

Is the grass always greener on the other side?
這山望著那山高？

The Real Deal about

International Schools Vs. Mainstream Schools

國際學校 本地學校

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Human nature leads us to think greener pastures always lie yonder. From wherever we happen to be, the “other side” always seems to be more appealing. And never is this more evident than when it comes to education and the decision whether to go the mainstream or international route.

Having been in the teaching field for many years, with experience of teaching students from both sectors, not to mention having two teenagers of my own, I’ve come to learn a lot about both systems. I’ve seen parents switch their children from mainstream to international school. I’ve witnessed countless mainstream students buckling under the pressure of incessant exams and tests complaining and hankering after the “easier” life at international school. But is the grass really greener on the other side? It’s time to debunk some of the myths that pervade Hong Kong mindsets.

我們常常會「這山望著那山高」，在選擇本地學校抑或國際學校的問題上，這種心態更明顯。作為兩個十多歲孩子的母親，我從事教學活動多年，擁有豐富的教學經驗，對本地學校和國際學校的教育系統皆有較深入的認識。我曾經目睹學生家長們將他們的孩子由本地學校轉去國際學校，也見過無數來自本地學校的學生不堪日益增加的考試壓力，抱怨本地學校的學習任務繁重，渴望到國際學校過「更輕鬆」的生活。難道那山真的比這山高嗎？我想是時候來個「真相大搜查」了！



Wendy Lau

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由英國來港已21年的Wendy熱愛教學，出版過16本書。其網站www.elite-kids-hk.com刊有許多幫助香港孩子取得好成績的文章。



Myth #1

International school students have less homework.
國際學校學生家庭作業較少。

The truth

International school students have just as much homework as local school students but the focus is different. For primary school students, rather than endless pages of grammar drilling worksheets or workbooks, the focus is on reading, creative writing or doing research for projects, activities which have been proven to provide the foundation for strong literacy skills. For secondary school students, the homework workload in international schools often surpasses that of mainstream students, especially for students pursuing International Baccalaureate programs. The work is rigorous, requiring students to be self-motivated inquirers, responsible for managing study time carefully.

國際學校學生的家庭作業量同本地學校一樣，只是側重點不同而已。對於國際學校的小學生來說，家庭作業不是幾頁幾頁的語法練習，而是側重閱讀、創意寫作或做一些項目研究，都是一些可以幫助學生培養讀寫能力的活動。對於國際學校的中學生來說，家庭作業量通常比本地學校的學生還要大，參加學習國際學士學位項目(IB)的學生更甚。而且，IB課程要求非常嚴格，每個學生都必須自覺完成，並好好地管理自己的學習時間。

Myth #2

International school students have less exams and tests.
國際學校學生考試較少。

The truth

International school students are assessed just as frequently as children studying in mainstream schools. The difference is the assessments take place on a continuous basis sometimes without formal schedules or detailed syllabus coverage sent to parents. As a result parents, do not spend hours making their children memorize model answers in order to regurgitate them during an exam and promptly forget them after. Rather than providing a snapshot of a child's ability to perform in an exam with heavy marks deduction for the smallest of errors, the assessments check whether the children are making genuine progress and retaining knowledge. In upper secondary, there are just as many assessments as in mainstream schools in the form of mock exams and formal tests.

國際學校的學生也要與本地學校的學生一樣接受定期考核。其不同之處，在於前者的考核有時會持續進行，且不會向家長發出正式的考核時間表或詳細的考核課程範圍。這樣，家長就不需要花費時間讓孩子們記住問題的標準參考答案，好讓他們在考試的時候可以用到，而考後則全部忘掉。考試不是為了在考試過程中為學生所犯的錯誤扣除分數，而是檢測學生是否有進步，是否掌握了知識。到了高中階段，國際學校學生的模擬和正式考試與本地學校的一樣多。

Myth #3

Children in mainstream schools are taught more than those in international schools.

在本地學校的孩子比在國際學校的孩子學到的東西更多。

The truth

Both systems share the same goal - giving children the best education. The difference lies in approaches. Traditionally, children in mainstream schools are “taught” materials from textbooks resulting in what some would label a spoon-feeding approach. By contrast, at international school, the focus is on children as learners and inquirers, taking part actively in lessons and getting involved in hands-on learning rather than passively receiving information. In the lower years, there are generally less textbooks than in mainstream schools but this does not mean that children are learning less. Additionally, many mainstream schools are now adopting an approach which requires learners to be more active in their learning.

不論是本地學校還是國際學校，其目的都只有一個——為孩子們提供最好的教育。其不同之處在於實現這一目的之方法不同。通常，本地學校主要「教」學生們教科書上的教學材料，即是部分人所說的「填鴨式教育」。與此相反地，國際學校則比較注重學生個體，引導其作為學習者也作為調查者積極參與課堂活動，主動學習，而不僅僅是被動地接收資訊。國際學校低年級的學生，教材較少，但這並不表示他們學得較少。除此之外，許多本地學校現在也採用這一種教育方法，鼓勵學生更積極地參與學習。

Myth #4

Parents have less involvement and pressure if their children are in international school.

國際學校學生的家長們參與較少，壓力較小。

The truth

On the surface, this seems the case because in mainstream schools, exams and tests are scheduled in the handbooks and a syllabus is provided even for very young children. This results in parents feeling the need to spend hours doing revision with their children, helping them to rote-memorize material and thus encourages a results-orientated system. However, parents of children in international schools also play an important role in guiding their children towards good habits such as encouraging reading and assisting with projects.

從表面上看來，確實如此。因為在本地學校，學生所有的考試、測試都詳細記入手冊裡，甚至是年齡非常小的學生，也會有課程提綱。這就讓家長覺得應該花時間幫助孩子們複習，記住哪些死記硬背的學習資料，從而助長了以結果為導向的教育系統。但是，國際學校學生的家長們在引導孩子培養良好習慣方面，也一樣扮演著非常重要的角色，如鼓勵他們閱讀，協助孩子們完成項目任務等。

Myth #5

If my child goes to international school, he or she will be unable to learn Chinese.

進入國際學校的孩子可能較難有機會學中文。

The truth

Most international schools incorporate Putonghua into their learning program, with many offering it at IB level. Since students have different levels of the language, most international schools differentiate according to ability to ensure that students are learning at appropriate levels.

大多數國際學校也將普通話納入學習課程中，很多甚至納入IB課程。由於每個學生的語言層次不同，大多數國際學校會根據學生具體能力級別進行區分，確保學生學習適度水準的普通話。

Myth #6

Students who switch from mainstream school to international school find it easy.
學生從本地學校轉向國際學校很容易。

The truth

This very much depends on the timing of the switch and the personality of the student. Many older students make the switch and suffer what is similar to “culture shock.” Some may even flounder under these conditions. For example, a student who has spent many years in a mainstream school may find it overwhelming to be put into a situation where there are no black and white model answers and no “boxes.” They may feel less secure and find it hard to adjust to the different learning methods, especially when it requires a great deal of self-initiative, abstract thinking and the synthesis of information.

這主要取決於轉換的時間和學生的性格。很多高年級學生轉換後都要經歷一種類似「文化衝擊」的經歷，有些甚至還受困於此。例如，有些長期待在本地學校的學生，在進入沒有絕對標準答案的環境後，覺得無法適應。他們會缺乏安全感，很難適應不同的學習方法，特別是在需要很強的自主性、抽象思維和資訊整合的時候。

Myth #7

There is no discipline in international schools and students have too much freedom.
國際學校紀律不嚴，學生太自由。

The truth

The majority of International schools have very strict school codes which students are required to adhere to. These codes cover aspects such as uniform, conduct and other aspects such as Internet etiquette. Just as in mainstream schools, students are admonished for inappropriate behavior. Most international schools also have a prefect system. Creativity and self-expression are encouraged in international schools and this can be misguidedly construed as a lack of discipline when in fact it is helping students to develop as individuals.

大多數國際學校的校規都非常嚴，學生必須遵守。校規涉及的範圍廣闊，包括校服、行為以及其它準則，如網絡文明準則等。就像在本地學校，學生被教導不能有不當行為那樣，很多國際學校也有自己完善的體系。它們強調學生的創造性和自我表達能力。而這種創造性和自我表達能力，恰好容易被誤解為是缺乏組織紀律性。但實際上這有助於培養學生的自主性。

Myth #8

Local public exams are more difficult than international school exams.
本地公開考試比國際學校考試要難。

The truth

This is far from the truth. In fact, many international schools adopt the highly challenging IB programs, which are designed to develop internationally-minded people. According to the IB learner profile, learners are described as being inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, reflective, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers and balanced. A number of mainstream schools are offering the IB program to their students. More information on the IB is available at www.ibo.org/index.cfm and www.ibo.org/programmes/profile/.

事實並不是這樣的。實際上，很多國際學習採用具有高度挑戰性的IB項目課程，旨在培養具有國際思維的人才。根據IB學習手冊，學習者必須好學、多見識、善於思考、善於溝通、自律、開放、有同情心、敢於冒險以及各方面都得到均衡發展。很多本地學校都有向學生提供IB課程。更多IB資訊，請登錄：
www.ibo.org/index.cfm及www.ibo.org/programmes/profile/。



So how do parents make the choice? 因此，家長應如何選擇呢？

It really depends on the child and the parents. Some children thrive in mainstream schools because they prefer to learn passively and memorize answers for exams. Parents like to know which page of which book has been “taught” on which day and feel more secure with a constant stream of assessment results and being able to compare their children’s results with other classmates. This reflects the competitive nature of learning in Hong Kong. On the other hand, international school suits creative and inquisitive students with high levels of self-motivation. Parents who want their children to become independent thinkers who approach learning with joy and enthusiasm may be more suited to this route. Both systems turn out well-educated children with an equal chance of excelling in their chosen futures. The difference lies in the process of learning. It pays for parents to carefully consider their child’s personality and the different options allowing them to make an informed choice.

選擇本地學校還是國際學校，這主要取決於學生和家長。有些孩子更喜歡被動學習，能記住試題答案，因此在本地學校裡學得更好。家長希望知道在哪一天教某一本書上的某一頁，而且對經常性考核結果比較有安全感，能夠將他們孩子的考試成績與其它同學進行比較。這也體現了香港教學的競爭性。從一方面來說，國際學校適合比較有創意、好學、高度自覺的學生。希望孩子能培養獨立思考能力，通過寓教於樂之方法學習的家長，可能比較適合選擇國際學校。但是，不論是本地學校還是國際學校都表明，教育良好的學生在未來都一樣出色，只是學習過程不同而已。家長應充分考慮孩子的性格和不同選擇，以便作出正確的選擇。☞

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