

Research summary

Conceptualizing and assessing international-mindedness (IM): An exploratory study

Extracted from a research report prepared for the IB by:

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Executive summary

Introduction

Central to the mission of the International Baccalaureate (IB) is “the attempt to define international-mindedness in increasingly clear terms, and the struggle to move closer to that ideal in practice” (*Towards a continuum of international education*: 3). Aligned with this central mission, IB World Schools have embraced the notion of international-mindedness (IM) to guide their school philosophies and educational goals.

Although the term international-mindedness is not widely used outside of the IB and its related publications, the three components, including multilingualism, intercultural understanding and global engagement as underlying concepts cover a vast range of literature.

This exploratory study aims to document and reflect from a critical perspective upon a range of articulations of IM, related constructs and the conceptualizations of these constructs through a document analysis and literature review. Three overarching research questions (RQ) concern conceptualizing and assessing IM, as follows:

RQ1 How is international-mindedness conceptualized in the IB curricular context? How is IM addressed in the educational philosophy of the IB and the curriculum framework of its programmes? How are multilingualism, intercultural understanding and global engagement associated with IM? How are attitudes, knowledge, skills and action associated with aspects of multilingualism, intercultural understanding and global engagement?

RQ2 How are constructs related to IM defined and theorized in the research field of international and intercultural education? What are the theories, models, dimensions and core elements of IM and other related constructs? How are multilingualism, intercultural understanding and global engagement defined?

RQ3 How are international-mindedness and some related constructs assessed within and outside of the IB context? What skills and competencies are being assessed? What models and instruments are being used for assessing the intercultural dimension in different educational contexts?

Method

To address the three research questions, an extensive search and review of the existing relevant literature and an analysis of IB documents were conducted.

The primary aim of the literature review was to identify research on the concept of IM, its three core components, including multilingualism, intercultural understanding and global engagement, and their related constructs. The review also considered learning objectives and assessment criteria that could inform the document analysis. The analysis of IB official documents was aimed at making inferences about IM in the IB and its programme frameworks, in Primary Years Programme (PYP), Middle Years Programme (MYP), Diploma Programme (DP) and support areas. Other documents that did not carry the official IB logo or that were taken from the IB public website were also used when deemed necessary.

Due to the vast amount of data obtained from the above-mentioned sources, the software NVivo (version 8 and 10) was used for coding and retrieving purposes. As a result of the coding process, a list of themes emerged, which were organized into categories and subcategories.

Aligned with the research questions, an analytical framework was built. It represented the relationship between:

1. The core components of IM: multilingualism, intercultural understanding and global engagement.
2. The dimensions about how IM could be developed in the IB curriculum and IB learning context: assessment, knowledge, skills, attitudes and action.
3. The related constructs in the field of international and intercultural education as identified through the literature review.
4. The related constructs found in analysed IB documents.

The research was set in a broad social constructionist frame. The research team was informed by critical discourse analysis as a framework in places, which can be helpful in recognizing the concepts of text, discursive practice (production and distribution of the text) and social practice (context), these elements form an integrated unit, a discourse.

Overview of the findings

In order to give an overview of the findings from this exploratory study, these will be presented according to the main research questions:

How is IM conceptualized in the IB curricular context?

According to the philosophy of the IB curriculum, the aim of the IB programme is “to develop internationally minded people who, recognizing their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better and more peaceful world” (*IB learner profile booklet*: 5).

IM is addressed as an overarching concept, which is seen to be embedded across all the programmes. It has no curriculum of its own. It could be considered as an approach embodying the values of the IB philosophy, and the IB encourages schools and teachers to integrate an international-mindedness approach in all that they do.

The analysis of IB documents has revealed that, on the one hand, IM is embodied in the 10 learner profile attributes. The attributes of the learner profile express the values inherent to the IB continuum of international education: these are values that should infuse all elements of the PYP, MYP and DP and, therefore, the culture and ethos of all IB World Schools (*IB learner profile booklet*: 1). On the other hand, IM is manifested in the components of multilingualism, intercultural understanding and global engagement. However, it is not quite obvious how these three components relate to those of the learner profile.

How are constructs related to IM defined and theorized in the research field of international and intercultural education?

Within the field of international and intercultural education, the constructs related to IM as found in IB documents and literature review are presented together with commentary for each of the three core components: multilingualism, intercultural understanding and global engagement.

The IB defines *multilingualism* as “a reconfiguration of how we think about languages that takes into account the complex linguistic realities of millions of people in diverse sociocultural contexts” (*Language and learning in IB programmes*: 8). It can be seen from a review of the documents that the IB’s definition of multilingualism also has elements of the Council of Europe’s concept of plurilingualism, since the IB documents value diversity and experience in several cultures. The IB documents recognize that multilingualism is clearly related to questions of identity, to self and other connections, and that there is a potential for multilingualism to help connect people with histories, experiences and understanding of others.

Multilingualism is largely described in terms of speaking and learning languages, including languages for learning purposes. Learners' mother tongue is given considerable importance in relation to learner identity as well as support for second language learners. English as a lingua franca medium of instruction is encouraged, and recognized as important for success in the 21st century. Language learning is identified as an activity that is positioned largely outside the learner, as opposed to leading to internal change in perspectives for the learner.

Intercultural understanding is recognized as closely linked to language learning, and there is a strong emphasis on developing knowledge of other cultural groups, appreciation of different ways of being and behaving, and developing positive attitudes to others. There is, however, little attention to the questioning of one's own values, or decentring from one's own perspective. Real-time interaction and an accompanying focus on reflexivity and critical cultural awareness are not addressed in any significant fashion in the documents; criticality is largely connected to a cognitive process. Intercultural understanding is largely positioned outside the individual in the IB documents, thereby excluding the critical and transformative aspects of intercultural competence. The IB documents do recognize the wealth of diversity within the individual schools, and at times suggest that this could be developed as a resource for learning. This could be an excellent starting point for developing a transformative and critical intercultural approach. Greater linking to action-taking in the form of external intercultural engagement activities could also offer a good opportunity; again, the IB is well-placed for this kind of development.

Global engagement is described in the documents in terms of undertaking activity outside of schools, in the local community and/or other foreign communities. Global engagement is not closely linked to multilingualism, and there is some reference to intercultural understanding leading to global citizenship. In relation to global engagement, the IB is understandably cautious about taking a political stance; as an international educational organization, it is important to adopt a "universal ethos". However, the need to avoid taking a political position should not weaken the possibilities for IB to globally engage. Currently there is little reference to dealing with problems and cultural conflicts that might hinder the creation of a better and more peaceful world. It is difficult to see how a better world can be created if questions of equal opportunity, stereotyping, marginalization, race, gender, poverty, power and religion and faith are not investigated. While some of these issues are addressed in some places on the public IB website and in support material for teachers, the researchers have not found them to be consistently evident in the official curricular IB documents. It could be helpful for the IB as an organization to consider the notion of power across the curriculum.

How are international-mindedness and some related constructs assessed within and outside of the IB context?

This research shows that the aspect of assessment of international-mindedness is underdeveloped in IB documents. Rich opportunities exist for adapting current intercultural assessment models to the IB's needs. Through the development of assessment, the interconnected cycle of learning is completed and a wide range of opportunities exist for greater clarification of concepts, teaching and learning outcomes. This will surely help the IB to develop its own key concept of international-mindedness, and benefit future intercultural citizens wanting to develop a more peaceful world.

References

IB publications

IB learner profile booklet. November 2008 (updated January 2009).

Primary Years Programme, Middle Years Programme and Diploma Programme. *Language and learning in IB programmes*. September 2011 (updated August 2012).

Primary Years Programme, Middle Years Programme and Diploma Programme. *Towards a continuum of international education*. September 2008.

This summary was extracted 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.

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