

IB Curriculum – A Gateway to Essential Skills for 21st Century Learners

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It goes without saying that education plays a vital role in shaping the life of an individual. In a rapidly evolving world, children and youth need to be equipped with the skills set needed to thrive in a steadily transforming workplace and job market. This calls for an educational framework that not only provides the students the required content knowledge but also equips them with 21st century skills and global competence.

As the world merges into a global village and we adapt ourselves to a global community, the need to embed future-ready skills and competencies in the pedagogy becomes inevitable. Consequently, the choice of an educational institution is no longer driven by the brand name of the school or top subjects alone. Today's discerning parents also weigh the pros and cons of different education boards. To help their children develop into future-ready global citizens, more and more parents are today being opting for the IB or the International Baccalaureate curriculum framework.

Offered for students aged 3 to 19 years, the IB programme challenges students to excel in their academics while encouraging holistic personality development.

The IB Mission Statement

The characteristics of a 21st century learner are necessary skills for each student to learn in today's society. The International Baccalaureate (IB) organization's goals and mission statement complement 21st century learning in their overall objective, as well as on various other levels.

This mission statement embodies many of the same values as 21st century learning, with a primary focus on encouraging students to increase their level of intercultural understanding and respect, as well as working with international organizations to develop programs for international education and rigorous assessment (IBO, 2005). It is essential that 21st Century learners become effective global citizens in order to collaborate with and learn from an array of students from different religious, linguistic and cultural backgrounds (PPRC, 2010; NEA, 2010).

The IB mission statement also states “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” (IBO, 2005). 21st Century students are and need to become lifelong learners, and are encouraged to understand and learn from their differences with other students (Mauch, et. al., 2001). 21st century students are educated as lifelong learners to develop the ability to adapt to constant changes in technology and society in the future (Mauch, et. al., 2001).

The IB Standards & Practices

The International Baccalaureate Organization has also developed a set of standards and practices which have been produced to outline how the goals in the mission statement will be achieved (IBO, 2010). The IB standards and practices holds many values and beliefs which enable 21st century learners to develop the skills necessary for them to be successful in modern society. The IB standards and practices are outlined in the document:<http://www.ibo.org/become/documents/Programmestandardsandpractices.pdf>

“The school is committed to a constructivist, inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning that promotes inquiry and the development of critical-thinking skills” (IBO, 2010, pg.6) complements the need for a 21st century learner to develop critical thinking and problem solving skills. This inquiry based approach encourages students to think critically and problem solve in order to achieve an outcome, a skill which they will need in order to adapt to various situations in future employment (Harstie, 2001).

It is essential that in today’s global economy that 21st century students become effective global citizens with the ability to collaborate and learn from students from different cultural backgrounds. “The school develops and promotes international-mindedness and all attributes of the IB learner profile across the school community” (IBO, 2010, pg. 6) and “The school places importance on language learning, including mother tongue, host country language and other languages”(IBO, 2010, pg.6) are just two statements found in the IB philosophy will actively encourage 21st century learners to become effective global citizens and to respect and learn from students with diverse cultural and religious backgrounds.

Detailed curriculum and teaching methods are outlined in the standards and practices, designed to achieve the goals set out by the International Baccalaureate (IBO, 2010). These standards and practices are therefore a perfect complement to the objectives outlined in 21st century learning, as both will encourage students to become effective global citizens, critical thinkers, collaborators, communicators and lifelong learners in the process.

The IB Learner Profile

The International Baccalaureate Learner Profile is in essence, designed to convert the IB mission statement into a set of learning outcomes for the 21st century learner (International

Baccalaureate Organization, 2006). The profile is tailor made to benefit 21st century learning and complements the necessary skills and characteristics perfectly. The profile contains values and beliefs which encourage international learning as well as lifelong learning and all of the characteristics which are necessary for the 21st century learner to succeed in modern society. Below is a table describing what IB learners strive to be:



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.

IB learners strive to be:

Inquirers	They develop their natural curiosity. They acquire the skills necessary to conduct inquiry and research and show independence in learning. They actively enjoy learning and this love of learning will be sustained throughout their lives.
Knowledgeable	They explore concepts, ideas and issues that have local and global significance. In so doing, they acquire in-depth knowledge and develop understanding across a broad and balanced range of disciplines.
Thinkers	They exercise initiative in applying thinking skills critically and creatively to recognize and approach complex problems, and make reasoned, ethical decisions.
Communicators	They understand and express ideas and information confidently and creatively in more than one language and in a variety of modes of communication. They work effectively and willingly in collaboration with others.
Principled	They act with integrity and honesty, with a strong sense of fairness, justice and respect for the dignity of the individual, groups and communities. They take responsibility for their own actions and the consequences that accompany them.
Open-minded	They understand and appreciate their own cultures and personal histories, and are open to the perspectives, values and traditions of other individuals and communities. They are accustomed to seeking and evaluating a range of points of view, and are willing to grow from the experience.
Caring	They show empathy, compassion and respect towards the needs and feelings of others. They have a personal commitment to service, and act to make a positive difference to the lives of others and to the environment.
Risk-takers	They approach unfamiliar situations and uncertainty with courage and forethought, and have the independence of spirit to explore new roles, ideas and strategies. They are brave and articulate in defending their beliefs.
Balanced	They understand the importance of intellectual, physical and emotional balance to achieve personal well-being for themselves and others.
Reflective	They give thoughtful consideration to their own learning and experience. They are able to assess and understand their strengths and limitations in order to support their learning and personal development.

As shown above, there are many similar characteristics outlined in the IB learner profile as there are to 21st century learning. Communication, collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, intercultural understanding and lifelong learning all relate directly to the outcomes in which the IB learner strives towards (IBO, 2006). IB learners strive to be inquirers, collaborator, open minded, caring and thinkers, all of which are essential characteristics and skills needed for the 21st century learner to reach their full potential (IBO, 2006).

The learner profile states, “They understand and express ideas and information confidently and creatively in more than one language and in a variety of modes of communication. They work effectively and willingly in collaboration with others” (IBO, 2006, pg. 5). This refers directly to striving to develop communication and collaborative skills in order to become an effective global citizen. Being able to effectively and efficiently communicate and collaborate with others are two very important characteristics of 21st century learners (Delp, 2011; NEA, 2012).

They exercise initiative in applying thinking skills critically and creatively to recognize and approach complex problems, and make reasoned, ethical decisions” (IBO, 2006, pg.5). This statement from the learner profile relates to students becoming effective critical thinkers and problem solvers in order to make the correct decisions, all of which are essential skills for a 21st century learner (PPRC, 2010; NEA, 2012).

“They understand and appreciate their own cultures and personal histories, and are open to the perspectives, values and traditions of other individuals and communities. They are accustomed to seeking and evaluating a range of points of view, and are willing to grow from the experience.” (IBO, 2006, pg. 5) and, “They explore concepts, ideas and issues that have local and global significance. In so doing, they acquire in-depth knowledge and develop understanding across a broad and balanced range of disciplines.” (IBO, 2006, pg.5). These two statements taken from the IB learner profile show the profile’s commitment to developing students into inter-culturally sensitive and internationally collaborative global citizens (IBO, 2006). This is the primary focus of the IB learner profile and is an essential characteristic of a 21st century learner (NEA, 2010). Striving to become an IB learner will encourage the development of 21st century skills as all are directly correlated to necessary skills needed by any student in modern and future society.

The IB Program promotes a global perspective by

Insisting that all students study at least one second language.

Drawing on examples from different countries.

Urging students to consider multiple perspectives.

Developing an appreciation of other cultures and religions.

Addressing global issues and providing possible solutions.

Encouraging student and faculty exchanges with other countries.

An Answer for the 21st Century

Recent reports by the National Center on Education and the Economy (2006) and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2007) identify the following essential skills for the 21st century:

Creativity and innovation.
Self-discipline and organization.
Leadership.
Teamwork.
Cross-disciplinary knowledge.
Communication skills.
Analytical reasoning.
Real-world problem-solving skills.

These skills are evident in the IB learner profile, which lists 10 attributes that IB programs seek to develop in students.

IB programs are designed to stimulate young people to be intellectually curious and equip them with the knowledge, conceptual understanding, skills, reflective practices, and attitudes needed to become autonomous lifelong learners.

How Are Educators Responding?

The New Zealand Ministry of Education defines five key competencies for living and lifelong learning listed below:

Thinking
Using language, symbols, and text
Managing self
Relating to others
Participating and contributing

The Big List of Essential 21st Century Skills

This list comes from the book *Literacy is Not Enough* (Crockett, Lee et. al.; 2011). You'll be able to see it correlates rather well with both New Zealand's list and the IB Learner Profile. They certainly cover the Common Core's bases, too.

1. Problem Solving

Why it's important: In the future, complex problems that we can't even conceive right now will be everywhere. As society advances, so will the complexity of its manageable conflicts. The more we focus on students' ability to devise effective solutions to real-world problems, the more successful those students will become. This is what Solution Fluency is all about. It means solving complex problems effectively in real time using unique and carefully designed solutions.

In addition to this, problem-solvers can work independently from higher supervision. They are initiative takers and enjoy risk, and they aren't afraid to get their hands dirty and make mistakes. They also learn from those mistakes, and habitually debrief their processes to create more efficient and economical solutions.

These are the kinds of people who will be successful in a global marketplace like ours. Such an individual is an asset to any workforce. It's worth mentioning that in this future we're talking about, workers who are unable to think proactively towards solving problems will have a hard time finding employment.

2. Creativity

Why it's important: Our digital students are in a constant state of stimulation and neural development with technology use. They are natural producers and consumers, or prosumers, of information. Problem-solving is a skill that comes naturally to them and this can be advanced profoundly with the proper engagement in their learning. This comes from doing rewarding projects and meaningful tasks that give them challenges to overcome in imaginative ways.

Ask any student about what they like to create and you'll get a myriad of different answers. They are constantly searching for ways to express themselves and their uniqueness. Through social media, they display this creative edge and are given constant and instantaneous feedback from their peers. This same level of creative power is used as they face interesting challenges and figure out how to meet them with ingenuity and vision. This is why Creativity Fluency is one of the Essential Fluency skills.

It is fundamental that this side of any student is allowed to shine forth in their learning.

3. Analytic Thinking

Why it's important: Analytic thinking means being able to use the higher end of Bloom's Digital Taxonomy or higher-order thinking skills (HOTS).

Tasks that require linear thinking and routine cognitive work are being outsourced more and more. So it's essential to guide students towards being able to perform analytic thinking. It is

crucial to their ability to succeed in life after the classroom. Analytic thinking is a significant part of what makes up Information Fluency.

Analytical thinkers see data and information in many different dimensions, and from multiple angles. They are adept at conceptualization, organization and classification, and knowledge synthesis. These types of skills are invaluable because they allow students to deal practically with problems of a social, mathematical, and scientific nature. It empowers them to make effective and level-headed decisions in their lives and relationships. It's easy to see why critical and analytical thinking skills are important to success beyond school.

4. Collaboration

Why it's important: Students of the digital age are social by nature. They text, post, update, share, chat, and constantly co-create in technological environments with each other. When they are unable to do this in school, they become disengaged and unattached to their learning.

It is a skill that educators must exercise with them regularly, and understanding Collaboration Fluency will assist with this.

The work forces of the future (and even our present day) are globalizing due to the Internet. It is now the norm to communicate and market for global demographics instantaneously and effectively. An organization's business partners are now halfway across the world, and yet they meet and work with each other every day. The ability to collaborate and communicate in these situations is essential.

This kind of interaction goes hand-in-hand with the mindset of global awareness that is part of Global Digital Citizenship. Simply put, better collaborators make better students—and better citizens.

5. Communication

Why it's important: Communication is a broad term that incorporates multi-faceted levels of interaction and sharing information. Students love to communicate using technology. This is an essential part of Media Fluency. But it's more than just being able to effectively use digital media. It's about personal interactions as well.

Whether talking face-to-face, blogging, texting, or creating a visual product, their values and beliefs are defined by how well they communicate with others. Encouraging them to develop and hone every aspect of their communication skills will serve them well in both their personal and professional lives.

6. Ethics, Action, and Accountability

Why it's important: These are among the many characteristics of the Global Digital Citizen. A well-rounded and responsible global digital citizen practices personal, global, and online responsibilities geared towards creating a better world for everyone. This is a selfless, helpful, and caring individual who is respectful of other cultures and belief systems, and diligent about being at their best with interactions of all sorts, both online and offline.

Teaching our kids about global awareness and Internet safety have become mainstream practices in education. It's great to see such skills garnering the attention they deserve. IB schools continues to create resources to help educators all over the world incorporate these practices into their own teaching strategies.

With the emergence of multiple curriculums in India such as CBSE, CISCE, Cambridge International, and the IB, making the right choice could be a challenging task. Listed below are some of the key benefits of the IB curriculum:

Broad approach towards education: The diversity that the IB curriculum offers is incomparable to any national curriculum. IB schools offer students exposure to a wide range of subject choices. While students of other boards choose between regular Science and Commerce streams, the IB curriculum offers psychology, philosophy, film, global politics and other relevant subjects not usually offered in traditional schools.

1. **Global Skills Development:** The IB curriculum encourages a spirit of inquiry and helps students develop critical thinking and research skills that are crucial for excelling in college and beyond. Students are able to take responsibility for their own learning and understand how knowledge itself is constructed; this is further to the unique theory of knowledge (TOK) course. Students are encouraged to try different approaches to learning and to take responsibility for their own educational progress.
2. **International recognition:**
The IB curriculum is recognized by top local and international universities. Designed independent of government and national systems, it incorporates quality practice from research and its global community of schools. It also encourages students of all ages to consider both local and global contexts to develop multilingual students who appreciate diverse cultures.
3. **Practical teaching methodology:** The most common problem among kids is understanding and retaining what they are taught. The IB curriculum is based on concept-based learning methodology where the students are taught the concepts rather than memories facts and figures without really understanding the concept. The IB programmes

are different from other curricula because it encourages students of all ages to think critically and challenge assumptions.

4. **Personality Development:** While preparing kids to be globally competent, it is equally important to ensure their holistic development. This cannot be achieved with a rote-centric teaching-learning process and obsolete textbooks. The IB curriculum helps students develop emotional intelligence as they inquire into the world around them.
5. **IB programmes** incorporate quality practice from national and international research and the IB global community. They encourage students to think globally within a complex and hyper-connected world. Under the IB programme, students are encouraged to accept themselves confidently and express themselves with pride and confidence. It encourages students to be active in their communities and to take their learning beyond academic study.
6. Taking the right decision for your little ones should not be a difficult one. Considering the challenges that are unfurling today, you will appreciate that an educational framework that is holistic, global in outlook, transformational and timeless is all you need.

IB Curriculum primarily focusses on characteristics of 21st Century Learners in general and Essential Skills for 21st Century Learners in particular. It definitely prepares future generation to become well aware global citizens who are responsible for the choices they have made and accountable for the decisions they have taken. IB Curriculum if followed in true spirit will make Education truly Learner centric.

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