



IB CONTINUUM  
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## What is an IB education?



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International Baccalaureate®  
Baccalauréat International  
Bachillerato Internacional

The IB programme continuum of international education

## **What is an IB education?**

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The International Baccalaureate Organization (known as the IB) offers four high-quality and challenging educational programmes for a worldwide community of schools, aiming to create a better, more peaceful world. This publication is one of a range of materials produced to support these programmes.

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## IB mission statement

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.



# IB learner profile

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.

As IB learners we strive to be:

## INQUIRERS

We nurture our curiosity, developing skills for inquiry and research. We know how to learn independently and with others. We learn with enthusiasm and sustain our love of learning throughout life.

## KNOWLEDGEABLE

We develop and use conceptual understanding, exploring knowledge across a range of disciplines. We engage with issues and ideas that have local and global significance.

## THINKERS

We use critical and creative thinking skills to analyse and take responsible action on complex problems. We exercise initiative in making reasoned, ethical decisions.

## COMMUNICATORS

We express ourselves confidently and creatively in more than one language and in many ways. We collaborate effectively, listening carefully to the perspectives of other individuals and groups.

## PRINCIPLED

We act with integrity and honesty, with a strong sense of fairness and justice, and with respect for the dignity and rights of people everywhere. We take responsibility for our actions and their consequences.

## OPEN-MINDED

We critically appreciate our own cultures and personal histories, as well as the values and traditions of others. We seek and evaluate a range of points of view, and we are willing to grow from the experience.

## CARING

We show empathy, compassion and respect. We have a commitment to service, and we act to make a positive difference in the lives of others and in the world around us.

## RISK-TAKERS

We approach uncertainty with forethought and determination; we work independently and cooperatively to explore new ideas and innovative strategies. We are resourceful and resilient in the face of challenges and change.

## BALANCED

We understand the importance of balancing different aspects of our lives—intellectual, physical, and emotional—to achieve well-being for ourselves and others. We recognize our interdependence with other people and with the world in which we live.

## REFLECTIVE

We thoughtfully consider the world and our own ideas and experience. We work to understand our strengths and weaknesses in order to support our learning and personal development.

The IB learner profile represents 10 attributes valued by IB World Schools. We believe these attributes, and others like them, can help individuals and groups become responsible members of local, national and global communities.

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# Introduction

The aim of this document is to communicate clearly what lies at the heart of an International Baccalaureate (IB) education. For educators, supporters, students and their families, it explains the ideals that underpin all IB programmes. By describing the IB's educational philosophy, *What is an IB education?* also offers support for schools on their IB journey through programme authorization and ongoing implementation.

In 1968, the IB Diploma Programme (DP) was established to provide a challenging and comprehensive education that would enable students to understand and manage the complexities of our world and provide them with skills and attitudes for taking responsible action for the future. Such an education was rooted in the belief that people who are equipped to make a more just and peaceful world need an education that crosses disciplinary, cultural, national and geographical boundaries.

With the introduction of the Middle Years Programme (MYP) in 1994 and the Primary Years Programme (PYP) in 1997, the IB identified a continuum of international education for students aged 3 to 19. A decade later, the adoption of the IB learner profile across the continuum described internationally minded learners of all ages. The learner profile continues to provide important common ground for these challenging, stand-alone programmes, each developed as a developmentally appropriate expression of the IB's educational approach. The introduction of the IB Career-related Programme (CP) in 2012 enriches this continuum by providing a choice of international education pathways for 16- to 19-year-old students.

The IB's work is informed by research and by over 40 years of practical experience. This overview honours the vision that launched the IB and sustains its growth today. The dynamic legacy of the IB's founders continues to support a growing global network of schools dedicated to high-quality education, ongoing professional development and shared accountability.

*What is an IB education?* aims to be informative, not definitive; it invites conversation and regular review. The IB has always championed a stance of critical engagement with challenging ideas, one that values the progressive thinking of the past while remaining open to future innovation. It reflects the IB's commitment to creating a collaborative, global community united by a mission to make a better world through education.

As the IB's mission in action, the learner profile concisely describes the aspirations of a global community that shares the values underlying the IB's educational philosophy. The IB learner profile describes the attributes and outcomes of education for international-mindedness.

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.

Informed by these values, an IB education:

- centres on learners
- develops effective approaches to teaching and learning
- works within global contexts
- explores significant content.

Working together, these four characteristics define an IB education.





# IB learners

At the centre of international education in the IB are students aged 3 to 19 with their own learning styles, strengths and challenges. Students of all ages come to school with combinations of unique and shared patterns of values, knowledge and experience of the world and their place in it.

Promoting open communication based on understanding and respect, the IB encourages students to become active, compassionate, lifelong learners. An IB education is holistic in nature—it is concerned with the whole person. Along with cognitive development, IB programmes address students' social, emotional and physical well-being. They value and offer opportunities for students to become active and caring members of local, national and global communities; they focus attention on the values and outcomes of internationally minded learning described in the IB learner profile.

IB learners strive to become inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced and reflective. These attributes represent a broad range of human capacities and responsibilities that go beyond intellectual development and academic success. They imply a commitment to help all members of the school community learn to respect themselves, others and the world around them.

IB programmes aim to increase access to the curriculum and engagement in learning for all students. Learning communities become more inclusive as they identify and remove barriers to learning and participation. Commitment to access and inclusion represents the IB learner profile in action.

## The learner and the IB World School

The IB learner profile brings to life the aspirations of a community of IB World Schools dedicated to student-centred education. IB programmes promote the development of schools that:

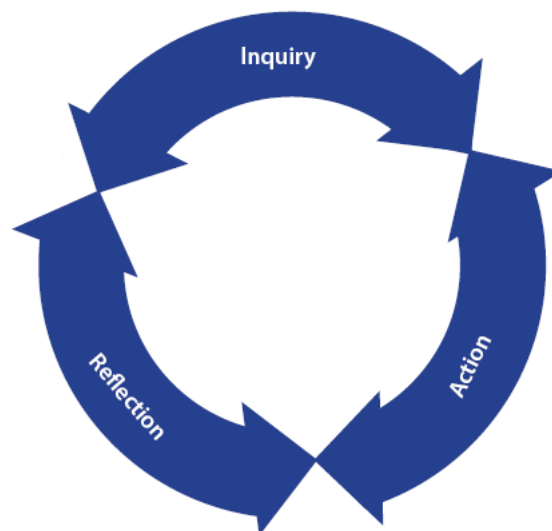
- create educational opportunities that encourage healthy relationships, individual and shared responsibility and effective teamwork and collaboration
- help students make informed, reasoned, ethical judgments and develop the flexibility, perseverance and confidence they need in order to bring about meaningful change
- inspire students to ask questions, to pursue personal aspirations, to set challenging goals and to develop the persistence to achieve them
- encourage the creation of rich personal and cultural identities.

These educational outcomes are profoundly shaped by the relationships between teachers and students; teachers are intellectual leaders who can empower students to develop confidence and personal responsibility. Challenging learning environments help students to develop the imagination and motivation they need in order to meet their own needs and the needs of others.

IB programmes emphasize learning how to learn, helping students interact effectively with the learning environments they encounter and encouraging them to value learning as an essential and integral part of their everyday lives.

# Teaching and learning in the IB

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 towards open, democratic classrooms. An IB education empowers young people for a lifetime of learning, independently and in collaboration with others. It prepares a community of learners to engage with global challenges through inquiry, action and reflection.



## Inquiry

Sustained inquiry forms the centrepiece of the written, taught and assessed curriculum in IB programmes. IB programmes feature structured inquiry both into established bodies of knowledge and into complex problems. In this approach, prior knowledge and experience establish the basis for new learning, and students' own curiosity provides the most effective provocation for learning that is engaging, relevant, challenging and significant.

## Action

Principled action, as both a strategy and an outcome, represents the IB's commitment to teaching and learning through practical, real-world experience. IB learners act at home, as well as in classrooms, schools, communities and the broader world. Action involves learning by doing, which enhances learning about self and others. IB World Schools value action that encompasses a concern for integrity and honesty, as well as a strong sense of fairness that respects the dignity of individuals and groups.

Principled action means making responsible choices, sometimes including decisions not to act. Individuals, organizations and communities can engage in principled action when they explore the ethical dimensions of personal and global challenges. Action in IB programmes may involve service learning, advocacy and educating self and others.

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## Reflection

Critical reflection is the process by which curiosity and experience can lead to deeper understanding. Reflective thinkers must become critically aware of their evidence, methods and conclusions. Reflection also involves being conscious of potential bias and inaccuracy in one's own work and in the work of others.

An IB education fosters creativity and imagination. It offers students opportunities for considering the nature of human thought and for developing the skills and commitments necessary not only to remember, but also to analyse one's own thinking and effort—as well as the products and performances that grow from them.

Through inquiry, action and reflection, IB programmes aim to develop a range of thinking, self-management, social communication and research skills referred to in IB programmes as “approaches to learning”.

Effective teaching and learning requires meaningful assessment. IB World Schools strive to clarify the purpose of student assessment, the criteria for success and the methods by which assessments are made. In IB programmes, assessment is ongoing, varied and integral to the curriculum. Assessment may be formal or informal, formative or summative, internal or external; students also benefit by learning how to assess their own work and the work of others.

IB students demonstrate what they know and can do through consolidations of learning, culminating with the PYP exhibition, the MYP personal project, the DP extended essay and the CP reflective project. The entire school community can be involved in providing feedback and support as students demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and mastery of skills.

# Global contexts for education



In our highly interconnected and rapidly changing world, IB programmes aim to develop international-mindedness in a global context. The terms “international” and “global” describe that world from different points of view—one from the perspective of its constituent parts (nation states and their relationships with each other) and one from the perspective of the planet as a whole. Sharp distinctions between the “local”, “national” and “global” are blurring in the face of emerging institutions and technologies that transcend modern nation states. New challenges that are not defined by traditional boundaries call for students to develop the agility and imagination they need for living productively in a complex world.

An IB education creates learning communities in which students can increase their understanding of language and culture, which can help them to become more globally engaged.

Education for international-mindedness relies on the development of learning environments that value the world as the broadest context for learning. IB World Schools share educational standards and practices for philosophy, organization and curriculum that can create and sustain authentic global learning communities. In school, students learn about the world from the curriculum and from their interactions with other people. Teaching and learning in global contexts supports the IB’s mission “to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect”.

## Multilingualism and intercultural understanding

For the IB, learning to communicate in a variety of ways in more than one language is fundamental to the development of intercultural understanding. IB programmes, therefore, support complex, dynamic learning through wide-ranging forms of expression. All IB programmes require students to learn another language.

Intercultural understanding involves recognizing and reflecting on one’s own perspective, as well as the perspectives of others. To increase intercultural understanding, IB programmes foster learning how to appreciate critically many beliefs, values, experiences and ways of knowing. The goal of understanding the world’s rich cultural heritage invites the IB community to explore human commonality, diversity and interconnection.

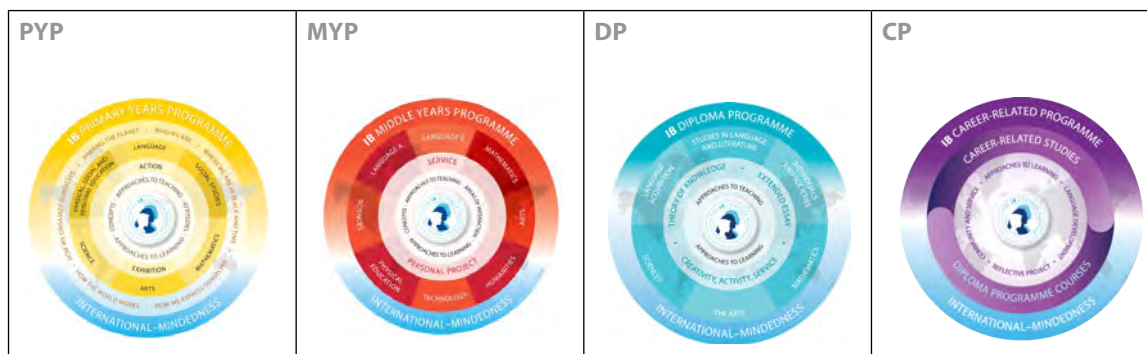
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## Global engagement

Global engagement represents a commitment to address humanity's greatest challenges in the classroom and beyond. IB students and teachers are encouraged to explore global and local issues, including developmentally appropriate aspects of the environment, development, conflicts, rights and cooperation and governance. Globally engaged people critically consider power and privilege, and recognize that they hold the earth and its resources in trust for future generations.

An IB education aims to develop the awareness, perspectives and commitments necessary for global engagement. The IB aspires to empower people to be active learners who are committed to service with the community.

# Significant content



An IB education provides opportunities to develop both disciplinary and interdisciplinary understanding that meet rigorous standards set by institutions of higher learning around the world. IB programmes offer curriculum frameworks and courses that are broad and balanced, conceptual and connected.

## Broad and balanced

An IB education represents a balanced approach, offering students access to a broad range of content that spans academic subjects. In the PYP, learning aims to transcend boundaries between subject areas. As students develop in the MYP, DP and CP, they engage subject-specific knowledge and skills with increasing sophistication.

## Conceptual

Conceptual learning focuses on broad and powerful organizing ideas that have relevance within and across subject areas. They reach beyond national and cultural boundaries. Concepts help to integrate learning, add coherence to the curriculum, deepen disciplinary understanding, build the capacity to engage with complex ideas and allow transfer of learning to new contexts. PYP and MYP students encounter defined sets of key concepts, and students in the DP and CP further develop their conceptual understanding.

## Connected

IB curriculum frameworks value concurrency of learning. Students encounter many subjects simultaneously throughout their programmes of study; they learn to draw connections and pursue rich understandings about the interrelationship of knowledge and experience across many fields. Course aims and programme requirements offer authentic opportunities to learn about the world in ways that reach beyond the scope of individual subjects.

In the PYP, students learn about and use knowledge, concepts and skills from a variety of subjects to explore six transdisciplinary themes of global significance. In the MYP, students study a range of subjects and often bring together two or more established areas of expertise to build new interdisciplinary understanding. In the Diploma Programme, students encounter a range of subjects, and through the creativity, activity, service (CAS) component of the DP core may continue their own explorations of physical activity and the creative process. Interdisciplinary DP courses and requirements offer students ways to explore new issues and understanding that reach across subjects, and the theory of knowledge (TOK) course helps students connect their learning across the curriculum. In the CP, the components of the core act as a link between the DP subjects and the career-related studies to assist students understanding across the curriculum.

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In IB programmes, assessment forms an integral aspect of teaching and learning. To understand what students have learned and to monitor their progress, teachers use a range of assessment strategies that provide meaningful feedback. IB assessment supports good classroom practice by encouraging authentic performances of understanding that call for critical and creative thinking. Final assessments for older students in the IB continuum are internationally benchmarked. Assessment in the PYP stresses the importance of both student and teacher self-assessment and reflection with a primary objective of providing feedback on the learning process. A range of strategies for assessing student work take into account the diverse, complicated and sophisticated ways that individual students employ to understand their learning experiences. Assessment in the MYP features a robust design that includes rigorous, criterion-related internal assessment (course work) for all subject groups, as well as an optional range of externally marked or moderated onscreen examinations and portfolios of student work. Assessment in the DP aims to balance valid measurement with reliable results, providing an internationally recognized university entrance qualification whose results are based on both coursework and external examinations. Assessment in the CP incorporates the validity and reliability of DP subject assessment together with summative and formative assessment in the CP core.

# Conclusion

An IB education is unique because of its rigorous academic and personal standards. IB programmes challenge students to excel not only in their studies but also in their personal growth. The IB aims to inspire a lifelong quest for learning hallmarked by enthusiasm and empathy. To that end, the IB gathers a worldwide community of supporters who celebrate our common humanity and who share a belief that education can help to build a better world.

The IB connects this higher purpose with the practical details of teaching and learning. A global community of IB World Schools put these principles into practice, developing standards for high-quality education to which they hold themselves mutually accountable. An IB education represents a testament to the power of this collaboration.

Education is an act of hope in the face of an always-uncertain future. An IB education calls forth the very best in students and educators alike. The IB believes that together we can help to prepare students for living and working in a complex, highly interconnected world.



## Additional reading

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