## **AVID** and ATL

By David Ogden and Kari Christensen 2008

Exploring the overlap between AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) and the defining features of Approaches to Learning, one of the five areas of interaction in the IB Middle Years Programme

## **Defining Features of Advancement Via Individual Determination**

AVID is an in-school academic support program for grades 4-12 that prepares students for college eligibility and success. AVID places academically average students in advanced classes to level the playing field for minority, rural, low-income and other students without a college-going tradition in their families. AVID is for all students, but it targets those in the academic middle. AVID is implemented school wide and district wide.

The mission of AVID is as follows:

To ensure that all students, and most especially the least served students who are in the middle:

- will succeed in rigorous curriculum
- will complete a college preparatory path
- will enter mainstream activities of the school
- will increase their enrollment in four-year colleges
- will become educated and responsible participants and leaders in a democratic society.

### The AVID Elective

Not only are students enrolled in their school's toughest classes, such as honors, International Baccalaureate, and Advanced Placement, but also in the AVID elective. For one period a day, they learn organizational and study skills, work on critical thinking and asking probing questions, get academic help from peers and college tutors, and participate in enrichment and motivational activities that make college seem attainable. Their self-images improve, and they become academically successful leaders and role models for other students.

The AVID curriculum, based on rigorous standards, was developed by middle and senior high school teachers in collaboration with college professors. It is driven by the WICR method, which stands for writing, inquiry, collaboration, and reading. AVID curriculum is used in AVID elective classes as well as in content-area classes in AVID schools.

WICR gives students the skills they need to succeed in college-preparatory classes, like Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate. These WICR techniques move students from being passive learners into active classroom contributors and critical thinkers, an approach that's necessary for college admission and success. AVID emphasizes writing in all subjects, with a focus on clarifying and communicating their thoughts and understanding material. AVID is also based on inquiry, not lecture. Many activities, from Cornell note taking to tutorial groups, are built around asking questions, which forces students to clarify, analyze, and synthesize

material. Two common methods used in the AVID classroom are the Socratic Seminar and Philosophical Chairs.

Furthermore, the AVID classroom is not a traditional one in which a teacher lectures to passive students; it is a collaborative environment. An AVID teacher is a facilitator and an advocate. But students, not teachers or tutors, are responsible for their learning. Tutors function as discussion leaders, while students challenge, help, and learn from one another. The AVID methodologies stress the importance of the AVID family, the value of team building, and the benefit of strong leadership skills. And last but not least is the critical component of reading. AVID students don't merely read words on a page. They are taught to analyze, question, critique, clarify, and comprehend the material.

#### **Cornell Notes**

Note taking helps students remember what was taught in class. A good set of notes can help a student work on assignments and prepare for tests outside of the classroom. They allow students to help each other problem solve. Good notes help students organize and process data and information and aid students in recall by getting them to process their notes three times (writing is a great tool for learning). First, the students take their notes. Then, students compare notes with a partner after class. They talk about what they wrote and why. Each looks for gaps and missed info. And finally, both partners should are then free to add to their notes.

Learning logs are another mechanism used in the AVID classroom. They can be used in a number of different ways, but they are a great technique for classrooms where lectures don't usually occur. For example, such lecture-free classes might occur in physical education or music. Students are still held accountable for their learning via the utilization of the reflection piece in the learning logs.

#### **Time Management**

The AVID students are taught the importance of time management from day one. AVID students are required to keep an up-to-date planner that is checked regularly by the AVID elective teacher. In conjunction with schools' web-based grading programs that are currently accessible to parents and students, assignment logs are also used as a means for students to keep track of the details of their course work.

AVID students are also taught to set goals at regular intervals throughout their four-year experience in AVID. Typically goal setting occurs at the beginning of each semester. Students are asked to make a commitment to their learning by physically writing their goals down and referring back to them as the semester rolls along.

Learning styles are another topic that is reinforced in the AVID classroom. Students who know themselves best on a personal level stand a better chance for success on an academic level. So whenever possible, students are exposed to a variety of learning style and personality surveys.

#### **Binders**

One of the most beneficial pieces of the AVID methodology is the AVID binder. AVID students are expected to keep an organized AVID binder all four years that they are in the program. This

binder is checked weekly at first, and then periodically for the remainder of the school year. The binder is a key portion of the student's grade for the AVID class. An organized binder is the key to the student's success!

Source: AVID Center (<u>www.avidonline.org</u>)

## **Defining Features of Approaches to Learning**

Approaches to learning (ATL) is one of the five areas of interaction of the International Baccalaureate's Middle Years Programme (MYP). The areas of interaction give the MYP its distinctive core. They provide a framework for learning within and across the subject groups. They allow connections among the subjects themselves, and between the subjects and real-life issues. These areas are common to all disciplines and are incorporated into the MYP so that students will become increasingly aware of the connections between subject content and the real world, rather than considering subjects as isolated areas unrelated to each other and to the world. The areas of interaction are explored through the subject areas, thereby fulfilling an integrative function. Some aspects, however, may also be approached as separate modules and interdisciplinary projects throughout the MY

ATL helps students explore and find answers to these basic questions.

- How do I learn best?
- How do I know?
- How do I communicate my understanding?

Helping students to learn is the ultimate goal of all schools. Through approaches to learning (ATL), schools provide students with the tools to enable them to take responsibility for their own learning. ATL is central to the programme, as it is concerned with developing the intellectual discipline, attitudes, strategies and skills which will result in critical, coherent and independent thought and the capacity for problem solving and decision making. It goes far beyond study skills, having to do with "learning how to learn" and with developing an awareness of thought processes and their strategic use. This requires articulating, organizing and teaching the skills, attitudes and practices that students need to become successful learners. It is the shared responsibility of the school and teachers to ensure that ATL is at the core of all curriculum development and delivery.

This area of interaction recognizes that true learning is more than the acquisition of knowledge: it involves its thoughtful application, as well as critical thinking and problem solving, both individually and collaboratively and includes the skills listed below.

#### Organizational skills, study practices and attitudes towards work

Expectations need to be agreed, made explicit and developed through the school's pastoral care system (advisory/homeroom period) with reinforcement in the academic disciplines. The development of these skills and attitudes will be supported by the systematic use of tools such as a homework diary, and by student, parent and teacher involvement in acquiring common attitudes towards learning. This includes individual support and counseling for students struggling to meet the school's expectations.

#### • Collaborative skills

Learning is often a group activity: students must learn how to work effectively together. Carefully designed collaborative learning uses the dynamics of groups to encourage students to take advantage of each others' strengths to consider different points of view.

#### Communication

The development of language is central to ATL as it is a medium for the generation of ideas as well as for their expression. Students need to acquire the skills of essay writing, analytical writing and creative writing. They also need to explore different, appropriate forms of expression to suit various contexts.

## • Information literacy

Learning how to access information and use it wisely is increasingly important. Students need to learn how to use the library and other media as well as to understand the research process (from finding and selecting information to judging it critically). This should be incorporated into inquiry and project work.

#### Reflection

Developing the ability to appraise work and evaluate performance realistically, and using this evaluation to adapt behavior and learning strategies, is central to becoming an independent learner. A number of instruments and practices can help, including student self-evaluation used in assessing work and reporting, portfolio assessment where students have to explain their work to others, and student involvement in writing assessment rubrics.

## Problem solving and thinking skills

Building a higher thought process using convergent and divergent thinking, making a point of view coherent, creatively generating new ideas and considering issues from multiple viewpoints, are all examples of transferable thinking skills. Teaching practices that require students to explain how their thought processes help develop these skills which, when used systematically, can become habits of mind.

#### Subject-specific and interdisciplinary conceptual understanding

Students can start to appreciate and compare the nature and methodology of different academic disciplines, exploring and reflecting on different ways of knowing. (At the highest level this leads on naturally to Theory of Knowledge in the Diploma Programme.)

Approaches to learning helps students acquire transferable skills: it fosters positive values and attitudes, leading to the development of purposeful and effective habits of mind.

Source: *Middle Years Programme Areas of Interaction Guide*. International Baccalaureate Organization. 2002. pages, 3, 4, 8, 16-17.

# Overlap between key elements of AVID and key elements of ATL

Table 1

	Note taking strategies	Binder strategies	Agenda strategies	Questioning strategies	Writing	Inquiry	Collaboration	Reading
Organizational skills, study practices and attitudes towards work	<b>√</b>	✓	✓					
Collaborative skills				✓			✓	
Communication					✓		✓	
Information literacy						✓		✓
Reflection				✓	✓			
Problem solving and thinking skills				✓		<b>✓</b>		
Subject-specific and interdisciplinary conceptual understanding				✓	✓	✓		✓

Table 2

Attribute	AVID	ATL
Has defined scope and sequence	Has recommended	No. Schools develop
	activities for the various	their own based on
	grades. Also has a	defining features and
	library for middle school	other school's
	and one for high school.	exemplars.
Helps students learn how to learn	Yes.	Yes.
Taught as a separate elective	Yes, required as a	Not required but some
	separate elective.	schools do in beginning
		years of the program.
Skills taught in subject area classes	The WICR strategies	Required shared
-	cross curriculum areas.	responsibility across all
		grades and subjects.
Designed to improve academic skills	Yes.	Yes.
Uses specific learning strategies	Yes.	No.
Focuses on organizational skills	Yes.	Yes.
Focuses on team building / collaborative	Yes, as a core	Yes.
skills	component of program.	
Focuses on communication skills	Yes, as a result of its	Yes.
	focus on writing,	
	reading, inquiry and	
	collaboration.	
Focuses on reflective skills	Yes. AVID students are	Yes.
	asked to reflect	
	continually on a variety	
	of levels.	
Focuses on critical thinking / analytical	Yes, as a core	Yes.
skills	component of program.	
Focuses on writing skills	Yes, as a core	Yes, as part of emphasis
	component of program.	of language
		development.
Focuses on reading skills	Yes, as a core	Yes, as part of emphasis
	component of program.	of language
		development.
Focuses on subject-specific and	AVID methodologies	Required shared
interdisciplinary connections	may touch on	responsibility across all
	interdisciplinary	grades and subjects.
	connections, but no	
	structured focus exists.	

## Developed by:

Kari Christensen, New Hope, Minnesota (kari\_christensen@rdale.k12.mn.us) David Ogden, Seattle, Washington (dogden@alumni.princeton.edu)