

Educational and Leadership Philosophy

Andrew Cross

Over the course of my career in education many individuals, through their words, and by their example, have helped to shape my philosophy of education and management. Among the most instrumental of these have been my students from around the world who continually remind me, with their enthusiasm for learning and their idealism, why I became an educator. I can think of no other profession with greater potential—when undertaken with care and compassion, patience and self-awareness—to influence the human and natural environment our children will inhabit in their adult years. At their best, international schools nurture powerful life-long habits of mind and action in children. We often speak of ‘21st century skills’ as a kind of mantra in contemporary education. There is no doubt that the type of learning and skill development implied by this phrase is absolutely essential to our children’s career prospects as we move deeper into this new century. However, I believe that we should give equal emphasis in our schools to ‘21st century *values*’: international-mindedness, sustainable living, and digital ethics, to name a few of these. Wonderful work is being done in international schools in all of these areas, but more energy and resources can be devoted to instilling these values in every child entrusted to our care.

Children who attend international schools are among a tiny, and blessed, minority world-wide. They are empowered to reach their full human potential in ways that millions—even billions - of their peers cannot begin to imagine. The children who walk through our doors every morning must be free to express their creativity and challenge conventional wisdom, but they must also be led to understand that freedom and responsibility are two sides of the same coin. The International Baccalaureate Learner Profile expresses it best: *“we take responsibility for our actions and their consequences.”*

I believe strongly in the role of educational technology as a tool for understanding skill development, and I have seen more than once its transformative role in unlocking new knowledge in children. To take one example, for students with specific learning challenges, particular software tools can make the difference between years of soul-destroying the ability to experience the greatest motivator of all: success. The best use of technology encourages students to make connections with what is happening outside their classroom walls so that the virtual universe does not become their only meaningful living space. As the teacher and author Jordan Shapiro writes,

To avoid students becoming completely absorbed in technology, teachers need to demonstrate to students how magical and beautiful the real world is. Then they wouldn’t want to spend all of their time on a computer. (IB World, Sept. 2015, p. 15.)

In closing, I will always be an advocate for the potential of international education to give children a window into a wider world, and perhaps even to make the world a slightly kinder and gentler place.