

Episode 48 - IB Schools - Kylie

#048 - An increasingly popular choice for parents and students are International Baccalaureate (IB) Schools. These schools are found in 159 countries around the world. The reason they are so popular may be because their focus is on child-centred learning and the well-being of the child is at the forefront of everything they do. Learning is inquiry based and individualised, fostering critical thinking and building problem solving skills. In this episode I talk with Kylie who works at an IB school in Wagga Wagga, NSW. She shares with us her passion for education and how her own pedagogical practices align so well within the IB programs.

Kylie is originally from Sydney and has worked in many diverse settings across Sydney, Mudgee and Wagga Wagga, NSW. She is a highly accomplished teacher, taking on 22 projects to get this accreditation. It took her 18 months to complete. These projects have now been taken up by different education systems. Kylie was also part of the team to start up a Junior School in Wagga Wagga to be part of Riverina Anglican Grammar School. She obtained her degree at University of Western Sydney at Milperra and started working as a teacher in 1996.

The school where Kylie works at is an IB world school. IB schools offer a number of programs. They are;

Primary Years Program (PYP) - includes preschool age to Year 6

Middle years program - Years 7-10

Diploma - Years 11-12 - students can choose whether they want to do the HSC or IB.

Kylie's school is already an existing Years 7-12 school but she was part of the team to start up a junior school on the same campus. The Diploma Program was already implemented by the Principal and his wife for the senior years a number of years previously, so the principal wanted to offer PYP as a point of difference to other schools. The structure of PYP goes back to the core of inquiry learning and students finding that passion and finding that curiosity.

The school had not even been built but parents had total trust in the school. Parents wanted to enrol their students, even during COVID restrictions. Parents wanted something different and PYP was that point of difference. Kylie worked with different people to resource the school. She developed new ways of setting up procedures of students with additional needs and well being approaches.

Kylie met with every family that showed an expression of interest. One family at a time would come in to look around the school to see what the learning would look like. Kylie also offered a Q and A session to see what as a school they could offer students but also what parents could offer the school.

Some year groups were originally low in numbers like Years 1 and 2. As a way of growing numbers, all of the Riverina community were invited to the school and were shown what was on offer at the school. As a result more students were enrolled into the school, particularly for Year 1. They currently have 180 students and waiting lists for Years 3-6. The school is working towards a two stream school.

The Regio Emilio approach fits in with PYP very well. Regio is more an approach in student choice and learning through doing, and engaging the community. The school makes use of parents, industry and the school community to teach students with well-being at the forefront.

If someone was to walk past the classroom at this school, there would be a lot of learning in action. They would see;

- The classroom environment would be based on relationships between teacher and student to become co-learners.
- Students would have evidence of developing their inquiry displayed on walls
- Students would have been trained to work independently and be self directed.
- Teachers would have built skills early on to make this happen to enable working one-on-one with students.

The advantages of being an IB world school include engaging students through their interests and building on skills of research, inquiry, resilience, and asking for help. It is a holistic approach to education. You would also see happy and engaged students.

Some disadvantages could be that it takes longer to train staff in this different approach, most teachers need to be on board, and learning can plateau in Term 1 while strategies are being implemented and life long skills are being built. This improves over time especially in Literacy and Numeracy and student engagement.

If a school is interested in becoming an IB world school there is an authorisation process. They can contact IB on their website with an expression of interest. The school's vision and philosophy has to align with IB's. All teachers and leaders need to be trained in IB programs. It takes around 12-18 months to become authorised, then another 12-18 months of a candidacy phase.