

Philosophy and principles of the Diploma Programme

Introduction

The Diploma Programme provides a challenging, internationally focused, broad and balanced educational experience for students aged 16 to 19. Students are required to study six subjects and a curriculum core concurrently over two years. The programme is designed to equip students with the basic academic skills needed for university study, further education and their chosen profession as well as developing the values and life skills needed to live a fulfilled and purposeful life.

The driving force behind the Diploma Programme is a philosophy about the nature of education, which is expressed in the IB's mission statement, in the IB learner profile and in the fundamental principles on which the curriculum is based and which continue to inspire its development.

The 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.

The learner profile is the embodiment of the IB mission statement in 10 attributes and aims to define the type of learner the IB aspires to develop in all three of its programmes. It is intended to provide a focus for reflection on what is most important in IB World Schools and the IB teaching profession, which is why it is located at the heart of the programme (see figure 1: The Diploma Programme model).

The 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.

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.

Breadth and balance

A distinguishing characteristic of the Diploma Programme is a concern with the whole educational experience of each student. The curriculum framework (see figure 1), and the supporting structures and principles, are designed to ensure that each student is necessarily exposed to a broad and balanced curriculum.

The learner profile and the core are positioned at the centre of the programme, reflecting the priority given to affective as well as cognitive dispositions, and a concern with developing competent and active citizens as well as subject specialists. The core requirements of theory of knowledge (TOK), the extended essay and creativity, action, service (CAS) broaden the educational experience and challenge students to apply their knowledge and understanding in real-life contexts.

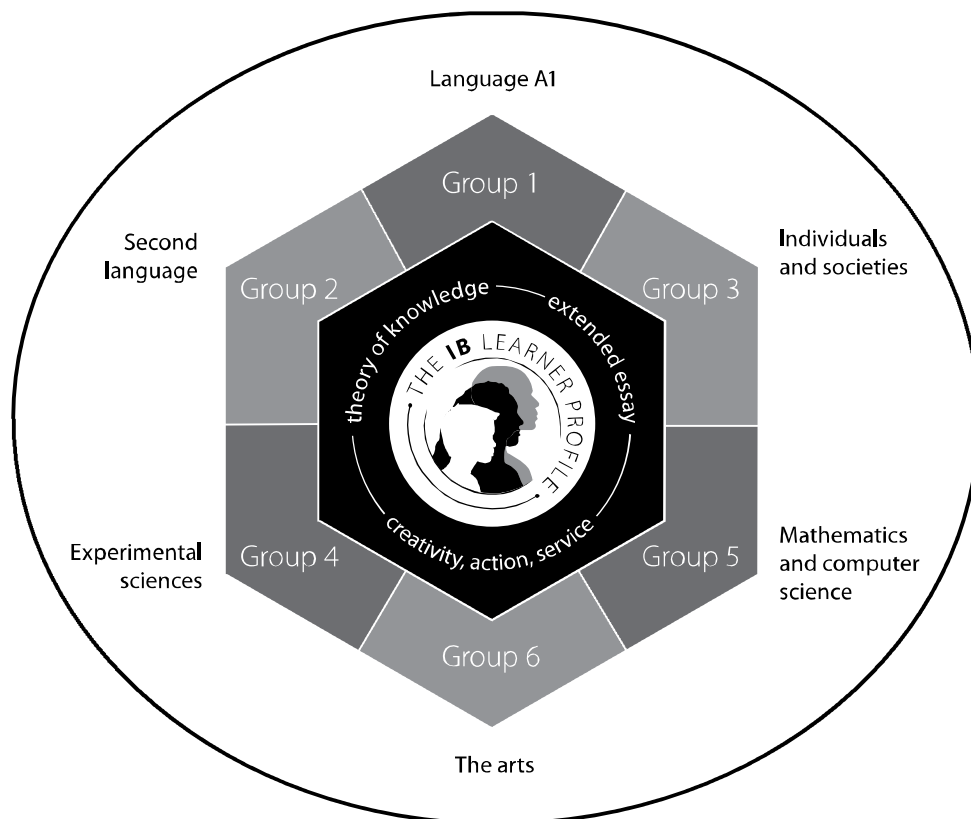


Figure 1
The Diploma Programme model

Students study six subjects concurrently. These include two languages, one subject from individuals and societies (group 3), one experimental science (group 4), one mathematics subject (group 5), and one subject from the arts (group 6) or another subject from groups 1 to 5. (See the *Handbook of procedures for the Diploma Programme* for a full description for this and other specific requirements.) There is also currently one transdisciplinary subject, environmental systems and societies, available to students. This option allows students to satisfy the requirements for both groups 3 and 4 by studying one subject, thus allowing them to select another subject from any group (including another group 3 or 4 subject) to make up a total of six.

It is essential that a pre-university education equips students with the depth of discipline-specific knowledge and skills that they will need to follow their chosen university course and for use later in their professional lives. Specialization is encouraged in the Diploma Programme by expecting students to study three (with the possibility of studying four) subjects at a higher level (HL). This is balanced with a requirement for breadth by expecting students to study three more subjects at standard level (SL) (or two when four HL subjects are completed).

Disciplinary and interdisciplinary understanding

The Diploma Programme is a discipline-based course of study. Each academic discipline provides its own methodological framework that students learn to understand and use. This understanding is essential in order to provide a deep appreciation of the nature of an academic discipline as well as a solid foundation for future university-level work.

Students are expected to make connections between different academic disciplines and not to study subjects in isolation from each other. Teachers and schools have a responsibility to help students make meaningful connections between different disciplines through providing instruction, teaching schedules (often also referred to as timetables) and learning environments that support this process. Concurrency of learning is expected in the Diploma Programme as it provides one important means of supporting interdisciplinary learning.

Concurrency means teaching the curriculum in a schedule that consistently exposes the student to all of their subjects and the core, over the two years of the programme. This allows students and teachers to make links between experiences in the core and the academic subjects that are being studied, and it is based on the belief that the total educational experience is more than the sum of its parts.

The TOK experience provides a forum for discussion and instruction that supports the development of interdisciplinary understanding. It is essential that the TOK course relates directly to students' experiences in the academic disciplines and that the academic disciplines, at appropriate times, refer to TOK issues.

Education for intercultural understanding

International-mindedness is an attitude of openness to, and curiosity about, the world and different cultures. It is concerned with developing a deep understanding of the complexity, diversity and motives of human actions and interactions. In the modern information age, geographical frontiers present less of an obstacle than in the 1960s (when the IB Diploma Programme was first developed) and the impacts of globalization can be seen in every area of life. Intercultural understanding and cooperation have never been more important and lie at the very heart of the IB's mission statement and the IB learner profile.

In the Diploma Programme, the subject aims, objectives, content and assessment criteria are written in order to develop international-mindedness while, at the same time, ensuring that teachers have enough choice to make the course locally relevant and grounded.

Language learning, and learning about different cultures through language, plays a pivotal role in the programme. In group 1, while studying their best language, students are exposed to a wide range of literature in translation that requires cross-cultural comparison. The learning of a language in group 2 emphasizes the development of intercultural communicative competence, which focuses on developing the skills that enable learners to mediate between people from different societies and cultures (Byram 1997).

All group 3 subjects focus on understanding human nature, decisions and events in a global as well as local context and emphasize critical thinking, the development of multiple perspectives and constructive comparisons. Group 4 recognizes science and technology as vital international endeavours based on open critical inquiry that transcends politics, religion and nationality. Group 5 stresses the universal language of mathematics and its origins in the world's great civilizations. Group 6 encourages an active exploration of arts within the students' own and other cultural contexts with respect for, and understanding of, cultural and aesthetic differences that promote critical thinking and problem solving. The core components of TOK, the extended essay and CAS all encourage reflection on multicultural perspectives and experiential learning beyond the traditional classroom.

Focusing exclusively on the taught curriculum, however, is insufficient. Standard A2 in the IB publication *Programme standards and practices* (September 2005) states: “The school promotes international-mindedness on the part of the adults and the students in the school community. There is a list of practices that IB World Schools must foster, most of which go beyond the formal, taught curriculum to consider essential aspects of the school environment and its supporting structures and policies.

The whole school community needs to model the values and behaviours associated with education for intercultural understanding. International-mindedness can be achieved in rich national as well as international settings provided the school environment, broadly considered, is supportive. International-mindedness starts with the attitude an individual has towards themselves and others in their immediate environment. Students need to learn to understand themselves, what it means to be human, and to make sense of their place in an increasingly interdependent, globalized world. International-mindedness, therefore, starts with self-awareness and encompasses the individual and the local/national and cultural setting of the school as well as exploring wider global perspectives.

Education for intercultural understanding requires students to develop knowledge of different cultural perspectives but also, and critically, it requires reflection on **why** different perspectives exist. It is important that this consideration stems from a student’s understanding and appreciation of their own culture and nationality so that international understanding and cooperation supplement local and national allegiances. Understanding is not the same as acceptance of all practices. While the IB’s mission statement stresses that “other people, with their differences, can also be right”, the learner profile also emphasizes the importance of reflective, caring and principled action.

A holistic educational experience

Alec Peterson, the first director general of the IB, described the aims of the Diploma Programme as going beyond the acquisition of knowledge and skills to include the education of the “whole person. This was in order “to develop to their fullest potential the powers of each individual to understand, to modify and to enjoy his or her environment, both inner and outer, in its physical, social, moral, aesthetic and spiritual aspects” (Peterson 2003: 33).

While helping students acquire international perspectives and understanding is essential, it is not sufficient. Students also need to develop the “will to act” and the skills and values necessary to make a positive contribution to society. Responsible citizenship is based upon compassionate and well-informed citizens who become proactively involved in their communities. It is also important to encourage young people to enjoy life to the full, and educating the whole person includes exposure to artistic, recreational and sporting activities that can enrich experience. A complete education of the whole person must also encourage the enjoyment of leisure (Peterson 2003: 58).

The CAS programme plays a central role in providing a holistic educational experience and needs to be grounded in a supportive learning environment.

Learning how to learn

From its origins in the 1960s, the IB Diploma Programme stressed the importance of students developing independent learning strategies and skills that were transferable to new contexts – in short, the need to “learn how to learn” (Peterson 2003: 41). In the modern information age, as the amount of information and knowledge increases exponentially, it is the process of learning, applying and evaluating knowledge that matters more than ever before, not just the acquisition of knowledge.

Learning how to learn is not taught as a separate course in the Diploma Programme; it needs to be infused naturally into the curriculum as part of the teaching and learning process that supports the development of learner profile attributes. A number of aims and objectives identified in the subject groups, supported by the TOK course, require students to reflect on and to evaluate the knowledge claims they encounter and the methodologies they are learning. This “metacognitive” approach to learning helps students develop the higher-order thinking strategies needed to become lifelong independent learners.

Each academic discipline presents students with different challenges and it cannot be assumed that understanding gained in one discipline or context will be easily transferred to another. The structure of the Diploma Programme, with the expectation of concurrency of learning and the TOK experience, is designed to help students (with the support of teachers) make meaningful connections between the experiences of the core and the different academic disciplines. In the process it is expected that students will develop a better appreciation of themselves as learners and the nature of human knowledge.

The extended essay requires students to demonstrate an ability to learn independently and is intended to promote high-level research and writing skills, intellectual discovery and creativity. Students select a research question, normally relating to one of the six subjects they are studying, and complete a focused essay. They have to identify an appropriate methodology, conduct their own research and arrive at their own conclusions.

Access

The IB believes that the Diploma Programme provides an excellent educational framework for students of a wide range of abilities and backgrounds and should be made available as widely as possible. The IB has identified as a priority the need to increase access and enable more students to benefit from experiencing its programmes.

In 2006, in its report *From Growth to Access: Developing an IBO access strategy* (available on the IB website: <http://www.ibo.org>), the IB's governing body defined access as “enabling more students to experience and benefit from an IB education regardless of personal circumstances”.

Access includes a number of concepts:

- encouraging and enabling more schools that are located in economically underserved environments to participate in the Diploma Programme
- encouraging more students to enroll in the full Diploma Programme rather than just to work towards individual subject certificates
- broadening the subject choices and options that students can select in schools as part of their Diploma Programme and ensuring that students can study appropriate courses for their needs
- assisting students with various language backgrounds to access the Diploma Programme
- providing opportunities for students with special educational needs to access the Diploma Programme.

The IB is constantly looking at ways to improve access and to help schools reduce barriers that impede student participation in the Diploma Programme. The ways in which schools can support access are considered in detail in “Building an accessible programme”.

Creative teacher professionalism

Teachers have the critical role of interpreting, developing and delivering the curriculum. Teachers have to create their own programme of study, ensuring that the curriculum experienced by students is aligned with the prescribed subject aims, objectives and content, and is adapted to the local context. Effective delivery of the curriculum requires teachers to be reflective practitioners who are critically self-aware of their own teaching and who model the thinking and approaches they expect of their students. Creative teacher professionalism refers to the central responsibility that teachers have in the design and delivery of the programme, which needs to be supported by ongoing professional development.

In creating programmes of study, a starting point is provided by subject guides and other teacher support material produced by the IB. Beyond these, teachers are expected to consider and use a wide range of resources as well as develop their own. Teachers are uniquely placed to do this, as they know their students and the local context. Some course companions, resource materials designed to support learning in specific subjects, are approved by the IB but teaching to a textbook is inconsistent with the philosophy of the programme.

Another aspect of creative teacher professionalism is the responsibility that teachers have to support the IB in curriculum development and assessment. The IB believes that the partnership between the organization, teachers and school administrators is fundamental to the continued success of its programmes. All subjects and core components in the Diploma Programme are regularly reviewed and developed with the help of experienced teachers, and most examiners are also experienced teachers in IB World Schools. One essential part of the curriculum evaluation and review process involves teachers responding to questionnaires so that, on one level, all teachers can be involved in curriculum review and development. Experienced teachers are encouraged to become involved in IB work beyond their school, through activities including examining, workshop leadership, curriculum development committee membership and participation in regional association work.