

The nature of creativity, action, service

...if you believe in something, you must not just think or talk or write, but must act.

Peterson (2003)

Creativity, action, service (CAS) is at the heart of the Diploma Programme. It is one of the three essential elements in every student's Diploma Programme experience. It involves students in a range of activities alongside their academic studies throughout the Diploma Programme. The three strands of CAS, which are often interwoven with particular activities, are characterized as follows.

Creativity: arts, and other experiences that involve creative thinking.

Action: physical exertion contributing to a healthy lifestyle, complementing academic work elsewhere in the Diploma Programme.

Service: an unpaid and voluntary exchange that has a learning benefit for the student. The rights, dignity and autonomy of all those involved are respected.

CAS enables students to enhance their personal and interpersonal development through experiential learning. At the same time, it provides an important counterbalance to the academic pressures of the rest of the Diploma Programme. A good CAS programme should be both challenging and enjoyable, a personal journey of self-discovery. Each individual student has a different starting point, and therefore different goals and needs, but for many their CAS activities include experiences that are profound and life-changing.

For student development to occur, CAS should involve:

- real, purposeful activities, with significant outcomes
- personal challenge—tasks must extend the student and be achievable in scope
- thoughtful consideration, such as planning, reviewing progress, reporting
- reflection on outcomes and personal learning.

All proposed CAS activities need to meet these four criteria. It is also essential that they do not replicate other parts of the student's Diploma Programme work.

Concurrency of learning is important in the Diploma Programme. Therefore, CAS activities should continue on a regular basis for as long as possible throughout the programme, and certainly for at least 18 months.

Successful completion of CAS is a requirement for the award of the IB diploma. CAS is not formally assessed but students need to document their activities and provide evidence that they have achieved eight key learning outcomes. A school's CAS programme is regularly monitored by the relevant regional office.

Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes are differentiated from assessment objectives because they are not rated on a scale. The completion decision for the school in relation to each student is, simply, "Have these outcomes been achieved?"

As a result of their CAS experience as a whole, including their reflections, there should be evidence that students have:

- **increased their awareness of their own strengths and areas for growth**

They are able to see themselves as individuals with various skills and abilities, some more developed than others, and understand that they can make choices about how they wish to move forward.

- **undertaken new challenges**

A new challenge may be an unfamiliar activity, or an extension to an existing one.

- **planned and initiated activities**

Planning and initiation will often be in collaboration with others. It can be shown in activities that are part of larger projects, for example, ongoing school activities in the local community, as well as in small student-led activities.

- **worked collaboratively with others**

Collaboration can be shown in many different activities, such as team sports, playing music in a band, or helping in a kindergarten. At least one project, involving collaboration and the integration of at least two of creativity, action and service, is required.

- **shown perseverance and commitment in their activities**

At a minimum, this implies attending regularly and accepting a share of the responsibility for dealing with problems that arise in the course of activities.

- **engaged with issues of global importance**

Students may be involved in international projects but there are many global issues that can be acted upon locally or nationally (for example, environmental concerns, caring for the elderly).

- **considered the ethical implications of their actions**

Ethical decisions arise in almost any CAS activity (for example, on the sports field, in musical composition, in relationships with others involved in service activities). Evidence of thinking about ethical issues can be shown in various ways, including journal entries and conversations with CAS advisers.

- **developed new skills**

As with new challenges, new skills may be shown in activities that the student has not previously undertaken, or in increased expertise in an established area.

All eight outcomes must be present for a student to complete the CAS requirement. Some may be demonstrated many times, in a variety of activities, but completion requires only that there is **some** evidence for every outcome.

Range and diversity of activities

All students should be involved in CAS activities that they have initiated themselves. Other CAS activities may be initiated by the school.

Activities should vary in length and in the amount of commitment required from the student, but none should be trivial. Some schools have ongoing relationships with local organizations that offer challenging opportunities for service activities that may also incorporate elements of creativity and/or action. Other schools undertake major, concentrated, one-off activities that may involve considerable planning and fund-raising (for example, expeditions or building projects).

In line with the aim of CAS to broaden students' experience during their Diploma Programme years, work that is part of a student's study of a Diploma Programme subject, theory of knowledge or extended essay may not be counted towards CAS. The idea of CAS is to ensure that students have a balanced, fulfilling overall experience; it is not to overload students who are already participating in a very demanding academic schedule.

Projects, themes, concepts

Students should be involved in at least one project involving teamwork that integrates two or more of creativity, action and service, and is of significant duration. Larger scale activities of this sort may provide excellent opportunities for students to engage "with issues of global importance". From time to time, in line with its mission statement, the IB may identify broad themes that schools are invited to support ("Sharing our humanity" is the first of these). Such themes may provide a context that will enable students to generalize further in their reflections, following the maxim "Think globally, act locally".

Creativity

Creative activities should have a definite goal or outcome. They should be planned and evaluated like all CAS activities. This can present something of a challenge where, for example, a student is a dedicated instrumental musician. It would be artificial to rule that something that is both a pleasure and a passion for the student could not be considered part of their CAS experience. How, though, can it help to fulfill CAS learning outcomes? It may be useful to refer back to the section "The nature of creativity, action, service", particularly to the second principle: **personal challenge**—tasks must extend the student and be achievable in scope.

Perhaps the instrumental musician can learn a particularly difficult piece, or a different style of playing, in order to perform for an audience. The context might be a fund-raising activity, or the student might give a talk to younger children about the instrument, with musical illustrations. Appropriate CAS activities are not merely "more of the same"—more practice, more concerts with the school band, and so on. This excludes, for example, routine practice performed by IB music or dance students, but does **not** exclude music, dance or art activities that these students are involved with outside the Diploma Programme subject coursework.

Action

Similar considerations apply here. An outstanding athlete will not stop training and practising in order to engage in some arbitrary, invented CAS physical activity. However, modern approaches to sports coaching emphasize the notion of the reflective practitioner, so it is possible for the athletics coach to incorporate relevant CAS principles and practice into training schedules for the benefit of the student. Setting goals, and planning and reflecting on their achievement, is vital. “Extending” the student may go further, for example, to asking them to pass on some of their skills and knowledge to others. If their chosen sport is entirely individual, perhaps they should try a team game, in order to experience the different pleasures and rewards on offer.

Some excellent “action” activities are not sporting or competitive but involve physical challenge by demanding endurance (such as long-distance trekking) or the conquest of personal fears (for example, rock climbing). It is important that schools carefully assess the risks involved in such activities.

Alternatively, a student’s “action” may be physical exertion as part of a service activity.

Service

It is essential that service activities have learning benefits for the student. Otherwise, they are not experiential learning (hence not CAS) and have no particular claim on students’ time. This rules out mundane, repetitive activities, as well as “service” without real responsibility. A learning benefit that enriches the student personally is in no way inconsistent with the requirement that service be unpaid and voluntary.

The general principle, sketched out in the section “The nature of creativity, action, service”, that the “rights, dignity and autonomy of all those involved [in service activities] are respected”, means, among other things, that the identification of needs, towards which a service activity will be directed, has to involve prior communication and full consultation with the community or individual concerned. This approach, based on a collaborative exchange, maximizes both the potential benefits to the recipients and the learning opportunities for the students.

Ideally, such prior communication and consultation will be face-to-face and will involve the students themselves. Where this is not possible, schools need to work with appropriate partners or intermediaries, such as NGOs (non-governmental organizations), and make every effort to ensure both that the service provided is appropriate, and that the students are able to understand the human consequences of their work, for both individuals and communities.

Service learning

Service learning is a phrase that is in common use in many countries, denoting service to the community combined with learning outside the classroom. The notion is already established in the IB Middle Years Programme area of interaction, community and service, which requires teachers to plan suitable service activities to exemplify and extend subject learning. In the Diploma Programme there are opportunities for service activities to be linked to subject learning. There is substantial research (see Furco 2003 for an overview) that indicates the power of service activities linked to subject learning. Among the well-documented benefits are that service learning:

- enhances students’ willingness to take risks
- promotes meta-learning (learning about learning)
- develops students’ ability to communicate and make relationships
- supports different learning styles
- enables all students to achieve, that is, to experience success.

However, there are two considerations.

- It is essential that CAS activity is an extension to subject work. To attempt to count the **same** work for both a subject or extended essay and CAS would constitute malpractice.
- It is desirable that students, rather than teachers, initiate the service activity. This is in accordance with the greater expectations of autonomy and maturity in Diploma Programme students.

Political activity

The IB has no view on whether or not it is appropriate for students to be involved in political activities as part of their educational experience. Views on this vary considerably in different cultural contexts, so it is a matter for decision at local or school level.

However, where such activity is locally sanctioned, there is a question about whether or not it may qualify as CAS. It may be relevant to consider the following factors.

- Is the activity safe and secure, given the local circumstances?
- Is it an activity that will cause, or worsen, social divisions?
- Where are the learning opportunities for the students involved?

Religious activity

Some of the same concerns apply here as with political activity. For example, in some parts of the world religious observance is illegal in the school curriculum; in others it is compulsory.

It is recognized that this is a sensitive and difficult area. Nevertheless, the general rule is that religious devotion, and any activity that can be interpreted as proselytizing, does not count as CAS.