



Responding to Challenges of Global Competition

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From a few years ago, when almost nobody had heard of the International Baccalaureate Program, we are now in a state where almost every other day, an IB school is being announced. We have seen in the past a similar craze for 'Montessori' education, followed by the use of the word 'Convent' by all and sundry, with many being completely innocent of whether they were in fact a convent or not. It just sounded right and attracted students, who would then be given uniforms and maybe a bit of smattering of spoken and written English. The absurdity was so high that you even had schools such as St. Mirn's convent or maybe Lakshmbai Convent and in fact a rather successful Dr Kaushal Convent. The next wave of progress was to use computers for children right from class 1, the earlier the

better. Never mind the pedagogy or even the development of the child's sensory motor facilities.

The latest buzz-word, short of the IB or CIS etc., is the use of the word International, Global, World or some term with similar meaning. Next to be followed would probably be cosmic, holistic, celestial, universal, Galactic, or some such attractive out of the world expression.

The good part in all this is that it reflects the drive towards becoming better than the immediate neighbour and striving towards higher challenges and standards.

Someday, when the Government actually opens its eyes from its deep slumber we will truly have world schools in which children of all nationalities will study together and India will be the preferred Education destination, because of its enormously rich heritage. After all sitting over tens of thousands of years of civilization is a capital asset that can now be unlocked.

Well, there is no doubt in my mind that the IB is probably the best International program around. But alas inspite of the desires of the top visionaries at IB to do so, there is no feasible way in which it can attempt to reach the kind of numbers that are at the bottom of the pyramid and are the real challenge to Indian education. The obvious answer is that many other schools could and would need to acquire a good world class education by following sound strategic plans, by drawing from what the best practices in the past have taught us and





maybe extrapolating a bit into the future to the so-called next practices as elucidated by Professor C. K. Prahalad.

An interesting question that flashed through my mind as I write this column is how many Nobel Laureates would have gone through the IB curriculum, and the answer would be statistically insignificant. In fact the school which has produced the highest number of Nobel prize winners is at Bronx, New York, and has given six Nobel laureates, all in Physics. So also one could look at the key business leaders or outstanding statesmen. So there is enough evidence and hope that one could achieve excellence through alternative ways as well.

One initiative just launched is called the Globalachieve system which draws upon a fair amount of research over long periods, to

evolve assessment methods which are measurable in a more defined and standardised way so that it could be used as a scalable measure of the quality of achievement. A visit to the site www.globalachieve.com would be very informative to those who want to forge ahead. I gather that almost 50 or so schools of fairly acknowledged reputation are already involved in the program. Teachers who are part of the Globalachieve system get to participate in professional development workshops to continuously improve their practice and improve themselves. For example, the forthcoming workshop on implementing developmental assessments is extremely useful to put in place viable and effective alternatives to the traditional examination system which is being sought to be done

away, at least partly. Progress maps, portfolios, projects, performances, products and other forms of assessment, which are Internationally followed, could be adopted after the exposure and training at these intensive workshops. One of the very important aspects of the IB program is the Theory of Knowledge course, which is central to the Diploma program. The importance of this in preparing our children for the world of tomorrow cannot be under-estimated.

We all realize and are in agreement that the next 50 years will see changes in the world at a rate and with an impact that we have never seen before. This is because we now have a better understanding of the world of atoms, right to being able to handle nano-technology, the world of bits to an extent that we can now make

almost all erstwhile inanimate machines endowed with an 'intelligence' that can respond in unimaginable and unforeseen ways to human behaviour to create adaptive devices and gadgets, and a highly connected 'always on' world through Broadband Internet and awaiting the magic of Internet 2 at not too distant a future.

As a source of energy we are about to enter the hydrogen economy and as the basic human activity we would be in complete mastery of bio-technology with a better understanding of the human genome.

What would it take to be a leader, thriver and a spearheader of change in the emerging world. Surely not the same knowledge, attitude, skills and beliefs as of the past, which may have well served both national and International civil servants in a largely colonial order, but a capacity to cope with the knowledge economy of the future with much greater transparency, right to information and greater democratic governance.

An awareness of the different dimensions of learning and internalizing in themselves the capacity to 'learn to know' is what will separate the leaders from the rest of humanity.

We need to adopt the most well accepted ingredients of ever new emerging educational methodologies, and draw the most from, research done , world-wide for better understanding of how effective learning takes place, at all stages of development.

Of course the final years of the Diploma Programme of the International Baccalaureate includes this very explicitly and formally as the 'Theory of Knowledge ' course

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which no other educational program in India either at the school level or at any other level offers. Even the IIT's and IIM's do not provide their students with the understanding of epistemology inducted into everything that student studies.

In the true spirit of the Vedas, encouraging us to be receivers of noble thoughts from all directions, let us open ourselves to them, build upon them to create by adoption or adaptation our very own system to make our learners future proof. We will need to do this by active and interactive participation of practicing educators, enlightened and concerned parents and to create and give to ourselves, rather than let it be thrust upon us by the powers of the State or even of International trade blocks. You are invited to become part of this new freedom movement to liberate education and take it forward.

There can be no doubt whatsoever that the new generation learners from these globally oriented world-class schools would be most valuable in their most productive years, a few decades from now. A great future beckons them.