

A Reflection from the Humanities Room: the MYP, Humanities and Change

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As we reflect on the summer term of 2020 we no doubt look back at a term of challenges, innovation, some creative teaching strategies (some successful, some less so) and plenty of new ideas to take forward into the future. These extraordinary circumstances have put pedagogy under the spotlight; how viable and relevant are exam driven GCSE's in the 21st century and are there more appropriate alternatives better suited for the modern world?

This question was raised in a recent and perceptive Tes article by Emily Hardewick (<https://www.tes.com/news/gcse-exams-assessment-ib-myp-uk-future-better>) proposing the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (MYP) as that viable alternative to GCSEs.

Key to the MYP are the concepts, the approaches to learning and the statement of inquiry. At first glance, as Hardewick states, these can appear confusing but should not be off putting. This is the glue of the curriculum, linking and connecting units and content. Concepts provide real life relevance to the subject matter. The statement of enquiry provides focus. Approaches to learning establish learning techniques.

The result is blended learning that the curriculum takes a stage further via a specific interdisciplinary unit delivered to all year groups. Teachers collaborate to create a course that brings together a variety of subjects to deliver a single outcome that is greater than the sum of its parts. This provides significant enrichment and emphasises the "real world" nature of the IB.

This week the question of assessment has dominated the headlines as schools attempt to grade examinations that have not taken place. At Wotton House our overall assessment was well under way by the Covid lockdown and finalising projects could take place off site. Without the stress of sitting exams, or not, our students were free to complete their work at their own pace and achieve meaningful results.

I relate to this. Many years ago in my A level days I flourished in ancient history but lacked examination technique leading to rather disappointing grades. The resulting piece of paper did not, in my view, reflect my enthusiasm and ability in the subject. Nor did it open the door to university.

Fast forward many years and I find myself teaching humanities at Wotton House International School in Gloucester, following a curriculum that is designed to make the subject relevant, topical, connected and practical. Most importantly, it enables students to demonstrate ability and understanding not under stressful examination conditions, but through processes including research, exploration, debate, projects, creativity and practical application - skills that are totally relevant to adult life. In my, quite long, career, rarely have I been asked to sit an exam, but I have consistently needed to apply what are clearly MYP skills in walks of life as diverse as law, archaeology, sport and of course, teaching.

Humanities lends itself perfectly to blended learning, by definition, this is what it is. The MYP approach becomes additionally fascinating when we integrate, for example, languages and maths or drama and science.

The challenges faced by schools this summer have emphasised the relevance of the MYP in the modern world and the shortfalls of examination based assessment. Emily Hardewick is quite right to commend the MYP and, as one of just a handful of International Baccalaureate schools in the United Kingdom, we are enjoying preparing a challenging, stimulating, exciting and relevant material for the new academic year.