IB learner profile in review

Report and recommendation

(Executive summary)

April 2013
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1. Introduction

The IB learner profile consists of 10 attributes, each accompanied by descriptors that expand on them, that IB learners should strive to cultivate as they participate in IB programmes, programmes that “aim 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 mission statement).

In 2005, a series of working groups and discussions explored how best to understand and articulate the programmes’ common educational values in light of the IB’s mission, leading to the IB learner profile as it currently stands (with only minor revisions from the PYP student profile). The IB learner profile booklet was first published in 2006 and rebranded in 2009. For many IB World Schools, the learner profile has become a trusted statement of core values.

2. Standards for a quality review of the IB learner profile

The following standards were agreed as essential for a quality review to take place.

- The review has a clear rationale.
- The review process is transparent and aligned with the standards and practices for curriculum review in IB programmes.
- Research into the learner profile’s content and its implementation in IB World Schools informs the review.
- The review offers opportunities for a wide range of stakeholders and stakeholder groups to participate.
- The review incorporates multiple cultural and linguistic perspectives.
- The review results in clear recommendations regarding potential revisions of the IB learner profile.
- The review outlines future directions for the development of materials to support the IB learner profile.
- The learner profile review is complete by January 2013.
- A detailed communications plan keeps the IB community informed about the learner profile review.
- The current review creates processes and structures that inform future reviews.

3. The review process

Planning for the review began in 2011. The review began in March 2012 and culminated with a working group of IB educators and expert consultants meeting in December 2012. Data for the review were gathered from literature reviews, field notes, multilingual focus groups, research studies and a community-wide survey.
4. Generalizations that might be drawn from the survey

The IB learner profile global survey was available to all members of the IB community from March to October 2012. Unique respondents to the survey totalled 1,107, representing an estimated 6,000 individuals (mostly teachers) equally distributed across the three IB regions. The following generalizations could be drawn from their responses.

- The IB learner profile should be subject to regular review.
- The IB community is largely satisfied with the learner profile, both its list of 10 attributes and the descriptors that further explain them, although many educators expressed concern about the term "risk-takers".
- Two (related) values that could be missing from the learner profile emerged: resilience and resourcefulness.
- The learner profile is seen as having less impact on adult members of the IB community.
- The learner profile has largely achieved its goals, although its relationship to the development of international-mindedness has been unclear.

5. Key issues

Based on a review of the relevant literature and a review of data from informal, semi-structured reflections, this review examined in detail the following aspects of the learner profile:

- clarity of purpose and language
- alignment with sound theory and effective practice in education
- situation with respect to debate about values in education
- capacity to respect and celebrate cultural and linguistic diversity.

6. Recommendations

Based on these discussions and converging lines of analysis, a revised version of the IB learner profile is proposed. The revision follows from the following recommendations:

a. The learner profile has an iconic status within IB programmes, and major changes could jeopardize its value to many IB stakeholders. The learner profile’s 10 attributes seem largely fit for purpose and do not pose major issues for intercultural understanding. The 10 attributes should not be revised.

b. The learner profile respects the IB’s cultural heritage, and it contains within it the potential to remain in dialogue with other traditions and with changing circumstances. Modestly revising some of the descriptors offers a way to develop the learner profile further.

c. An explicit statement of the learner profile’s relationship to the development of international-mindedness could help IB World Schools make meaningful connections and applications of the learner profile to their mission.

d. While respecting the IB’s intellectual property and copyright, schools should be encouraged to continue exploring the learner profile by questioning, revising, adding and developing age-appropriate and contextually appropriate variations.

e. Because the learner profile lies at the heart of the IB’s student-centred, holistic model of education, it has important connections to all other aspects of IB programmes.

f. Standing at the front of all IB documents, the learner profile provides a common starting point and clear context/frame for programme resources, so its graphic representation should suggest a more dynamic, interrelated and open-ended family of ideas/aspirations/outcomes.
g. Theoretical discussions of culture and meaning are important, as are the concrete applications of the learner profile as it is lived out in IB World Schools and other communities of practice around the world.

7. Further study
This first review of the IB learner profile prompted many meaningful conversations and healthy debate across a wide range of stakeholder perspectives and educational issues. In the course of these discussions, the review identified several directions for further inquiry, including a need for:

- longitudinal studies of the impact of an IB education in the lives of alumni, including their reflection on attributes of the learner profile as foundational values and their effects on personal development and civic participation
- continued respectful dialogue with other cultures, especially the traditions of indigenous peoples and their ways of knowing, as well as the long and honourable educational traditions of Islamic, Hindu and Confucian-influenced societies
- explorations of our common humanity and human capabilities in face of emerging global challenges
- further reflection on how to assess the impact of the learner profile on IB World Schools and IB learners that sensitively accounts for a broad variety of educational contexts, a wide range of human development and multiple interpretations of key attitudes/values/dispositions.

8. Publication plan
A full version of this report will be published on the online curriculum centre (OCC) by August 2013. Approved revisions will be published in a new edition of “What is an IB education?” in September 2013. The revised learner profile will be published on an ongoing basis as programme and communication materials are created or re-issued.

9. Continuing the conversation
The review has prompted many important and meaningful dialogues and debates. As points for further reflection, questions like these can frame conversations in the IB organization, in IB World Schools and in the wider international education community:

- Does this revision of the IB learner profile retreat too far from the current version’s implied vision of the brilliant individual learner, courageously defending his beliefs, on a lifelong quest to acquire knowledge for its own sake? Do the changes represent a valid, more culturally diverse broadening of focus and a better balance between the individual and the collective? Do they go far enough?
- To what extent must the learner profile present a thoroughgoing, universally inoffensive educational philosophy, and to what extent can it represent a position (even one that is negotiable and open to debate)?
- What can external and internal stakeholders reasonably infer from the learner profile about the IB’s epistemology, ethics and political positions?
Appendix 1

Proposed revision of the IB learner profile

This proposed revision of the IB learner profile aims to express important ideas in clear language that is accessible to a range of non-specialist international readers. The descriptors are framed with first-person plural pronouns (“we” and “our”) to highlight the inclusive nature of IB programmes, call attention to the importance of learning communities (students, families, teachers, school leaders and others), and reflect the IB’s social-constructivist philosophy of education. This approach values the active collaboration that is a hallmark of all IB programmes. Taken together, descriptors now include an explicit reference to every PYP attitude.

The text also includes two optional adaptations that schools can use to reflect their values and cultural contexts while respecting the IB’s copyright and intellectual property.

A statement of intent at the end of the document describes the learner profile’s nature and purpose in the context of international education, bracketing the attributes and descriptors with the prologue. These essential statements frame the IB learner profile and provide the lens through which it should be interpreted and implemented in IB World Schools.
IB learner profile (revised, with optional wordings)

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ATTRIBUTE (Optional wording)</th>
<th>NEW DESCRIPTOR (optional words at schools’ discretion)</th>
<th>Descriptor from current IB learner profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inquirers</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This descriptor incorporates the PYP attitude “enthusiastic”. It balances independent and cooperative learning in a way that affirms the IB’s educational philosophy.
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. This descriptor emphasizes the development and application of knowledge that demonstrates understanding and leads towards responsible action.

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. This descriptor uses familiar terms to describe the skills, dispositions and motivations necessary to engage with personal and social challenges and to make informed, thoughtful 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. This descriptor adds careful listening as a key dimension of internationally minded communication.

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.

They exercise initiative in applying thinking skills critically and creatively to recognize and approach complex problems, and make reasoned, ethical decisions.

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

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.

This descriptor strengthens the dimension and discussion of human rights, reflecting the heritage and continuing commitment of international educators to explore our common humanity.

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.

This descriptor highlights critical appreciation (appreciate: "to be fully conscious of; be aware of; detect"; "exercise wise judgment" or "appraise") as an important dimension of being open-minded.

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.

This descriptor uses language that implies “service with” rather than “service to” others.
**Risk-takers**

(Courageous) 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.

This descriptor adds language that incorporates ideas from the PYP attitudes “enthusiasm”, “commitment” and “confidence”. It focuses more on effort (agency and resolve) and problem-solving that look towards the future.

**Balanced** We understand the importance of balancing different aspects of our lives—intellectual, physical, (spiritual) 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.

This descriptor offers school communities an option to include spiritual dimensions of the human experience in its reflection. It moves from a dichotomy of “me” and “you” to highlight relationships between people and with the environments we encounter and construct.

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.

They understand the importance of intellectual, physical and emotional balance to achieve personal well-being for themselves and others.
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.

This descriptor expands reflection beyond individuals and their mental processes toward a more holistic view that encompasses nature and society. It empowers learners to think less about barriers that cannot be overcome (limits) and more about plans for growing stronger and creating better futures for themselves and their communities.

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

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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.

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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.

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Note: A new design for the IB learner profile will be available in the future.