

If Your Employees Won't Go To Hardship Countries Because Of Their Children's Education, Then Online IB Education Options May Be The Answer

How Is Education Changing – What Does The Future Hold?

It's not easy to predict the way that schools and colleges will operate in the future but what is sure is that change is coming. Looking back 100 years, classrooms were essentially the same then as they are now – the teacher stands at the front and shares knowledge that is prescribed by the school or the examination board. The students accept what they are told, they master the basics, recall the facts and give the answers that are expected in the way they have been drilled. Schools still mostly operate from 8.30am to 3.30pm for about 38 weeks a year, and no-one can really explain why there is still a six or eight week summer holiday when finding childcare is expensive for working families and when there is no need for child labour to help to bring in the harvest!

Of course that is the extreme picture. Schools as facilities today would be unrecognisable to the likes of Thomas Gradgrind, the Headmaster in 'Hard Times' by Charles Dickens. In the UK, thanks to the Building Schools for the Future initiative, some school buildings resemble five star hotels or up-market corporate offices with light, airy open spaces, clean bright furniture and modern design. Rooms are connected with interactive whiteboards, Wi-Fi and laptops, and iPads seem to be everywhere.

There is a realisation that the format of education needs to be modernised too. The increasing demands of the 21st century with exponential technological innovation and rapid globalisation present us with a future that is hard to imagine. In the YouTube video on the progression of information technology researched by Karl Fisch called 'Did You Know?' (www.youtube.com/watch?v=YmwwrGV_aiE) the thesis is

proposed that 'we are currently preparing students for jobs that don't yet exist, using technologies that haven't yet been invented, in order to solve problems that we don't even know are problems yet.' If we look at the speed of the introduction accessibility and availability of mobile phones, the internet, personal computers, devices and social media, is there any doubt about the rate of advancement of technology?

So what matters? To be literate and numerate will always be the first priority closely followed by being computer literate and to be able to use technology in an agile and creative way. Students will need to be better critical thinkers, out of the box problem solvers, able to research individually, asking the right questions and verifying the evidence and they will need to collaborate locally, internationally and interculturally. They will need to be able to explain, reflect on and rationalise their learning and to be creative, and of course, it will be an advantage if they are proficient in more than one language! How do you implement a curriculum and measure that kind of learning?

The International Baccalaureate (IB) founded in 1968 provides one way forward in providing educational programmes that recognise individuality, contemporary issues and global cooperation. That is exemplified in their 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 organisation works with schools, governments and international organisations 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.

Around the world the number of IB schools is increasing with over 3,965 schools in 147 countries that are developing and offering four challenging programmes to over 1,240,000 students aged from 3 to 19 years. Universities around the world understand that IB students are strong independent learners and they are actively encouraging their applications.

During the last few years the IB has taken a step forward in offering some of the IB Diploma courses taken by 16 to 18 years olds as online options. With universities opening up so much of their course content to learners there is now an emerging trend for online participation in education. Universities have things called MOOCs - 'massive open online courses'. MOOCs provide interactive user forums that help build a community for students, professors, and teaching assistants, and one of the most recent examples has been that developed by Google with Open edX. Imagine being able to study a course for free that is being offered by Stanford, MIT or Harvard University or at any of the UK or worldwide universities now sharing their courses. The phenomenon has been described as "a digital tsunami", threatening to sweep aside conventional university education.

The IB is now working with seven pilot schools around the world and Dwight School London is currently the only one in the UK accredited as an Open World School. Students in the Sixth Form there have the option of selecting one IB Diploma course which they can study online. They work in virtual, global classrooms with their classmates and teacher spread out across the world. The advantages

for motivated students are many – they are able to take on a subject not normally offered in their own school; they can work largely at their own pace joining discussions and blogs with students who have many different perspectives and experiences, and they can use the technology that they are very familiar with. The IB is opening up this opportunity to all students from around the world. Already many schools have interactive websites with student portals where work is set, submitted, discussed and marked and this is a style and approach that will surely continue to expand and grow.

It is interesting to look at the work of Sugata Mitra, Professor of Educational Technology at the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences at Newcastle University, England. He is best known for his 'Hole in the Wall' experiments that demonstrated that groups of young people, irrespective of who or where they are, could learn to use computers and the Internet on their own with

public computers in open spaces, such as roads and playgrounds, even without knowing English. He suggests that the days are gone where the teacher is the fount of all knowledge and he proposes that schools, as we know them, are heading for redundancy, except that is, for being places to teach young people how to socialise, to persevere, to care

and behave, and most importantly to question and learn.

Change may come slowly but as the older generation of teachers are replaced by those for whom technology, innovation and devices are the norm, it is clear that schools, classrooms and learning will be very different to what we recognise now.



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In 2008 David led the development and foundation of The Holmewood School London, a school that specialises in supporting international and local children who have complex educational needs.

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