A global learning story about responsible action

Background information

The International School Manila (ISM) is an independent international school in the Philippines whose structures and traditions reflect an educational heritage from the United States. ISM has offered the IB Diploma Programme since 1975. The school’s mission is to “build a vibrant learning community” where people live “positively, joyfully and ethically”. Every age group participates in service learning—with a particular focus on “Education for all” as the key to creating a better world. The school’s service learning goals are to:

- develop awareness of injustices in the ISM community, the Philippines and the world
- develop genuine compassion leading to lifelong involvement in community service
- develop responsible citizens (individuals whose actions add harmony to the world)
- develop disciplined thinkers (individuals who avoid thinking in black-and-white and instead seek to understand the complex nature of issues)
- develop the understandings that “the main cause of poverty is injustice” and “poor children have the same potential as advantaged children, they only lack opportunity”
- think globally but live more locally.

ISM put these principles into practice and demonstrated its strong commitment to collaborative planning by hosting a student conference in partnership with the Global Issues Network (GIN). GIN was launched in 2007 by teachers and students from six international schools in Europe. The programme was inspired by the IB community theme “Sharing our humanity” and by Jean-François Rischard, former World Bank Vice-President for Europe. His book *High Noon: Twenty Global Problems, Twenty Years to Solve Them* promotes cooperation to address critical challenges involving water management, climate change, environmental sustainability, global health and extreme poverty.
Inquiry/challenge
How can schools meaningfully engage in the study of global issues and challenges with integrity, in ways that lead to sophisticated student understanding and self-directed action on local and global scales? What support do students need in order to meet creativity, action, service (CAS) learning goals for engaging in service that addresses globally significant issues?

Action/solution
The ISM holds an annual service week for older students called International Community Actively Responding to the Environment (ICARE). Building from this model of student engagement, the school led a collaborative regional effort that pooled resources to secure expert assistance, create a sustainable model for interactive learning and expand its local impact. Over 500 students took part in a one-day event in which they connected with local social action groups and put into practice what they were learning about systems thinking, innovation and strategy.

Reflection/next steps
By working with the GIN, the school organized a student-led conference that is transferable to other institutions and regions. The conference itself used multiple strategies to consolidate learning and plan future action, including debriefs, formal reports and student blogs. “Sprout” groups paired up young people who had developed project ideas with experienced mentors who helped them turn their plans into reality. An ongoing e-course continues to supports skill development in team building, project management and communication.
ISM’s inquiry, action and reflection on global challenges demonstrates growth toward the following IB Programme standards and practices (2010).

A: Philosophy
5. The school promotes responsible action within and beyond the school community.

B2: Resources and support
11. The school utilizes the resources and expertise of the community to enhance learning within the programme(s).

C2: Written curriculum
7. The written curriculum promotes students’ awareness of individual, local, national and world issues.

C3: Teaching and learning
6. Teaching and learning addresses human commonality, diversity and multiple perspectives.

On their IB journey, schools reflect and report on their implementation of these standards for programme authorization and ongoing programme evaluation.

Highlights

In the GIN Manila 2012 conference on “Compassionate Action”, ISM used AtKisson Group’s “Pyramid for action” to create “sustainable action planning” workshops (SAPs) that empowered students to serve as group facilitators, providing a framework for sustained inquiry and responsible action. This strategy developed students’ conceptual understanding, knowledge base, approaches to learning (skill development), dispositional awareness and emotional intelligence.

Before, during and after the conference, students used blogs to analyse issues, report progress and reflect on action. One group explored sustainable management of world fisheries and aquaculture. Here is an example from their introduction to this issue of global significance.

There’s a silent genocide going on in the seas, beyond where our eyes can see, beyond the patrol of policemen, outside in countless waters. Do we think twice about the sushi we eat—have we ever asked where exactly it was from and what method was used to catch the fish? That tuna we so frequently find in our diet, and consume without questioning of its origin, could’ve been caught through dynamite fishing, or bottom frawling, and on the way could’ve destroyed vital ecosystems in water such as coral reefs (which breed young fish) and other vulnerable habitats. That piece of tuna could’ve been caught by huge international corporations, and local fishermen may have lost jobs and who knows what sort of domino effect that may have had—what skills would they have now to be proud of, and what income would they have to support their families? How do we change their default mindset of “a war between the fishes and humanity,” and how do we promote the sense of interconnectedness between our Fisheries and ourselves? The issue of fisheries depletion is a massive one, and it stretches on and on to the most fundamental aspects of not only our environment, our society, our economy, but also our personal and emotional well being.

Building a case for change, the group used a “compass” approach (with the mnemonic N/E/S/W) to create a multidimensional analysis of issues, systems, leverage points, feedback loops and creative solutions. They organized their initial inquiry as follows.

**Nature**
1. Increased population of formerly endangered marine species, including fish.
2. Decrease the use of harmful fishing practices such as bottom trawling, dynamite, electro-fishing, etc.
3. Less pollution caused by human activities, which kill marine life including fish, such as oil spills, garbage, toxic runoff, etc.
4. More conservation of natural ecosystems and protecting fish, coral, and other important species.

**Economy**
1. Job security of those involved in the fishing industry.
2. Ensuring that the fishing industry does not suffer massive losses as fish supplies are depleted.
3. Increased market share of small scale fishing companies or individual fishermen, who face being crowded out by large corporations.
4. Increased dedication to sustainable fishing practices from involved corporations, such as supermarket giants and fishing companies.

**Society**
1. Increased awareness amongst consumers of the issue of fisheries depletion, so that they can make more sustainable dietary choices.
2. Increased efforts from governments to address the issue of fisheries depletion.
3. Increased societal pressure on involved businesses and corporations to make public information regarding the way they acquire their fish.
Well being

1. Protection of communities and individual fishermen whose lifestyles and well-being are inextricably tied to the health of world fisheries.
2. Protection of consumers of fish from increasing levels of harmful toxins in the animal due to human pollution, such as increased levels of mercury.

This kind of analysis serves as the starting point from which students are continuing to develop and implement sustainable initiatives that address key challenges across many scales (local, regional, national, international and global).

Additional information

http://www.pyramid2012.wordpress.com
http://www.gk1world.com
http://www.earcos.org
http://www.constructing-learning.com
http://www.ismanila.org
http://www.tigweb.org
http://www.global-issues-network.org
http://www.ginmanila2012.wordpress.com
http://sustainability.ism-online.org/