

NEWMAN SOCIETY REVIEW

October 8, 2020

Analysis of International Baccalaureate Program

By Dr. Denise Donohue and Dr. Dan Guernsey

The following is part of The Cardinal Newman Society's series of analyses of secular materials and programs used in Catholic education. Such materials and programs must be carefully evaluated to determine if their underlying philosophy, content, and activities are aligned to the mission of Catholic education and, if used, what adaptations might be needed.

The Newman Society's "Policy Guidance Related to Secular Materials and Programs in Catholic Education" offers a framework for such evaluation and is the basis for this particular analysis.

Overview

The International Baccalaureate (IB) program is used in about 5,000 schools in more than 150 countries,¹ including more than 1,800 schools in the United States.² The IB program has steadily increased its presence in the U.S., adding about 100 new schools a year in recent years.³ Catholic schools currently comprise 2 percent of that total.⁴

Originally designed to instruct the children of international diplomats, the IB Diploma Program (IBDP) and its foundational Theory of Knowledge course were officially registered in Geneva in 1968. As the program slowly acquired global recognition, the Middle and Primary Year Programs were introduced, followed by a program geared toward students on a career-related track.

The mission statement reads:

¹ See <https://www.ibo.org/about-the-ib/> (accessed on June 12, 2020).

² See <https://www.ibo.org/country/US/> (accessed on June 12, 2020).

³ "International Baccalaureate: Guided by a Mission" at <https://www.newsweek.com/insights/best-usas-ib-accredited-schools-2016> (accessed on June 12, 2020).

⁴ See <https://www.ibo.org/programmes/find-an-ib-school> (accessed on June 12, 2020).

The International Baccalaureate® aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect. To this end the organization works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment. These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.

The learner profile was developed in 2006 to actualize the mission statement and to ensure the development of dispositions within the student characteristic of “international-mindedness”:⁵

The profile aims to develop learners who are: inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced, and reflective.

The IBDP is the oldest and best-known component of the IB. It aims to facilitate entry into college by offering specialized coursework during the student’s last two years of high school. The program is divided into six subject areas of language and literature, language acquisition, individuals and societies, sciences, mathematics, and the arts. Students are required to choose one course from each area and either an additional art course or a second course from one of the first five areas. While teachers have some say in course coverage (content and time spent on each concept), the mandatory externally graded exams drive the instruction. Students must also complete an extended essay (a research project begun in the junior year), a service project, and the foundational Theory of Knowledge (TOK) course.

The goal is to ensure a structured, academically rigorous, internationally focused program. It attempts to secure this goal through extensive teacher training, high levels of accountability, and strict testing regimens. Like AP, the IB uses its intensive testing programs in an attempt to stake out a position as a reliable indicator of college readiness so as to gain the notice of college admissions counselors and families.

Forty-one (41) Catholic elementary and secondary schools in the United States have adopted one or more of the IB’s programs.⁶ These schools see the IB’s reputation for academic excellence, focus on the integration of knowledge, and emphasis on global solidarity and service as working in harmony with their school’s Catholic mission.⁷ However, the existence of some important commonalities does not translate into a significant fit between IB and Catholic education.

⁵ See <https://www.ibo.org/benefits/learner-profile/> (accessed on June 12, 2020). See also Bastian, S., Kitching, J., & Sims, R., *Theory of Knowledge, 2nd Ed.* (Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2014) 11.

⁶ See <https://www.ibo.org/programmes/find-an-ib-school> (accessed on June 12, 2020).

⁷ John White, “The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme in U.S. Catholic High Schools: An Answer to the Church’s Call to Global Solidarity,” *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* (Vol. 15, No. 2, March 2012) 179-206 at <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ969995.pdf> (accessed on June 12, 2020).

Concerns

- IB takes a relativistic approach to truth. This is evident in its insistence upon exclusive use of a constructivist learning methodology (see discussion below), and it can be interpreted in its mission to help students “understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.” The latter statement is certainly correct if understood to support the universality of truth, and matters of taste and opinion in some areas allow for multiple interpretations. Nevertheless, Catholic thought holds that there is much in the universe that is real and exists apart from our tastes, opinion, and often limited insight, whereas the IB program is often too focused on cultural differences. Math, science, and morality are not subject to human whim and limitation. Even though due to our fallen nature we might not always see the truth and may even at times seek to ignore or obfuscate it, we are nonetheless obliged to honor and bear witness to it in its fullness and direct our whole life in accordance with the demands of truth when discovered.
- IB insists upon the exclusive use of the constructivist learning approach⁸ to the exclusion of other proven instructional methodologies.⁹ A constructivist learning approach “is a view of learning suggesting that learners use their own experiences to create understandings that make sense to them, rather than having understanding delivered to them in already organized forms.”¹⁰ Key features of a constructivist approach center on the learner as an active participant in the creation of new understanding, building upon their current understanding of a topic under consideration. Social interaction, or collaboration, is an essential component as is the centering of the learning tasks within real-world, meaningful settings.¹¹ This is a relatively new instructional approach with roots dating back to the early 1900s and the

⁸ While the philosophy of the IB program as articulated within its Standards and Practices suggests the use of a “range and variety of strategies” and the use of differentiated instruction to meet student needs (see <https://www.ibo.org/globalassets/publications/become-an-ib-school/programme-standards-and-practices-en.pdf>), Section A: Philosophy: Standard A, 3 (c) for the Primary Year Program states “The school is committed to a constructivist inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning that promotes inquiry and the development of critical-thinking skills.” The professional instruction webinar series titled *Strengthening programme implementation: Collaborative practice* (2016) advances that a school commits to a constructivist approach to teaching and learning. See slide “Action Plan, A: Philosophy: The school’s educational beliefs and values reflect IB philosophy. 3c. The school is committed to a constructivist, inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning that promotes inquiry and the development of critical-thinking skills” at <https://www.ibo.org/programmes/ib-world-school-webinars/> (accessed on June 12, 2020). The middle school and Diploma Program build on this constructivist approach with required collaborative, action-oriented, community-based projects.

⁹ Kirschner, P.A., Sweller, J., & Clark, R.E., “Why minimal guidance during instruction does not work: An analysis of the failure of constructivist discovery, problem-based, experiential, and inquiry-based teaching,” *Educational Psychologist* 41(2) (2006) 75-86.

¹⁰ Eggen, P. and Kauchak, D., *Learning & teaching: Research-based methods* (6th ed.) (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2012).

¹¹ Eggen and Kauchak (2012) 313.

research of developmental psychologists Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky and educational researcher John Dewey.¹²

Constructivist learning theory tends to bleed over into a constructivist *philosophy* which states that man constructs his own knowledge—even of reality¹³—and that nothing exists that is not constructed in one’s own mind. Piaget, Vygotsky, and Dewey all rejected an objectivist or realist “view of knowledge and the possibility of attaining truth as it actually exists.”¹⁴ This is something quite contrary to the Catholic perspective,¹⁵ by which man is viewed as capable of knowing and entering into an objective reality. A constructivist philosophy leads to a subjectivist and relativistic view of reality since reality, according to this theory, is based upon each person’s perception.

Catholic schools must be cautious about an exclusive use of any one instructive methodology. All content and subject areas should be infused with a Catholic worldview, oftentimes requiring a variety of methods of instruction¹⁶ depending upon the learner’s experience and background knowledge of the faith. Embracing a pure method of inquiry alone guarantees that only a partial connection or no connection to the Catholic faith will be made. Catholic schools using the IB program should insist on using other proven instructional approaches¹⁷ such as direct-instruction, lecture-discussion, guided-inquiry, and “learning by heart” (which has a special place in effective catechesis).¹⁸ These methodologies are also valid and hold a place in Catholic school pedagogy.

- IB has wide-ranging and costly licensing and program requirements, insists upon extensive teacher training in an overwhelming and indiscriminate group of teaching practices and contemporary learning theory, and controls the cumulative tests which drive the curriculum. There is real danger that a Catholic school’s own unique program and specific Catholic teacher training needs could get overwhelmed and crowded out.

To be approved as an IB school, governing boards must agree that initial and future budgets will include funding for IB course instructors to receive IB professional development, that there is at least one designated IB coordinator in the school, and that teachers teaching IB courses have within their schedule a dedicated collaborative planning session and reflection

¹² “Constructivism” at <https://www.learning-theories.com/constructivism.html#contributors> (accessed on June 12, 2020).

¹³ See Gerard O’Shea, *Educating in Christ: A Practical Handbook for Developing the Catholic Faith from Childhood to Adolescence* (Brooklyn, NY: Angelico Press, 2018) 82-85.

¹⁴ O’Shea (2018) 83.

¹⁵ See Saint John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (1998) 82.

¹⁶ U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, *National Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2005) 96.

¹⁷ See O’Shea (2018), Chapter 13 for a discussion of effective and ineffective instructional approaches to use when infusing the Catholic faith into subject areas.

¹⁸ O’Shea (2018) 102-103.

time.¹⁹ IB standards also highlight the central role of library and multimedia availability, so the program can “ensure access to information on global issues and diverse perspectives.”²⁰

- To onboard the IB program, Catholic schools have included language in their mission statement to describe students as global learners and have changed their graduate profiles to include the required characteristics of the learner profile: All IB learners strive to be Inquirers, Knowledgeable, Thinkers, Communicators, Open-Minded, Caring, Risk-Takers, Balanced, Principled, and Reflective. Catholic schools seek to instill a host of virtues in students as well as attitudes and dispositions described by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Many schools already have graduate profiles that include attributes of service and life-long learning as well as outcomes of living one’s faith and becoming a witness and evangelist for Christ, but when worldly qualities and characteristics become equally or more important to the formation of a student as a disciple for Christ, a school’s Catholic identity can be compromised.

The IB program requires that each grade level focus upon prescribed concepts and that these concepts are explicitly documented in classroom practice and lesson plans. Oftentimes in Catholic classrooms, pride of place is given to the formation of a specific weekly virtue, including the theological virtues, which is used as a cross-curricular strand for formation purposes. In contrast, some Catholic schools have been moving to the use of philosophical questions such as “What is goodness?” or “How is this beautiful?” as overarching essential questions. The IB program, in demanding a school-wide understanding of concepts such as change, global interactions, systems, continuity, and perspective and how these concepts are viewed from a local, global, and national level, focuses primarily on man and his manipulation and interaction within the world, rather than on the person and his relationship with God.

With so many requirements from an outside organization, the mission focus of Catholic education may easily be crowded out. This violates the Catholic social principle of subsidiarity, which maintains that a state or larger society not “substitute itself for the initiative and responsibility of individuals and intermediary bodies.”²¹ Much like recently failed national education reform movements in the United States, which attempted to drive local efforts, the IB places international, secular humanist requirements created by outside groups upon local schools.

¹⁹ “Resources and Support,” *Programme standards and practices* (2014) at <https://www.ibo.org/globalassets/publications/become-an-ib-school/programme-standards-and-practices-en.pdf> (accessed on June 12, 2020).

²⁰ “Resources and Support,” *Programme standards and practices* (2014).

²¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993) 1894.

- IB’s emphasis on creating a globalist and relativist conception of the common good lacks what must be a Catholic school’s evangelical mission to spread the Kingdom of God on earth. Because Catholic education also pursues the common good, it may be tempting to assume a close match with a shared sense of philanthropic nobility and friendliness. But the nature of the common good and the means to advance it are approached differently in the relativistic and secular IB program than in the truth and faith-based focus of a Catholic school.

IB literature states, “The aim of all IB programmes is 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.”²² While this is a laudable goal, it excludes the need for strong local culture, the dignity of each human person as made in the image of God and the need to *avoid* a shared guardianship that increases the subservience of local peoples and cultures to globalist solutions which compromise individual liberty and national sovereignty in ways that contravene.

IB’s emphasis on global citizenry conflicts with the Catholic social justice principle of subsidiarity, which favors a capable, smaller, and localized institution over dominance by a larger institution.²³

IB’s emphasis on a global citizenry can also mask the more profound reality of Catholic emphasis on the transcendent and universal destination of humanity in God.

Recommendations

Given the problems, complexities and dangers of integrating the IB program into a faithful Catholic school, it is best to not attempt to do so. Instead, Catholic schools should develop their own instructional programs to ensure a strong Catholic identity, an integral and harmonious Catholic liberal arts program, and solid teacher training that specifically includes designated opportunities for faith formation as well as the best of both traditional and contemporary educational practices.

However, if a Catholic school has already incorporated the IB and circumstances do not allow for a transition away in the short term for prudential reasons, we recommend that school leaders ensure that their use of IB exemplifies the five *Principles of Catholic Identity in Education*,²⁴ paying particular attention to the concerns identified for each principle below.

²² *Programme standards and practices* (2014).

²³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1993) 1894.

²⁴ The Cardinal Newman Society, *Principles of Catholic Identity in Education Overview* (2017) at <https://newmansociety.org/principles-catholic-identity-education/overview/>

Principle I: Inspired by a divine mission. A Catholic school seeks to secure the supreme individual good of the students, that is their union with God, and to help serve the common good, the maximum of well-being possible for human society.

- The Catholic school must be up front and explicit that the eternal salvation of its students is the primary goal, and the secondary goal of service pursues the common good. The Catholic school's goal of service is of a different order than the IB's service orientation and is particularly concerned with preparing students "for service in the spread of the Kingdom of God, so that by leading an exemplary apostolic life they become, as it were, a saving leaven in the human community."²⁵ Service in a Catholic school has an evangelistic strand for the individual who is serving as well as those who are served.
- The Catholic school must ensure that it does not fall into IB's secular humanism with its errant anthropocentrism. This can lead to the assumption that all human ills are solvable by wholly human programs and human self-mastery rather than a reliance on God's grace, mercy, and salvation. It can also result in a worldview where the manipulation of things and people supplant contemplation and an authentic interpretation of a thing or person's meaning and proper end as intended by God.
- The IB mission statement must be interpreted with mental reservation. The IB Mission element which states, "other people, with their differences, may also be right" must be interpreted as "other people may actually be right about some things" or "other people may be closer to the truth than I am on this matter." Such a proposition is always worthy of consideration and determination; whether or not there are "differences" involved is irrelevant. Assuming that "differences" provide privileged access to the truth or that there are multiple truths so that others can also be right at the same time risks descent into intellectual cowardice and relativism. There is no room for relativism in Catholic schools, as their goal involves truth and freedom, and as St. John Paul II stated, "once the truth is denied to human beings, it is pure illusion to try to set them free. Truth and freedom either go together hand in hand or together they perish in misery."²⁶ The ardent pursuit of truth, indicative of Catholic education, should lead all to Christ, who is truth incarnate, and not be left to a relativistic mindset for the purpose of inclusivity and collaboration.
- The Catholic school must expand the limited profile of an IB graduate to fulfill the mission of Catholic education, not just the mission of international-mindedness, to include aspects of the Beatitudes, fruits of the Holy Spirit, and other dispositions advanced in the Bible such as humbleness, gentleness, patience, faithfulness, goodness,

²⁵ Saint Paul VI, *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965) 8.

²⁶ Saint John Paul II (1998) 90.

self-control, perseverance, godliness, joyfulness, peace, modesty, and love (see Gal 5:22, 2 Peter 1:5 and Eph 4:2).

Principle II: Models Christian communion and identity. A Catholic school is a faith community united in service and fidelity to the local and universal Church. A warm family-oriented climate pervades the school, where employees model faithfulness to Christian truth and service is oriented in Christian love.

- The Catholic school must ensure that a globalist mindset does not replace the Catholic principle of subsidiarity—to address needs and concerns at the lowest level possible.
- The Catholic school must ensure its deeper sense of community. More than just globalist humanistic citizens of the world, Catholic schools develop “universal” citizens with an eternal destiny in the communion of saints.
- The Catholic school must transcend the IB’s limited and errant understanding of community and community service. If this point is missed, it could lead the school to think it is adequately fulfilling its communal function when it simply helps others through secular human aid projects. A Catholic school’s sense of community and service is called to go deeper. As the Church reminds us, “Every human being is called to communion because of his nature which is created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, within the sphere of biblical anthropology, man is not an isolated individual, but a person: a being who is essentially relational. The communion to which man is called always involves a double dimension, that is to say vertical (communion with God) and horizontal (communion with people).”²⁷ We do not serve others to be cosmopolitan, politically correct, or impress colleges and potential employers. We bond with others and humbly serve others—always starting with those closest to us and moving outward—because we and they are made in the image and likeness of God.
- The Catholic school must ensure that its own teacher training²⁸ in Catholic identity is strong and effective and does not simply cede teacher training to the extensive IB requirements.

Principle III: Encounter Christ in prayer, scripture and sacrament. Catholic education, rooted in Christ, is continually fed and stimulated by Him in the frequent experience of prayer, scripture, and the Church’s liturgical and sacramental tradition.²⁹

²⁷ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools: A Shared Mission Between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful* (2007) 8.

²⁸ See <https://newmansociety.org/principles-catholic-identity-education/faculty-staff-service/>.

²⁹ Saint John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis* (1979) supra note 39, at 59.

- The Catholic school, interfacing with IB, must increase its spiritual elements explicitly, given that IB has removed religion from its mission.

Principle IV: Integrally forms the human person. A Catholic school harmoniously forms student’s bodies, minds, hearts, and souls in an environment where there is no separation between time for learning and time for formation.

- As with the AP test, the IB tests are such high-stakes affairs that they can drain the joy from learning and limit it to the intellectual and to the testable. More holistic Catholic education also teaches things which cannot be easily measured or tested or translated to academic credit. To do this requires an academic atmosphere characterized by flexibility, freedom, discovery, and awareness that enkindles a love for truth wherever it might be found, especially if it manifests itself in un-testable glory.
- The Catholic school must ensure the well-rounded education of the student, not just a specific focus on how to apply knowledge to “novel situations for which there are no ready-made answers.”³⁰
- The Catholic school must ensure that students continue to grow in physical ability and skill, since the last two years of the Diploma program heavily emphasize the acquisition of academic content along with sociological projects.
- The Catholic school must ensure the teaching and practice of Catholic social teaching, specifically the dignity of the person as made in the image and likeness of God—and not the dignity of the person simply because he has the ability to think and make his own choices and establish his own community. The Catholic school will teach the right to life and the sanctity of marriage and the family.

Principle V: Imparts a Christian understanding of the world. A Catholic school critically and systematically imparts a Christian vision of the world, of life, of culture, and of history, ordering the whole of human culture to the news of salvation. It also ensures the illumination of all knowledge with the light of faith and allows formation to become living, conscious, and active.

Two specific IB areas need to be addressed: literature selection and the Theory of Knowledge Course.

Literature selection: In any high school literature course, the IB requires that roughly half of all works taught must come from a prescribed list of authors (any work from an author can be

³⁰ International Baccalaureate, *Theory of Knowledge (2nd Ed)* (2015) 8.

selected). This list is large enough that a savvy and well-formed Catholic educator, who knows the works and authors to emphasize and avoid, can piece together an acceptable curriculum.

- A Catholic IB school should carefully study and implement the Newman Society’s *Catholic Curriculum Standards for Language Arts*³¹ and “Policy Guidance Related to Literature and the Arts in Catholic Education” in its program.

Theory of Knowledge (TOK) Course: This is the keystone IB course which attempts to unify the IB diploma curriculum, and it is the only course of study that all IB Diploma students must follow.³² It is a general overview of epistemological theories of how humans come to know anything. It is a type of secular metaphysics course which raises fundamental philosophical questions about truth, meaning, certainty, relativism, reality, theology, morality, freewill, freedom, perception, logic, language, and a host of other philosophical and theological concerns. Significantly, this is all done in an ostensibly neutral way, which simply lists claims and counterclaims for each critical element while avoiding a position on the truthfulness or accuracy of the claims.

This is a particularly dangerous and presumptive approach and can pose a grave threat to the intellectual and spiritual lives of students, who may not be in a position to adequately process and assess philosophical conundrums and crises which humanity has been debating for centuries. The material may be too weighty to be adequately digested by some teen minds. The dangerous combination of being overwhelming, oversimplified, and unresolved can lead to confusion, overconfidence, or despair. Ideas which students are not yet equipped to process on their own can risk leaving them adrift in a sea of relativism, rather than anchored in reality.

Natural philosophy requires a dynamic union with faith in order to purify it and liberate it from presumption and despair.³³ In many cases the Catholic Church has provided definitive answers to these questions through centuries of reflection using both reason and revelation. Clear Catholic presentation on these topics is absolutely critical. In reality there is no neutral position, as every textbook or instructor presents a course through a particular worldview or lens, and a Catholic curriculum demands that its courses be taught from a Catholic worldview.

When one tries to be everything to all people, one can be nothing to anyone—a truth that is evident in the presentation of the Ethics and Religious Ways of Knowing (WOK) sections. The morality subsection of the TOK course bends to proportionalism and consequentialism, inferring that the use of a deontological system of rules is backward—thus the following of the Ten Commandments as one of many ethical systems is inferred as an unadvanced way of knowing. It

³¹ The Cardinal Newman Society, *Catholic Curriculum Standards for English/Language Arts 7-12* (2016) at <https://newmansociety.org/catholic-curriculum-standards/englishlanguage-arts-7-12/>.

³² *Theory of Knowledge (2nd Ed)* 7.

³³ St. Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (1998) 75-76.

is also suggested that morality has many “matrices,” all of which can be correct depending upon your point of view.

According to one of the TOK textbooks, “It is not easy to know where to draw the line between one’s self and the groups we identify with... It is in this sense that we recognize that while there are multiple views on nearly all issues of importance—morality being central to our thought just now—no one can decide for you what is right and what is wrong no matter how tight the community bond is.” The very humanist view of morality is evidenced here, “At the very least, we can give our best thinking to important issues and one way to do this is to continue to ask questions of ourselves, thereby revising, rejecting, or reaffirming our own moral views.”³⁴

It is the responsibility of Catholic educators to present cogent, compelling, and lived answers to the greatest of life’s questions, such as when discussing the difference between intelligent design of creation and the theory of evolution. Unfortunately, in one TOK text a faith-based answer to this type of discussion is met with incredulity:

The fundamental flaw in this argument is that a designer must logically be more complex than his or her design—a proposition which also needs explaining. Despite this, *this line of thinking survives* in what is known as ‘intelligent design’—proposed as an alternative explanation to evolution. *Unfortunately for the ‘theory’, intelligent design amounts to little more than an admission of ignorance* when faced with a phenomenon that is not understood. Most of the favourite examples (e.g. blood clotting mechanisms, the structure of the bacterial flagellum, the functionality of the eye) used by the advocates of intelligent design have been shown to have credible origins and developmental pathways through evolutionary processes (italics not in the original).³⁵

To the contrary, Catholic educators are not neutral or disinterested spectators about these topics or the morality of these issues in the lives of their students. Teachers must be both passionate about the truths they discover and about the freedom and responsibility of their students to engage with these truths with growing independence. It is the student’s responsibility to probe and test the insights presented in their classes in their own lives. Students are ultimately free to reject the truths and reality which confront them, but teachers must in charity and freedom provoke the confrontations with reality whose ultimate source is Christ, the Word—the Logos—and Truth incarnate.

Catholic schools should heed Pope Leo XIII, who warned, “we must avoid at all costs those unfortunate schools where religious beliefs are indifferently admitted with equal treatment, as if, in the things that regard God and divine affairs, it matters little to have or not to have the right

³⁴ *Theory of Knowledge (2nd Ed)* 302.

³⁵ *Theory of Knowledge (2nd Ed)* 321. .

doctrine, or to embrace truth or error.”³⁶ Secular TOK courses are deeply prone to this danger. Catholic IB schools must do all they can to counter it.

Therefore, if choosing to use the IB program:

- The Catholic school must ensure that the TOK teacher is deeply and faithfully trained in Catholic metaphysics and philosophy and has sound theological insight and training. It cannot be left to chance or simply handed off to a person of deep intellect and sincerity; the instructor must possess and be able to powerfully share a deep and felt Catholic intellectual worldview to counter the secularism and relativism saturating TOK texts.
- The Catholic school must ensure the use of its own supplemental textbooks to present relevant materials and objections from a Catholic philosophical and theological tradition. A Catholic TOK program must ensure that significant readings or insights from *Fides et Ratio*, *Veritatis Splendor*, *Redemptor Hominis*, *Dei Filius*, and *Gaudium et Spes* (Part 1, Ch. 1-4) are included when “faith” is discussed as a required “Way of Knowing (WOK).”
- The Catholic school must ensure that the TOK course does not supplant catechesis and theology courses and must accompany a standard four-year, full-credit Catholic religion regimen. Because of the distinct secular philosophy driving so much of the curriculum, it is essential that the school double down on Catholic instruction, including the teaching, comparison and understanding of Catholic social justice principles, and be even more explicit in its Catholic identity than other schools.
- The Catholic school must challenge the IB perspective that theology and religious knowing are just other possible ways of knowing. Some texts condescendingly say that religious knowledge should not be rejected out of hand by IB students, as it is theoretically one of many possible ways of knowing that some may find helpful. This is a far cry from a Catholic understanding of theology as the queen of sciences.
- The Catholic school must ensure that its teachers are prepared to counter the relativism which saturates TOK texts with clear teaching that the universe is human-friendly and was made for humanity. Reality is not unknowable or a trick of uncaring nature (materialist assumption) or of a god who wants to fool us.
- The Catholic school must be aware that the relativism which informs the TOK course is also present in the critical pedagogy and constructivist elements required by the IB program. Such ideologies are founded on the notion that reality is a product of the mind or of the culture, and by changing the culture we can change reality and the truth. The IB

³⁶ See http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/it/letters/documents/hf_l-xiii_let_18890719_e-giunto.html (accessed on June 12, 2020).

program celebrates, “Teaching and learning in the IB celebrates the many ways people work together to construct meaning and make sense of the world. Through the interplay of asking, doing and thinking, this constructivist approach leads toward open, democratic classrooms.”³⁷

- The Catholic school must ensure that the “Areas of Knowledge” of religion and ethics, subsets of the TOK course, are not taught from secular textbooks but from the Catholic perspective, as incorporated in a traditional Catholic world religion class or Catholic morality course and based on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Denise Donohue, Ed.D., is Director of the Catholic Education Honor Roll at The Cardinal Newman Society.

Dan Guernsey, Ed.D., is Senior Fellow at The Cardinal Newman Society and principal of a diocesan K-12 Catholic school.

³⁷ This quote originally came from “What is an IB education?” (2013) 4 at <https://www.thinkib.net/leadership/page/22536/a-note-on-constructivism> (accessed on June 12, 2020). The updated version at <https://www.ibo.org/globalassets/what-is-an-ib-education-2017-en.pdf> eliminates this claim yet retains the emphasis on critical pedagogy and addressing real-world problems through educational projects.