

Developing the IB learner profile

Introduction

The learner profile highlights desirable student attributes that the IB hopes to develop through participation in its educational programmes. Although derived in its current form from the Primary Years Programme, the attributes of the learner profile have been embedded in the philosophy and inspiration for the Diploma Programme since it was initially developed in the 1960s. In addition to suggesting approaches to teaching and learning, which are considered in “Teaching, learning and assessment”, the learner profile also stresses the importance of broader attitudes and capabilities, which are the focus of this section.

One assumption of the Diploma Programme has always been that education does not begin or end in the classroom and that direct personal experience, in addition to academic study, is essential in educating the whole person. According to Peterson (2003: 45), Kurt Hahn’s educational philosophy influenced the initial development of the CAS and the extended essay requirements, emphasizing the importance of experiential learning and service. Hahn believed education should lead to self-discovery, compassion and purposeful action, which he expressed in the motto: “*Plus est en vous*” (more is in you).

There are a number of other important reasons for the emphasis placed on the learner profile attributes in the Diploma Programme.

- The relationship between affective and cognitive experience is being increasingly recognized and understood by cognitive scientists. We are learning more about how emotion is linked to cognitive functioning and performance and the implications of this for effective learning. See, for example, Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007), who argue that cognition and emotion are profoundly interrelated, with important implications for educational practice.
- Universities and employers want students with a broad base of skills who have real-life experience in addition to good academic results.
- There is an increasing emphasis on connectedness in education, on the need to fit academic studies into a human and global context. The reality of our interconnected 21st-century world, our information society, is causing many educators to rethink and re-evaluate what is important and what we should be teaching in our schools. We are also recognizing the need to prepare students for the social and moral challenges that await them in such a complex world. The traditional academic disciplines alone will not prepare our young people for such challenges. Our students must develop the necessary skills, habits of mind and the moral and ethical values to be able to understand and manage the interconnectivity and complexity of the modern world.

School culture

The learner profile is not confined to the classroom or to the CAS programme. It permeates the whole life of the school and needs to be considered in the context of the hidden curriculum as well as the formal, acknowledged curriculum. The formal curriculum can be defined as all activities associated with the school schedule, the school’s intended educational programme. The term “hidden curriculum” is sometimes used to describe the environment in which the formal curriculum is delivered and the unintended, unconscious or unplanned outcomes of teaching and learning. See, for example, Bulman and Jenkins (1988: 10) and Vallance (1991: 40).

In order to develop a school culture based on the learner profile, and to align the formal and hidden curriculums as far as possible, it is essential that the school's values and mission statement match the learner profile in action as well as in principle. Adults in the school – including the school leadership, staff and even parents – need to model the beliefs, values and behaviour indicated in the learner profile. Students must experience and contribute to the profile in the day-to-day life of the school.

In the IB publication *Programme standards and practices* (September 2005), standard A1 states: “There is close alignment between the educational beliefs and values of the school and those of the programme. Many of the practices listed under A1, as well as other standards, require the school to actively promote a culture of learning consistent with the learner profile. A great deal of attention is paid to aspects of education beyond the formal, taught curriculum.

What can schools do to support and develop the IB learner profile?

The existence of the learner profile provides an opportunity to engage school communities (governors, teachers, parents and students) in the debate about the place of values in schools and the purpose of education. The profile does not attempt to describe precisely how the attributes can be nurtured in a school or prescribe a list of practices that must be adopted. The act of “making sense” of the profile in the context of a school community is critical to its development and is the responsibility of each school. It is essential that students engage critically with the learner profile, and the values embedded in it, rather than accept them unconditionally.

Many IB World Schools explicitly develop and then apply profiles for the whole school community. Two possible examples are provided in figure 3 and figure 4 in this section. It must be stressed that these are only examples and, in order to establish ownership, each school should develop their own. The examples provided are adapted for school leaders and teachers. Some schools further develop the profile, deriving specific performance indicators, and use these for evaluation and recruitment purposes. Other schools have developed parent profiles, with the help of the parent association. These are distributed to all parents and used to support positive parental involvement in the life of the school.

Unless the learner profile is at the heart of school life, and is supported and nurtured, there is a danger that its lack of visibility will mean that it is not valued. Simply copying the profile and hanging it on the wall will not make it part of the life of the school.

It is essential that schools encourage leadership and management styles that support an environment conducive to the development of professional learning communities (see “Professional development”). Teachers need to be empowered and supported to become creative professionals. Trust engenders trust. School administrators need to empower teachers and teachers need to empower students. Small instances can be important and convey powerful messages. The recording of CAS provides a good example. If too much emphasis is placed on students collecting signatures and counting hours as evidence for completion of the programme, the implicit message is that they are not trusted and that CAS is a chore.

Particular attention needs to be given to the hidden curriculum and the unintended experiential learning that goes on around the school. This means that students should not only be involved in learning, but should also be given responsibility, independence and ample opportunities to play an active role in school life. Adults need to model the behaviour expected of students and to display positive professional relationships. They are expected to care about the atmosphere and climate of learning created in the classrooms and corridors, become involved with school activities beyond the classroom, and provide academic, social and emotional support to students.

IB learner profile attribute	Responsibilities	Indicators
Inquirers	Pedagogical leadership Demonstrate lifelong learning	Passionate about research into effective schooling, teaching and learning, management of change Constantly evaluating with a view to improving practice
Knowledgeable	Understand IB principles and practices Understand cultural and local contexts	Understands local context as well as being globally aware and concerned
Thinkers	Enhance the collective intelligence of the organization	Backs up decisions with clear, reasoned evidence of how conclusions were reached Thinks creatively
Communicators	Transparency Collaboration	All agendas are open Decision-making is collaborative Communicates in several languages
Principled	Accept responsibility for their actions and do not blame others	Decisions are based on ethical grounds Leadership is based on integrity, honesty, fairness and compassion
Open-minded	Value the perspectives of others that might be different from their own	Encourages an open, critical debate of issues Reacts positively to criticism from others
Caring	Sensitive to school climate Compassionate behaviour Support staff development	Good of the school comes before self-interest Models ethical behaviour Supportive of staff as well as students
Risk-takers	Visionary leadership Prepared to delegate leadership to others Courageous	Open to new and different ideas to improve the quality of the programme and the learning environment

IB learner profile attribute	Responsibilities	Indicators
Balanced	Development of the whole child emphasized Support Diploma Programme core	Looks for evidence of growth and development in all areas of school life
Reflective	Constructively self-critical Striving to improve	Encourages and facilitates evaluative feedback from the whole school community (students, teachers, as well as board)

Figure 3
Example of a learner profile for school leaders

Note: While directed at the administrative leadership (school director, board principal, Diploma Programme coordinator), leadership should also be considered as devolved and situational, to include students, teachers and parents where appropriate.

IB learner profile attribute	Responsibilities	Indicators
Inquirers	Demonstrate lifelong learning Encourage student-led inquiry Seek professional development opportunities	Passionate about research into teaching and learning, and subject development Willingness to take on opportunities beyond classroom teaching (for example, examining)
Knowledgeable	Understand Diploma Programme principles and practices Understand cultural and local contexts	Excellent subject knowledge and knowledge of Diploma Programme curriculum and assessment practices
Thinkers	Model excellent thinking practice	Thinks creatively Explains to students how they reached answers and conclusions
Communicators	Listen and encourage students to speak up Share practice with colleagues	Allows students a role in decision-making Communicates in several languages

IB learner profile attribute	Responsibilities	Indicators
Principled	Fair and consistent dealings with students Accept responsibility for actions	Students are respected Ethically-based discipline is applied Honest with students and others
Open-minded	Value the perspectives of others that might be different from their own	Encourages an open, critical debate of issues Reacts positively to constructive criticism from others, including students
Caring	Sensitive to school climate Demonstrate compassionate behaviour Supportive of colleagues	Good of the school comes before self-interest Models ethical behaviour Interested in student welfare
Risk-takers	Visionary leadership Prepared to delegate leadership to others Courageous	Open to new and different ideas to improve the quality of the programme and the learning environment
Balanced	Considers role to be a teacher of the whole child not just the subject	Supportive of CAS, TOK and other holistic school programmes
Reflective	Constructively self-critical Always striving to improve	Encourages and facilitates evaluative feedback from students as well as other teachers and administrators

Figure 4
Example of a learner profile for teachers