**ATL Implementation Review May 2018**

**Overview:**

The important dynamics of the school under study were the size, over 2000 students, the large number of second language learners being taught in a language in which they had very different levels of proficiency, the large number of assessed programmes on offer to students and the different emphasis in each programme on content and process of learning.

One of the difficulties identified early on was the lack of a good ATL reporting platform that would enable teachers and administrators to see an overview of which ATL skills were being developed in which subjects at which times of year and which also enabled reports to be drawn on ATL skills per subject, per Grade level and per student. This is a common problem for which new resources (in the form of an ATL tracker app) have been developed since this review that may help solve.

There is widespread appreciation of the benefit of ATL skills development on student learning and a wide range of methods of addressing that.

The obvious limitation of this ATL review was simply that I only received data from those who volunteered to be interviewed who were probably those who were most comfortable with and had opinions on ATL.

I have written each interview up from the point of view of the interviewees and all direct quotes are in quotation marks. I have put interviewees comments together if they had subjects, levels and ideas in common. I have not included all comments from all interviewees as some reiterated what others had already said.

**Key Comments:**

“All teachers want to try and help their kids do better and inherently that is what I like about the ATL skills – they help quantify what good teaching and learning is all about”

“The most meaningful component of any unit is always what the student gain through ATL oriented approaches, the most useful takeaways for students are all ATL components”

“For MYP and even more especially for IGCSE, students need to develop ATL skills in order to succeed, to manage content and time pressures, to develop self-organisation – and it is up to teachers to focus students on all the skills of self-management”

“MYP + IGCSE workload forces teachers to make sure students have the right skills to cope but they need to introduce the most important skills early on and have students practice these skills on the content from the beginning.”

“I would prefer to be able to address the ATL this kid needs to put the most work into rather than the one mandated for this class”

“There is a need to be able to map the progression of skills within each subject so teachers can see clearly what has been done before and where students are up to.”

“ATL skill selection by teacher will shift depending on the composition of the class and their present skill level eg. in English language. A rigid framework of skills per subject won’t work because of the different levels of all skills within students. There is a need for diagnostic assessment and remedial skills classes.”

**Implementation Strategy:**

Management strategy was to use the momentum generated by my whole-school workshop in February 2016 to mandate that:

* all departments had to pick from the 10 ATL skill Clusters in the ATL framework, the Clusters that contained the skills that constituted the best fit with their teaching subjects
* within those Clusters they then had to pick 8 ATL skill strands to focus on in all subject teaching classes
* one ATL strand was to be highlighted or focused on in an deliberate way in each unit
* within each unit teachers were asked to develop activities which would connect the particular ATL strand to the summative assessment
* teachers were also asked to implement formative assessment practices related to the ATL strand to give students feedback on their ATL performance – using student self-assessment as the primary mechanism
* teachers were also asked to make comments on the development of one ATL for each students in terms of strengths and weaknesses, twice per year in their end-of-semester report cards

It was expected that there would be a development of self-management of ATL skill practice throughout the middle school and high school years so that by the time the students were engaged with the IBDP they would be taking ownership of their ATL skill development and managing their own self-assessment of ATL strengths and weaknesses

* there was a perceived lack of inclusion of Affective ATL skills in ATL choices by subject groups which was compensated for by the development of a Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programme of exercises for teachers to work through with students in their home room. This programme was designed around PERMA, Martin Seligman’s Positive Education programme, which focused exclusively on Social and Emotional learning practices but some teachers also took the opportunity in this programme to add in basic study skills as well. Data from the review of PERMA is being collated at this time but the overall impression is that this programme has highlighted the importance of social and emotional learning for both students and teachers and has alleviated any pressure on teachers to address the more Affective skills in subject lessons.

**Interviews:**

**English Language:**

After my workshop the English Language department:

* identified Organisation, Communication, Information Literacy, Media Literacy, Critical Thinking and Creative Thinking as the most pertinent ATL Clusters for their group of subjects
* tied units to specific ATL strands
* mapped out the ATL sequence in each subject area
* Implementation and focus for the first 6 months was very “gung-ho” but after that the requirements of monitoring specific student attainment in ATLs by reflection, feedback and reporting on ATLs both to students and in reports for parents became “very cumbersome” and now most teachers are simply “going through the motions”.
* “Inquiry learning is the key to developing ATLs within subjects but because of the link to IGCSE which is a very content driven programme which does not lend itself to inquiry, all lessons *are* linked to ATLs just not very specifically”.
* Understandable but unfortunate because “the most meaningful component of any unit is always what the student gain through ATL oriented approaches, the most useful takeaways for students are all ATL components” Developing the skills of critical analysis of novels is “so much more important than the particular characteristics of any one novel” and yet the IGCSE curriculum especially requires a focus on particular works.
* Inquiry learning is the key to good learning and the development of ATL skills but inquiry learning is simply good teaching practice and good teachers will develop the ATL focus that is needed by students in any lesson as it in needed rather than in a prescribed programme.
* All teachers need to understand that the aim of ATL is to achieve good learning and by using the inquiry statement in the unit plan to scaffold learning and then using the ATL focus to generate learning activities that can be linked to subject objectives we can achieve high engagement and authentic subject learning. The problem is that some curricula do not allow for this and identifying, specifying and documenting ATLs makes the process too formal to allow for the spontaneity required of good teachers and good teaching.

**Language Acquisition:**

After my workshop they:

* decided on the top 8 ATL strands
* looked for examples within their existing curriculum and teaching practice where these ATL strands were happening already
* mapped out the *Introduction*, *Practice* and *Mastery* stages of ATL development not by grade level of students but by phases of language acquisition for Grade 6-10 and then by grade level for Gd 11 & 12
* entered ATL information into unit plans
* Middle school planning was for one ATL skill per unit and one Unit per quarter which meant one ATL skill focus per quarter. Asking the question “what ATL skill will the student need to practice in order to have success in the assessment required?”
* then develop tasks, ATL skill exercises and formative assessments focused on skills
* “This makes unit planning much simpler as all our teachers are focused on the same thing at the same time and we can all get together and come up with different activities to practice each ATL skill with different age groups of students and we try different things, share what works and what doesn’t work and develop a bank of resource activities directly linked to ATL skills”.
* each ATL skill strand could then be developed by different teachers in different lessons throughout the quarter using different exercises
* “Good teaching requires the use of good ATL skills all the time. That’s all teaching is, the practice of ATL skills.”
* “We have always taught skills but now we are putting the skills necessary for language acquisition into a more organised package”.
* mechanisms used to check ATL performance are self-assessment and formal reflection on ATL skills
* reflection is an ATL skill that is practiced in every unit and requires teachers to give students feedback that relates to which ATL skill they could focus on to improve their performance in similar assessment tasks
* absolute necessity to involve students in the loop of

assessment🡪feedback🡪changes to make

One fascinating formative assessment method used in this subject was to hand back a piece of work to the students which has been annotated at the top with codes for incorrect work eg. “in this piece of work you have ***v*** (incorrect verbs), ***a*** (incorrect articles), ***`*** (incorrect accents)” etc but not telling the students where they have made these mistakes and then requiring the students to find their own mistakes and self-correct. A wonderful formative assessment focused on subject based skill practice which teaches self-evaluation. Could be used in most subjects eg Maths - “you have made 4 arithmetical errors on this page, find them and correct them”; Science – “you have made two logical errors in data analysis, find them and correct them” etc etc.

High School level:

* “Learning through inquiry makes students more self-aware of how ATL skills affect performance”
* Interdisciplinary unit between Languages and PE (on cutting down screen time and replacing with creative or physical activity) was wonderful opportunity to focus on ATL skills – 1 week investigating, 1 week planning, 1 week presenting followed by reflection on ATL skills using guiding questions provided by teachers to help students focus on specific ATL skills
* For school reports have created a comment bank related to the 8 key ATL skills that teachers can use to craft individual ATL comments – 560 characters

**Arts:**

* started to use ATLs as an unassessed introductory unit for the first two weeks of the year, dance, music, drama, visual arts, all students and all teachers together producing their first exhibition in all areas after two weeks of the year
* then looked at connecting the exhibition to 8 ATL skills per department – looking more at the generic ATLs rather than the subject specific ones, incorporating ATLs in all units across all grades
* mapped out 8 ATL strands, identified what Mastery means and when to Introduce and Practice
* started off well but hard to keep the ATL idea high priority and has been overtaken by other priorities
* ATLs are implicit in everything done in the arts but with some teachers the ATLS are not being articulated specifically and evidence is not being gathered specifically
* Using emojis (see Vanessa McConville) to focus students on particular ATLs and trying to build in feedback🡪reflection🡪change process but some teachers find it difficult to keep the ATL focus when they are not assessed
* Complexity of MYP and IGCSE planning means ATLs sometimes get lost
* At DP level ATLs included in unit plans now and specific strategies in place to give feedback to students
* Visual Arts only meet with students once per week and most of that time is taken up with assessment so due to time pressure a focus on ATL skills is lost

**Maths:**

After my workshop they:

* picked 8-10 subject specific ATL skill strands and looked for alignment with subject matter from middle to high school – Organisation, Collaboration, Critical Thinking
* allocated ATLs to MYP units, at least one ATL per unit and aimed to cover each in one year, felt a bit forced as the ATLs didn’t necessarily fit into the units as taught, became a documentation exercise
* IB Evaluation asked the question “Why only one ATL per unit?”, added in more core generic ATLs to each unit
* Concern was that in Maths they were using all the subject specific ATLs anyway but not making sure the students were clear about the ATL skills they were practicing and teachers were unsure about how to make ATLs more obvious in class. Challenge is to move from unconscious awareness to conscious awareness of the skills in play in every Maths lesson – both for teachers and students
* In the middle school, the ATL requirements have focused the teachers much more on the skills that are in play in the normal classroom
* Trick is to focus students on the skills they are using in Maths without creating the fear that these skills will be assessed – easier with Grade 8 than Grade 6
* “Parents have some difficulty understanding the emphasis on students’ skills but for students, putting the emphasis on process relieves some of the anxieties about Maths content”
* Taking out the fear of assessment with activities that focus on ATL skills eg. planning out a summer camp with al the budgeting, organisation, planning, able to focus on collaboration skills (unassessed but reflected on throughout the project) while learning Maths (assessed)
* Using reflection on ATL skills after each test – verbal in MS written in HS – but limited opportunities to re-visit ATL skills. Need to build in opportunities for improvement in all ATL skills

**Business Studies:**

* biggest issue is measurement – for students to identify which ATL they are practicing in different classes and to gauge their own ATL progress and development
* developed emojis – a different emoji for each ATL Cluster – one for Critical Thinking, one for Information Literacy etc
* instituted student self-assessment (by electronic means using the emojis) in formative and summative assessments at the end of each unit to highlight strengths and weaknesses
* found students were being very accurate about their progress BECAUSE THERE WERE NO GRADES ALLOCATED!
* all reflection became reflection on ATLs – “What ATL do I need to focus on in order to do better in my next assessment?”
* important for teachers to build in opportunities for developing ATLs based on self-assessment

ATL self-assessment🡪practice🡪improvement🡪self-assessment

* Issue around “a need for Mastery statements or Developmental standards for each level of ATL development”

**Science:**

After my workshop:

* chose 10 ATL strands to focus on, some found within normal learning objectives but some were chosen outside of normal teaching areas
* started with 2 ATLs per unit, one unit per quarter, teachers wrote all their own tasks to be completed within units
* because of the requirement for feedback to students and students considering the feedback to be “another assessment” this became too much and was reduced to 1 per unit
* feedback on reports of only one ATL worked but was still seen as “grading” by students
* ATL skill development was seen by teachers as something “that we do already” and it seemed like a lot of documentation to re-specify what was already done
* ATL focus in lessons was good for students, raised their awareness but wasn’t planned in such a way to allow students to revisit ATLs and improve their performance.
* “The connection between subject matter knowledge and competence in ATL skills was acknowledged but reflection on that connection by teachers or students is lacking so the utility of ATL skills in improving subject matter learning is lost.” Need for opportunities to be built in for students to reflect on specific ATL skill proficiency and then practice and develop those same ATL skills to improve performance.
* a need for more inquiry learning and more focus on the Personal Project as an opportunity to develop and practice ATL skills
* concern over a lack of discussion between departments which must lead to overlap and also a lack of discussion between MS Science and HS Science on progression and development of ATLs through all levels of MYP
* “All teachers want to try and help their kids do better and inherently that is what I like about the ATL skills – they help quantify what good teaching and learning is all about”
* combination of MYP and IGCSE means balancing time on skills with time on content
* need for sharing ATL resources, skills exercises in Science that all teachers could use
* we have practicals which are fun for students but ATL skills requires teachers to do other activities as well which is challenging for some teachers
* none of the Grade 6-8 teachers carry on with the kids for Grades 9&10 and so building coherence of ATL skill practice is difficult both in terms of preparing them well for the IGCSE environment and knowing where whole classes and individual students are up to in their skill development

**Personal Project**

* “The backbone of the Personal Project is ATL skills”
* 1st step is developing student awareness - acronyms and posters can be used effectively - TOPBRICK for the Learner Profile attributes and TRCSS for the ATL Categories
* EE guide and PP guide both feature increased focus on ATL skills
* “If our learners have a good skill set then our teaching becomes so much easier”
* move to BQC (Building Quality Curricula) brings in the requirement for the specific teaching of ATL skills
* “In the PP all ATL skills need to be evidenced – what evidence can the student produce of the practice or development of specific ATL skills? To do this competently students need continual reflection on ATL and their own strengths and weaknesses prior to the PP to build up the level of metacognition required”

**Geography:**

After my workshop

* noticeable improvement in the use of consistent language around ATL and the prominence of ATL skills in unit planning through the CRF
* linking ATL skills to subject delivery widened the choice of activities for students to do in class
* small changes helped - linking MYP assignments with ATL skills and putting space in the feedback form for specific ATL reflection increased the students understanding of and reflection on ATL skills
* incorporating ATL reflection into report cards improved engagement by teachers with ATL skills because they had to track ATLs in order to be able to make useful comments
* to begin with Subject Leaders asked teachers to select only subject relevant ATL strands but later changed to allow teachers to select from the full list of ATL skills
* “For MYP and even more especially for IGCSE students need to develop ATL skills in order to succeed, to manage content and time pressures, to develop self-organisation – and it is up to teachers to focus students on all the skills of self-management”
* “MYP + IGCSE workload forces teachers to make sure students have the right skills to cope but they need to introduce the most important skills early on and have students practice these skills on the content from the beginning.”
* “There is a need to be able to map the progression of skills within each subject so teachers can see clearly what has been done before and where students are up to.”
* ATL skill selection by teacher will shift depending on the composition of the class and their present skill level eg. in English language. A rigid framework of skills per subject won’t work because of the different levels of all skills within students. There is a need for diagnostic assessment and remedial skills classes.

Adminstration:

* Requiring the reporting on ATL skills in semester reports produced different responses from different teachers
* High need for documentation of planned ATL skills through the unit planners and student progress achieved in ATL skill development through assessment of some kind
* Very little obvious separation of Core Generic and Subject Specific ATL skills by subject areas
* SAL meetings are good places to share information but don’t ever have a specific ATL focus

**Adminstration 2 – these people both left this school before my review and were reflecting back on their experience of ATL implementation and thinking of the most important features. Both these people were in Administration at the school under study prior to the review:**

* Lack of good software to map out ATL use and also to pull out ATL performance by students, by Grade, by subject
* Requiring evidence based comments by teachers on reports on ATL skill development worked well
* Not forcing it – asking subject teams to do their ATL planning plan just one quarter/unit/term ahead. What are the ATL skills we are going to focus on in our first unit? Get everyone working together sharing resources then at the end of the unit/quarter/term reflect on what was achieved and plan out the ATL focus for the next unit/quarter/term.
* Biggest need is to have subject meetings regularly to decide on ATL focus
* “We really pushed for explicit teaching. So every MYP assignment would have an ATL attached and a subject-free activity that would allow the kids to practice the skill. Then during the assignment the skill would be used to meet the criteria.”
* In some cases the skill was already in the MYP criteria – like research and critical thinking in humanities, so that was easy.
* Making the implicit more explicit – dedicating one full lesson every now and then to teaching one specific ATL skill helped to make it real for students
* Problem with open selection of ATL skills is the duplication of all the most basic skills by every department which shows how important they are but does not achieve the goals of subject specific skill development
* Separate out Core Generic ATL skills and teach them in the home-based learning sessions or a separate programme like STRIVE. Mix with Social and Emotional (PERMA) skills to make a full programme of basic, core generic skills for every student, mapped out Gd 1-12 to enable subjects to then focus on the most important skills for each subject

**Five key points for ATL success:**

1. Absolute commitment by the whole leadership team in middle and high school to embed them.
2. A continuous focus on ATLs for three years.
3. Time set aside for staff to specifically work on creating ATL activities.
4. Reporting on the ATLs meant that the teachers were more committed to focusing on the explicit teaching and parents were also used to the vocabulary.
5. Posters in the rooms.

**My conclusions after processing all the data generated by this review on specific difficulties in implementing an ATL programme at any school and some possible solutions:**

1. *No clear separation between Core Generic and Subject Specific ATL skills resulting in duplication of the most basic ATL skills by many departments and a lack of focus within subjects on subject specific ATL skills.*

Separate out the most basic Core Generic ATL skills and teach them in the home-based learning sessions or a separate programme like STRIVE. Mix with Social and Emotional (PERMA) skills to make a full programme of basic, core generic Social, Emotional and Learning skills for every student, mapped out Gd 1-12 to enable subject groups to then focus on the most important skills for advantage in each subject.

1. *Lack of overall planning of Subject Specific ATL skill implementation to give students advantages in summative assessments*

Start with the most serious assessments – Exhibition, Personal Project, Extended Essay, IGCSE and DP examination questions and requirements – analyse for the skills needed to give students an advantage in each and use backwards planning to structure subject specific ATL implementation.

Have subject areas use their subject guides to determine which Subject Specific ATL skill strands (ignoring all the Core Generic ATL skills covered by the SEL programme) fit most appropriately within their subject areas. What are they doing already in normal teaching and what are the characteristic skills of an “expert” in their field? Make sure that information is shared across all subjects and all levels and make sure that all Subject Specific ATL skill Clusters are represented somewhere.

Get Grade 9 teachers and Grade 11 teachers to make wish lists of skills – “I wish that by the time I see these students for the first time they had already learned and practiced the skills of …….” Then use backward planning to map those skills back.

1. *Lack of opportunities for students to develop and improve their ATL skills*

Make sure that every ATL skill is not only practiced once by students. Make sure that the development of each ATL skill follows the path of:

Introduction 🡪 practice 🡪 reflection 🡪 development 🡪 reflection 🡪 mastery

Institute diagnostic assessment of key ATL skills at all levels.

After every formative or summative assessment engage students with reflection on ATL skills asking the question “Which ATL skills would have enabled me to perform better in that assessment?” And then make sure there are more opportunities built into subject lessons to practice and develop further the same ATL skill.

Build remedial ATL skills classes into Learning Support or have them conducted by teachers (or senior students) outside of normal class times or make them available in on-line ATL skills development modules of exercises students can access to help them to practice any ATL skills in a subject free way.

1. *Lack of student record keeping of ATL skill development*

Students need to individually compile ATL portfolios, separate from subject achievements, across all subjects from MYP1 to Grade 12 in which they collect and record evidence of ATL development and use.

1. *Lack of cohesion of ATL skill development between MYP3 and 4 and between MYP 5 and DP*

Within subject groups MYP 1-3 teachers need to meet with 4 & 5 teachers and DP teachers on a regular basis to discuss ATL development by students.

PD for teachers needs to focus on developing cohesion of ATL skill development between programmes and across subjects.

1. *Lack of importance placed on ATL skills by students*

Use posters, quotes, statistics, graphs, charts to demonstrate to students that their future employment success depends on knowledge plus skills and in a digital age skills are paramount.

Make the self-management of learning the highest possible achievement in the school and something all students will want to move towards. Make sure all students make the connection between self-management of learning and ATL skills.

1. *Difficulties teachers have in generating ATL skills exercises to use in their subjects*

Identify those teachers who have had success in ATL skill implementation and have them deliver short PD sessions for all staff where they talk about the resources they have developed and how they incorporate ATL skills in lessons in their departments.

Do everything possible to demonstrate to all teachers that they can all learn from each other because the skills stay the same across all subjects, its only the content that changes.