

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321275269>

# Interpreting and implementing the IB Learner Profile in an internationalised school in China: a shift of focus...

Article in *Journal of Research in International Education* · November 2017

DOI: 10.1177/1475240917742534

CITATIONS

0

READS

18

1 author:



Adam Poole

University of Nottingham, Ningbo Campus

10 PUBLICATIONS 4 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



The Avatar Project: Researching Chinese Students' Funds of Identity Using Digital Technology [View project](#)



International Teacher Identity in a Chinese school in Shanghai, China [View project](#)

**Accepted version for publication.** Poole, A. (2017). Interpreting and implementing the IB Learner Profile in an internationalised school in China: a shift of focus from the 'Profile as text' to the 'lived Profile'. *Journal of Research in International Education*.

## **Abstract**

This article presents findings from a case study that explored the way Sophie, an expatriate International Baccalaureate Diploma art teacher in an internationalised school in Shanghai, China, interpreted and implemented the International Baccalaureate Learner Profile. The findings challenge the view that the Profile exerts a regulatory force on teachers' behaviour by showing that Sophie not only reshaped the Profile according to her beliefs about teaching and learning, but also resisted what she perceived to be underlying patriarchal and westernising discourses. Findings suggest that the notion of a regulatory discourse should focus on both the *Profile as text* and also what could be called the *lived Profile*. Finally, this article offers tentative recommendations for professional development that incorporate both the *Profile as text* and the *lived Profile*.

## **Keywords**

Learner Profile, international education, regulatory discourse, cultural scripts for teaching and learning

## **Introduction**

The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) was established in 1968 as a practical necessity in response to a new mobile population who required internationally orientated courses of study (Peterson, 2003). The programme's stated mission is to 'develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect' (in Resnik, 2012). The International Baccalaureate Organisation offers four programmes of study for students: the Primary Years Programme (PYP) for students aged 3-12; Middle Years Programme (MYP) for students aged 11-16; the Diploma Programme (DP) for students aged 16-19 (IB, 2017); and more recently, the Career-related Programme (CP) which, in addition to offering a minimum of two DP courses, also provides students with practical, real-world approaches to learning that lay the groundwork for both career-related education and lifelong learning. Despite the rapid expansion of the IBDP in recent years, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region (Hayden, 2016; Walker, 2010), there still remains a dearth of studies that focus on the International Baccalaureate Learner Profile (hereafter referred to as either the Learner Profile, or Profile), a set of ten attributes that sit at the heart of all four programmes and that are designed to foster international-mindedness (IBO, 2009; Singh & Qi, 2013). For the purposes of this article, international-mindedness is taken to refer to knowledge about global issues, cultural differences, and critical thinking skills (Hill, 2012) which are put to work to foster understanding between individuals (Resnik, 2012).

The Learner Profile is worthy of study because of its central place in the overall IB curriculum, and also because it articulates a vision of international-mindedness, a defining feature of international education that remains somewhat enigmatic and under-defined.

Given that a defining characteristic of international education is, or should be, an intercultural and global focus, teachers and school leaders should be aware of the role that individuals and schools play in facilitating, reproducing or even challenging the idea of international mindedness. Researchers also need to be responsive to the central role of educational stakeholders in interpreting and implementing international mindedness, as embodied in the Learner Profile. However, the current literature on the Profile tends to focus on either the *Profile as text* (Cambridge; 2013; Tarc, 2009; Van Oord, 2007, 2013), which over-emphasises the regulatory nature of the Profile as reinscribing normative western behaviour, or the Profile in relation to the perceptions of stakeholders, thereby losing sight of the actual Profile as a document (Beek, 2016; Cause, 2009, 2011; Chatlos, 2015; Lai, Shum & Zhang, 2014; Wang, 2012, 2013, 2015; Wells, 2016). This article adds to the growing literature on the Learner Profile by attempting to find a middle ground between these two positions. In order to achieve this aim, I present how Sophie (a pseudonym), an IBDP art teacher in an internationalised school in Shanghai, China, not only reshaped the Profile according to her beliefs about teaching and learning, but also resisted what she perceived to be patriarchal and westernising discourses by (re)presenting the attributes as a piece of art. The term ‘internationalised school’ here corresponds to Hayden’s (2016) term, Type C non-traditional international school and refers to nationally focused schools that offer international curricula to local indigenous elites. In contrast, Type A schools have been defined as traditional international schools serving transnational elites and Type B as ideological international schools that seek to make the world a more peaceful place through promoting greater intercultural understanding and international cooperation (Hayden, 2016). Findings suggest that future research should focus on both the *Profile as text* (as presented by the IB in official documents), and also what I call the *lived Profile* (as interpreted and implemented by individuals). Tentative recommendations for professional development are also made that include synthesising the *Profile as text* and the *lived Profile*.

## **The IB Learner Profile**

The review of literature on the Learner Profile has identified two main themes: understanding and implementation. While these themes are inextricably linked, they are presented separately for convenience sake. Understanding, in this study, refers to the way teachers internalise and make sense of educational phenomena such as curricula, syllabi, or academic content, according to their beliefs about, and experiences of, teaching and learning, while implementation involves an action component of putting curriculum or content into practice.

### ***Understanding the Profile***

The Learner Profile (see Table 1 for definitions of the Profile’s ten attributes) provides an important indication of the characteristics that the IB consider internationally minded individuals should possess (Singh & Qi, 2013). It is also intended to mould policy and practice in order to provide a unifying ethos for the disparate organisations that comprise IB World Schools (Bullock, 2011), and to provide continuity across the IB’s four programmes (Bryant et al., 2016). However, the term international-mindedness is still

considered to be ambiguous (Gunesch, 2007; Haywood, 2007). As a result of this conceptual confusion, the International Baccalaureate Organisation has responded with a number of publications designed to provide a more robust theoretical basis for defining, implementing and assessing the Profile (see e.g. Bullock, 2011; Hare, 2010; Singh & Qi, 2013; Walker, 2010; Walker et al., 2016).

**Table 1.** Definitions of the ten attributes that comprise the IB Learner Profile (IBO, 2009)

| <b>Learner Attribute</b> | <b>Definition of Learner Profile attribute</b>   |
|--------------------------|--|
| <b>Inquirers</b>         | Development of natural curiosity; active and lifelong learning; independence of learning.  |
| <b>Knowledgeable</b>     | Exploration of concepts and ideas that have local and global significance; development of knowledge across a broad range of disciplines.   |
| <b>Thinkers</b>          | Initiative in applying thinking-skills critically and creatively; make reasoned ethical decisions.   |
| <b>Communicators</b>     | Effective collaboration with others; ideas expressed confidently and creatively in different languages and in different modes of communication.  |
| <b>Principled</b>        | Students act with integrity and honesty; they take responsibility for their own actions and their consequences.  |
| <b>Open-minded</b>       | Appreciate their own cultures and personal histories, and are open to the perspectives, values and traditions of other individuals and communities; intercultural awareness.             |
| <b>Caring</b>            | Empathy, compassion and respect towards feelings of others. Commitment to service, and act to make a positive difference to the lives of others and to the environment.                  |
| <b>Risk-takers</b>       | Unfamiliar situations approached with courage; have the independence of spirit to explore new roles, ideas and strategies; students are brave and articulate in defending their beliefs. |
| <b>Balanced</b>          | Intellectual, physical and emotional balance to achieve personal well-being.   |

---

**Reflective**

Consideration of learning and experience; assess strengths and limitations to support learning.

---

However, despite being provided with more guidance (IBO, 2015), educators still struggle to understand the purpose of the Profile, particularly in non-western contexts. For example, Rizvi et al.'s (2014) cross cultural comparative analysis of the Profile in India, Australia and Hong Kong found a great deal of discrepancy and tension between the way teachers understood the purpose of the Profile. While some teachers viewed the Profile as a framework of academic and moral attributes, others connected the Profile to the idea of international-mindedness, which itself was open to considerable interpretation and confusion. Similarly, Lai et al.'s (2014) study of nine IB World Schools in Hong Kong revealed the contextualised challenges that teachers encountered in integrating international-mindedness into Chinese language teaching and highlighted the strategies they employed to overcome these challenges. Some of the challenges included a tension between the international orientation of the Profile and expectations of parents who were more examination-orientated in their focus. This point is also illustrated by Tate (2013), who observes that the ideological objectives of international-mindedness – such as critical inquiry and independence – are more commensurate with so-called progressive pedagogies, such as constructivism, that emphasise debate and collaboration which are often to be found in Type A and Type B traditional international schools, but whose inclusion in Type C non-traditional international schools is problematised by the existence of nationally focused pedagogies that reflect examination-orientated cultures of learning.

In contrast, Chatlos' study (2015) of an IB Middle Years Programme in the US highlighted the ways content-specific beliefs shaped teachers' understanding of the individual learner attributes. Content-specific beliefs refer to teachers' epistemological and pedagogical beliefs about a particular subject (Levin, 2015; Bao, Zhang & Dixon, 2016). The findings showed that teachers use their subjects as filters that foreground those attributes they consider to be most relevant to their subject. The study found that teachers disagreed about the attributes of principled and caring, and proposed that additional attributes, such as effort, integrity and persistence, should be added. Cause (2009, 2011), researching in a similar western context (Australia), also found that IB Primary Years Programme teachers felt limited in teaching the ten attributes of the Profile, leaving little room for the development and exploration of their own interpretations of international-mindedness in the form of other attributes. These findings suggest that the *Profile as text* is regulatory in nature as teachers not only struggle to make sense of the learner attributes, but also feel constrained by their relatively limited number and their articulation as values or virtues which appears to reflect a western bias (Van Oord, 2013).

### ***Implementing the Profile***

Although the Profile is presented in its textual form as a set of ten attributes, each with a clear definition (as illustrated by Table 1), the high generalisation of each attribute, along with a lack of clear guidelines for implementation (Cause, 2009, 2011; Wells, 2013; Wright

& Lee, 2014; Walker, 2010), has led to the Profile being implemented in diverse and often contradictory ways. Moreover, its implementation is often in tension with the notion of international-mindedness. For example, Cause (2009) found that students in a Primary Years Programme in a candidate IB school in Australia did not demonstrate the Profile in a globally normative sense (that is, the *Profile as text*) but expressed the Profile differently according to their own beliefs and experiences (that is, in the form of the *lived Profile*). In addition, implementing the Profile in non-western contexts can be problematic for western and non-western educators, particularly when learner attributes clash with the sociocultural norms of the local context. For example, Elkay (2011) identifies risk-takers as an attribute that does not easily fit within a Middle-Eastern culture of learning as its underpinning assumptions about individuality and action clash with the more collectivist mind-set of her teaching context. This can result in cultural discontinuity when ‘western’ values are implemented in non-western contexts (Elkay, 2011; Haywood, 2007; Rizvi et al., 2014; Van Oord, 2013).

In addition, some researchers (Cambridge, 2013; Poonoosamy, 2010; Tarc, 2009; Tate, 2013; Van Oord, 2007, 2013) have adopted a more critical stance by revealing the ways in which the Profile exerts discipline over both students and teachers by only presenting one set way to act internationally minded (Haywood, 2007). For example, Tarc (2009) argues that ‘Western metaphysical assumptions about being and learning are naturalised and [...] made universal’ (p. 42) in the Learner Profile, which Cambridge (2013) interprets as an ‘explicit example of the regulative discourse promoted by the IB’ (p. 191). Interestingly, these findings suggest that despite being defined at a high level of generalisation, the attributes that comprise the Profile still exert a considerable regulatory force on teachers and students.

Van Oord (2007) arguably offers the most sustained critical reading of the Profile by exposing what he considers to be a discontinuity between the content and epistemological-levels of the IB curriculum. His argument is that while the content-level of the International Baccalaureate curriculum is overtly international, on an epistemological-level the Diploma Programme actually conceals a ‘western configuration of learning and meta-learning, transmitting and perpetuating conceptual knowledge as the dominant kind of knowledge’ (p. 386). Wells (2013) also questions the apparent universality of the values encompassed in the Profile, arguing that the attributes are largely based on a western liberal humanistic tradition of values which is incommensurate with other philosophical traditions. The construction of international-mindedness from a western perspective thus leads to global cultural convergence rather than cultural diversity (Belal, 2017; Tate, 2013) by creating an elite class of individuals who perpetuate cultural imperialism (Belal, 2017; Fox, 1985).

## **Towards the lived Profile**

While the conceptual literature focuses on the way the *Profile as text* functions as a vehicle for neo-imperialism or an internationalising agenda, findings from the empirical studies highlight the way teachers’ beliefs about international education in general, and teaching and learning more specifically, shape the way teachers understand and implement the Profile. Far from leading to cultural convergence, the empirical literature clearly

demonstrates that teachers are active agents in the process of educational transfer (in this article, transfer is understood as the process of translating the *Profile as text* to *Profile as lived*). Moreover, teachers are empowered subjects who bring their own tactics and agendas to bear on the interpretation and implementation of the Profile. However, while the majority of studies cite conceptual confusion and subject knowledge belief as the main factors that lead to interpretative ambiguity, little has been written about how teachers resist being conscripted into a seemingly covert internationalising agenda by scripting their own versions of the Profile. This study attempts to build on the literature by exploring how international teachers in a Type C non-traditional international school interpreted and implemented the Learner Profile. [While the majority of studies consulted for this research project make use of the verb *understand* to describe the internal processes of making sense of the Profile, I use *interpret* as it foregrounds the active role that individuals play in implementing and also resisting the *Profile as text* which problematises the notion of a regulatory discourse that controls teachers' behaviour.] Therefore, my aim is to show how Sophie not only resisted being regulated by the Profile, but also remade the Profile according to her experiences as an artist and her beliefs about teaching art.

Resisting, as I interpret and use it in this study, is based on the work of Pennycook (2017) and Giroux (1983), the concept of resistance being used as a verb in the present continuous in order to underscore its processual and open-ended nature. From Pennycook, I take the general idea of human agency, and the ways in which educational actors appropriate English or international education to their local context. More specifically, Giroux provides a conceptualisation of resisting which has been used here as an analytical framework for interpreting Sophie's data. As initially presented by Giroux, resistance is a three-staged process, the first of which, *perception*, involves an individual becoming conscious of, and subsequently critiquing, hegemonic structures or the unequal relations of domination. Hegemony is understood in Gramscian terms as a dynamic force that involves contradictions that leave hegemonic control open to challenge by members of subordinate groups (Fairbrother, 2003). The second stage, *reaction*, involves reflective action or a response to an individual's perception of hegemony, and a realisation of their powerlessness. The final stage, *result*, is a form of self-emancipation that challenges the relations of domination.

Giroux's model of resistance is particularly relevant to the field of international education and the spread of English and English language education in the twenty-first century, as it brings to the fore issues of power and control, particularly the view that international education is a form of neo-imperialism in which westernising hegemonic structures are naturalised and made universal in language education (Pennycook, 2017) and international curricula (Cambridge, 2013; Tarc, 2009), such as in the form of the Learner Profile (Van Oord, 2007). While the conceptual literature is couched in a kind of fatalistic disempowerment (the *Profile as text* is seen as hegemonic, but there is no room for resistance), Pennycook, Giroux, and other critical theorists like Freire (1996) offer a more optimistic approach that enables researchers to shift focus from the *Profile as text* to the *lived Profile* and the various ways in which stakeholders negotiate meaning and power through their reinterpretation and implementation of the Profile.

However, not all aspects of Giroux's model are applicable to international education and expatriate teachers in internationalised schools. For example, the Marxist aspect of class is not particularly relevant as nowhere in Sophie's interview data was there reference to powerlessness. Therefore, I revised the model slightly, grounding it in Sophie's data, thereby making it more commensurate with her lived experience. Hegemony has been conceptualised in a more general sense, one which encompasses actual control and regulation in the Gramscian sense and also what could be called perceived or constructed control which involves individuals projecting hegemonic structures onto the Profile. Adopting this position also allowed me to find a more nuanced middle ground between absolute control on the one hand and complete resistance on the other. As such, the three terms employed by Giroux have been retained, and redefined according to my purposes. Thus, *perception* refers to an individual becoming conscious of the Profile as an example of actual or constructed hegemony and critiquing it; *reaction* involves reflective action in response to an individual's realisation of empowerment by restorying the Profile in different forms and redefining or adding new attributes; and *result* leads to an alternative Profile that challenges the *Profile as text* and which can also lead others, such as students, to similarly question the apparent naturalness of the Profile. Resisting, as it is used here, underscores individual agency by recognising that individuals are able to bring about transformative change in their surrounding environment through the ability to think critically, which includes scepticism, intellectual curiosity and an openness to multiple perspectives (Fairbrother, 2003 p. 14).

## **Methodology**

The focus of this study was on the ways in which individuals interpreted and implemented the Learner Profile; a single-case study design was adopted, focusing primarily on one IBDP teacher. However, as the data for this study was drawn from a larger study focusing on international teacher identity, use was made of additional interview data with other high school teachers for triangulation and validity enhancement. Case study design is also well suited to capturing the subjective, qualitative aspect of lived experience, and can help to describe real people in real situations such as individuals in organisations or institutions (Yin, 2013). Researchers exploring teacher beliefs (Li, 2013) and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme/Learner Profile (e.g. Chatlos, 2015; Wang, 2015) have also employed single or multiple case studies of teachers as a methodology to gain access to participants' subjective meanings – their beliefs about teaching as refracted through the prism of their lived experience. Hence case study design is commensurate with the notion of the *lived Profile*.

Although many of the empirical studies on teachers' understanding of the Learner Profile made use of interviews as the main source of data collection, artefact / visual analysis was also included. While interviews are particularly suited to providing the researcher with a window onto the participants' inner worlds (Hammersley, 2006), they have also been critiqued for revealing more about the socio-discursive nature of the interview context than the actual inner world of the individual. Moreover, there has yet to be a study that focuses on a visual interpretation of the Profile. For example, Chatlos (2015) employed word clouds (an image composed of words used in a particular text or subject) as a form of data



generation; teachers were asked to construct word clouds during the study, thereby creating room for reactivity. However, this study draws upon visual data that was created *in situ*, before this study began, and should therefore be more congruent with Sophie's lived experience – a defining criterion for validity within a participatory research methodology. The artefact chosen for analysis was Sophie's visual representation of the Profile (see Appendix 1). Sophie was given the interview questions before each interview session in order to be better prepared. This process helped to mitigate against asymmetries of power and also to ensure that the research was done *with* rather than *on* the participants, a defining aspect of participatory based research paradigms (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016).

### ***Data analysis***

Analysis of interview data involved a semi-grounded approach that drew upon the two main themes that emerged in the literature review – understanding and implementing the Profile – as initial categories for data analysis which were subsequently refined to one main theme, resistance, broken down into the three stages suggested by Giroux (1983) – perception, reaction, and result. The analysis process remained open to new and unexpected patterns that emerged as data analysis progressed.

An augmented form of member checking was also employed as an additional form of data analysis. Although member checking – or member validation – is often used as a way to enhance validity by sharing transcripts, findings and finished reports with participants (Richards, 2003), the participants were encouraged to reflect on, and contribute to, initial emerging interpretations based on the interview transcripts. This dialogic approach (see Harvey, 2015 for a more detailed explanation) enabled interpretation of the data to become more grounded in the participants' lived experience and also, through co-construction, allowed them to be more active in the research process.

### ***Research context***

WEST (a pseudonym) is a recently opened private internationalised (Type C) school that offers the IGCSE (International General Certificate of Secondary Education) and IBDP to Chinese nationals. The school hires expatriate and local teaching faculty to deliver these courses. In addition to an international focus, the school emphasises the Chinese national curriculum. For example, primary and middle school students follow the local curriculum until grade 9, after which they sit the *Zhong Kao* exam (high school entrance examination) and transition to an internationalised stream from grade 9 onwards. The data gathered for this article comes from a larger research project dealing with international teacher identity which received ethical clearance from the University of Nottingham, Ningbo Campus, China.

Sophie is an IGCSE and IBDP art teacher who has lived, studied and worked in China for 7 years. She is also an artist and regularly holds exhibitions of her work in Shanghai and other cities in China. Sophie holds a PhD in art and is fluent in Chinese. She is also a woman in an industry that is dominated by men. According to Scout Real Estate, who based their findings on a survey undertaken by the State Administration of Foreign Experts

Affairs in China, 74% of expatriates in China are male (Scout Real Estate, 2015). This percentage is corroborated by the interview data about WEST which revealed that Sophie was the only female expatriate in the high school – the remaining five expatriate teachers were male. Although the report primarily focuses on Sophie’s interpretation and implementation of the Profile, the data are triangulated with interview data from other faculty members: Daisy (English), Robert (Economics), Tyron (Biology and PE) and Paul (Music). Aside from Daisy, who is a Chinese national, all the participants are western nationals.

## Findings

Findings are presented according to the analytical framework developed above, in which resistance is understood as a process which involves *perception* (critical awareness and becoming conscious of perceived control or regulation), *reaction* (transformative process of enacting change in response to perceived control or regulation) and *result* (awareness of having brought about transformation which may lead to critical reflection in others).

### *Perception*

Sophie’s perception of the Profile was considerably different from that of the other high school teachers. For example, the high school teachers perceived the Profile’s function as akin to a guide or a framework for unifying practice and belief which also reflects the explanation given by the International Baccalaureate Organization in Bullock (2011) and Walker (2010). The Profile thus functions as a way to ‘*give the teachers and also the schools a clear picture of what kind of students are we cultivating*’ (Daisy) and ‘*to create as all rounded an individual as possible*’ (Paul). The interview data also revealed that high school teachers’ knowledge and beliefs about the subjects they taught shaped their understanding of international-mindedness. For example, Tyron, who teaches biology, explained that ‘*they’ve written it in such a way that we would all live in harmony and we would share the planet together and we have to look after the planet, that we should live in peace*’. Overall, the participants perceived the Profile as a unifying force to guide teachers in order to facilitate well-rounded students who are internationally-minded.

In contrast to the other teachers, Sophie was far more critical, saying that:

I’m kind of critical about the IB. I’m interested in the IB because it is challenging for me to teach IB art because I don't know – this is very new for me. But I’m not sure it's the best way to learn art. From my point of view, I don’t know for the other subjects, but for me, it’s very western – it’s very western. I think we should switch to every kind of curriculum. We can always find our way to teach art.

Sophie positions the IBO as restrictive and regulative which she then extends to the subject of art which she considers to be too western in its focus. According to her belief about teaching art, teachers should have the freedom to select the curriculum that best serves their pedagogical and, in this case, artistic purposes, which also necessitates a more global focus. This critical tone is also extended to the Profile which Sophie viewed as ‘*just beautiful words to describe the beautiful IB curriculum*.’ She also emphasised what she perceived to

be the Profile's arbitrary nature in relation to art (*'for me, it's not really so important'*) as well as its regulatory function (*'I think it's trying to form the same kind of personality everywhere in the world'*). The repetition of *'beautiful'* suggests that, for Sophie, the purpose of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme and the Profile (to create international-mindedness) is just rhetorical in nature – it sounds and looks attractive, but is ultimately a kind of embellishment that lacks any real substance in terms of its relationship to the subject of art.

Sophie also highlighted what she interpreted as the patriarchal nature of the Profile. For example, when asked to describe the Profile, she explained that it represented *the perfect American guy*. She went on to say that:

It's also very masculine. I've got this idea when I see those words, it's a man, you know, 30 years old who has success in his life and is now a manager somewhere and a good businessman. You know, that's the perfect profile for a businessman: to be creative, to be knowledgeable, to be reflective. For me, it's very male. When I see that, I represent to myself a man, a young man, and maybe a businessman.

Sophie's interpretation of the Profile as the personification of patriarchy was quite surprising as the literature has so far only focused on a perceived bias towards western configurations of learning and western humanism (Cambridge, 2013; Haywood, 2007; Van Oord, 2007; Wells, 2013). Sophie's beliefs about art and her own experiences of being a woman appear to shape her understanding of the Profile as being androcentric in nature. For example, she focuses on creative, knowledgeable and reflective as attributes that strike her as being particularly masculine, but does not acknowledge other attributes, such as caring and communicators, which reflect traditional notions of femininity, at least in terms of normative gender stereotypes.

### ***Reaction***

Sophie resisted what she perceived to be *western* and *patriarchal* regulative discourses by restorying the Profile as a piece of art according to her own artistic agenda. Her version of the Profile consisted of the ten attributes represented in visual form. However, for this article, the attributes that Sophie considered significant for her as an artist and an art teacher (balanced, open-minded, principled and risk-takers) are presented. The reader can find images of the Profile in the Appendix. In explaining this approach, Sophie's interview data is also used to explain her rationale for representing the attributes the way she did, with my own interpretative and contextual gloss included to guide the reader.

### ***Balanced***

The attribute balanced is defined in the Learner Profile as *'intellectual, physical and emotional balance to achieve personal well-being'*. The other participants defined being balanced in a similar way. Tyron, who also teaches PE, explained that *'you have to think about that you have to look after your body. You have to look after your mind, and you also have to look after your emotions'* (Tyron). Similarly, Robert viewed being balanced as *'an important part of learning and if you ignore one part of the self, it's not going to work'*

*properly.*’ Finally, Daisy also believed that her students needed to be balanced ‘*in terms of the art, music and PE and also subjects like maths, Chinese.*’

In contrast, Sophie offered a radically different interpretation of Balanced (see appendix), explaining that:

[W]hen you have passion or something you cannot be balanced. When you have passion then you can be an artist or a designer because you can go to the extreme. So I think it’s really a standard and it’s a kind of a box and you have to stick to all of these standards and if you can’t you are out of the box, you know, you are out. So that’s why it isn’t the best student who can stick to all these profiles, it cannot be a good artist or a good designer.

Sophie interprets the Profile through the lens of her lived experience as an artist. There emerges in her interviews a distinction between being an art student and being an artist. For Sophie, the ideal art student is one who is an artist or embodies attributes that Sophie associates with being an artist. Her beliefs about art – that one cannot be an artist unless one is passionate and prepared to go to extremes, ‘*out of the box*’ – are at odds with what she considers to be a slavish commitment to the Profile, which could lead to passion and creativity becoming compromised. The quashing of one’s creativity could thus be likened to a form of regulation. Sophie, however, challenges this perceived regulation by inverting the attribute of being balanced in order to emphasise the importance of being *passionate* and *out of balance* as essential dispositions for being an artist.

### *Open-minded*

Open-minded is defined as an appreciation of one’s own cultures and personal histories, and a willingness to be open to the perspectives, values and traditions of other individuals and communities. The other participants also connected being open-minded with the need to develop students’ intercultural awareness, as conveyed through Daisy’s comment that students should ‘*embrace different perspectives*’ (Daisy). However, the high school teachers also perceived political difficulties in doing so in the Chinese context. For example, Tyron considered open-mindedness to be ‘*pretty difficult in a country where the government is not open-minded and they have some sort of hold over the people.*’

In contrast, Sophie did not consider being open-minded to have much applicability to art ‘*because it is very rare that a student will act like a narrow-minded person*’ – that is, being open-minded is a prerequisite for studying art and being an artist; therefore, its cultivation is unnecessary. She thus represented being open-minded as an empty canvas (see Appendix) that’s ‘*like a square – a window, open [...] the window in art is really important; it’s a window on the world.*’ Whereas the other participants highlighted the need to develop diversity by embracing different cultural perspectives, Sophie understood art as offering the artist an objective window of sorts on the world – it allows an individual to see and to represent *the world* as it is.

### *Principled*

The attribute of being principled views students as acting with integrity and honesty and taking responsibility for their own actions and their consequences. Overall, all the

participants were in agreement about its definition. However, they tended to emphasise certain aspects of being principled over others. For example, while Robert considered being principled as '*acting with integrity*', Daisy believed that '*students should be responsible for their actions*'. Tyron developed the definition provided in the Learner Profile document by adding a moral dimension, saying that '*we should think about what is right and what is wrong*'. While Sophie's representation of being principled as a square (see Appendix) resonates with both the IB's definition and the other participants' understanding, she also adds a number of additional aspects that reflect a more critical stance. She explained that:

a square is a good illustration of principled. You have to act like straightforward and be honest, to be fair, and have a sense of justice. When you read the definition – take responsibility for our actions and their consequences. The back of the canvas is displayed to show the honesty – the fact that nothing is hidden.

The addition of a sense of justice adds a moral imperative to being principled and also suggests that students need to be objective, non-partisan and open-minded, which also relates to Sophie's interpretation of being open-minded as a *window onto the world*. Her interpretation of the Profile's attributes is thus intertextual in nature. For example, the image of the blank canvas showing that nothing is hidden connotes transparency, which is juxtaposed with Sophie's view of the Profile as rhetorical or empty (the *beautiful Profile*).

### *Risk-takers*

The final attribute, risk-takers (approaching unfamiliar situations with courage and defending beliefs) was the most problematic for the participants to define and implement. For example, the participants highlighted difficulty in getting Chinese students to be more active and to take risks in class. While Robert acknowledged that '*you learn more from your mistakes than you do from what you get right*', Tyron admitted that '*it is kind of difficult because people just don't want to take risks because of the consequences*'. His statement is particularly relevant in the Chinese context as Chinese students have been shown to be reluctant to make mistakes in a public setting, such as the classroom, due to a fear of losing face. Face (*mianzi*) is the need to be respected by others and to avoid embarrassment in social interactions (Hwang et al., 2002).

In contrast, Sophie's representation of risk-takers as a slashed canvas (see appendix) appears to convey a need for students studying art to break away from traditional forms in order to discover their own style. Her explanation also supports this interpretation:

There is an Italian artist, Lucio Fontana, who decided to open the canvas and paint with a knife which is much more extreme than painting white on white. That's why I think it's a good presentation of risk-taker. Go with your knife and cut the canvas – open it! Destroy the canvas! [...] I am not going to give you a good recipe for making a good beautiful work of art. There is not a good way for that so I tell them 'be a risk-taker' [...] That I think is the goal of studying art: to put them (the students) out of their comfort zone, to get them to do something else.

Sophie uses her knowledge of art and being an artist – in this case the artist Lucio Fontana – to redefine the attribute of risk-taking, and appears to represent a significant form of resistance, thereby challenging the view that the Profile exerts a regulatory force on teachers' behaviour. Sophie's use of violent verbs – *cut*, *destroy* – also reinforces her general belief that learning art requires students to be put out of their comfort zones, perhaps in order to look at the world from a new perspective. However, at the same time, Sophie's commitment to her beliefs also blinds her somewhat to the sociocultural norms of her students who, as Confucian learners, may be reluctant to challenge authority or to take such risks in front of their peers, which could lead to a loss of face.

### **Result**

Sophie's interviews did not yield too much data about her awareness of her version of the Profile; however, some of her remarks indicated that she was aware of the potential *her* Profile might have for developing resistance. For example, Sophie displayed her Profile in her art classroom, which meant that it became a public statement of her resistance. Recounting her experiences of incorporating the Profile into her teaching, Sophie remembered that she heard some of the students '*reading the words and trying to understand*'. She went on to say that:

Like I remember one of the students ... I remember he said 'wow reflective, it's so weird!' So it asks them questions, and I like this. There is not an answer.

Sophie's Profile, as a public text in her classroom, also functioned as a tool for facilitating critical reflection in her students. For Sophie, the student's confusion about her interpretation of the Profile provided an opportunity for pushing him to become more active by asking questions. Her last sentence – '*there is not an answer*' – also reveals Sophie's belief about art as a subject: it is the process of being confused or questioning that needs to be encouraged rather than the need to arrive at a definitive answer. The same belief also applies to her earlier statement that '*we should switch to every kind of curriculum. We can always find our way to teach art*'.

### **Discussion**

Overall, the findings support previous studies by showing how teachers' beliefs about the subject(s) they teach (Chatlos, 2015) and the sociocultural and political idiosyncrasies of the local context (Lai et al., 2014; Li, 2013; Rizvi et al., 2014; Zheng, 2013) shape the ways teachers interpret and implement the Profile. Sophie's data also corroborate Bryant et al.'s (2016) argument that the mediation process is a matter of choice, implying that teachers are conscious and have control of the way they interpret and implement the Profile. This was certainly the case with Sophie who used her identity as an artist as an interpretative and critical frame. The findings also support the conceptual literature (Cambridge; 2013; Tarc, 2009; Van Oord, 2007, 2013) by highlighting the ways that Sophie was conscious of being regulated by both the Profile and the 'IB' as an organisation. Significantly, while most of the participants in this study (except for Daisy) were from the 'west', it did not necessarily follow that they were 'western' or implemented the Profile in a 'western' manner congruent with western humanism. The data reveal a great deal of divergence in

the high school teachers' interpretations, which suggest that individual beliefs about teaching, as well as prior learning and life experiences, play a significant role in shaping the way teachers interpret and implement the Profile. In addition, the appropriation of the concept of resistance allowed illustration of how Sophie was able to challenge what she perceived to be western and patriarchal hegemony by restorying the Profile as a piece of art which she then used to develop critical reflection in her students.

However, this study also adds new findings, such as Sophie's personification of the Profile as an American male, which was particularly surprising as the empirical and conceptual literature did not make any reference to it. Why then did Sophie understand the Profile in such a unique and different way from the other participants? Teachers do not operate in a vacuum, but bring with them to the classroom beliefs about teaching and learning that researchers have called cultural scripts for teaching and learning. Cultural scripts for teaching and learning have been defined as a 'relatively small and tacit set of beliefs about the nature of the subject, how students learn, and the role that a teacher should play in the classroom' (Stigler & Hiebert, 1998, p. 2). Cultural scripts frame what individuals expect to happen in the classroom, how they interpret what is happening and how to interact. They are not monolithic truths set in stone, but can be contested and rewritten by individuals through a process of internalisation and actualisation (Tan, 2015). Cultural scripts for teaching and learning have been utilised to show how teachers' beliefs both regulate teachers' behaviour and empower teachers to contest and story their own versions of what they think should happen in the classroom (Tan, 2015). Therefore, Sophie's interpretation of the Profile as an American male was based on her beliefs about teaching art. However, Sophie's implementation of the Profile in visual form also became an act of resistance through which she asserted female agency by restorying the ten attributes according to her beliefs about being an artist who is a woman.

Findings also suggest that the nature of a regulatory discourse is far subtler than the conceptual literature can acknowledge due to its methodological focus on the *Profile as text*. When the *lived Profile* becomes the main unit of analysis, it is possible to view regulation or a regulatory discourse as a dynamic and co-constructed process: it involves both the *Profile as text* and the *lived Profile*. Therefore, the *Profile as text* does indeed exert a regulatory force on individuals because it is comprised of only ten attributes whose origins and definition are rooted in a western humanist tradition. Moreover, the generality of the attributes' definition forces teachers to develop more focused definitions in relation to the subject they teach and their lived experiences. However, as illustrated by my findings as well as some of the empirical studies (Chatlos, 2015; Lai et al., 2014), individuals perceive the purpose of the Profile and its attributes very differently, and are therefore likely to impose or project their own (mis)interpretations of hegemony on the Profile. This was the case with Sophie, who used her own beliefs about being an artist to critique and resist what she considered to be an androcentric Profile. In this sense, it is not so much the *Profile as text* that is inherently regulatory or hegemonic, as the individual's interpretation of the text as such.

Finally, while the local context (such as the ecology of the school, educational policies, assessment routines, and students' cultural scripts for teaching and learning) have also been

shown to mediate the implementation of the Profile (Lai et al., 2014), data from this study were unable to verify whether this was the case for WEST, as my focus was mainly on the teachers' individual interpretations of the Profile. This points to a limitation in this study which future research could rectify by adopting a more expansive case study design that enables researchers to explore how individuals implement the Profile within the school as a complex and evolving organisation (Greenwood et al., 2011; Thornton and Ocasio, 2008).

## Conclusion

Is it possible to conclude that (mis)interpretations such as Sophie's are somehow wrong and therefore lead teachers to perceive hegemony where in fact there is none? If so, whose perspective should be privileged in order to guide/regulate teachers' interpretation of the Profile? The answers to these questions clearly depend on an individual's stance regarding the extent to which they think teachers should be able to impose their own interpretations on the Profile. Walker (2010) captured this dichotomy succinctly when he wrote that 'the IB cannot be everything to everyone and many students study the Diploma Programme precisely to achieve a passport to higher education in the West' (p. 8). Indeed, too much diversity or localisation may compromise the international focus of the Diploma Programme, making it too parochial. Similarly, regulating teachers' interpretations of the Profile may over-emphasise the western aspects of the Profile (as Walker, 2010 points out) which could also undermine the international focus of the IB curriculum. Clearly, some compromise between these two extreme positions is necessary and, I would argue, possible.

Walker et al. (2016), for example, have developed what they claim to be a 'solid instrument' for measuring the Profile, which has been validated through a series of psychometric procedures. While such an instrument may be welcomed by International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme teachers who have found implementing the Profile difficult due to a lack of assessment criteria (Wright & Lee, 2014), others may question whether a set of inherently ambiguous attributes or values (or virtues, as Van Oord (2013) calls them) can or should be measured quantitatively. Moreover, the line between measuring and regulating is a fine one, and it is conceivable that if such an instrument were adopted by schools, it might regulate both teachers' and students' interpretation and implementation of the Profile by requiring them to demonstrate pre-set learning outcomes in order to 'make the grade'. In contrast, I would consider it more effective for schools to develop their own individualised programmes from the bottom-up in order to incorporate stakeholders' perceptions and experiences of teaching and learning, both of which are integral in the interpretative and implementation process, which would also allow teachers and students to reflect more on their identities as international teachers and students respectively.

Thus, future research could develop a framework for professional development that gives teachers the space and critical tools needed to make connections between the *Profile as text* and the *lived Profile*. Future research could also validate or challenge the resistance model developed in this article. While Sophie's interview data corresponded to perception, reaction and result, different variables (such as sample size, international teaching context



or subject area) may reveal that individuals demonstrate some of the stages of this process but not others, and perhaps not always in the linear manner presented here.

### **Acknowledgments**

**I would like to thank the journal's editors and the anonymous reviewers for feedback on an earlier draft.**

### **Funding**

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### **References**

Bang M and Vossoughi, S (2016) Participatory design research and educational justice: Studying learning and relations within social change making. *Cognition and Instruction*, 34(3), 173-193.

Bao C, Zhang LJ and Dixon HR (2016) Teacher narratives as theorisation of teaching: A Chinese teacher's perspective on communicative language teaching (CLT). *New Zealand Studies in Applied Linguistics*, 22 (2), 37-52.

Beek A (2016) *Contextual Interpretations of International Mindedness in International Baccalaureate Diploma Students* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Calgary).

Belal S (2017) Participating in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme: Developing international mindedness and engagement with local communities. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 16(1), 18-35.

Bullock K (2011) *International Baccalaureate learner profile: Literature review*. Cardiff, International Baccalaureate Organization. Retrieved from [www.ibo.org/research/resources/documents/LPLitReview\\_final.pdf](http://www.ibo.org/research/resources/documents/LPLitReview_final.pdf).

Bryant DA, Walker A and Lee, M (2016) A review of the linkage between student participation in the International Baccalaureate Continuum and student learning attributes. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 15(2), 87-105.

Cambridge J (2013) Dilemmas of international education: A Bernsteinian analysis, in R. Pearce (ed) *International Education and Schools: Moving Beyond the First 40 years* (pp. 183 – 204). London: Bloomsbury.

Cause L (2009) International mindedness and 'social control'. *Asian Social Science*, 5(9), 32.

Cause L (2011) 'International-mindedness': a field of struggle, confusion and hope. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science Research*, 11(7).

Chatlos E (2015) *The Relationship of Middle Years Programme Teachers' Beliefs and Practice to the International Baccalaureate Learner Profile*. International Baccalaureate. (Jeff Thompson Award).

Davy I (2011) Learners without borders: A curriculum for global citizenship. *International Baccalaureate Organization*. [http://www.godolphinandlatymer.com/\\_files/IB/B309322691ABF031CB793E9DDA-47FE3A.pdf](http://www.godolphinandlatymer.com/_files/IB/B309322691ABF031CB793E9DDA-47FE3A.pdf) [accessed 16/11/2016].

Elkady E (2011) The MYP and its cultural context: A reflection from Dubai. In M C Hayden and J J Thompson (eds). *Taking the MYP Forward*. John Catt Educational Ltd, pp. 180 – 189.

Fairbrother GP (2003) The effects of political education and critical thinking on Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese university students' national attitudes. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 24(5), 605-620.

Freire P (1996) *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (revised). New York: Continuum.

Fox E (1985) International schools and the International Baccalaureate. *Harvard Educational Review*, 55(1), 53–69.

Giroux HA (1983) *Theory and resistance in education: A pedagogy for the opposition*. South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.

Greenwood R, Raynard M, Kodeih F, Micelotta E and Lounsbury M (2011) Institutional complexity and organizational responses. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 5(1), 317-371.

Gunesch K (2007) International education's internationalism: Inspirations from cosmopolitanism', in M. Hayden, J. Levy and J. Thompson (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Research in International Education*. London: SAGE, pp. 90-100.

Hammersley M (2006) Ethnography: problems and prospects. *Ethnography and education*, 1(1), 3-14.

Hare J (2010) Holistic education: An interpretation for teachers in the IB programmes. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 9, 141-152.

Harvey L (2015) Beyond member-checking: A dialogic approach to the research interview. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 38(1), 23-38.

Hayden M (2016) Institutional Interpretations of International Education in National Contexts. In: *SAGE Library of Educational Thought and Practice: International Education* (Volume 2): London: SAGE Publications, i-xiv.

Haywood T (2007) A Simple Typology of International-Mindedness and its Implications for Education, in M Hayden, J Levy & J Thompson (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Research in International Education*, SAGE Publications, London, pp. 79-89.

Hill I (2012) 'Evolution of international mindedness', *Journal of Research in International Education*, 11(3), 245-261.

International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) (2009) *IB learner profile booklet*. Cardiff: International Baccalaureate.

International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) (2013) *IB learner profile in review: Report and recommendation (April 2013)*. Cardiff: International Baccalaureate.

International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) (2017) [www.ibo.org](http://www.ibo.org). [accessed 02/05/2017].

Jin L and Cortazzi M (2006) Changing practices in Chinese cultures of learning. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 19(1), 5-20.

Lai C, Shum MS and Zhang B (2014) International mindedness in an Asian context: The case of the International Baccalaureate in Hong Kong. *Educational Research*, 56(1), 77-96.

Levin BB (2015) The development of teachers' beliefs. In H. Fives & M. G. Gill (eds.), *International handbook of research on teachers' beliefs* (pp. 48-65). New York, NY: Routledge.

Li L (2013) The complexity of language teachers' beliefs and practice: One EFL teacher's theories. *The Language Learning Journal*, 41(2), 175-191.

Peterson ADC (2003) *Schools across frontiers: The story of the International Baccalaureate and the United World Colleges*. Open Court Publishing.

Pennycook A (2017) *The cultural politics of English as an international language*. London and New York: Routledge.

Poonosamy M (2010) The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme in post-colonial Mauritius: reaffirming local identities and knowledges, *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 30(1), 15-30.

Resnik J (2012) The denationalization of education and the expansion of the International Baccalaureate. *Comparative Education Review*, 56(2), 248-269.

- Richards K (2003) *Qualitative Inquiry in TESOL*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rizvi F, Acquaro D, Quay J, Sallis R, Savage G, and Sobhami N (2014) *IB learner profile: A Comparative Study of Implementation, Adaptation and Outcomes in India, Australia and Hong Kong*. University of Melbourne.
- Rowley J (2002) Using case studies in research. *Management research news*, 25(1), 16-27.
- Singh M and Qi, J (2013) *21st century international mindedness: An exploratory study of its conceptualisation and assessment*. Cardiff: IBO.
- Scout Real Estate (2015) Expats in China: nationalities and in which cities they settle. <http://www.beijingrelocation.com/blog/expats-in-china-nationalities-and-in-which-cities-they-settle/> [accessed 21/08/2017].
- Stigler J. W. & Hiebert J. (1998). Teaching is a cultural activity. *American Educator*, 22, 4–11.
- Tan, C. (2015). Education policy borrowing and cultural scripts for teaching in China. *Comparative Education*, 51, 196–211.
- Tarc P (2009) *Global dreams, enduring tensions: International Baccalaureate in a changing world*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Tate N (2013) International education in a post-Enlightenment world. *Educational Review*, 65(3), 253–266.
- Thornton PH and Ocasio W (2008) Institutional logics. *The SAGE handbook of organizational institutionalism*, 840, 99-128.
- Van Oord L (2007) To westernize the nations? An analysis of the International Baccalaureate's philosophy of education, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 37(3), 375-390.
- Van Oord L (2013) Moral education and the International Baccalaureate learner profile. *Educational Studies*, 39(2), 208-218.
- Walker G (2010) East is East and West is West. <http://www.ibo.org/globalassets/publications/east-is-east-and-west-is-west-en.pdf> [accessed 02/05/2017].
- Walker A, Lee, M and Bryant DA (2016) Development and validation of the International Baccalaureate Learner Profile Questionnaire (IBLPQ), *Educational Psychology*, 36(10), 1845-1867.

Wang X (2012) The Enabling of School Participants' Access to Negotiation of Meaning: A Way of Improving Intercultural Understanding. <http://journal.acs-cam.org.uk/data/archive/2012/201202-article3.pdf> [accessed 24/01/2017].

Wang X (2013). The construction of researcher–researched relationships in school ethnography: Doing research, participating in the field and reflecting on ethical dilemmas. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(7), 763-779.

Wang X (2015). *The discursive construction of Intercultural Understanding in China: A case study of an International Baccalaureate Diploma Program*. London: Lexington Books.

Wells J (2011). International Education, values, and attitudes: A critical analysis of the International Baccalaureate (IB) Learner Profile. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 10(2), 174 – 188.

Wells J (2016) *Learner reflections on the International Baccalaureate (IB) Learner Profile and international mindedness at a bilingual school in Bogota, Colombia* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Bath).

Wright E and Lee M (2014) Elite International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme schools and inter-cultural understanding in China. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 62(2), 149-169.

Yin R K (2013) *Case study research: Design and methods*. 5<sup>th</sup> edition. London: SAGE publications.

Zheng H (2015) *Teacher beliefs as a complex system: English language teachers in China*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

### **Author Biography**

Adam Poole is a doctoral student in the Department of Education at the University of Nottingham, Ningbo, China. His research focuses on international teachers in Shanghai and aims to develop an approach to international teacher identity that could inform ongoing professional development. Adam is also interested in Funds of Knowledge and Funds of Identity, and has published a number of articles that deal with how these approaches could be adapted to fit the Chinese context.

## Appendix

Sophie's representation of the IB Learner Profile

