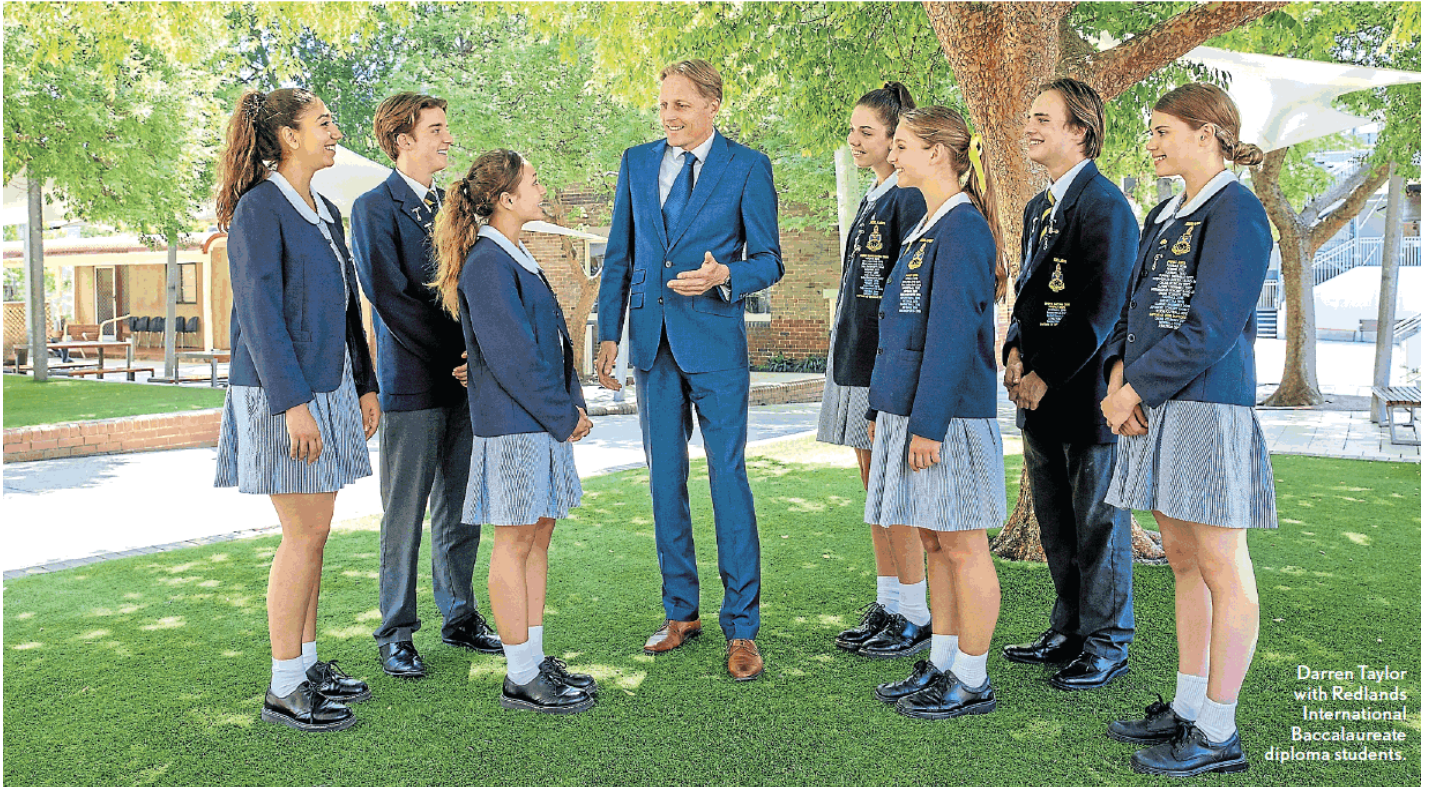


# Teaching students how to think ... in a world that sometimes doesn't



Darren Taylor  
with Redlands  
International  
Baccalaureate  
diploma students.

## OPINION DARREN TAYLOR

*In a decade* when news can be deemed fake, when people's social channels are defined as a type of media and when news is curated by algorithms that reinforce rather than broaden perspective, a challenge for schools is teaching students how to think, as distinct from what to think.

The response from students from an increasing number of schools is to pursue the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (IBDP), which is an alternative to the HSC in NSW and VCE in Victoria.

Founded in Switzerland in 1969, the IBDP is today the year 11 and 12 curriculum for more than 185,000 students worldwide in 158 countries across 3585 schools, 79 of which are in Australia.

The central aim of the IBDP is to develop internationally minded students who, recognising their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better and more peaceful world.

It follows that the IBDP has a specific focus on global engagement, multilingualism and intercultural understanding, which is supported by three specific areas: Theory of Knowledge, Extended Essay and Creativity, Activity and Service.

Theory of Knowledge trains students to think critically, question things they know, and identify if they can trust that knowledge. Students are called upon to be independent and

inquiring learners, and to reflect on their learning – independent and collaborative – in a meaningful way.

The compulsory, self-directed 4000-word Extended Essay research assignment develops students' abilities to pursue independent research and their communication skills. Studies have consistently shown this element provides a highly valuable preparation for university.

The Creativity, Action and Service element is about helping students to enhance their personal growth through experiential learning and through providing the opportunity to develop a sense of social responsibility.

This is all underpinned by a joint focus on international-mindedness and academic rigour, with students required to study six subjects including three at a higher level, at least two languages (including their first language and a second language of acquisition), a humanities-based subject, a science and mathematics.

In summary, the internationally recognised course requires students to engage in multi-disciplinary learning across subject areas, and to be challenged to think critically not only about what they are learning, but the learning process, while engaging in core subjects that will support global engagement in the future.

For students, this means that the IBDP has the potential to be simultaneously broader in its

outlook while more prescriptive in its structure when compared with the HSC or VCE, and will therefore appeal to different students.

So why do students choose IBDP? Redlands has offered year 11 and 12 students the choice of the HSC or IBDP for longer than any other school in NSW and, in recent years, about half of our senior students have undertaken each program, with similar numbers of girls and boys in both.

Feedback from our Redlands IB

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students over 30 years tells us that those who are attracted to the IBDP value three things: the structure of the course, as already canvassed; the fact it is extremely useful in transitioning to university in Australia and overseas; and that it fosters valuable critical thinking skills.

While the HSC and VCE are wonderful pathways to university, the IB provides a streamlined path with direct equivalency for entrance to universities overseas, a factor that is becoming

increasingly important as more students do not consider national borders as barriers to studying, living or working. Again, based on experience, this has proven very useful to some of our Redlands alumni as each year about 10 per cent go on to study at universities such as Oxford, Stanford, Cambridge and Yale.

When you consider the media and social media world that swirls around, when so much information is questionable, subjective or even

knowledge and to become aware of their own perspectives and those of the various groups whose knowledge they share.

The overall aim here is to encourage students to formulate answers to the aforementioned question, 'How do you know?', in a variety of contexts, and perhaps more importantly, to see the value of that question in the first place.

Critical thinking skills are also developed through the Extended Essay, where one-third of the marks are allocated to the demonstration of these skills and the associated skills of research, analysis, discussion and evaluation. Creativity, Activity and Service components provide the context for critical thinking, specifically pertaining to the fact that experiential learning is shaped by the world around them.

Creating a culture of thinking is not only part of the IBDP but an integral part of the Redlands Learning Platform, our educational philosophy which underpins learning for all students from preschool to year 12.

As educators, we want to develop students to be inquisitive, critical thinkers who see potential when assessing the world around them, and who are confident, compassionate and courageous in their pursuit of education and life-long learning.

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