds before they were fully knowledgeable about their issues and we wanted the children to focus on how to help – that it's not just about giving money but also sharing information and reaching out, just being in touch with people concerned with the issues they were addressing." – Class teacher (Exhibition year group)

> "The action is becoming more and more genuine and it's become more consistent with the issues that they are working on and the kids now have years in the PYP so they are coming through with more experiences of how to take action." – Class teacher (Exhibition year group)

Modelling and scaffolding of action has also taken place in each of the three schools in previous year groups and as part of different units of inquiry. PYP coordinators mentioned that units had been updated and developed to encourage more student-initiated action, relating particularly to the environment but also regarding other opportunities for community action, service learning and critical self-reflection in terms of one's own actions and values.

Exhibition structure

The Exhibition was approached from an inquiry focus in all three schools and structured over 8-12 weeks depending on the school. In most cases there had been preparation work on a regular basis leading up to the beginning of the Exhibition unit, enabling students to consider local and global issues and perspectives and also, in previous units of inquiry, students had focused on the development of particular skills and reflective practices needed to carry out an open and collaborative inquiry, as is usually the format of the PYP Exhibition.

During the interviews, teachers spoke of students still not having all the required skills and needing some support to be able to carry out research effectively. In one school, each Exhibition class had a group of students who struggled with self-management skills in particular and were grouped together so they could be more fully supported. However, the PYP coordinator when explaining this system also said "it wasn't ideal and we won't be doing that again."

Some students admitted to finding research hard, especially as it related to searching the internet and not finding child-friendly materials on their issues, although many spoke of enjoying interviewing people and carrying out surveys as part of their inquiry. A number of students spoke of group work being demanding, particularly in relation to group dynamics and not being able to choose who they would work with. For some, this also affected the action they chose:

> "You needed to have approval of all your group."

> “I was saying ideas and my group would say ‘no’.”
>
> “My mentor would give us an idea and my group would say, we have to do that and I would say to them, ‘it’s just a recommendation! We don’t have to do it that way.’ But they didn’t listen.”

In one school, students identified that the writing up of the report was a lot of work but that the researching itself wasn’t hard and they enjoyed the diversity of choice when presenting through different forms of media and the arts. In another school, the administrators and teachers spoke about trying to create a balance between skill building and reflection throughout the year before embarking on the Exhibition to ensure that students were also prepared for the demands of secondary school. During the Exhibition timeframe, targets were set each week and the teachers mentioned that these enabled the students to meet deadlines. Six months on and these same students recalled a highly intense year with students remarking that,

> “It was really tiring.”
>
> “[It was] bang, bang, bang! More work each week.”
>
> “6th Grade is much easier after all that pressure in 5th Grade.”

And another student from younger year group anticipated the Exhibition to be difficult:

> “Everything we have been doing this year they say we are doing it to prepare for the Exhibition, so I think the Exhibition is going to be very hard.”

Students in this cohort were also the only ones to mention grading and points received for work and how important it was to achieve, especially to “pass the year”.

Having choice and making personal connections with the issues they wanted to explore were areas that were commonly raised by students in their focus groups. One school gave full flexibility to the students, creating broadly focused groups entitled “society” and “health”, and their central ideas were also broad enough for students to explore what they were each passionate about. They worked together to share ideas and resources and to find commonalities through action projects.

In another school the overarching focus was on sport. All students studied different elements of sport and at the same time looked into sport in two given countries. They could then choose their issues within the area of sport, for example, discrimination, access, equity, opportunities and limitations were noted, and they made comparisons between the two countries. Their

feedback regarding this sporting focus tended to represent a lack of enthusiasm with students stating the following:

> "We didn't get to choose our topic."
>
> "I think we could learn a lot about other things because we already knew a lot about sport."

Others reported that they did learn a lot, as mentioned by Aymara, but didn't connect enough with the issue to know how to follow-up with a specific action:

> "I didn't think I would like it because I don't like sport much but I found out about sport psychology and learned about what sports girls do in China and the pressure they have. It was interesting. I feel very bad for them. Maybe I could have written to the Chinese government."

In the third school, administrators spoke about "de-emphasising" the role of mentors and class teachers so that students could take more ownership over their learning. However not all students saw it this way.

> "The mentors weren't that good in my group, sometimes they were busy so we didn't have that much support."
>
> "The mentor said, 'no, this is wrong' and erased all the things."
>
> "Our mentor didn't really know what to do because it was his first time. It didn't matter though. Everything still worked out."

Mentors were trained, or given information about their role, and in all schools had contact with the class teacher and or the PYP coordinator to know what to check over with students and how to provide feedback on their progress. However, not all of them had a lot of time to devote to meeting their groups and reviewing their work. Some were not from the PYP section of each school and a number of them were completely new to the Exhibition experience. During interviews with mentors, understanding of the Exhibition process and of action differed among mentors within the same school.

One of the PYP coordinators spoke of effective questioning and how that can be used to help mentors to guide students.

> "When the children say, "what do I do now?" that's when you need to ask them questions. Because they haven't probably thought about what you have thought

about as an adult, because they haven't lived those experiences. That's the role I see of the mentor and the teacher and to help with organisation, because some of the children are very organised…but there are others that really aren't. They are the children that need the assistance."

Time was recognised as a challenge by students, teachers and coordinators. Action, while often thought about in the beginning of the Exhibition and served as a purpose and motivation, didn't receive the same amount of time as other parts of the Exhibition. According to the students, there wasn't enough time allocated to enable them to carry out their projects well. According to the teachers, this had to do with student organisation, the types of action ideas and the resources available.

Students and self-actualisation

When asked if they felt students of their age could make a difference in the world, most students during the focus groups agreed and Amelia elaborated,

> "I personally think we can. They are leaving the country to us and we need to make the world a better place so it is up to us to make a difference."

Students looked back on the action experience as largely enjoyable and identified the actions they took with emotional responses, such as, "giving the books to the children made me happy".

They also reflected on their learnings through taking action and from the Exhibition in general:

> "Before I didn't do a lot of sports, but now I run 15 minutes a day."

> "Before the Exhibition, I didn't know that these things were important and that there were such big problems."

> "I think the Exhibition changed our way of thinking, especially mine. Before studying bees, I didn't even care for bees, I didn't think about what it meant for getting food on the table. Now I tell others not to kill bees, I don't even kill an ant. Everyone has a way of helping the earth, even that ant."

> "I used to be afraid of people who were different from us. I raised awareness in my family. My little brother used to laugh…my sister used to talk about them…now I tell them not to. I think it's really mean."

Discussion and summary

Teachers and administrators repeatedly spoke about the importance of skill building and that

the Exhibition is as much a personal experience and a journey as it is about learning to carry out in-depth research and celebrate the end of the PYP. While the research was carried out in collaboration with others, action as an event was not overly emphasized in any of the schools although time was allocated to it and guidelines were given in most cases. It mainly happened as the students initiated it, depending on the level of support by the teacher and/or mentor.

In terms of the selection of which actions to take, School A largely focused on developing their own awareness and skills while the majority of students in Schools B and C developed projects to raise awareness in others, along with some indirect action such as fundraising or collecting donations for organisations, or direct action that involved projects to enhance the school community. Almost all groups of students were free to propose plans for action, although many indicated they sought ideas from teachers, mentors and parents and some felt restricted by having to change or reduce their actions according to what teachers or mentors deemed appropriate or feasible. Administrators and teachers explained that projects had to be well-thought through and needed to meet specific requirements in order "to get the green light".

It could be argued that the three schools operated from a 'weak frame' as coined by Bernstein (1971) and discussed earlier. This allowed for deep inquiry, construction of knowledge and was somewhat student driven. However, they occasionally demonstrated a 'strong frame' as evidenced in the weekly deadlines, some limitations on choice of topic, action and/or pace, and through using specific research and action criteria. It could also be due to the demands of the Exhibition both in terms of teacher expectations for learning, the differing roles of mentors and the limitations of time. Following Bernstein's (1977) analysis of school culture, it would seem that with the exception of School C's student comments on academic achievement and grading, all three schools focused largely on action from an 'expressive' standpoint, that is, on action as developing values and character building.

While time was a significant restriction and raised the most anxiety when discussed in focus groups long after the event, many felt their actions had been successful and the majority indicated on the survey 'yes, definitely' or 'probably' when asked if they thought their actions had impacted others and made a difference. The largest target groups of action across all schools were parents and younger students in the primary school. While some action projects took place with outside organizations, Schools B and C developed projects for and within the school community and in School A the greatest number of projects were developed to raise parents' awareness.

It appears that students' understandings of action are directly related to how they have witnessed action that took place in the past, how their teachers have reinforced it and the specific action they chose to do. The biggest successes in action, as perceived by the Exhibition students themselves, were from the school where there were the most complaints about how hard the process was. This could reflect an emphasis on academic achievement

and needing to perform at a competitive level to reach specific outcomes. Overall, students in School A felt they didn't get enough support to carry out action and those in School B felt they would have done better with more confidence. These points of view indicate that joint student-adult participation is needed and valued by students, positive relationships with teachers and having a sense of wellbeing to take action are significant and structuring the Exhibition so there is enough time for students to take action is important for them. It could also be advised that schools consider ensuring mentors have an understanding of transformative pedagogy, active student participation and responsible action. Overall though, it seems great benefits were gained by the student cohorts from each school and there is enough evidence to suggest that they saw themselves as having the ability, or the potential, to be agents of change or active citizens and research matters and share information about critical local and global concerns in relation to sustainability and social justice.

Perhaps the most revealing results in the study, in terms of Exhibition impact, came from the younger students who formed part of the target group. In each school, the students in the grade below were selected to give feedback as part of the research process. They had all attended the presentations of the Exhibition and had participated in some way in the action of the others in the year ahead, or had witnessed their actions. The discussions with these younger students demonstrated their passion for their upcoming Exhibition and how influenced they were by the work of previous Exhibition students. When asked what they had learned in the Exhibition the year before, they could recall a number of facts and opinions, each one interrupting the other with another piece of information. It appeared that the greatest action for making a difference and influencing others was in the Exhibition research and presentations themselves. Therefore, it is important to see the Exhibition as an action in itself. The act of researching and sharing information may have powerfully influenced and potentially shifted the perspectives of those who visited and listened to the Exhibition presentations. It seemed to happen this way for many students in the grade below, who, perhaps in awe of their older peers, may have listened fully to the Exhibition presentations and learned from them.

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