

## **Education for international mindedness: Life history reflections on schooling and the shaping of a cosmopolitan outlook**

**Katie Wright**

*La Trobe University*

**Emma Buchanan**

*The University of Melbourne*

*The development of “international mindedness” is an established aim of international education and has recently gained prominence in national school systems. Despite its increasing salience, it remains an ambiguous construct and an understudied aspect of schooling. It is implicated in globalized educational markets and attempts to measure international mindedness and its kindred concepts, such as cosmopolitanism, are fraught. Drawing on a study of subjective perceptions of the influence of schooling over the life course, this article explores education for international mindedness. Informed by life history and narrative approaches, it provides an analysis of reflections from people who completed International Baccalaureate (IB) programs from the 1970s to 2010s. Commonalities and differences in narratives of those who attended “international schools” and “national schools” are explored in relation to influences people attribute to shaping their worldviews. The article illustrates the value of qualitative approaches and offers new insights into sociological critiques of international education and international mindedness, grounding and enlivening recent characterizations in complex life histories.*

A central aim of international education is to promote the kinds of knowledge, skills and understandings that foster in students a predisposition towards cosmopolitanism (Cambridge & Thompson, 2004; Matthews & Sidhu, 2005). While various descriptors are employed to characterize this attribute, *international mindedness* is the term which has garnered most traction, largely due to its promotion through educational programs developed by the International Baccalaureate (IB) (Bunnell, 2008; Haywood, 2007). The IB is an educational foundation established in 1968 with the dual aim of developing an internationally transportable academic credential and creating an educational program that fostered “a sense of common humanity” (Rizvi, 2009, p. viii). Since the introduction of the original IB Diploma Program (DP) for students in their final two years of secondary schooling in a small number of international schools, the IB has grown tremendously and its offerings have expanded to four different educational programs, all of which seek to promote international mindedness. As articulated by the IB, key attributes of international mindedness are global engagement, multilingualism, and intercultural understanding (Sriprakash, Singh, & Qi, 2014).

While closely associated with international education, the intensification of globalization, mobility, and transnational flows has seen the values invoked by international mindedness become increasingly salient to educational endeavors in national schooling contexts (Fielding &

Vidovich, 2017; Lai, Shum, & Zhang, 2014). Yet despite widespread usage and growing significance in educational discourse, international mindedness remains an ambiguous concept and an understudied aspect of schooling and curricula, with conceptual discussion and scholarly debate outweighing empirical exploration (Belal, 2017; Cause, 2011; Harwood & Bailey, 2012; Tarc & Beatty, 2012; Sriprakash et al., 2014). International mindedness is, moreover, an increasingly problematized concept. Recent scholarship has underscored the multiple and contradictory dimensions of international mindedness and its kindred concepts, notably cosmopolitanism, and critiqued the IB for its position in globalized neoliberal educational markets (Doherty, Luke, Shield, & Hincksman, 2012; Tarc, 2009).

This article seeks to enliven theorization of international mindedness and enrich recent sociological critiques highlighting tensions between the liberal-humanist values of cosmopolitanism – such as the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and the openness to difference and other cultures – and the co-option of these educational goals for instrumental ends – such as economic advantage through labour market opportunities (Doherty et al., 2012). The study on which this article draws aimed to generate new insights into the connections people make between their schooling experiences and their later lives (Wright, 2015). Subjective reflections on the influence of schooling over the life course were elicited through in-depth interviews with people who had completed IB programs. While most studies of the IB have focused on recent graduates, this research offers fresh perspectives on the cultivation of international mindedness from the standpoint of both recent graduates as well as people who completed their schooling decades ago.

The article begins by considering definitional and conceptual issues around the construct of international mindedness, the IB's approach to fostering it, and how this has been understood and debated in the scholarly literature. An overview of the broader study and the qualitative biographical approach taken is then provided. In examining themes related to international mindedness and the links people made between educational experiences and their later lives, we consider school type, specifically what we term "international schools" vis-à-vis "national schools". Acknowledging that considerable differences exist *within* these categories, this emerged as a key point of distinction in people's reflections on the influence of schooling in general and curricular and program aspects in particular. Yet, as our analysis also reveals, participants identified broad ranging resonances that resist simple categorization. The interview narratives presented below offer new insights into conceptual engagements with the construct of international mindedness, grounded in the narratives of a diverse group of people who experienced changing formulations of this construct in their schooling.

### **Conceptualizing and Critiquing International Mindedness**

We begin our review of the literature by considering definitional and conceptual issues in relation to international mindedness, turning first to questions of what constitutes international education. While international education has a range of meanings and is readily associated with international schooling (Heyward, 2002), we follow Cambridge and Thompson's (2004, p. 162) description of international education as a set of ideas mobilized in "the theory and practice of education for 'international mindedness' in international schools and other institutions". International mindedness is also a slippery and multidimensional concept, one that has been understood in different ways (Haywood, 2007; Lineham, 2013; Sriprakash, Singh, & Qi, 2014).

Offering a definition that overcomes the conceptual muddiness of the term, Hill (2012) delineates its key attributes, arguing that international mindedness:

embraces knowledge about global issues and their interdependence, cultural differences, and critical thinking skills to analyse and propose solutions. International mindedness is also a value proposition: it is about putting the knowledge and skills to work in order to make the world a better place through empathy, compassion and openness – to the variety of ways of thinking which enrich and complicate our planet. (p. 246)

Drawing out its attitudinal components, Harwood and Bailey (2012) suggest it is reflected in a “person’s capacity to transcend the limits of a worldview informed by a single experience of nationality, creed, culture or philosophy and recognise in the richness of diversity a multiplicity of ways of engaging with the world” (p. 79). Hayden, Rancic and Thompson (2000) highlight its dispositional dimensions – being open-minded, flexible in thinking and having respect for others – but note it can also include linguistic competence.

An examination of international mindedness, both conceptually and empirically, necessitates engagement with its kindred concepts, notably global citizenship and cosmopolitanism. Global citizenship entails connections between the local and the global and a curriculum that will prepare students to understand and engage with global issues in a spirit of openness to difference (Taylor, 2017). Similarly, while acknowledging the long lineage and the complex and contested meanings of the term cosmopolitanism, we employ it as another complementary term, one that points to “an intellectual and aesthetic sense of openness towards peoples, places and experiences from different cultures, especially those from different nations” (Matthews & Sidhu, 2005, p. 53). Our use of the term is also attuned to the double-sided nature of cosmopolitanism, entailing both instrumental and strategic dimensions as well as a liberal-humanist orientation (Doherty et al., 2012; Tarc, 2009). Empirically, our interviews with IB graduates affirm that these terms are enmeshed, overlap, and may be used interchangeably.

Schools and education systems across the world have taken a strong interest in *internationalizing* education (Sriprakash et al., 2014). Promoting international mindedness has historically been, and remains, a central goal of the international schooling sector (Haywood, 2007; Hill, 2012). Yet, as educational systems have increasingly sought to prepare young people for future citizenship in a globalized and interconnected world, the attributes captured in the constructs of international mindedness, global citizenship, and cosmopolitanism are now viewed as important dispositions to foster in national educational jurisdictions (Fielding & Vidovich, 2017; Lai et al., 2014). With its founding internationalist aims, the IB was well placed to capitalize on this trend, becoming a key player in global educational markets. Its expansion in recent years has been rapid, particularly in publicly funded schools (Tarc & Beatty, 2012). A range of rationales have driven its adoption in different jurisdictions, from concerns with developing a distinctive educational identity (McGhee, 2003) and gaining competitive advantage (Doherty et al., 2012) to state-supported strategies of addressing disadvantage and raising academic standards, as evident in the USA (Siskin & Weinstein, 2008).

Conceptualizations of international mindedness as a framing concept for the IB have changed over time. As Hill (2012) notes, during the mid to late 20th century, the construct emphasized intercultural understanding, language learning and human rights. However, this changed somewhat towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to encompass “principles related to sustainable development, awareness of global issues, and international cooperation as conflicts continued to arise around the globe” (Hill, 2012, p. 245; see also Tarc, 2009). Mobilizing international mindedness thus encompasses ethical and moral facets, for example, acceptance of difference and promoting intercultural goals, what Tarc (2009, p. 23) describes as “a diffuse set of liberal-humanist, cosmopolitan” values. It also entails more instrumental orientations, enacted through strategic engagements with cosmopolitanism, bringing economic advantages that flow from transnational lifestyles, buttressed by international mindedness as a form of cultural capital. Doherty and colleagues (2012, pp. 313-314), for example, suggest that there is “an inherent, unarticulated tension between cosmopolitanism as an end in itself, and as a means to other, specifically economic and occupational, ends”. Doherty and Li (2011) found both dimensions evident in response to questions of the choice of the IB over the national curriculum in a group of IB Diploma Program (DP) students in Australia. In contrast to studies with a narrower program impact and evaluation focus, more sociological oriented analyses such as this position the IB as an “elite credential” in an increasingly marketized national and transnational educational landscape (Doherty et al., 2012, p. 317; see also Weis & Cipollone, 2013).

There have also been criticisms that the IB, with its foundation in a humanist tradition, may be understood as a project of westernization (Sriprakash et al., 2014; Tamatea, 2008). While the IB has sought to integrate non-western views and perspectives, it has been suggested that the overarching aspirations of international mindedness “may still be decided by the western knowledge industry” (Poonoosamy, 2010, p. 19) and contribute to the normalization of educational standards and benchmarks. In addition, there are concerns that the promotion of international mindedness by the IB – as opposed to the promotion of *international understanding* in earlier iterations of IB programs – reflects an embrace of neoliberalism, whereby understandings between *individuals*, rather than understandings between *nations* has become the central focus (Resnik, 2012).

### **A Life History Approach to Exploring Education for International Mindedness**

The distinctive approach of our study is that it takes a *longer view* of participation in IB programs and the fostering of international mindedness. We examine perspectives of IB graduates dating back to the 1970s, across a range of educational jurisdictions. Further, in contrast to other research, our approach did not seek to *measure* international mindedness but rather to provide new biographically situated qualitative perspectives on the connections people make between their schooling experiences and their later lives. Importantly, we did not set out to delineate the extent to which formal education may have more or less of an impact than other factors, such as family. Nevertheless, the interview narratives do offer insights into different spheres of influence in the shaping of what the IB calls *international mindedness* and what may also be termed a *cosmopolitan outlook*.

The study on which this article draws employed a life history approach, informed by biographical and narrative methods (Plummer, 2001; Roberts, 2002). The aim of the research was to explore subjective perceptions of the ways in which participation in a particular

educational program, the IB, is understood by people in the post-school years and over the course of people's lives. This encompassed exploration of personal values, attitudes, and dispositions, including international mindedness, which is a key goal of IB programs. A life history approach was selected to generate rich and detailed insights (Roberts, 2002) into links people themselves make between their schooling experiences and the shaping of their worldviews. As with other qualitative approaches, the intention was not to produce empirical generalizations. Rather, the aim was to elicit in-depth, situated biographical accounts that would add depth and nuance to studies of educational impact and the IB, as well as generate reflections that could enrich more critical readings of the IB as producing and reproducing social stratification.

Illuminating self-perceptions of international mindedness through interviews poses methodological challenges – both in defining and measuring it (Tarc & Beatty, 2012). An interview-based interpretive approach is fruitful for illuminating the complexity of this concept. Analysis of the views of former students of educational programs that explicitly aim to inculcate international mindedness sheds light on its experiential dimensions, which in turn can contribute to and extend conceptual discussions. Given the diversity of our participants, and indeed the study's temporal scope – schooling experiences spanning more than 40 years – our findings offer fresh and empirically grounded perspectives, complementing a range of existing studies of international mindedness and the IB.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 22 people, 11 women and 11 men, aged between 20 and 63 years who participated in IB programs from the early 1970s to 2010s. Participants included people with a variety of nationalities, cultural backgrounds, and schooling experiences in different locations and school types. Recruitment took place through IB networks and schools offering IB programs and interviews were conducted via Skype or telephone. Interviews began with questions about family of origin and early schooling experiences. Memories of IB programs were then explored, before turning to reflections on life after school and perceived lasting influences of their education on their lives.

During the interviews, focused questions were asked, such as “tell me about your memories of the IB program and the IB subjects you studied” and “to what extent do you see your education shaping your life beyond school?” However, the semi-structured approach to the interviews allowed for flexibility and openness. Participants were thus given opportunities to reflect on other areas of interest as they arose, an approach advocated by Patton (2014) and Plummer (2001). Discussion of international mindedness, global citizenship, and cosmopolitanism arose in some interviews without prompting by the interviewer. In others, it surfaced in response to the question of how their schooling or the IB program they undertook may or may not have influenced their outlook and worldview. Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and transcripts were sent to participants. Analysis of interviews was undertaken iteratively, in two phases. The first comprised examination of individual life stories. Phase two involved cross-case thematic analysis of all interviews.

### **International Mindedness and School Type**

An important point of difference that emerged across interviews in relation to the development of international mindedness was the type of school attended. Participants had graduated from a

variety of schools but for analytic purposes we distinguish between two types: “international schools” and “national schools”. In drawing this demarcation, we acknowledge that the question of what makes a school “international” is not simple (Heyward, 2002). We categorize international schools as those historically or primarily catering to expatriates *and* in which there is an explicitly international orientation or non-nationalistic ethos (Heyward, 2002). We use the term “national school” to refer to educational institutions positioned within national systems that have adopted IB programs. While there are of course differences *within* these categories, it is the differences *between* them that are most salient for our discussion.

A common response from participants, when asked about the influence of the IB on their later lives was that it provided them with “a broader view of the world”. For many, this was described in terms of the development of an international, global, or cosmopolitan perspective, and for some this had important ethical and political dimensions. Critical thinking, an important dimension of international mindedness (Hill, 2012), was also a notable theme and was conceived of variously as an orientation and skill. Responses pointing to the importance of critical thinking and the IB to the development of international mindedness were consistent across school types, although there were important differences, as we explore below. While issues around the cultivation of international mindedness in relation to areas such as social mobility, inequality, globalization, and identity formation (Doherty et al., 2012) are not the primary focus of our discussion, the life history narratives offer insights into these wider dynamics.

Consideration of narratives of former IB students with schooling experiences in these two categories of school type offers insights into program and curricular dimensions, as distinct from other factors, such as school ethos in efforts to foster international mindedness. We acknowledge that pathways to different school types are important and therefore, within the constraints of space, we also consider family background. Not surprisingly, a number of students who attended international schools came from globally mobile families with considerable degrees of intercultural and transnational cultural capital (Doherty et al., 2012). However, most did not.

### **International Schools and the Cultivation of International Mindedness**

We turn now to interview narratives of people who attended international schools, looking first at commonalities that emerged in interviews with people aged over 50 who attended international schools on scholarships in the 1970s and early 1980s. We then look at a somewhat different narrative and life trajectory of a younger participant, who completed the IB DP at an international school in the late 1990s. Overall, for those who attended international schools, the student body and ethos of the school were vividly recalled as aspects of schooling experience that informed the development of concepts, attitudes, and outlooks related to international mindedness, a finding also noted in other empirical studies (Belal, 2017).

For participants aged over 50 years, all of whom attended international schools, a recurrent theme was that their schooling experience opened them to the wider world. Clearly, the impact of their experiences is attributable not only to their educational program but to the fact that they were living abroad. Participants in this age range undertook IB studies abroad at a time in which international travel and intercultural engagement was limited. As 57-year-old David

commented, cohabiting with “a broad mix of students from all over the world” was life-changing. David had been attending a local high school before he was awarded a scholarship and left his family in Australia before completing the DP in 1976. Similarly, 55-year-old Claire, who left Northern Ireland in the mid-1970s and completed the DP in 1978, felt that the experience had an enormous impact. As she explained:

The slogan at the school is international understanding and for me, that was the big, big thing. I mean I came from a really small, closed yet divided community, which I was very attached to and very defensive of ... it was a huge difference ... I [became] more interested in mixing with people from different backgrounds ... and that has stayed with me very much.

With regard to spheres of influence, disentangling school culture, ethos and student body from curricular or program aspects, is a difficult task (Belal, 2017; Lineham, 2013). This is suggested in comments made by 51-year-old Sabina, who completed the DP in 1980. Reflecting on the international school she attended in Germany; she said: “I think you can’t separate the IB from the fact that it’s an international school. They adopted the IB ... because it fit their mission statement”. Similarly, David found it difficult to distinguish between the two, although he did identify the ways in which certain subjects he studied fostered a global perspective.

The experience of cultural immersion and being “opened up” to the world appears to have appreciably shaped the working lives of the older graduates interviewed: David has lived and worked in a number of countries, while Claire now lives in France and works in international relations. Such mobility is also evident in the career trajectory of Sabina, who lives and works in the United States as a journalist. Indeed, three of the four people in the over 50 age group went on to work abroad in areas requiring the capacity to navigate cultural and political differences. In some respects, this is suggestive of practical and even instrumental effects of education for international mindedness, wherein attitudes related to international mindedness operate as forms of cultural capital, affording advantage and mobility in a globalized economy.

A characterization of these former IB students as adopting the logic of the strategic “IB chooser” (Doherty et al., 2012) does not apply easily here. Their studies were undertaken before the rise of global league tables that shaped the mission statements of aspirational and elite schools. Nevertheless, their schooling opportunities do appear to have afforded them a degree of cultural capital; they were able to take advantage of and create opportunities beyond national borders, even though they did not grow up in mobile, transnational families.

This type of cultural immersion and exposure to a wider world was, however, more complex for some, as our interview with Roza revealed. In the mid-1970s she was nominated by her school to participate in a newly established Polish government educational program, which supported two students each year to complete their education at an international school abroad, which she did from 1975 to 1977. She says at the time, she was “completely in love with the experience”. She described it as liberating in many ways; she had newfound independence and she experienced the IB emphasis on individual opinion as new and exciting. She also reflects upon difficulties experienced by some of her fellow students.

One example Roza provided of the difficulties that arose in the context of challenges to the norms associated with students from different cultural backgrounds was the expectation that everyone would have boyfriends or girlfriends. As she recalls, this was problematic for some,

There were so many nationalities in every class and it was assumed that we would therefore acquire a certain amount of internationalism ... But on the other hand, I would say that the expectation was rather that in the end, everybody would conform to this sort of European/American standard. That this one particular way of seeing things would prevail in the end.

Critiques of efforts to promote internationalism, particularly in terms of its universalizing dimensions, are brought into sharp relief in Roza's narrative. Her more ambivalent account is suggestive of wider tensions at play in efforts to promote international mindedness, an endeavor suggested by some as a form of cultural imperialism (Sriprakash et al., 2014; van Oord, 2007). In addition, unlike many of her contemporaries from other regions, Roza was required by the conditions of her scholarship to return to Poland upon graduating. While acknowledging the rationale to build national capacity, her story reveals the personal impact of this state policy:

This philosophy has a big flaw, namely, it assumes that people are happy in their own country, and while it's probably quite right when you think of students from Holland, Italy, or the United States, but if you think about people like us, from Poland or from certain African countries ... I'd say this policy was naive to the point of being cruel because [it] gave all those people a glimpse of what the world could be like, and now go back [home] and basically waste it all, because nobody is going to need it.

Roza's experience underscores the double-edged nature of efforts to foster international mindedness for those unable to take advantage of its promise. While she welcomed the opportunity to study outside of Poland, enjoyed being immersed in an international school environment and found the IB exciting and liberating, this was problematic upon her return home. While she wanted to stay abroad for her university education, she did not have a visa or the financial resources to do so. She found returning to Poland extremely difficult – her options for tertiary study were limited and she experienced the social and political conditions as stark and oppressive in contrast to the two years she spent abroad. Her description of the coping strategy she developed is poignant. She lived, she said, in a state of "internal expatriation" what she described as physically living in one place but being "somewhere else" mentally.

At university, in Poland, Roza became politically active and she attributes this to her educational experience of the IB, particularly learning about historical struggles for independence. She acknowledges too that she more easily found work than many of her peers because she was equipped with English language skills that fostered employment opportunities, mainly translation work and tutoring. Maintaining friendship networks outside Poland also meant that she preserved an intellectual engagement with the wider world, both through that personal contact and with friends sending her books.



For Roza and others, for example, David, the IB's fostering of international mindedness was understood as deriving from the experience of immersion in an international school setting and also through the curricular program that was based on non-nationalistic critical inquiry. Many students mentioned the importance of particular subjects, especially History, which was typically recalled as being globally focused. Such exposure fostered, they suggested, broad and critical perspectives that contrasted sharply with the narrower nationalistic views they associated with their previous education.

Reflections on the IB provided by Roza, Sabina, Claire and David offer insights into how people reflect on international mindedness as promoted in international schools offering the IB in the 1970s to early 1980s. This was a time when the construct tended to be interpreted in terms of intercultural understanding, language learning and human rights (Hill, 2012). For those who graduated more recently, experiences of the construct of international mindedness were somewhat different, given that the concept itself shifted somewhat to include concerns with sustainable development, international cooperation and geopolitics (Hill, 2012). Without implying a simplistic causal relationship, we do find traces of these different emphases in more recent graduates' narratives. To illustrate, we briefly consider Harith's story, which is suggestive of these dynamics. His account also illuminates the complexity of interconnected dimensions of influence – family, culture, school and curriculum – that shape people's experiences of schooling and, in turn, their reflections on its resonance over the life course.

Harith completed the DP in 1997 at an international school in China. Unlike the older group of IB graduates, he came from what could be described as a transnational and globally mobile family. His parents were professionals from Sri Lanka, they moved to Japan for a period and then to Hong Kong, where Harith was born. During his childhood, he developed a keen interest in Chinese culture and learned Mandarin. Harith's description of his younger self is of someone who is independent, competent, and curious. He wanted an experience of immersion in Chinese culture and he was attracted to the internationalist orientation of the IB, so sought out an international school offering the IB in Mainland China. While recognizing that both his family background and the experience of being in an international school played an important role in the development of his worldview, he delineates what he says was the particular influence of the IB on his present-day sense of himself as an internationally minded, global citizen. As he said:

We had to read a lot of global literature ... from Japan, Nigeria, the United States, and UK ... And with history we did Chinese history, French, you know the Cuban Missile Crisis, United States, the Russian Revolution, we did a lot of global politics. However, if I had come at sixteen and said that I wanted to be a doctor [which he did become], I would have done maths, chemistry and physics, and my global perspective would have been very, very different. So I do think the global perspective comes very much from the subjects that I chose, and I'm so glad that I did those subjects because I feel that I can talk and understand politics a lot more than some of my very scientific counterparts.

Harith and his family could be described in terms of Doherty and colleagues' (2012) depictions of "IB choosers" – families in high-income brackets, parents with postgraduate education,

linguistically diverse and globally mobile. In such cases, they suggest that it may be the transnational family who is “seeking out the IB to better accommodate their worldviews” because local curricula fail to meet their needs (Doherty et al., 2012, p. 328). The corollary is that rather than international mindedness being an outcome of the IB, it reflects a pre-existing transnational disposition. Certainly, Harith strategically chose the IB and there have been professional benefits for him, including transnational medical work. However, this is not the full picture. The complexities and interconnected spheres of influence come into focus when considering his narrative in greater depth. In his subjective account of international mindedness, it is clear this also includes a strong personal orientation of being critically engaged with the world, beyond a narrow instrumental professionalism. He links, for example, experiences of community service in the IB with his current humanitarian medical work. Harith’s narrative, then, suggests that cultural competence and global mobility has multiple faces, including what might be termed a critical ethic of care. This was also evident in the narratives of younger graduates of international schools, particularly in discussions of the volunteering work they currently do, and links they make between this and the community service component of the IB.

### **National Schools and the Cultivation of International Mindedness**

Reflections from people who attended “national schools” and undertook IB studies from the 1980s through to the early 2010s provide a point of contrast and another perspective on the complexities associated with educational efforts to foster international mindedness. Approximately half the people in the study undertook the IB at such schools. As with the classification of international schools, we acknowledge the heterogeneity of the “national” educational experiences we are considering together here, which includes schools operating in different national contexts and catering to very different student cohorts. Yet common themes did emerge. Most strikingly, and perhaps not surprising, students who attended national schools spoke of international mindedness as being promoted through the disciplines and broader curriculum – course content, pedagogical styles and epistemic orientation – rather than through a school-wide ethos, extracurricular activities or an institutional emphasis on international dialogue.

Five of the six participants who attended state-funded secondary schools did so in North America, where the IB experienced considerable growth in the public sector from the 1980s onwards (Tarc, 2009). We also draw here on interviews with two people who were students at private schools in Australia and Mexico, and one person who undertook IB studies in her local state school in Poland. Whether private or state funded, the national schools described here differed from those we categorize as international schools in important ways. They generally had a more homogenous student body, at least with regard to nationality, and the ethos of the school tended to reflect a nationalistic or local outlook, rather than an explicitly internationalist one. It follows, then, that participants’ reflections on international mindedness would focus more on program and curricular aspects rather than the inculcation of such values through other characteristics of their school, for example, the student body. This was certainly suggested by the reflections of our participants.

A typical response to the question of whether a global perspective was an important part of their schooling was that it came through strongly in certain subjects, particularly History,

Geography, and Literature. Belal's (2017) recent study of international mindedness found similar views amongst alumni; and yet, interestingly, *current* students in her research underplayed curricular aspects. In our study, 39-year-old Benjamin, who attended an American high school and completed the DP in 1993, responded to this question by saying:

I don't recall them saying, now we're going to focus on being cosmopolitan, but it was cosmopolitan, it was just a fact of life, when you're scouring all this literature. And I do remember them saying we're trying very hard not to be Eurocentric. So I guess in that way they were trying to be cosmopolitan.

Benjamin described his education as giving him "the tools to understand the broader world". This occurred, he said, through literary texts, such as *Heart of Darkness*, which dealt with colonization and European expansion, and provided alternative standpoints to consider: "we were always learning to think about things from the other point of view". Like many of our participants, Benjamin's comments also suggest that people interpret international mindedness as being closely related to open-mindedness and critical thinking, as identified in the literature (Hill, 2012; Wilkinson & Hayden, 2010).

Benjamin's reflection on critical thinking is suggestive of a cosmopolitan orientation as an end in itself. Benjamin did not explicitly describe himself as internationally minded; yet this came through strongly in his interview. Responding to a question about the overall influence of the IB over the twenty years since graduating high school, he said it shaped his understanding of public policy and international affairs. He describes his tertiary studies in engineering as narrowly technical and believes the education provided by the DP fostered a broad and critical perspective that has stayed with him. In raising the subject of public policy, he explained that he could understand political debates and put them into an international, historical and global context, and he attributes this to his IB experience. This theme was reiterated in many interviews, supporting earlier research undertaken with former IB students soon after graduation (Taylor & Porath, 2006). While our study was not intended to measure program impact, our research suggests that for some, these influences may be long-lasting.

A number of participants commented that the global perspectives promoted in the IB program challenged nationalistic views. This has been a contentious issue in the United States. As Bunnell (2009, p. 61) has shown, while the IB has received state support and federal funding, it has also been subject to "concerted attack" from "a vast array of ultra-conservative agencies and commentators who denounce the curriculum as federal interference, and fundamentally 'un-American'". Doherty et al. (2012, p. 316) have similarly noted that some neoconservatives view the IB as "a dangerous form of internationalism". Thirty-five-year-old James, who completed the DP in 1997, throws light on the source of concern:

We talked about the US in a very honest way, which is not what you really get in a lot of, in most, high school education in the US ... we definitely were taught to question and criticize the role of the US in foreign affairs and the thinking that you know, everything that the US did was right, or something like that ... there was definitely a focus to see us in the entire world, and not just the US.

It was not only students from the United States who made such comments. Twenty-three-year-old Miguel, who completed the DP at a private school in Mexico City in 2010, recalls an international perspective as central to his education. As he explained: "The thing is that the IB provided units that would, well, they have to be analysed from another perspective, other than from a Mexican perspective". This was a recurring theme across the interviews. For 20-year-old Frederico, who attended a religious school in Australia and completed the DP in 2012, it came through most strongly in English. He recalled, in particular, the exploration of many cultures, facilitated through reading literature from across the globe.

Reflections on international mindedness from 26-year-old Stefa, provide another viewpoint. Stefa completed the DP in 2007 at a state school in Poland. For her, while there were dimensions of internationalism in the curriculum, the most striking moments were rather more incidental. She described an event when former IB students visited her school to talk about opportunities to study abroad. This gave her a new sense of possibility. She contrasted the widening of her worldview provoked by this, with the horizon of possibilities she saw as broadly reflective of Polish education and society. She also recounted other incidental aspects of schooling as important, including teachers undertaking training abroad, suggesting a form of international mindedness as a proclivity towards transnational mobility. Interestingly, Stefa went on to work in an international organization. In addition to such incidental comments or encounters, an important aspect of the IB for her was subject matter and teaching style, which contrasted sharply to what she described as Poland's nationalistic and homogenous pedagogical and curriculum culture.

Yet not all those interviewed experienced a strong sense of the IB program as fostering internationalist perspectives. For 34-year-old Cooper, who attended a state school in Canada and completed the DP in 1998, this was not an aspect he recalls as significant. As he described it: "in many respects it was still a sort of very suburban Canadian perspective". For others, though, engagement with the IB was remembered as crucial in their development. Jessie, a 46-year-old Canadian woman who took only two IB subjects in her local high school in 1986, was adamant that the experience was transformative:

I mean history doesn't really cover it ... [it was] far more geopolitical, global ... very much a big picture ... how economics fit in, how individual human rights fit in, how you followed the markers and the tracers of the ups and downs of different empires and countries. I still use it today when I'm looking at geopolitical affairs around the entire planet, including economics, which is one of the reasons why I went into activism in politics.

The impact of studying IB History, and the IB subject Theory of Knowledge, is striking in Jessie's case. She describes this as something that "set the framework" for the rest of her life.

### **Concluding Comments**

This article has explored narratives of 13 former IB students, aged 20 to 58, reflecting on schooling experiences and the cultivation of international mindedness. Drawing on the accounts provided by a diverse range of people with schooling experiences spanning more than four decades, this research provides new biographically informed insights into schooling and the

shaping of personal values, attitudes, and dispositions. As the literature suggests, international mindedness is a complex and multidimensional concept. It is, moreover, a challenging educational “outcome” to research empirically, with only a limited number of qualitative studies exploring international mindedness and the IB. At the same time, educational efforts to foster attitudes and outlooks associated with international mindedness are subject to increasing critique, primarily due to their place in a marketized and elite global educational economy. The research presented in this article provides fresh insights into international mindedness through exploration of subjective perceptions of the lasting influence of schooling. Uniquely, our study grounds analysis of international mindedness in the life histories of former IB students, and our findings suggest that the “effects” of IB programs that seek to foster this outlook are both instrumental and attitudinal.

In our study, international mindedness emerged as a multifaceted and sometimes ambiguous construct, interpreted by former IB students in a variety of ways and often associated with kindred concepts, such as cosmopolitanism. The type of school people attended – broadly grouped above as “national” and “international” – emerged as an important factor in the reflections made by participants regarding the influence of the IB in the formation of their worldview. For people who undertook IB studies in international schooling contexts, a common theme that emerged across all age groups was that cultural immersion in an international school setting was an important component of fostering comfort with, an interest in, and an inclination towards engaging cross-culturally, and helped attune many to geopolitics. For those educated in national school settings, the development of an awareness of cultural, social, and political diversity through school programs was more closely related to curriculum. While a multiplicity of influences come into play in the shaping of people’s worldviews, the identification of particular subjects as important in fostering international mindedness was clearly evident.

International mindedness encompasses abstract forms of understanding, what some participants referred to as a “broad worldview,” as well as practical effects and instrumental dimensions, such as the capacity to work in intercultural settings and to move across national borders with ease. In our study, the instrumental – and often critiqued – practical “benefits” of IB programs were evident in the life trajectories of people who are now globally mobile. Thus, the cultivation of international mindedness may be understood as enacting a strategic form of cosmopolitanism. Yet, as we have noted, a narrowly instrumental characterization of this proclivity fails to capture the complexity of international mindedness, particularly the ethical engagements that we have described as being an important part of a cosmopolitan orientation. As the narratives suggest, international mindedness entails critical thinking, acceptance of difference and being engaged in the wider world – attributions that are simultaneously instrumental and attitudinal.

Our exploration of subjective perceptions of the influence of the IB over the life course, which we considered alongside scholarly debates on international mindedness, offers historically grounded and biographically situated insights into how a group of former IB students understand the process of becoming “internationally minded”. Crucially too, the article has further illuminated the multiple faces of international mindedness, including how its instrumental dimensions operate within increasingly stratified schooling systems and how this can coexist with a wider cosmopolitan ethic.

**Katie Wright** is an Australian Research Council Fellow (DECRA) and Senior Lecturer in Sociology at La Trobe University.

**Emma Buchanan** is an Early Career Researcher working in the history and cultural study of education.

**Contact:** Dr. Katie Wright, Department of Social Inquiry, La Trobe University, Australia.  
[katie.wright@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:katie.wright@latrobe.edu.au)

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