



# Dr Paul Tarc

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## A conceptual approach for interpreting the expanding instances of the internationalisation of education

### Research Objectives

Dr Tarc's research areas include globalisation and education, international education, aims of education, cultural politics of schooling, progressive pedagogies, critical literacies, teacher education, reflective practice and interpretive research methods in education.

### Detail

Paul Tarc is Associate Professor in Critical Policy, Equity and Leadership Studies at the Faculty of Education at Western University in London, Ontario, Canada. He coordinates programs in international education in teacher education and graduate studies. His research centres on progressive and critical forms of education in global times.

### References

Tarc, Paul. (2019). 'Internationalisation of education as an emerging field? A Framing of international education for cross-domain analyses', Special Issue: Connecting Different Spheres of Internationalisation in Education Internationalisation Policies in Schooling – National and Organisational Perspectives, *Policy Futures in Education*, DOI: [10.1177/1478210318824254](https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210318824254)

Tarc, Paul. (2009). *Global dreams, enduring tensions: International Baccalaureate in a changing world*. New York: Peter Lang.

Tarc, Paul. (2013). *International Education in Global Times: Engaging the Pedagogic* (Peter Lang).

### Personal Response

#### **What first sparked your research interests into the internationalisation of education?**

|| I taught in private, K-12 international schools for seven years in Ecuador, The Philippines and Vietnam in the 1990s. This experience informed my interest and research in international education. Upon my return to teach and study in Canada, I was surprised to see growing interest in the International Baccalaureate and internationalisation in the local/national scene. Encountering international education at home and abroad, led me to my PhD topic as guided by the question: What is the international in international education? ||

# A conceptual approach for interpreting the expanding instances of the internationalisation of education

*The internationalisation of education (IE) has accelerated across the past two decades. Although there are now a range of representations and discussions of IE, lacking is a historically-informed framework to connect domains and levels of IE practices. Dr Paul Tarc from Western University argues for a conceptual approach to IE, one that includes theorising past and present enabling conditions of international education to illuminate IE's motivating visions, significant (operational) obstacles, and resultant tensions. His conceptualisation of IE is informed by an analysis of the International Baccalaureate's development over the last six decades. This analysis reveals inherent tensions of IE, between its normative visions, as education for intercultural understanding and respect, and instrumental agendas, as revenue generation. Dr Tarc's conceptualisation provides a basis for stakeholders to better understand, connect and shape the IE movement.*

International education manifests in different ways across the globe. Universities in the West, for example, tend to seek out international students as a form of revenue generation and as a way of promoting intercultural engagement. At the level of K-12 schooling, there are multiple entry points for internationalisation. National curricula reform has become well aligned with international education's goals for fostering 'global competence' and '21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning.' These converging objectives are illustrative of the larger transnational educational policy flows mediated by actors like the OECD and IB. The adoption of international curricula in state systems, such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) programmes, also become attractive choice options for middle-class parents who are seeking

advantage in the schooling-career nexus. Thus IE, reflects a level of globalisation processes re-shaping citizenship goals. It is important thus to distinguish between the agendas driving the internationalisation of education (IE) as a process within globalisation, and the meanings and uses of 'international education' as advanced by stakeholders on the ground.

Amidst the growth of demands and diverse initiatives in international and global education, many theoretical and practical questions arise. For example, how are stakeholders to understand and work within emerging trends in education under globalisation forces? What are the dominant visions, agendas and tensions in play? Beyond the attractiveness of education initiatives as a revenue generation model, what are the possibilities and limits of the educational aspirations of IE? Can such trends really deliver the 'dream' of producing 'global citizens,' who denounce insular models and nationalism, in working toward a more egalitarian world for sustainable futures?

Dr Paul Tarc proposes a conceptualisation of IE in order to help tackle these larger questions and to understand the nuances at play in concrete manifestations of IE.

## WHY THE NEED FOR A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK?

Tarc's proposal seeks to better connect the multiple manifestations of the internationalisation of education



across domains and levels, given the varied terminologies used (global citizenship education, international education, global competence, etc), the multiple communities involved, and a lack of historical and relational contextualisation considered. A level of isolation across scholarship and different stakeholders' discussions has compounded this disjuncture between actors in IE. Thus, Tarc proposes a framework for finding conceptual coherence across multiple domains and levels of IE.

This framework or interpretive method is based upon his research into 20<sup>th</sup>-century trajectories of international education, under heightened processes and perceptions of globalisation. In order to better understand where IE is heading, we must first understand the antecedent motivations and manifestations of international education; by examining how IE is formed and informed by the weight of history under changing conditions in the world, one is able to better grasp where the internationalisation of education is likely heading and how it might be steered. Tarc's framework facilitates greater comprehension of IE as an organic and historically formed process.

## RHETORIC VERSUS REALITY

In his book, *International Education in Global Times: Engaging the Pedagogic* (Peter Lang, 2013), Tarc emphasises the potential disjuncture between the humanist goals espoused in IE discourse and actual practices:

*It is clearly possible for one to engage in the IE movement, with little attempt to*

*understand the deeper visions, the shifting contextual features or their implications; however, in so doing, one risks engaging somewhat blindly into a murky and complicated terrain...* (Chapter 1, page 6.)

Tarc's championing of conceptual analysis forefronts the potential miscommunications between parties when

These nuances surrounding mobility and educational objectives or contexts and pedagogical desires can lead to confusion as to the objectives and effects of IE. Moreover, where pragmatic, instrumental agendas lead or define the aspirational, deparochialising educational aims, there may be instances where actors are advancing parochial or even exploitive

## Tarc proposes a methodology for delivering conceptual coherence across multiple domains and levels of IE.

discussing the purpose and outcome of IE. For example, one person might consider it the means by which to enhance cross-border mobility; another may use the term to refer to bringing a global perspective to the national classroom.

practices; these negative outcomes of IE are particularly a danger given colonial legacies and asymmetric relationships, and are antithetical to the aspirational vision of international education to promote world peace and intercultural respect.





To unpack the complex inter-relations between the aspirational and pragmatic visions that are typically entangled in IE initiatives, Tarc favours the metaphor of tensions and employs it in his framing of IE initiatives.

**INHERENT TENSIONS IN IE: INSIGHTS FROM TARC'S PERIODISATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE**

Tarc's research presented in *Global Dreams, Enduring Tensions: IB in a Changing World* (Peter Lang, 2009), traces the transformations of international education through a historical periodisation of the International Baccalaureate. He examines the 'idea' and ideals of IB from the time of its creation under the 'Keynesian liberalism' of the 1960s in the field of multilateral international schools, to its current rise as an expedient under neoliberal

school reform within private and state-funded systems. He has identified three core tensions of the international in IB, enduring across IB's development. Understanding how these tensions arose for IB and how their dynamics changed across time and how the IB Organisation in turn managed them can help frame contemporary discussions and explorations of IE. It is therefore worthwhile to outline these tensions in some detail.

**CITIZENSHIP TENSION**

The IB diploma program (IBDP), as a secondary school leaving diploma, was created in Geneva, Switzerland, in the 1960s. It served the dual purposes as an internationally-accepted 'passport' to university and as an education for 'international understanding.' For the creators and supporters of IB, promoting an education for 'international

understanding' was not contentious. Members of the international community were not overly concerned with conflicting national or international loyalties. To an extent, international understanding was not only a taken-for-granted educational aim, but part of the day-to-day reality of expatriates living and working in cosmopolitan communities such as Geneva.

However, within national contexts, international understanding was potentially a political/ideological quagmire. Because a primary purpose of state schooling has been to produce loyal national citizens, education for international understanding, as promoting loyalties beyond the nation, was seen by some to be a threatening proposal. For state governments, it potentially impinged upon the sensitive area of national sovereignty. Wider cultural politics impacted on how IB was promoted to potential funders and schools in national contexts. More fundamentally, sensitivity to national contexts was necessary because, as a mobile diploma, IB had to cut across and interact with national systems. As a result, the (perceived) threat of promoting international loyalties was tackled in a number of ways, primarily by promoting national identity as the precursor to international understanding, which was presented as an openness towards other nations and cultures.

Today, as suggested above, this tension has altered considerably. The larger debate around the desirability



of cosmopolitan loyalties continues. However, within schooling, 'international understanding,' or its updated terms as 'international mindedness,' or 'global citizenship,' are hardly contentious. Governments still want loyal citizens, but international education is now viewed as aligning with the more economic focus of governments on developing citizens as human capital for global competition.

**CURRICULAR TENSION**

The curricular tension emerged where education for international understanding pulled against the demand for IB to meet international standards for university access. Managing the tension between international understanding (framed in the 1960s as an 'education of the whole person') and international mobility (meeting the academic standards of universities) had a significant impact on not only how the IB was envisioned but also on how it developed. To manage the curricular tension, the IB Organisation developed a flexible and innovative curricular program and a multi-modal, nuanced approach to assessment.

Today the IB uses the term 'international mindedness' to signify its larger goal. The pressure for the IBDP to be a preparation for the demands of universities across nations still constrains IB's progressive educational ideals. Research shows that the IBDP proves to be exemplary for preparing students for the academic challenge of an undergraduate degree, but students' development of 'international mindedness' seems much more uncertain. The development of the Middle Years Program and Primary Year's Program in the 1990s opened up opportunities for the organisation to more fully realise their ideals of 'educating the whole person' through inquiry and transdisciplinary approaches. In some ways though, one finds the inherent challenge of governing progressive education, given the importance of the autonomy of the teacher and the local context in enactments of progressive pedagogy.

**OPERATIONAL TENSION**

Most broadly construed, the dream of IB hinged on the transformative hopes of education in an era of the massification and democratisation of schooling, circulating in the West in the 1960s. Its greatest ambition, in effect, was to engender peace by developing international understanding and respect of a wider population. In actuality, IB was developed for users of international schooling who represented a relatively narrow social elite. Internationally collaborative, yes, but Western-centric in content and designed for entry to European and North American universities. Thus, the dream of a

such as Ecuador, who have partnered up with the IB Organisation. Surely this has broadened the users of IB to include middle class families. On the other hand, these middle class families often use IB to further their social mobilities through educational choice.

**TENSIONS AND TIMEFRAME: IE AS AN EMERGING FIELD**

By examining the changing circumstances and agendas that created tensions within IB provision, Tarc has opened the door to an approach by which stakeholders of IE across contexts can unearth and examine similar and unique tensions surrounding IE. As the internationalisation of education comes under greater scrutiny from scholars, funders, and theorists, Tarc's conceptual framework enables diverse parties to examine tensions of IE that arise as normative visions express

themselves under operational constraints. Educators, stakeholders, and theorists can utilise Tarc's framework of 'tensions' as a means by which to comprehend and gauge different manifestations of IE, to trace how distinct agendas – pedagogic, financial, cosmopolitan – resonate and conflict under wider social conditions. They can surface the resonating and conflicting aims of IE in relation to intended and unintended outcomes.

**Tarc's conceptual approach offers a common framework by which diverse stakeholders can examine and respond to the forms and tensions within IE.**

transformative and internationalist IB was set against the parochial and elitist actuality of IB in international schools under the hegemony of the West.

As the IB has evolved, its programmes have become more responsive to divergent perspectives and worldviews, suggesting a less-Western-centric bases. The concern of access, however, continues to be a large challenge. On the one hand, more than half of IB schools now exist in the state sector mainly in the Anglo-West but also in some particular countries,



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