

RESEARCH SUMMARY

A comparative study of international-mindedness in the Diploma Programme in Australia, China and India



**Based on a research report prepared for the IB by:
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Background

This qualitative study explored the concept of international-mindedness in the Diploma Programme (DP) across six IB World Schools in Australia, China and India. In the IB, education for international-mindedness aims to develop global citizens who, “recognizing their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better and more peaceful world” (IBO, 2008: 5).

The study investigated how international-mindedness takes shape in the DP in relation to different sociocultural contexts in Indian, Chinese and Australian schools. The research focused on four main areas of inquiry:

1. DP students’, teachers’ and parents’ conceptualizations of international-mindedness in Australia, China and India
2. the relevance of international-mindedness to students’ post-school trajectories
3. possible approaches to the assessment of international-mindedness in IB World Schools
4. cross-case comparisons of international-mindedness by school.

Research design

Using a multi-site approach, 196 parents, teachers and students were interviewed, either individually or as part of a focus group, in six IB World Schools in Australia, China and India (two schools in each country).

- Student interviews examined students’ post-school options, expectations, aspirations and constraints, and the perceived relevance of international-mindedness to their life beyond school.
- Focus group interviews with DP teachers focused on two main areas. The first investigated teachers’ understanding of international-mindedness in relation to pedagogy, curriculum and assessment. The second area explored teachers’ experiences, perceptions and conceptions of international-mindedness in relation to students’ post-school trajectories.

- Interviews or focus groups with parents explored their experiences, perceptions and conceptions of international-mindedness regarding their aspirations and expectations for their children.

In selecting schools, the researchers aimed to ensure that at least 30% of DP students were from the local/national population and that schools had been authorized to offer the DP for at least two years. A summary of the six participating schools is provided in Table 1.

| School name (pseudonym) | Location | School type | Size | IB programme(s) |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|--------|-----------------|
| Bangalore Academy | Bangalore, India | International, private | Large | PYP and DP |
| Mumbai Academy | Mumbai, India | International, private | Small | DP |
| Beijing Urban School | Beijing, China | Private | Medium | MYP and DP |
| Beijing Private School | Beijing, China | Private | Large | Continuum |
| Brisbane Public School | Brisbane, Australia | Public | Small | DP |
| Gold Coast Private School | Gold Coast, Australia | Independent, private | Medium | DP |

Table 1. Characteristics of participating schools

Additionally, observations of classroom practices and school events, document analysis and informal discussions offered ethnographic insights into school practices of international-mindedness across the six sites.

Findings

Conceptualization of international-mindedness

Almost all participants interviewed in this study expressed the perception that international-mindedness is difficult to define and can be interpreted in multiple ways. Indeed, international-mindedness

was seen as a contested, multifaceted concept that has varied implications for thinking and behaviour. Nonetheless, the study found that participant views of international-mindedness could be clustered into three overarching categories: a tool for individual gain, an orientation towards shared understanding and a way to push boundaries for change. Table 2 presents these three categorizations of international-mindedness as well as major themes associated with each category. Brief descriptions of a cross-section of key themes follow the table.

The DP curriculum provides rich ways of tracing local–global interconnections to encourage international-mindedness. A key challenge for teachers as part of their pedagogy for international-mindedness is to engage with: (a) non-western knowledges and (b) students’ cultural knowledges in making these interconnections.

- **Multilingualism:** A key challenge for IB World Schools as part of their pedagogy for international-mindedness is to recognize and harness multilingual capacities. A recognition of intellectual equality through

| International-mindedness as a tool for individuals | International-mindedness as shared understanding | International-mindedness as pushing boundaries |
|---|---|---|
| Western cultural capital Hypermobility Academic advancement Leadership | Common humanity Global engagement Intercultural understanding Local-global interconnectedness Open-mindedness Social awareness | Social class and cross-religious understanding Multilingualism Critiques of westernisation Anti-individualism Service |

Table 2. Conceptualizations of international-mindedness

- **Western cultural capital:** International-mindedness is seen as a form of western cultural capital, especially in terms of being a tool with which to access western higher education. While this was highly valued by parents, many teachers critiqued this conception of international-mindedness as being narrow and inadequate.
- **Hypermobility:** Mobility in terms of travel and global movement is a key theme through which IB students, as well as parents and teachers, expressed their understanding of international-mindedness. The term “hypermobility” captures the frequency, normativity, and extensiveness of students’ international movements. Findings from the analysis suggest that more explicit connections between students’ global mobilities and international-mindedness could enrich pedagogies for international-mindedness.
- **Common humanity:** Notions of international-mindedness as a form of “common humanity” appeal to a sense of global community and shared understanding. These conceptions, however, can gloss over the complex histories, conditions and contingencies of “shared understanding” in an unequal world.
- **Local–global interconnections:** A more reflexive approach highlighted by some students and teachers is that of “local–global interconnections”.

language will help teachers address the emphasis on western knowledge in notions of international-mindedness.

- **Service:** Ideas of community service are key to “doing” international-mindedness, but depending on how this is supported in schools, it can be a notion that is more oriented towards self-service than productive community work. The most effective use of community service observed in schools was when service was integrated explicitly into all school activities and the overall school vision. For example, the concept of “service leadership” in Bangalore Academy enabled the school to have ongoing conversations about social justice, privilege and responsibility.

Relevance of international-mindedness to students’ post-school trajectories

The connections between the DP students’ international-mindedness and their university pathways were strong and explicit. All DP students in the study planned to attend university, and almost all students in the Indian and Chinese schools aspired to attend universities in the west. Table 3 shows students’ preferred university destinations and ratios of DP students across the three countries.

| IB student country | Main university destinations | Rationales |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| India | United States, United Kingdom | -Prestige of western universities -Flexibility of the US university system -Connections with family overseas |
| China | United States | -Prestige of US universities -Connections with family overseas -Competition in the Chinese Gaokao* system |
| Australia | Australia | -Prestige of local universities -Academic connections between local universities and the IB World Schools |

* The entrance examination to Chinese universities at the end of Year 12 in China.

Table 3. Main university destinations and rationales

Participants considered international-mindedness to be highly relevant to students' internationally oriented university pathways and career aspirations. Many participants expected that the traits of international-mindedness, particularly being globally mobile, multilingual and interculturally aware, would help IB students who will most likely work in multilingual, multicultural and multi-ethnic environments. However, the analysis also illuminated that students' post-school trajectories are also shaped by other factors, including:

- cumulative advantages they gain from and through their parents, more so than their schooling
- international experiences of their parents and those they themselves experience
- diasporic network of which they and their families are a part
- work of their parents, which is integral to their learning.

Taking the above findings together, the researchers concluded that there are advantages to IB World Schools in giving greater attention to the knowledge of individuals and families. These knowledges, networks and experiences greatly enhance collective capabilities for international-mindedness.

Assessing international-mindedness

Five possible scenarios for assessing international-mindedness emerged from the research analysis: international mindedness as not assessable; the assessment of internationally minded citizenship; the assessment of internationally minded capabilities; the assessment of significant changes effected through international-mindedness; and the assessment of

international-mindedness through rational disagreement.

Reflecting on these scenarios, the researchers suggested the following criteria for designing the assessment of international-mindedness:

- support inventive and potentially innovative practices of international-mindedness
- design minimalist modes of assessment that ensure continuity and coherence in education for international-mindedness
- be responsive to emergent obstacles
- renegotiate the design of modes of assessment as circumstances change
- use assessment mechanisms to detect emergent patterns of inventiveness and potential innovativeness in practices of international-mindedness
- feed emergent learning about international-mindedness back to the IB and schools to support improvements in practices at all levels.

Cross-school comparisons

As noted above, the research focused on three culturally dissimilar countries. This focus revealed that the practices of international-mindedness varied across the six school contexts and were dependent on school cultures, level of commitment from teachers and leadership, and level of integration and promotion across school activities. Observations of successful school practices of international-mindedness occurred when schools:

- embedded international-mindedness into their long-term strategies by clarifying and supporting the place of international-mindedness in relation to the school's curricular planning (for example, Bangalore Academy)
- introduced major agents in school leadership to drive the school planning and practice of international-mindedness (for example, Brisbane Public School)
- embedded research about issues related to international-mindedness and the implementation of the DP (for example, Beijing Private School)
- explicitly linked school events to ideas relating to international-mindedness
- engaged the critical and creative capacity of students to plan and organize events for international-mindedness
- diversified school events for international-mindedness and intensified students' intercultural experiences through participation in events that were

grounded in productive intellectual exercises, for example, Model United Nations, TOK forums and International Olympiad for Linguistics

- provided opportunities for students to develop and practice international-mindedness through attending international events
- promoted ongoing thinking and meaning-making about international-mindedness through organizing academic conferences, seminars and forums and disseminating participants' perspectives.

However, planned and purposeful integration and support of international-mindedness was not even across the six schools. For example, in most cases there was little evidence to suggest that at an organizational level, schools were capturing, documenting and giving accounts of how international-mindedness was being implemented. In addition, participants tended to perceive international-mindedness as something "additional" to the curriculum.

Recommendations

Drawing together the study's findings, the researchers recommended seven features for teaching international-mindedness. These features can inform school engagement, curriculum planning and assessment practices relating to international-mindedness in IB World Schools.

Pedagogies for international-mindedness need to:

- be **reflexive** about their assumptions, and make explicit the limitations, conditions and contingencies of their associated constructs
- be **ethically engaged** so that they privilege constructs that are transformative and enhance critical capacities
- be **situated** in terms of sociocultural, economic and political contexts, including students' backgrounds, diasporic experiences and parental work networks
- be recognized as **contingent** and responsive to shifting social, cultural, economic and political contexts
- be premised on **intellectual equality**, including recognition of multilingualism, non-western knowledges and student/family cultural knowledge
- be **interconnected** and **relational** in terms of the national contexts of IB World Schools
- be **embedded** and **explicit** in school activities, curriculum planning and overall school vision.

References

IBO (International Baccalaureate Organization). 2008. *Towards a Continuum of International Education*. Cardiff, UK. IBO.

This summary was developed by the IB Research Department. A copy of the full report is available at <http://www.ibo.org/research>. For more information on this study or other IB research, please email research@ibo.org.

To cite the full report, please use the following:

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