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.

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 internationalisation of educational curricula reform in different countries, such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) programmes, also becoming 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 announce 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 20th-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 disjunction between the humanist goals espoused in IE discourse and actual practices; these negative outcomes of IE are particularly a danger given colonial legacies and asymmetrical relationships, and are antithetical to the aspirational, deparochialising educational aims, there may be instances where actors are advancing parochial or even exploitive practices; these negative outcomes of IE are particularly a danger given colonial legacies and asymmetric relationships, and are antithetical to 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.
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 ‘ideal’ and ‘ideals’ of IB from the time of its creation under the ‘Keynesian liberalism’ of the 1960s in the field of multilateral education for international understanding, and explores 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 quarrel. 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 (measuring 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 Years 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.

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

**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 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, 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 mobility 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 understand and undertake 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 conceptual framework of ‘tensions’ as a means by which to comprehend and gauge different manifestations of IE, to trace how distinct agendas – pedagogic, financial, cultural – resonate and conflict under wider social conditions. They can surface the resourcing and conflicting aims of IE in relation to intended and unintended outcomes.