

# Enquire, explore,

By Saira Minto Khan

**L**AST Sunday as I sat with my two seven-year-olds, reflecting on our relationship with one another and how we could reduce the friction therein, we were able to steer the conversation, in a very civil manner, towards discovering rights and responsibilities and how they go hand in hand even for young people.

We finally agreed that the affairs of our home will be managed better if each one of us understood their own responsibilities and others' rights. Excited to discover this, the three of us decided to put down our "agreements" in this regard on a big poster to be put up on the children's bedroom door to serve as a reminder in case anyone got carried away.

Perhaps our discussion on finalising agreements became a little loud, when my daughter took a hard line on something, because our activity caught the attention of my husband who was engaged in his Sunday morning ritual of burying himself in a heap of newsprint. Jumping in to resolve the matter, he told the children that there was no point disagreeing with anything that their mum said because we as parents knew better. Then he asked me: "Why can't we make rules instead of agreements, and they simply follow?"

I was speechless. I looked at our children who were bewildered as my entire thesis about rights and responsibilities had suddenly come crashing down. I knew my husband meant well. He had intended to offer a solution to an ongoing debate and had merely referred to his childhood that was spent taking orders being held accountable for misdemeanors without playing a role in defining what good behavior is. At that time it was difficult to manage a positive conversation between the four of us and the best option was to wriggle out of this debate. The experience made me think of the predicament of all children in pursuit of learning in our country who have to follow closed and rigid programmes and who are assessed on their ability to reproduce textbooks and norms of good behaviour standardised by someone else. Imagine how this hampers their personality development and keeps precious talent suppressed.

Honestly speaking, I would perhaps have subscribed to similar thoughts and behaviour had I not been exposed to and become totally infatuated with an extremely modern, compassionate and dynamic method to educate young children called the International Baccalaureate (IB).

It is a western system of education that aims to connect children with learning through something as natural as "inquiry" or "questioning" that enables them to play a role in discovering things ranging from norms of behaviour to conservation of energy and makes them eager lifelong learners.

I received my first training at an IB teacher's workshop in Dubai two years ago and it opened my eyes to a new world. IB is not just a teaching methodology with a curriculum and an exam at year end. It is a philosophy, an ideology

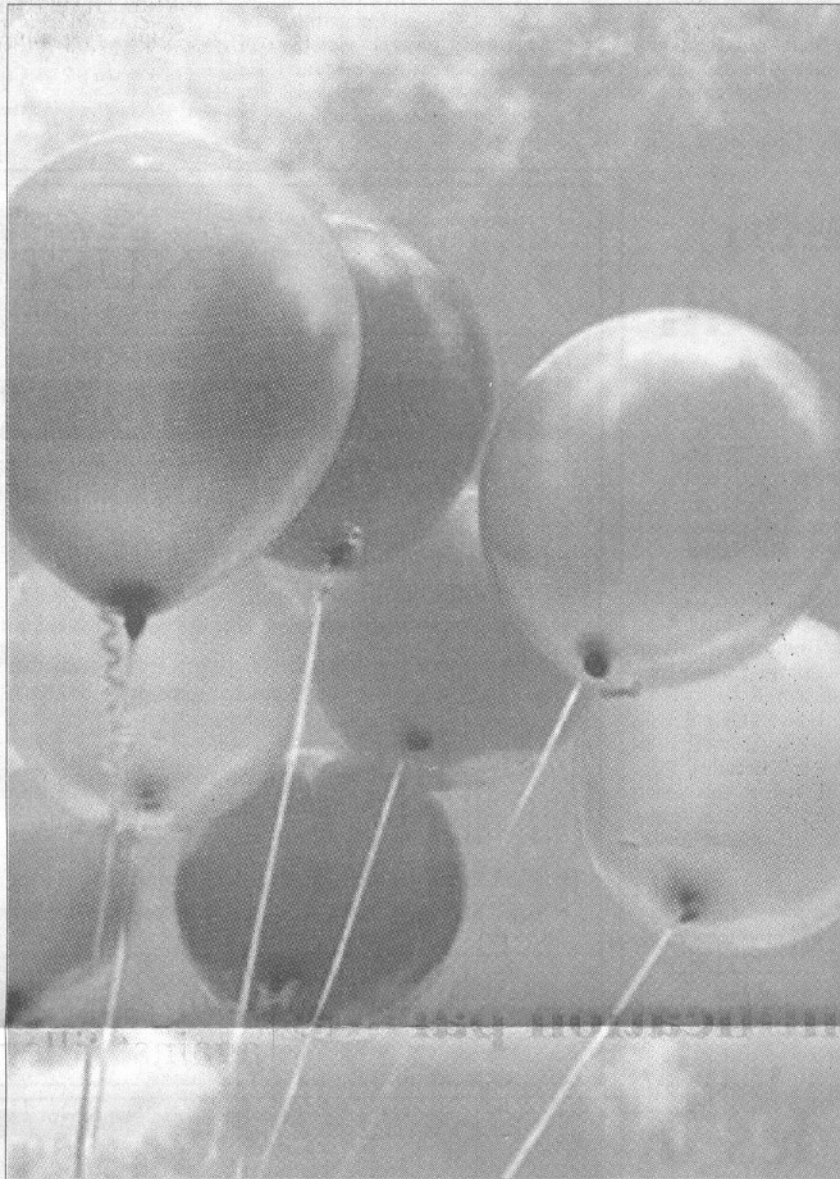
which professes compassion and revolves around "inquiry" attempting to address the curiosity in a thinking young mind.

In IB's scheme of things, children are the focus; they configure as equal partners in a learning experience that works as a two-way street between them and teachers. My involvement with IB has contributed immensely to build a positive learning environment at home as well and in spite of my children attending a non-IB school in Karachi, I have been able to infuse their personalities with an eagerness to

world. An IB school has programmes for children between three to 19 years divided into the following three programmes:

- Primary Years Programme (PYP) for three to 11 years old
- Middle Years Programme (MYP) for 12 to 16 years old
- Diploma Programme (DP) for 17 to 19 years old

I have worked on the Primary Years Programme in a local school in Karachi — the only school in Pakistan that has been awarded candidacy for PYP by the Int'l Baccalaureate Organization.



get involved in and explore subjects that kindle curiosity in them. Obviously as a parent I have to be ready to answer their questions or address their inquiry in a satisfactory way.

IB was conceived 35 years ago in Europe as a teaching system to facilitate mobility of international/expatriate students by giving them a common curriculum. With the world reducing to a mere global village, IB eventually evolved as a learning system that could potentially be used to connect all school-going children to a common

Catering to the youngest age group, this programme is obviously the basis of IB learning as it lays the foundation for learning through this very progressive programme.

Since IB doesn't promote conventional text and notebooks, a number of people wonder if with all this talk about being student-centred and inquiry-based, IB-educated primary-level kids end up with any learning at all or they just question, explore and have a good time. The answer is that IB incorporates all conventional learning in its especially

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devised syllabus called "scope and sequence" that is targeted at specific age groups. This age appropriate scope and sequence is taught not as "math" or "English" or "grammar" or "science" but is implemented through Units of Inquiry (UoIs) under the umbrella of six "transdisciplinary themes" that not only cover conventional subjects but have the flexibility to incorporate questions and topics emerging every day as humankind goes through a time of exponential growth. Take a look at the titles of six transdisciplinary themes and admire the depth of this teaching method:

ways we reflect on, extend and enjoy our creativity and appreciate aesthetics.

- **HOW THE WORLD WORKS** covers all subjects that talk about natural world and its laws; the interaction between natural world (physical and biological) and human societies, use of scientific principles by humans; the impact of science and technology advances on the environment.

- **HOW WE ORGANISE OURSELVES** is an inquiry into the interconnectedness of human-made systems and communities; the structure and function of organisations, governments and societal decision making; economics and its impact on humankind.

- **SHARING THE PLANET** is something that caters to the current times; an inquiry into rights and responsibilities in the struggle to share finite resources with other living things; communities and relationships within and between them; access to equal opportunities; peace and conflict resolution

With "inquiry" at the heart of all IB curriculum, students are engaged in "units of inquiry" or UoIs prepared by the school according to the scope and sequence. The biggest challenge for any IB school is to have teachers who are committed to the IB philosophy and IB makes it mandatory for schools pursuing their curriculum to give training to their staff regularly.

Every IB school must follow the basic IB philosophy clearly stated in the IB mission statement reproduced below:

"International Baccalaureate aims to create inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect. IB programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences can also be right."

To this end an IB curriculum works on creating a learners' profile among its students that outlines the importance of 10 key attributes in a learner which are: knowledgeable, caring, balanced, risk-taker, open-minded, reflective, principled, communicator, inquirer and thinker. Children are familiarised with the importance of these attributes through activities and class/school environment where their own work reflecting these attributes is displayed all year long.

Who can deny the need of creating these attributes in young learners whatever part of the world they may belong to? More than anywhere these attributes are needed in the young people of the region we live in. Imagine our children learning the importance of peace and conflict resolution through their school curriculum. With ethnic and cultural diversity that's spread all around us giving us a rich tradition, we only need to open our minds to a philosophy called the International Baccalaureate. ■

- **WHO WE ARE** will have all topics involving nature of self, values and beliefs, personal, social and spiritual health, families, relationships, friends, communities, culture and what it means to be human.

- **WHERE WE ARE IN PLACE AND TIME** incorporates everything about our orientation in place and time, personal and communal histories, homes and migration, explorations and discoveries.

- **HOW WE EXPRESS OURSELVES** focuses on all ways to discover and express ideas, feelings, nature, culture, the