

A 21st Century Education

Learning for life in our times



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DID YOU KNOW the top ten jobs today didn't exist ten years ago? Fast forward another ten years and the world will be a very different place again. That means that many skills learnt in schools today may be obsolete by the time children graduate. For educators, this poses a difficult problem: How do you prepare children for a world that doesn't exist yet?

Change is inevitable. In the natural world, it is not the biggest or strongest species that survive - dinosaurs died out a long time ago. It's those that adapt to changing environments that do. Think of the chameleon for example.

The same can be said about working in the adult world. One-job careers are now almost non-existent. In fact, today's graduates will have between five to 15 jobs in their lifetime. Adaptability, therefore, is key. Those who dislike change, or are unable or unwilling to adapt, will simply lose pace and may be left behind.

Moreover, internationalism is already here; the majority of countries the world over are already greatly interdependent. The clothes we wear, the foods we eat, the technology we use - most of it comes from another country. Travel is also easier and cheaper than ever before. Put the two together and it explains why so many

of us now work in different countries to the one we were born in. International understanding and having respect for other cultures is, therefore, vital. But it needs teaching. We are not born this way.

Taking all this into account, how do parents choose the right school for their child? Well the answer is quite simple. It is finding a school that parents believe will best prepare their child for careers that will likely span many jobs, countries and skill sets.

During their time in school, children need to acquire basic skills in reading, writing and math - that will never change - but what is becoming increasingly important is that children have the right blend of personal skills and attitude. After all, children learn far more than just knowledge during their time at school. The best teachers teach 'ways of being' as a person, as a learner, as a thinker; that will enable them to be successful.

Eight

I was once told that the difference between working in a factory and being the manager of the factory is the difference in personal skills and attitude. There is possibly a lot of truth to that. If we think about our own jobs, we all need a certain level of knowledge and skill to do our job

well, but someone else could easily learn that knowledge and skill. The people who are most successful in their field are those who work well with others, are the most determined, the best at coping with change, the best communicators, etc.

So do children really need to know which year the Battle of Hastings occurred, or is it more important that children have the skills and attitude to be able to find out for themselves? This way of thinking reminds me of that famous proverb: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for one day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime."

The same philosophy applies to learning. If you tell a child a fact, they might remember it. If you teach a child how to find out facts for themselves, they can find the answer to any question they want. The same goes for learning *skills*. If children learn to give up when they find something difficult, they are likely to give up every time they find something tricky. Whereas, if children learn what it means to be resilient, and to work hard until they overcome difficulties, they learn that they can achieve almost anything - if they try hard enough.

It is essential then that educators also adapt. What and how we teach has to change as well; learning in schools has to keep pace and stay relevant.

We have chosen to deliver the International Primary Curriculum (IPC), which is specifically designed for children growing up in the 21st century. As well as teaching with an international perspective, it places a high degree of focus on developing eight 'desirable' attributes in children: adaptability, cooperation, good communication, enquiry, resilience, thoughtfulness, morality and respect.

All eight are equally important. Next time you go for an interview, you are likely to be competing against people with very similar levels of knowledge, skills and experience. What sets us apart - and what employers really want to know - is how developed are we in these eight areas?

If educators can help children to develop these eight attributes, while also instilling a love of learning, children will become lifelong learners and have the best chance of success. ■

