



**LANTERNA
EDUCATION**

LANTERNA SPOTLIGHT

March 2023



**Building Successful
ATL Programmes
for the DP**

Introduction



Dear IB Educators

I would like to share with you the Winter edition of the Lanterna IB educational dispatch. This year is off to a great start in the education world and we are pleased to approach the May examinations without any disruptions.

The January DP coordinator survey highlighted some school-based challenges that led to the decision of making our first dispatch of 2023 about ATL (Approaches to Thinking & Learning).

In this report, we will cover the following:

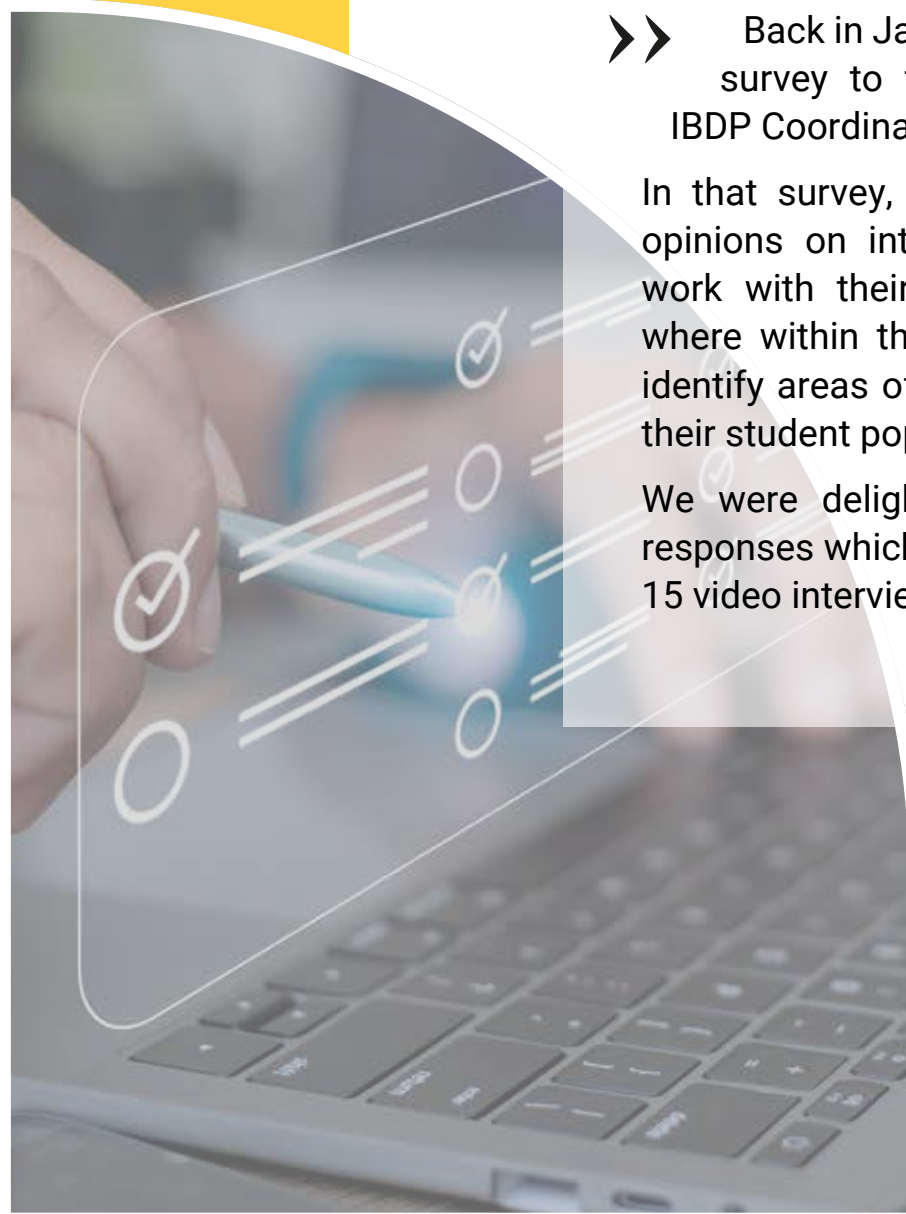
- ›› Key findings from our January IBDPC survey
- ›› How to design successful ATL solutions in schools
- ›› Interview with Lance King, a founding figure of the ATL programme in the MYP & DP

We would like to thank everyone who has kindly participated in our survey. In particular, we want to thank the DP Coordinators who gave up their time to take part in follow-up video interviews.

If you are interested in doing the same, please email me, tim@lanterna.com

Best wishes,
Tim

The Survey



»» Back in January 2023, we sent out a survey to the global population of IBDP Coordinators.

In that survey, we enquired about their opinions on integrating the ATL framework with their school curriculum, and where within that framework they could identify areas of strength or weakness in their student population.

We were delighted to receive over 90 responses which consequently led to over 15 video interviews with school leaders.

What are the ATLs?

A recap.

ATL stands for 'Approaches to Thinking and Learning'. This IB framework focuses on thinking and learning skills, commonly known in other curricula as '21st Century Skills or Competencies'. There are three key areas of ATL skills that students explore within this framework to succeed in school:

- Cognitive skills – active information processing and retrieval strategies (e.g. note-making, listening, time management, questioning, researching);
- Affective skills – gaining some control over mood, motivation, and attitude (e.g. self-motivation, perseverance, resilience, emotional management);
- Metacognitive skills – thinking about thinking (e.g. learning and thinking strategies, exploring new strategies, improving learning effectiveness).

- The foundations of a successful ATL framework will be introduced during the PYP, taught and developed during the MYP, and actively engaged with during the IBDP.

The September 2022 survey highlighted a few concerns from DP coordinators about some of their students' ATL skills - specifically their **self-management, organisational, and time-management skills**. After various conversations, we came to the conclusion that this stems from the years affected by COVID-19. Whilst some still managed to thrive in their studies, the majority of students' ATL skill-sets

An IB student would develop these ATL skills from Grades 1 to 12:

ATL skills across programmes:

SATL CATEGORY	PYP ATL	MYP ATL	DP ATL
Communication	Exchanging information Literacy ICT	Communication	Communication
Social	Organisation Social and Emotional	Collaboration	Social
Self-Management	States of Mind	Organisation Affective Skills	Organisation Character
Research	Information Literacy Media Literacy Ethical Use Info	Reflection Information Literacy Media Literacy	Research
Thinking	Critical Thinking Creative Thinking Information Transfer	Critical Thinking Creative Thinking Transfer	Critical Thinking Creative Thinking Computational Thinking

remained undeveloped due to the impact the pandemic had on education. Although proficiency in ATL skills is not actively assessed, it is still directly correlated with success in the DP examination. The students who have mastered their self-management, organisational, and time-management skills gain a huge advantage when taking these crucial exams. Additionally, they are more likely to succeed in further education and on their chosen career path. This stems from a combination of the COVID-impacted years, and effects of social media on a malleable generation.

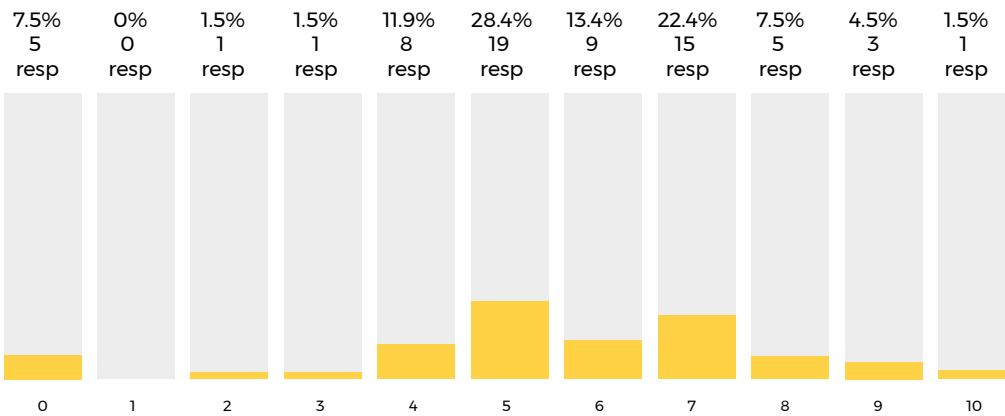
What Do Your Responses Tell Us?

LOTS FROM
THE JANUARY SURVEY

Avg 5.5

Out of 10, how well mastered are your MYP5 students ATL skills?

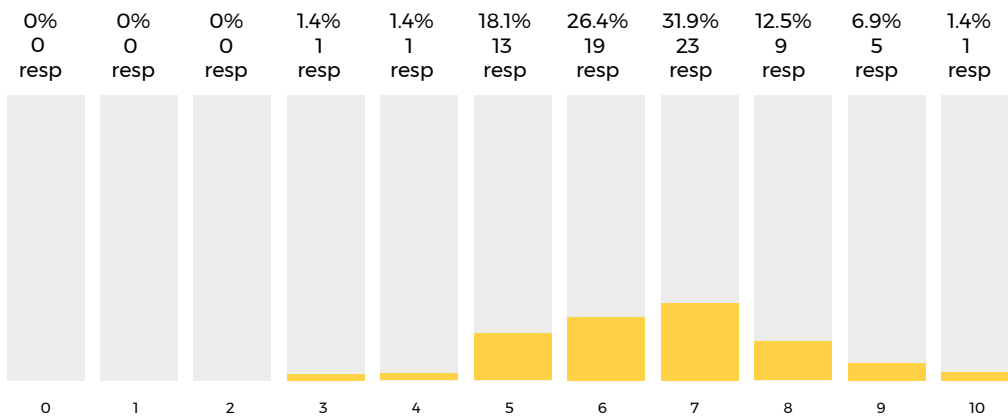
67 out of 73 people answered this question



Avg 6.6

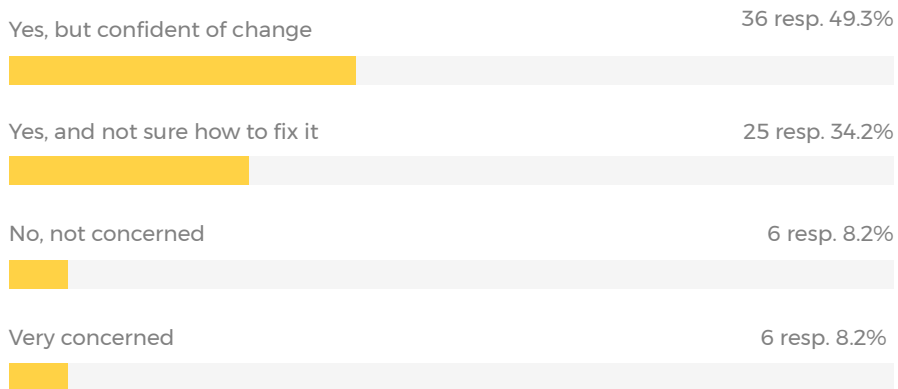
Out of 10, how well mastered are your MYP5 students ATL skills?

72 out of 73 people answered this question



Are you concerned with DPI students ATL skills?

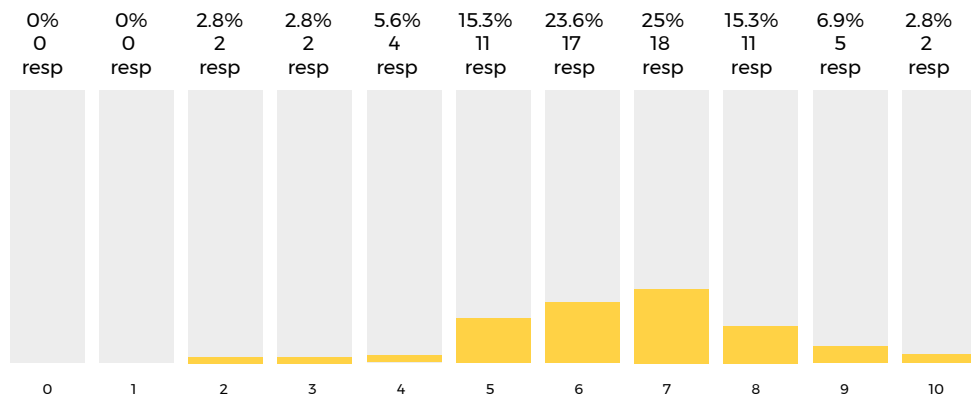
67 out of 73 people answered this question



Out of 10, how well do you think students understand that improving their ATL skills will improve their academic performance?

Avg 6.4

72 out of 73 people answered this question



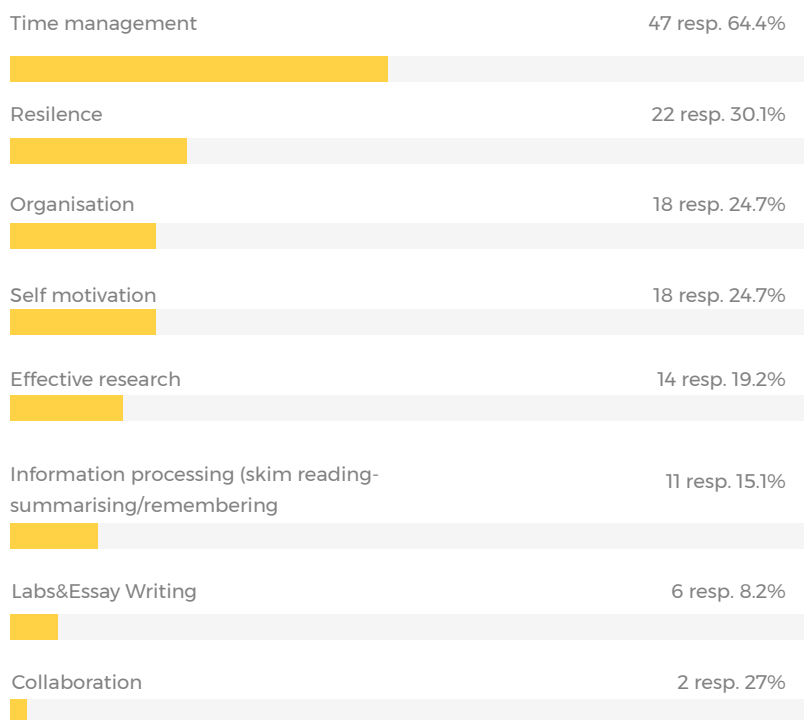
The results show that the majority of teachers are concerned by their students' ATL skills, are aware of their importance, and have a plan of improvement in place. This demonstrates that the IB emphasis on improving said skills is benefitting these students.

We can also note that 34% of teachers have some concerns about their students' ATL skills but they are not aware of how to address them.

Time Management & Organisational Skills Need Focus

Of the following, which two ATL skills do your dPI students need the most?

67 out of 73 people answered this question



Some of the biggest skill deficits identified in DP students relate to cognitive and affective skills. The above-highlighted ATL skills are essential for the development of students who can self-manage their studies - one of the overall goals of any ATL programme.

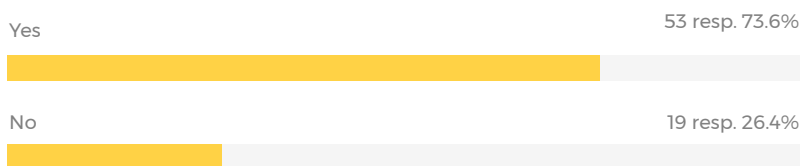
The dilemma for all IB and DP teachers is how students' proficiency in self-managed learning can be improved without taking any time out of studying other subject.

This issue has been exacerbated by the overwhelming efforts of re-introducing other components of school curricula that were previously removed during the years affected by COVID-19.

Schools have both the time and expertise to teach ATL skills

Do you have the experience to be able to teach these ATL skills to your DP students?

72 out of 73 people answered this question



The majority of DP coordinators believe they have both the expertise and time needed to implement ATL programmes. However, nearly half of the respondents seem to struggle with finding the time to incorporate ATL skills within their curriculum.

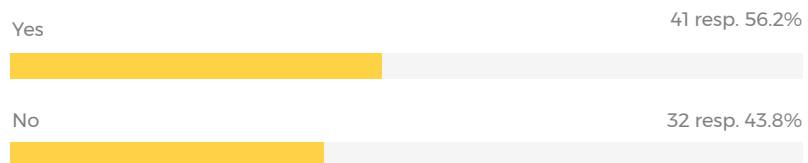
This could tie back to our previous whitepaper on teacher burnout and overload. Some of the respondents to this survey may be facing external challenges that prevent them from integrating ATL skills within schools' curricula.

In conclusion, this survey highlights a common concern about students successfully mastering ATL skills and spotlights a minority of DP coordinators who fear lacking the expertise or time to teach these skills.

The latter can be a product of schools' pressures to prioritise exam-centric teaching over equipping students with the ATL skills needed to succeed in every area of their studies. In

Do you (your teaching team) have the time to be able to teach these ATL skills to your DP students?

72 out of 73 people answered this question



fact, even the respondents who feel positive about finding time to teach these skills may have been overly optimistic.

As we are aware, a skill can only be mastered if the students learn the basics and practise said skill in different contexts. The main obstacles are the existing time constraints created by a packed curriculum.

The following section features advice from Lance King, our resident ATL 'expert', as he discusses this problem and presents some solutions to it.

What are the solutions?



Schools are painfully aware of the problem they face with introducing ATL skill teaching. While MYP5 cohorts get more attention than DP1s, they also have more time to develop and enhance their skill sets than DP1 students. A solution to this could be to form a 'hard re-set' of ATL skills training before DP1, giving them true agency during their DP programme.

Some survey respondents provided some suggestions on this topic:

- ▶ A Pre-DP, out-of-school, holiday workshop to fast-track this skill development in students;
- ▶ Regular top-up ATL workshops throughout the course of the academic year for existing and incoming DP students;
- ▶ Implementing an effective remedial ATL programme within normal subject lesson time.

Based on the suggestions and analysis of the problem, Lance would recommend taking the following steps:

01

Showcasing students with ATL skill proficiency.

It is important to highlight the positive outcome that studying ATL skills can have on students. Those who have mastered these skills actively seek out options at every stage of the learning process, they test strategies and continuously engage with both the subject they are studying and the processes they are using.

When they face failure, they know that it is a result of the process they have chosen and not themselves. They consequently seek out better processes, apply them, reflect on the results, and continue to improve their success following trial and error.

02

Providing training in key ATL skills

such as self-management and self-motivation either within school hours or out of school.

03

Providing opportunities within subject lessons for students to practise and improve their ATL skills.

The best way to motivate students to improve their time management is through incentives and modelling. Two things need to happen for students to take this skill more seriously:

Assign rewards to students who successfully manage their time and meet deadlines, and penalties to students who fail to do the same.



Teachers can encourage students

to emulate how they model their own time management processes. They could provide a schedule of all tests and assignments ahead of time so that students can plan far in advance.

Another example of how teachers can help students improve their time-management skills is by encouraging the use of wall calendars to track lessons, regular events, and assignment deadlines. This would prompt them to break down assignments into stages - each one with its own deadline - and to create to-do lists (something that would enhance their ability to prioritise tasks).

Once students are aware of how to best master their time and tasks, they can then be encouraged to introduce good information-processing strategies.

This could be done, for example, by encouraging the use of note-making in class and motivating students to review those notes every night.

Additionally, teachers could highlight the importance of organising a study area, learning memory techniques, knowing how to skim-read text, and summarising key points.



However, time and task management cannot stand on their own. Self-motivation, resilience and the ability to learn from mistakes are equally important skills to learn. Teachers could try the following methods to encourage progress in these other ATL skills:

01 Practice self-motivation and concentration strategies

by recalling how they have previously motivated themselves to do things they find difficult.

02 Focus on purpose

to maintain motivation and make short and long-term goals to encourage further achievements.

03 Reduce exam nerves

by employing the use of relaxation techniques.



Whilst affective ATL skills can be harder to teach than cognitive skills, teachers can still try the following methods to incorporate them within their lessons:

Limiting focus to certain specific skills within specific periods of time.

Encouraging students to share and evaluate different affective skill strategies among themselves.

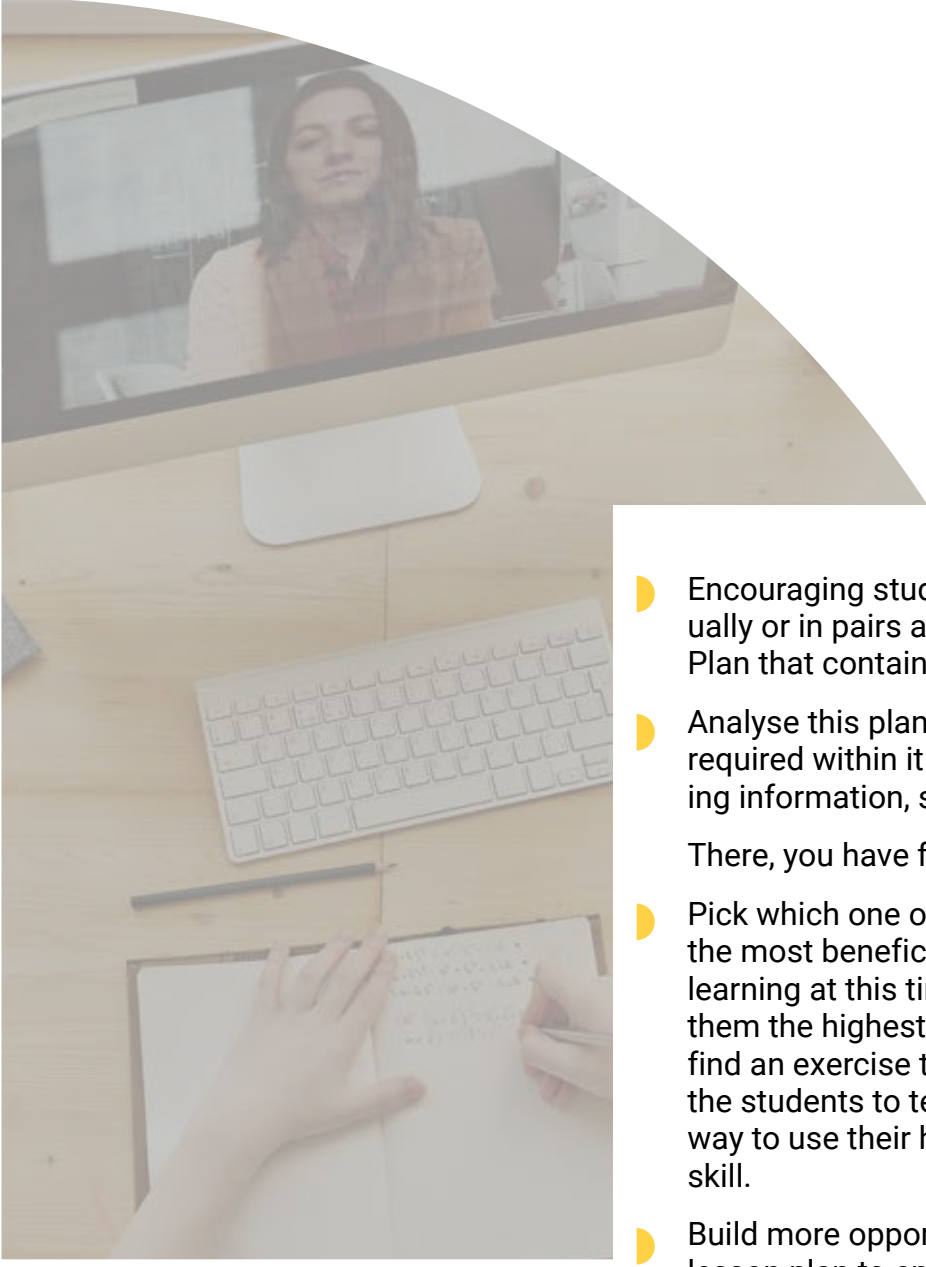
Inviting role models and other guests to give inspiring talks.

Noticing and celebrating every student's example of affective skill development.



Once the foundations have been set to encourage good ATL skill training and approach to learning, it is important that teachers focus on encouraging their practise as part of their subject lessons.

This is an example of an ATL-rich lesson:

- 
- ▶ Encouraging students to work individually or in pairs and access one Unit Plan that contains a lesson plan.
 - ▶ Analyse this plan and list every action required within it (e.g. listening, finding information, sharing ideas, etc.)
There, you have found your *ATL skills*.
 - ▶ Pick which one of those skills will be the most beneficial to your students' learning at this time, and make one of them the highest priority. Create or find an exercise to be undertaken by the students to teach them the best way to use their highest-priority ATL skill.
 - ▶ Build more opportunities within that lesson plan to encourage students to practise that particular ATL skill.
 - ▶ Focus every unit on one ATL skill. One skill that is well practiced and developed is better than two skills that have been barely explored.



Looking to the future



When we look at the IBO in a global context, we can note how forward-thinking and progressive this programme is in comparison to other school leaving qualifications. However, does that make it fit for purpose in today's society? It is imperative to wonder if having information readily available with the click of a button has made testing students' ability to retain information archaic.

This change in the way students access information forces us to reconsider which skills we should be equipping them with. Some skills remain relevant regardless: the skills to ask the right questions, to process the information they receive, and to make clever decisions based on that information.

The IBO's new director general, Olli-Pekka Heinonen, has explained the path that the IBO will be taking in the years to come - both from a pedagogical perspective and from the way that DP will be assessed in the near future. Read the IBO's article on this topic [here](#).

One thing is evident: schools that take time to integrate an ATL framework that is embraced by teachers and engaged with by students are better prepared for the upcoming challenges posed by the disruptive technologies already in use. These skills not only benefit them from an academic point of view, they also support them when facing mental health challenges by giving them the agency to develop a solution.

Could future exams be purely ATL-focused?

➤ The most disruptive technology for school-based education is likely to be the AI-based writing software ChatGPT. Its rise in popularity could lead to a future where teachers are no longer able to easily determine whether any submitted work is the product of the student or of this writing software. This could be the end of written assignments as we know them, with digital assessments and multi-choice questions taking over essays. However, this could just be the start of a revolution in the way we assess skills and knowledge.

This brings the question of whether subject-based assessments can design tests and exams to do the following:

Encourage the practice of ATL skills and higher-order thinking within the examination itself.

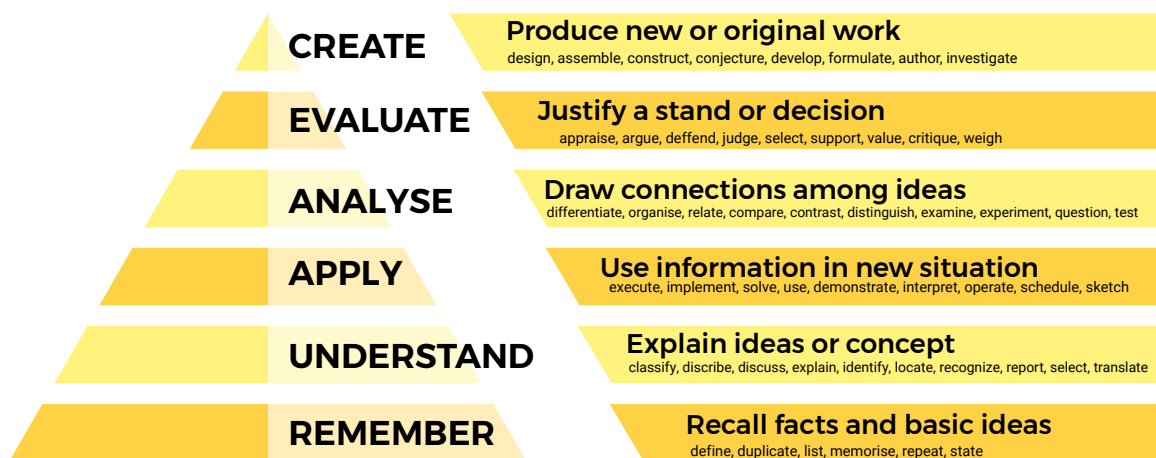
Test the student's expertise in the skills required for success in future grades and assessments.

Recognise the advantage of thinking over recalling.

One solution may be to make assessments open-book, following the same format as the MYP's e-assessments. In this eventuality, students would be able to instantly access all information they needed and be tested with ATL questions. This way, they would no longer rely on recalling information but rather on their information processing skills to pass.

Bloom's Taxonomy

➤➤ By adopting ATL questions, the assessments would shift from operating at the lowest levels of Bloom's Taxonomy hierarchy to the highest level. This would further encourage cognitive processing and is something that IB exams have already adapted to over the past decades.



Would this better assess the skills that a student needs for future education and career success

In the words of the late philosopher David Foster Wallace:

"Learning how to think really means learning how to control how and what you think"

(you can listen to the full speech [here](#)).

This is at the core of IB's mission as it encourages ATL to be more central in schools' learning philosophies. It comes as no surprise, then, that schools have turned to mindfulness and meditation to help students become more proactive in their thinking.



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