

Students at the Aga Khan Academy in Mombasa are pioneering a new educational model



Time to shine

How official initiatives, far-sighted schools and single-minded pioneers are offering a new generation the chance of an IB education

The average teacher in the 1950s would scarcely recognize the educational landscape of 2011. The internet has transformed students' ability to research, collaborate, work and test. The number of Chinese graduates will soon surpass that of the USA. And didactic models are being challenged and, in many places, supplanted – a process in which the IB has played an ever-growing role.

The IB's agenda has evolved over time, but the idea of expanding opportunity to as many students as possible remains. As Director General Jeffrey Beard puts it, the organization's remit is to "reach out to anyone who doesn't have access to an IB education."

What has become clear is that there is no single way to do this. While many initiatives have been directed by the IB itself, IB World Schools are also pursuing their own paths – through scholarships, collaborations with non-IB schools and outreach schemes. The IB Career-related Certificate (IBCC) will offer a new constituency of students the opportunity to study the IB. A greater focus is being placed on teacher engagement – "You change educational paradigms by getting into teaching colleges and getting involved in teacher training," says Chief Academic Officer Judith Fabian – and high-level discussions with governments.

IB World presents five approaches to expanding opportunity that show the range and scale of the work being done, from a teacher-led initiative giving students in Eastern Europe new perspectives to the pioneering work of schools in Costa Rica.

"One student sells charcoal by the roadside during the holidays"

Mombasa, Kenya

At the Aga Khan Academy in Mombasa, the children of diplomats and CEOs follow the IB continuum side by side with local Kenyan students, some from backgrounds so poor they can't afford to travel to school without financial assistance. The reason for such wide diversity: the full and part scholarships offered by Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) to the country's most able students, educating them to become the leaders of tomorrow, who will use their knowledge and qualifications to improve their communities.

Representatives from AKDN travel the country, visiting local schools and handpicking the most promising students. Every year, 12 are offered a scholarship, while others may be given a different form of financial support. In each Academy class roughly a quarter of students will be on full financial aid, and half on part scholarships.

"One student's dad is the CEO of a publishing house, so they spend every holiday abroad, whereas another student spends the holidays selling charcoal by the side of the road to provide food for his family," says Naheed Bardai, Dean of Students.

Having students from such a wide socio-economic scale can make integration a challenge, but Naheed explains: "We don't shy away from

diversity: we force it on the students.” Residential MYP students share dorms. All students are given the same weekly allowance and the school provides toiletries so they all use the same brands, helping to mitigate economic differences.

It’s not just local young people who benefit from AKDN’s initiatives – it also provides a substantial programme of English and leadership courses (infused with IB sensibilities) for local teachers. “We know we can’t go into a school with limited resources and low-skilled teachers and immediately talk about the IB mission,” explains Dean of

Studies Nick Alchin. “We have to be practical, so we might engage them by discussing research skills, for example. It still helps bring the IB to a wider audience.”

The Mombasa Academy was the first launched by AKDN, which is furthering His Highness the Aga Khan’s vision of a pluralistic international education to create the leaders of tomorrow. The AKDN already runs 300 schools and a university in Pakistan, and has since opened three further Academies. It

has plans for more across Africa and the Middle East, all offering the IB programmes.

Mercy Kituku has seen the benefits first hand. Having been awarded a full scholarship to complete the IB Diploma Programme in Mombasa, she is now studying biomedical sciences at the UK’s Reading University. “Without the Academy, I would not be where I am today,” she says. “After graduating, I want to work in medicine in Kenya and make a difference to my community.”

“Some of our students don’t even live in proper houses”

Bhopal, India

Mansoor Durrani, Vice President and Head of Project Finance at the National Commercial Bank in Saudi Arabia hasn’t had a day off ill in seven years. Like most bankers, he is used to working long hours and making tough decisions. But unlike his colleagues, he is not working for personal gain, but for a small school in his home city of Bhopal.

Motivated by a desire to contribute to the community he grew up in, Mansoor founded Eastern Public School (EPS) in 2003. Its philosophy combines the IB – which Mansoor says he “fell in love with” while researching pedagogy – with the core concepts of Islam. “I believe education is the only way to bridge the increasing gap between east and west,” he says.



Eastern Public School (above and below) and the Aga Khan Academy (left), offer genuine opportunities



“I am not an educationalist and I’m not from an affluent background, but I decided to put all my savings into this project.”

EPS began with only one student and a single teacher, but it has since grown organically, with a grade level added every year. It now has 300 students, is authorized to provide the PYP and soon hopes to be able to offer students the entire IB continuum. Students pay US\$10 a month to attend, making EPS one of the most generous fee-paying schools in Asia, if not the world. To fund the school, Mansoor moved to Saudi Arabia to earn a larger salary, 90 per cent of which he donates to EPS every month, along with his entire annual bonus. His is an inspirational example of how carefully focused altruism can further the IB’s aims in challenging circumstances.

EPS is very much a local school – all students and teachers come from the Bhopal community. None of the 40 teachers had any previous IB experience, so they frequently visit more established IB World Schools in the area to observe best practice. “Working here is not just a job, it’s a mission,” says EPS Principal Reshma Owais. “The message of the IB is spreading like wildfire through our town.”

Without Mansoor’s dedication and financial aid, it is unlikely that many EPS students would be able to receive an education. “They would not have dreamed of attending an IB World School,” he says.

“Some of our students don’t even live in proper houses and have never had access to technology,” adds Reshma. “When I see children excelling that could never afford such a high-class education without financial help, it’s the ultimate job satisfaction.”

It’s this satisfaction that keeps Mansoor working seven days a week, 365 days a year for EPS (any time he has off he spends at the school, helping with finances and administration). “Whatever I have had, I have given away,” he says. “But it’s worth it. I call myself one of the poorest rich bankers in the world.”

“Students are taking the initiative after a natural disaster”

Massachusetts, USA

With 79 per cent of its students officially living below the poverty line and almost a quarter classed as having special educational needs, Van Sickle Middle School in Springfield faces many challenges. But every one of its pupils is an IB student. The school partnered with IB Americas using a grant from the US Department of Education to ensure such inclusivity through a programme of professional development, led by on-site training of the 225-strong faculty.

A select group of teachers was chosen to train as facilitators, learning to help colleagues by running professional learning groups (PLGs). Teachers discussed best practice and ideas and critiqued each other’s methods. “At first there was some resistance as the idea of collaboration was so foreign,” says Principal Cheryl DeSpirt. “But collaboration has changed the whole culture of education in the school, and other schools in the district are adopting PLGs as a model.”

The funding allowed Lou Marchesano to work with the school as an IB Coach. He has noticed a transformation: “The collaborative environment has really blossomed. Classrooms have become active and students are very much engaged.”

MYP Coordinator Sharon Ford agrees: “Students have started doing things like taking the initiative to organize a call to action after a natural disaster, which never would have happened before.”

“The IB is the cure for the educational bulimia we have here”

Costa Rica

It may be a small Central American nation most famous for its coffee and its wildlife, but Costa Rica has always thought big. The country is known for its progressive democracy and international outlook. And now it aims to punch above its weight in education, too, bringing public and private sectors together in a unique initiative.

ASOBITICO (Costa Rica’s association of IB World Schools) draws funding from the government and donations from big businesses, including Deloitte and Nissan, to help the country’s best students complete the IB Diploma Programme. “We’ve vowed to do everything that’s needed to bring the IB to 20 public schools in Costa Rica,” says Project Director Daniel Samper.

The target is for 1,000 public school students to graduate each year by 2014. “Businesses realize they will really benefit,” explains Daniel. “If you want highly capable people working for you, IB



Van Sickle Middle School (above) is using professional development to alter outcomes



They are thousands of miles apart, but Galati (top) and Costa Rica share core IB values

graduates are the answer.” However, he points out there is no expectation for any student to later work for a donating company.

The IB couldn’t be more different to Costa Rica’s traditional rote learning system, which Daniel likens to memorising and then regurgitating reams of facts. “We believe the IB is the cure for the educational bulimia here,” he says.

In addition to attracting the cash injection needed to put students from rural or deprived backgrounds through the Diploma Programme, ASOBITICO also provides training for teachers. “The teachers are very capable,” says Daniel. “But they have never been given the opportunity to work in a different education system.” The group funds official training sessions and sets up mentoring partnerships with established IB World Schools.

Glynn Richards, Head of Access Projects, says the IB is becoming ever more popular in Latin America. In Ecuador, for example, the government is making a significant investment in infrastructure improvements and teacher training, with a view to introducing the IB to a greater number of schools, led by the vision of former Minister for Education Raul Vallejo, an IB Diploma Programme graduate.

“The IB can bring added value to our teaching”

Poland and Romania

In a crowded Romanian classroom, a study group is pondering how it can best embody the IB learner profile, guided by teachers from the Mark Twain International School (MTIS). But this isn’t a coming-together of IB students: the learners here are teachers and school leaders from local state schools, who have come to find out how the IB approach could supplement their traditional skills.

The official project, sponsored by the ArcelorMittal Foundation, aims to support state schools to maximize the effectiveness of teaching their national curricula through the range of student-centred approaches to learning found in the IB. The expectation is that, with support, some will go on to become IB World Schools. The project is also currently taking place in Poland.

Over a year, teachers from state schools take part in face-to-face and online workshops, led by fully trained members of staff from local IB World Schools. In total, MTIS staff worked with 50 teachers from three Galati schools. “The Galati teachers discovered how the Romanian system and the IB had common elements and how the IB can bring added value to their teaching,” says Anca Macovei Vlăscianu, MTIS Head of School.

Sessions covered 12 essentials of international education, including student-centred learning and international-mindedness. According to Mirela Rapotan, a teacher at one of the state schools: “We’re interested in sustaining a culture of thinkers and risk-takers. And we are trying to get our students used to the concept of the global citizen.”