



Global Dreams, Enduring Tensions

International Baccalaureate in a Changing World

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Foreword

The global popularity of the International Baccalaureate (IB) is truly remarkable. Over the past ten years, the rate of increase in students enrolled in IB programs has been over 10% annually. Today, there are more than 750,000 students enrolled in IB programs offered in no less than 130 countries worldwide. IB has entered into both private and state systems of schooling and the IB qualifications have become highly valued by both national and transnational employers. Many universities, in multiple countries, now enroll IB graduates ahead of high school graduates with local qualifications. IB has the potential to transform the global landscape of education, if indeed it has not done so already. It has established a new benchmark for addressing issues of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, and for thinking about the need for students to become reflexive about knowledge and to develop a sense of ‘international mindedness.’ How might we explain this success—what might aptly be referred to as a global movement in education?

In this wonderfully constructed and written book, Paul Tarc seeks to answer this question. He argues that an account of IB’s success requires attention not only to its history but also to the strategic ways in which its growth has been managed to reflect the changing times. The International Baccalaureate Office (IBO), Tarc suggests, has been a dynamic organization that has been able to adapt effectively to shifting economic conditions, political ideologies, schooling reforms, and cultural tastes. It has embraced the opportunities that the new times have offered, and has marshaled them in such a way as to enhance IB’s desirability to students, parents, and employers alike. IBO has been guided by research that has not only been technical, but also strategic and visionary, paying attention to the broader historical shifts in the ways in which societies are governed and have become inter-connected and inter-

dependent, and the manner in which IBO's own programs and services must respond to maintain relevance.

The historical origins of IB go back to the late 1940s, when Europe had fallen apart by the ravages of the Second World War, and a new educational vision for international peace appeared most urgent. However, it was not until the mid-1960s that IB finally came into existence, when a group of teachers in Geneva formed a syndicate that later became the International Baccalaureate Organization. The IB program reflected the emerging humanist values of the 1960s, with a focus on individual autonomy and social responsibility. It offered a rigorous academic program that encouraged students to learn how to learn and to develop skills of intercultural communication. Within the context of Cold War politics, IB represented an approach to lessening tensions and developing a sense of a common humanity. However, its early attempts to provide an alternative to entrenched nation-based qualification systems proved less than successful.

Some twenty years later in the 1990s, the resistance to a transnational qualification subsided; IBO was now able to draw upon the emerging awareness of globalization to support the need for a qualification that could systematically respond to a world in which the global mobility of people, finance, and ideas was becoming a norm. In an era of globalization, IBO's sense of cosmopolitanism and the mobility of the IB Diploma became assets. In turn, IBO sought to expand its horizons, from a small elite system to one that was massified and was available not only in selective private international schools, but in a growing number of schools within state systems in the West and in a growing set of newly forming international schools globally. However, IBO's new opportunities came with complications. IBO faced a dilemma over how fast and far it could expand without compromising its key values and principles. Neoliberal educational restructuring that proved to be such fertile ground for the growth and success of IB also threatened to marginalize the humanist and progressive visions of IB's founders. The dangers associated with neoliberalism and corporatization continue to loom large, as do allegations that IB is simply a global business catering largely to the global elite, and effectively serving to reinforce global inequalities in education.

The ways in which IBO has understood and addressed these challenges, and the extent to which IBO has been successful in doing so—organizationally and programmatically—constitute the core of Tarc’s account of IB. Thoughtfully and honestly, this account navigates the complex issues of not only global processes and their impact on schooling but also the institutional debates within the IBO itself. Tarc shows how, in the context of a large organization, the global dreams that IB represents are forever in danger of becoming sidelined and even obsolete, and how all of the teachers and administrators who are associated with IB have to work hard and consistently to re-animate these dreams in changing times. Tarc tells a story that no one interested in international education can afford to overlook.

—Fazal Rizvi, *University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, August 2009*