Hosting Early Study Abroad Students in Ontario: Internationalization of Education Dynamics in Secondary Schooling

Nancy Bell[1], Paul Tarc[2], Sandra R. Schecter[1], Alyssa Racco[1],
& Haoming Tang[2]
[1]York University, [2]University of Western Ontario

Abstract

This study illuminates the current policy and practice dynamics and tensions of school internationalization in the province of Ontario generated by the increasing presence of international students at the secondary school level, identified as *early* study abroad (ESA) students. It conducts a comparative thematic analysis of a set of interviews with school- and board-level stakeholders of internationalization alongside a critical policy analysis of a key provincial policy text. We find that ESA-based internationalization is largely run out of internationalization offices resourced to focus on student recruitment and administrative support, with oversight of homestay and custodianship being significant components. The more idealistic visions of school internationalization emphasized in provincial policy and some school discourse occur in a more reactive fashion. On-the-ground *educational* support of these newcomer ESA students is shouldered by schools and educators within their existing and limited capacities, while the *intercultural* dimensions and benefits remain largely aspirational.

Keywords: critical policy analysis, early study abroad, international education, internationalization of education, international students

Hosting Early Study Abroad Students in Ontario: Internationalization of Education Dynamics in Secondary Schooling

This research study attempts to understand the character and qualities of the internationalization of K-12 schooling as realized by, or manifested in, the presence of fee-paying students from around the globe in Ontario's schools, particularly those in the public sector. The recruitment and hosting of international students has recently been on the rise in Canada and the number of students has grown exponentially in the decade preceding the COVID-19 pandemic, with the number of international study permits issued peaking at 400,680 permits issued in 2019 (Government of Canada, 2021a). After an initial precipitous decline in 2020, due to the global pandemic, numbers appear to be rebounding (Thevenot, 2021). Although the majority of these students study in post-secondary institutions, prior to the pandemic there were over 69,480 studying at the K-12 level with almost half studying in Ontario (Government of Canada, 2021a). The phenomenon reflects a global trend with a burgeoning middle class in the Global South and East, seeking to pursue educational opportunities internationally (Waters, 2006), under the still hegemonic status of English and Western educational credentials (Ma & Wang, 2014).

This paper emerges from a broader SSHRC-funded project focused on the secondary schooling and sociocultural adaptation of this younger cohort of international students, whom we refer to as Early Study Abroad (ESA), to distinguish them from their older and more often discussed postsecondary peers. The

overall goal of the larger project is to produce an evidence-based representation of the policies governing the hosting and formal education of visa students enrolled in Ontario secondary schools and of educators' perceptions of the academic and social adaptation issues faced by this student cohort. The larger project examines policy at the macro (provincial/federal), meso (district/board) and micro (school/ classroom) levels.

In this paper, we focus on the policy statements and unwritten policies and practices of several school boards and private schools at various stages in the operation and development of their "international education" (IE) endeavours. This examination includes the analysis of website materials and interviews with key stakeholders in the school boards and schools. We compare these policies and practices alongside our critical analysis of *Ontario's Strategy for K-12 International Education* (Ontario Ministry of Education [OME], 2015). The following two core research questions guide our current study:

1. What are the administrative policy and practice responses to the hosting of Early Study Abroad students in Ontario?
2. How do these policies and practices reflect Ontario's official vision for International Education?

With the second question, we are considering the normative aims of IE (Tarc, 2019) to illuminate how ESA-based school programming enables, or might enable, the *educational* and *intercultural* benefits of internationalization, beyond the *pragmatic* goals or drivers and toward realizing the aspirational rhetoric. Our approach here is analytic rather than descriptive, with the goal of understanding the Ontario policy terrain and how different school boards and schools are institutionalizing the phenomenon of ESA presence.

Background

The internationalization of education or IE is not a new phenomenon, but the impact of fee-paying students on all levels of the education sector, and government support for the efforts to recruit (and maintain) them has intensified in the 21st century. Although education is technically a provincial matter, education falls in a jurisdictional gap between federal and provincial governments (Trilokekar & Jones, 2020). The federal government has sought to close that gap through various policy papers and branding initiatives culminating in the international education strategies (Government of Canada, 2014, 2019). Although primarily focused on post-secondary students, the strategy does include K-12 schools as a stakeholder. The federal government plays a facilitating role through marketing a Canadian brand, streamlining immigration policies (including the issuing of study permits) and approving custodians for minors.

Students from abroad have been studying in Canada's K-12 system since the 1980s. British Columbia was the first to establish a formal International Student program in 1985 (Waters, 2006), and today such programs are found in every province. Urban and rural school boards, as well as private schools, both cooperate and compete in their efforts to sell Canada as a destination. Most provinces have either formal policy frameworks or strategy documents that address K-12 and postsecondary students under one broad international education umbrella, or as separate entities, including *British Columbia's K-12 International Education Strategy* (2012), Manitoba's *International Education Act* (2013) and *Ontario's Strategy for K-12 International Education* (2015). Many boards and schools work together through the Canadian Association of Public Schools International (Caps-I), established in 2007 and similar provincial counterparts, such as the Ontario Association of School Districts International (OASDI). These organizations collaborate on recruitment, marketing, and advocacy issues and on establishing standards for hosting students. In addition, across the country a network of private enterprises and individuals recruit and provide accommodation and/or custodianship for minors studying in Canada without their parents.

A growing body of research from a critical perspective has posited this phenomenon as evidence of creeping marketization and neoliberalization of education. Fallon and Poole (2014) have highlighted how policy changes in British Columbia enabled school districts to create for-profit companies, while provincial support for public education was simultaneously being cut through the downloading of costs. Furthermore, competition for fee-paying students has exacerbated geographic inequality within the province's public education sector (Poole et al., 2020). Deschambault (2019) has cited policy distinctions between fee-paying international students and other ELLs as a factor contributing to the commodification of English Language Learning in British Columbia. Also researching the British Columbia context, Cover (2016) concluded that a lack of critical attention to the marketization of education in the local

media can be explained by the "dominance of marketization and associated neoliberal values already saturating the public sphere" (p.193). A critical examination of the development of government policy in Manitoba and Ontario found that, in both cases, despite differences in the initial impetus for hosting students, government policy or strategic positioning has followed the intensification of school recruitment efforts and "education activity is viewed as a lucrative industry with government policy serving as a legitimizing mechanism for schools to engage in marketization efforts" (Trilokekar & Tamtik, 2020, p.44). Similarly, Elnagar and Young (2021) have concluded that at both the institutional and (provincial) government levels, the rationale for international student recruitment initiatives was primarily economic, offsetting declining enrollment in schools. In examining Ontario's *K-12 International Education Strategy* from another perspective, Trilokekar and El Masri (2019) have highlighted the overlooked importance of teachers and teacher education in the implementation of its educational policy objectives of inclusivity, diversity, and equity.

Other research has explored the in-school and out-of-school experiences of ESA students in Western countries, including Canada (Kuo & Roysircar, 2006: Popadiuk, 2009, 2010; Schecter & Bell, 2021; Shin, 2014; Wang, 2013). Many of these studies have illuminated the multiple challenges that international students face (Heng, 2018; Ma & Wang, 2014; Popadiuk, 2009, 2010; Schecter & Bell, 2021). Wu and Tarc (2021) have found that the idea of accumulating academic and cultural capital through study abroad in a Western country is a well understood and stated goal of students and their families. However, realizing this goal in practice it is not always straightforward. For many international students, their study abroad experience is relatively transactional and instrumental, aligning with internationalization's *pragmatic* orientation. Unfortunately, a roadmap for the realization of these goals is not articulated clearly in provincial education policy (Schecter, & Merecoulias, 2023; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2019). Research has indicated that the more *aspirational* benefits of intercultural learning and existential growth are not well acknowledged or supported by faculties of education, administrators or teachers (Bell & Trilokekar, 2021; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2019; Wu & Tarc, 2022). Indeed, Schecter and Bell (2021) found that the challenges of adjusting to a culturally and linguistically unfamiliar environment were mitigated by fostering relationships with peers from the same home country – a finding which would seem to challenge the notion of intercultural integration.

Our study illuminates the policy terrain and internationalization dynamics that set the conditions for the ESA student experiences described in these micro-level studies. It also complements the policy research cited above on school internationalization in Canada. On the one hand, like these authors, we understand and analyze policy as performative, contested, cross-level and (re)contextualized (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). On the other hand, as we outline in the next section, we bring to these emerging analyses an explicit focus on the "ideologies" (Stier, 2004) and agendas (Tarc, 2009) of internationalization, and their entanglements across liberal, neoliberal and critical orientations (Andreotti et al., 2016; Tarc, 2009, 2011, 2019).

Framing

The analyses and discussion presented in the paper are shaped by the following two frames: (a) a conceptualization of the shifted and entangled core aims of international education under neoliberalization, and (b) a critical policy approach. First, we situate the increasing numbers of incoming ESAs to private and public Ontario secondary schools within a movement toward the internationalization of education that has accelerated in the 21st century. While "international education" has a much longer history, the more recent trend of internationalization emerges out of the neoliberalization of education that has been gaining ground over the past three decades (Elnagar, 2021; O'Sullivan, 1999; Pike, 2015; Tarc, 2009). Elnagar (2021) highlighted how this neoliberal trend has been manifested in Canada in the 21st century with an increasing discourse on marketization, engagement of private sector, and enlargement of the international education policy community.

Under this trend, models of international education have become *expedients*. Longstanding aims of developing intercultural awareness and understanding, for example, now function as cultural capital that individuals can strategically accumulate and employ in their schooling to advance their career trajectories (Tarc, 2011, 2013; Weenink, 2008). We understand the internationalization phenomenon to be entangled with both pragmatic or instrumental and more aspirational or idealist visions (Peterson, 1987; Stier, 2004; Tarc, 2019). Under neoliberalization, the drivers of internationalization are pragmatic agendas

such as revenue generation, with educational or cosmopolitan visions coming into play more reactively. To make sense of ESA policy and practice in the Ontario context, we use this conceptualization of the transformed international education agenda with an increasingly pragmatic emphasis on mobility and revenue generation to frame our discussion of the policies and practices in the K-12 sector.

The other frame we bring to this study undergirds our approach for interpreting policy. From a pragmatist and poststructural-informed understanding of policy (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), we go beyond a literal reading of policy—from what the policy "says," to what the policy "does" or how it intervenes. We read policy as a proposed "solution" to a problem; in providing a solution, policy also explicitly or implicitly constructs a problem in need of the proposed solution (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). Further, we read symbolic policy as an exercise in framing or consolidating a perspective. In this tradition, we speak of policy as enacted, rather than implemented, a term that better captures the non-linear, non-binary relationship between policy text and policy as practice (Ball et al., 2012).

Internationalization policies circulate across different educational jurisdictions aided by influential transnational interlocutors such as the OECD and UNESCO. Additionally, internationalization policy is a component of the neoliberal-inflected "global policy convergence" (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). In the zeitgeist of "progressive neoliberalism" (Fraser, 2019), international education uses a both/and logic of "making a difference" and "generating revenue" to shape the optics and cover the interests and concerns of multiple stakeholders (Tarc, 2021; 2022)

Methods

As noted, this paper emerges from the initial phase of a larger project, during which our goal was to examine policy context at the macro (government) and meso (school boards) levels to determine the level of variation across and within public boards and private institutions in Ontario. Further exploration at the school level is anticipated in the next phase of our study. Here, our selection of schools was purposeful in its inclusion of a variety of boards, large urban, midsize urban, rural, public (secular and Catholic) and private schools. We began with one board with which the principal researcher had an existing relationship and then used a snowball method to identify other participants who met our criteria. Next, we analyzed the written policies of the five public school boards and two private schools that were available online. In the second phase, we conducted seven structured, sequenced interviews of approximately one hour (Schecter & Bayley, 2004), with representatives currently working within each school board or private school, as well as one interview with a recently retired administrator from one board. The specific details of the eight interviews, representing five school boards and two private schools, can be found in Appendix A.

All interviews were conducted in person (pre-COVID-19) or over Zoom by the larger study's principal researcher, Dr. Sandra Schecter, and at least one other member of the research team. They were recorded and transcribed. The interview protocol is included in Appendix B. From these interviews, we were able to capture some of the nuances between written and unwritten policy and gain insights into the rationale for the variation in practices. We were also able to gain a better sense of the interactions of the key IE policy actors in Ontario, i.e., the administrators' and boards' "vision" for IE, as well as the opportunities for, and challenges of, realizing the more aspirational elements of internationalization alongside the practical logistics of ESA recruitment and hosting.

After transcribing the interviews, we deductively coded the data according to a set of key registers derived from our research questions, our examination of the information on school boards' websites and our interview protocol. Once data were coded and categorized by registers, the team inductively read for significance in the data, and then collaboratively identified preliminary themes. With this approach, the registers (as reflected in the interview questions) were tested out and somewhat altered by a more inductive reading of the participant narratives. The final registers, organized into an analytical chart (Appendix C), summarize our comparative analysis across schools and school boards. This final version of the chart contains seven main registers, as presented in the rows of the table. Some main registers contain subregisters. For instance, under "Admission criteria" there are three subregisters—"age", "academic", and "linguistic"—that appeared in all interviews. The columns of the table identify the schools and school boards involved in the interviews. For the head of each column, we used three colours to represent secular public boards (green), Catholic public boards (blue), and private schools (red). In the subsequent analytical process, we explicated upon the cells in the chart with data from interview transcripts, notes,

and summaries. We compared data collected from representatives of each school board or school to surface convergences and divergences for each register, as presented in the second subsection under "Findings."

Limitations of the Study

The findings of the study were limited by the number of schools and boards. The conditions created under the provincewide labour tensions in 2019, followed by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic early in 2020, created access barriers that were not insurmountable, but may have limited our view of ESA activity across the province. At the same time, all of the public board administrators were members of OASDI, knew one another, and seemed aware of and conversant with "best practices" across the province, which suggests that a level of saturation was achieved. It should also be noted that out study did not include any boards of education that were not OASDI members.

While our study provides insights into the enactment of ESA internationalization program policies and practices, ESA internationalization is a dynamic phenomenon that was further altered by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, our findings present only a snapshot of the phenomenon across a range of school boards and schools at different stages of internationalization.

Findings

The Ontario IE Policy Terrain and Actors

As alluded to in our introduction, we found that that enactment of "International Education" as it pertains to the hosting and education of ESA students is carried out and influenced by a range of actors, within the public and private sector at the macro, meso, and micro levels. These actors and the myriad ways in which their roles are interconnected are broadly outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Terrain and Policy Actors in Ontario K-12 International Education.
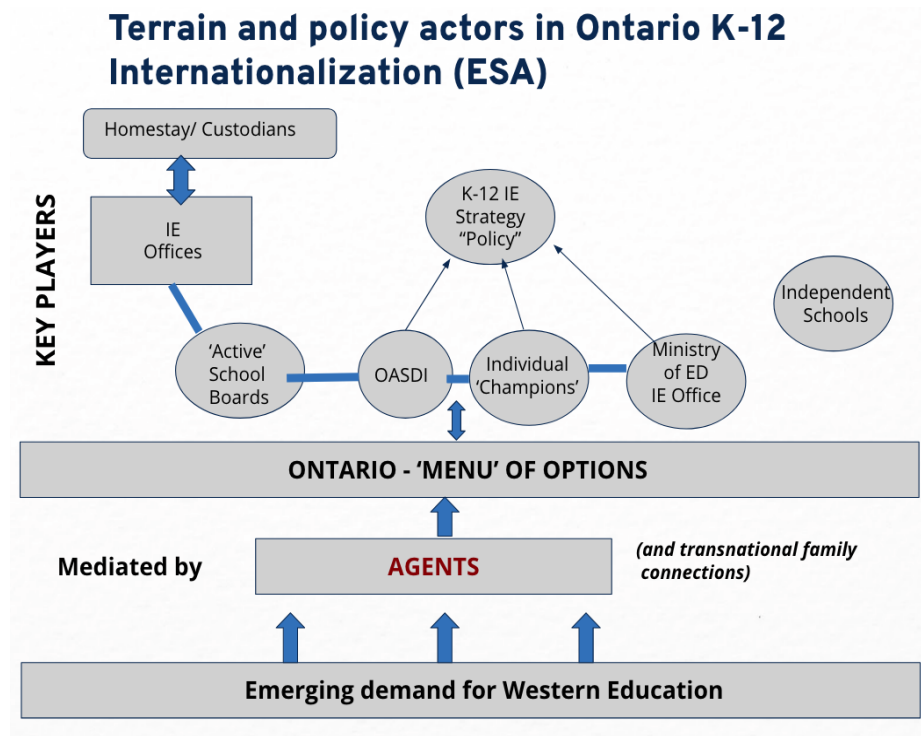
Ontario is one possible ESA destination within Canada and internationally. However, there is a menu of options for prospective ESA students that correspond to the different kinds of school boards and schools that are represented in our empirical sample. Significantly, IE offices are housed within public boards but operate outside their academic infrastructure. In the smaller private schools, IE is combined with other administrative roles. For the most part, the IE staff in these offices work in collaboration with several allies from the public and private sectors, including agents, legal custodians, homestay providers, the IE office of the Ministry, and schoolteachers (particularly ESL teachers and guidance counsellors who work with ESA students on a daily or weekly basis). In the public sector, there is an additional "organizational" actor in the Ontario Association of School Districts International (OASDI). Furthermore, within the terrain, the *Ontario K-12 International Education Strategy* (OME, 2015) must be viewed as a nonhuman actor that provides a common discursive frame for the various stakeholders of ESA, including the participants of our study.

Ontario's Strategy for K-12 International Education: A Critical Policy Reading

Although Ontario boards and schools have been recruiting and hosting ESA students for several decades, *Ontario's Strategy for K-12 International Education* was published in 2015. As such, the strategy must be seen as a response to a pre-existing situation rather than as a proactive plan (Trilokekar & Tamtik, 2020). The language of this document purposefully entangles liberal and neoliberal discourse to assert that International Education is a win-win for everyone: the teachers in Ontario, the Ontario students, the international students, and local economies. The policy—with its discursive prioritization of "international education" as benefitting all stakeholders—represents the "solution" to the "problem" of (an insufficiently regulated and rationalized) ESA student presence within Ontario's publicly funded schools.

Of note is the strategy's attempt to consolidate the "win-win" scenario and its "superficial reflexivity" (Tarc, 2021, 2022) to anticipate and accommodate critique. On the one hand, the policy suggests a comfortable balance between the economic and branding benefits for Ontario *and* the educational and intercultural benefits for students. On the other hand, when we consider the materiality of internationalization in terms of funding and operationalization, as evidenced in our interviews with administrators of international education offices, the pragmatic and economic agendas appear to be the main drivers.

Showing a "surface reflexivity" of existing critiques (Tarc, 2021) the strategy cites a lucid articulation of the important "choice" for internationalization and suggests that Ontario schools should aspire to the idealist agendas over the instrumental ones. Specifically, the strategy cites Richard Slimbach commenting on the dynamic of opposing rationales: "...*we can decide whether we will be mission driven and market sensitive, or market driven and mission sensitive*" (OME, 2015, p.14). As expected, the strategy affirms that it will be the former (see also Tarc & Budrow, 2022). This ordering and entangling of the idealist and pragmatic can be read from the prioritization of "four major goals" highlighted in the document:

1. "Future-oriented learning for Ontario students [as 'globally competent']
2. High-quality programs and services for K-12 international students studying in Ontario
3. Opportunities for sharing and developing Ontario education expertise; and
4. Pathways to postsecondary education, work, and living in Ontario." (OME, 2015, p. 4)

By placing future-oriented learning for Ontario students as the first goal, the strategy emphasizes that international education is a benefit for *all* students. However, the second goal, which centres on incoming international students, dominates, as evidenced in the policies and practices of participating schools and boards.

This second goal is divided into subcategories which further entangle the mission- and market-driven aspects of the strategy:

a. "excellent educational programs that meet the needs of international students. . .
b. high-quality programs for the care, safety, and well-being of international students. . .
c. managed and responsible growth of the international education sector. . .
d. financial sustainability through reinvestment of revenues from international student tuition." (OME, 2015, p.22–24)

From a radical or "progressive neoliberal" perspective (Fraser, 2019), these goals are framed as syn-ergistic—revenue generation becomes the (only) means to realize an aspirational IE. The implicit logic is one where financial and pragmatic considerations—growth and reinvestment—set the conditions for the idealistic and aspirational dimension of IE. We now turn from this critical policy interpretation to

the core empirical findings of this study to consider what local actors reveal about the practical logistics, as well as the way the mission- and market-driven nature of IE policy is evident in practice in Ontario.

IE Policy Enactment in Ontario: A Comparative Analysis

Based on our interviews and the review of websites, we analyzed the policies and practices of our sample of boards and schools across the province (see Appendix C). In this section we discuss the common features of ESA policy and consider unique features of the IE activity, as identified by schools and boards as part of their "International Education" initiatives.

The Business of Recruiting and Managing Growth

As noted, the basic architecture of ESA administration in the publicly funded boards includes an international education office. The size of the office ranges from two people (an administrator and an assistant) to half a dozen, depending on the size of board and number of ESA students, as well as the functions performed in the office. Regardless of numbers, the core activity is much the same. In public boards, the focus of the office is the recruitment of students and, in some cases, the administration of an International Education Certificate program.[1] In the private schools represented in our study, these functions were merged with other administrative duties. The number of ESA students (pre-COVID-19) ranged from five (small private) to over 2,000 (large urban board). Tuition ranges from $14,000 to $16,000 per year for the public schools. One of the private schools charges a considerably higher tuition rate, which includes boarding fees. One participant from the public sector explained that the "unwritten rule" is that the large GTA boards establish the tuition rate ceiling and other schools adjust accordingly. They further noted that "as much as we are not a business, we need to be priced competitively," highlighting the market-driven nature of the activity.

In terms of the demographics of ESA students, in five of the seven school boards or schools, China was identified as the major source country, reflecting trends in Canada and globally. Most participants expressed an interest and/or plan to develop markets in South and Central America and Europe. This intention was largely expressed as a fiscally wise move, rather than as a desire to broaden the cultural diversity of the international cohort; efforts remain largely targeted toward wealthier countries with large middle classes. In most cases, ESA students are enrolled for the purpose of completing an Ontario Secondary Diploma (OSD), although boards also accept students for short-term English immersion stays. ESA students still represent a relatively small proportion of the student population in each school or school board. All the participants we interviewed were projecting a steady growth in ESA student numbers before the COVID-19 lockdown and are uncertain, but optimistic, that the trend will resume after the pandemic.

A common feature in the recruitment of ESA students is the reliance on third-party agents, based both domestically and in sending countries, as a major source for new students. The outsourcing of recruitment can create discrepancies between agents' and schools' expectations for incoming ESA students. One administrator stated in the interview: "Relationship with agents is important, [as] they know we expect a baseline, but this is less important than motivation and general academic aptitude [of the students]." The small pool of agents works with both individual schools and school boards and more broadly with OASDI, arguably the brand ambassador for Ontario's publicly funded education system. This networking highlights the nature of the relationship between OASDI members, which is both competitive and cooperative. As one of them observed, "there are more than enough students to go around," emphasizing the potential for everyone to recruit enough students.

Admission criteria and standards is one area of difference between public and private schools. The two private schools in the study have stricter criteria, requiring an entrance exam, an interview with the principal, a minimum of 70% on STEM, and at least an intermediate level of proficiency in English. It should be noted that the small size of both private schools and their positioning as independent institutions allow for a more selective admission process. All public-school boards recommend or require students to have an "intermediate" level of English. However, this basic expectation is not clearly defined, and most public boards are more accommodating when it comes to admitting students. We surmise that

---

[1] Two of the boards have the Certificate Program in place; two others aspire to have it and the fifth dropped the program due to lack of interest.

the public boards are more sensitive to issues of access and equity as publicly funded institutions. One participant commented that it was "amazing to see how far a motivated student could come in one year," but noted that the most successful students started earlier (i.e., Grade 9). This participant noted that students who come in Grade 11 or 12, with low English proficiency, tend to struggle.

Generally, academic and linguistic expectations are not clearly articulated in the initial program descriptions on the public-school websites. Indeed, one administrator hinted that lack of clarity about the level of English required for academic success has led to a lot of "disappointed" students upon their arrival and placement in ESL classes. Similarly, the academic requirements for entrance appear to be flexible, with the private schools being the most demanding of prior academic success. As dictated by Ontario policy, all students are assessed in Math and English proficiency before starting school (OME, 2007). These assessments are administered locally by the boards, although three are now doing "pre-admission" English proficiency tests online. The market-driven aspect of internationalization becomes evident again in the need to meet recruitment targets, with one administrator noting that the board had a reputation as "last chance U" due to its low admission standards and its willingness to take those who had been rejected by other boards. In summary, it appears that the public boards are quite flexible in their admissions processes and willing to accept most prospective students.

Care and Well-Being of Students
In terms of the care and well-being of students, boards have a varying degree of involvement in accommodation and custodianship, which frequently are not provided by the same person. Legal custodianship is federally regulated and administered. Parents appoint someone who "lives within a reasonable distance" of the residence and school of their child and whom they are satisfied is "able to fulfill his/her obligations as a custodian in the event of an emergency" (Government of Canada, 2010). However, those obligations are not defined, nor is what is considered a "reasonable distance." While OASDI has developed a set of recommended detailed guidelines that outline the role of all stakeholders in this regard, among our participating schools and boards, practices range from a laissez-faire approach, in which students are responsible for making all arrangements on their own, to boards assuming legal custodianship and working very closely with homestay providers. In another scenario, one of the small private schools operates a full boarding school for its students.

Formalizing or creating explicit protocols reflects concern for the students' welfare, as well as the need to mitigate liability. For example, one board requires that even students with parents in Canada (on a visitor permit) have a legal custodian. This decision was based on a case where a student tragically lost both parents in an accident and the board had no other adult contact for the student. Another board requires students to deal with one provider for both custodianship and homestay, stating that the arrangement gave them greater confidence that the students were well supported. This decision was based on a previous incident in which a custodian was found not to have communicated with a student for over a year. As one participant who supported this approach said, "If a school district overseas custodianship, coordinates homestays, plus has a screening process and strict structured policies, that's risk management, that's smart. A lot of parents think it gives the school board credibility."

Supporting Academic Success
The IE offices in our study were not involved in the delivery of academic programs. The responsibility for an ESA student's academic progress largely rests on school-based allies—teachers and guidance counsellors—who were not directly involved in this study. Nonetheless, most administrators had a keen sense of the challenges the students faced and the supports that they required to meet them. Key among these supports was time to acclimatize to a new academic culture and the need to quickly achieve proficiency in academic English. Many factors contribute to a student's ability to do so, including their level of proficiency on arrival, the length of time they study here before graduating, and the student's personal motivation. Several participants reported stories of disappointed students who arrived in Grade 11 or 12 with poor English skills and unrealistic expectations of university acceptance at the end of a year or two. On the other hand, as one participant noted, "a student can come in Grade 9 with zero English as long as they have reasonable expectations of what to accomplish and are motivated to learn."

Interview participants were unanimous in asserting the importance of a strong English as Second Language (ESL) program as key to the ESA students' success. In all the boards, this meant assigning

students to schools with existing ESL programs. In one of the midsized boards, for example, there are 11 schools with some ESL support but only three with a "comprehensive program." In larger boards, students had more choice of schools to attend. Participating administrators acknowledge how much the program relies on these school-level allies. One participant described it this way: "In order to build capacity, and to support our work, we need people on the ground in schools, people like ESL teachers." In the largest board, with a linguistically diverse student body and 42 participating schools with comprehensive ESL programs, the administrator felt that more support was needed for English Language Learners than the current provincial funding formula provided for. In contrast, the small Catholic board noted that the lack of a strong ESL program and the presence of a student body that lacked linguistic diversity were draws for a niche of ESA students. The niche comprised students from Europe and South and Central America who want to improve their already strong English skills by immersing themselves in a monolingual environment.

Academic performance requirements for students after they are enrolled are flexible in most boards. Most participants reported that students were encouraged to maintain a minimum average, although none of the boards we spoke to were rigid about this. For the most part, participants thought most students were successful (although no formalized ways of measuring success were mentioned). Nonetheless, not all students make the grade. The task of identifying struggling students and finding appropriate supports, again, largely falls to teachers and guidance counsellors at the school level. All the administrators noted that many ESA students face challenges, namely social isolation, and adaptation to new cultural norms—both social and academic. And while all participants spoke of school-level allies who helped address these challenges, only the two largest boards had evolved to the point of having specialized guidance personnel, who offer support with logistics, such as staying on top of visa requirements and help with social,emotional, and academic issues. In the small private schools, the administrators play a more hands-on role in identifying and supporting individual students who are struggling. Administrators also spoke of the difficult decision they had to make to demit students who are not successful. One participant conveyed that accepting tuition fees for a student who is not passing creates a "moral dilemma."

Cultural Integration

The level of school or board programs aimed at facilitating the integration of students and supporting their well-being also varied. Most IE administrators interviewed in this study did mention efforts and activities to support students, such as orientation programs, cultural programs, student clubs, and language learning support, but, for the most part, these programs seemed to be implemented in an ad hoc manner. One board was in the process of starting an international student committee comprised of teachers and students from across the board—an initiative welcomed by the administrator. Again, allies at the school level are key to the success of these initiatives, even in larger boards with centrally placed supports. One participant highlighted the role that these allies play, stating, "I am downtown in my office, and I am only one person. It's the teachers that have to help with that integration."

Indeed, the integration of ESA students was a concern cited by several boards, suggesting that the goal of "internationalization" for all as an outcome is still largely aspirational. Participants observed that ESA students tended to be focused on academics and less interested in the "cultural" aspects of their sojourn in Canada: "Being an international student is exhausting and interculturally is an underdeveloped goal." As one participant said, "We don't do a good job. We have a buddy program but most of the relationships don't become friendships." Several participants mentioned that students tended to isolate themselves with others from the same country. One administrator felt that intercultural integration only happened with the "consistency, support, and expertise" of teachers and guidance counsellors and required investment in professional development opportunities, which their board was supporting. However, most boards are not providing training or development for teachers, beyond introductory workshops when a school first begins hosting ESA students. On the other hand, the smallest board and two private schools seemed to find the integration of students less challenging, perhaps because of the small numbers of students. The board administrator there told us that ESA students were strongly encouraged to get involved by joining a club or a team. As they remarked, "we almost don't give them the choice." Only one participant questioned whether encouraging integration should even be a goal: "We struggle with the ethics of it, if the students are happy with [their] peer group, how far should we push that? I struggle with that."

Beyond the Pragmatic?

The question of integration is also related to the school's or board's broader vision of IE (or international-ization). Here we also found a range of responses. Beyond expanding the numbers of ESA students, most of the participants were not able to describe a broader definition of "in-ternational education" or what it meant for their school or board. One midsize urban board has a variety of other programs, including a commitment to the International Education Certificate (designed for all students), and some investment in international experiences for its teaching staff. The administrator from this board stated: "Nothing is more important than internationalizing our schools in the next two decades," but they described efforts across the province as inconsistent. The other midsize boards expressed an interest in developing the certificate program but, for the time being, recruiting students was the focus. As one stated: "we are still small, right now we are focused on recruiting students." Indeed, the largest board has dropped the international certificate pro-gram but expressed an interest in hosting more "short term" ESA students. The smallest board, with the least diverse student body, had perhaps the most clearly articulated vision of the intercultural benefits of ESA students, claiming that they "brought the world" to their (otherwise homogeneous) community, a goal reflected in the "almost celebrity status" that students from abroad had in their host schools. In this board, internationalization seemed more aligned with earlier forms of international education constituted by short-term international exchanges. One of the small private schools expressed the broader vision as tied to "high quality" education and "mutual learning" across borders and was particularly interested in the possibility of offering the OSD online.

Perhaps tied to this ambiguity about a broader vision, there are few efforts to evaluate the success of the programs, beyond meeting recruitment targets. There is a lack of data collection, let alone formal evaluation processes. One board has conducted student surveys in the past and is currently doing focus groups. The practice of students leaving the public boards for other public or private options was noted in all public boards, although not cited as an issue of major concern. One participant asserted that the best indicator of success was the extent of "internationalization" of our schools and of our classrooms. Even here no specifics were provided.
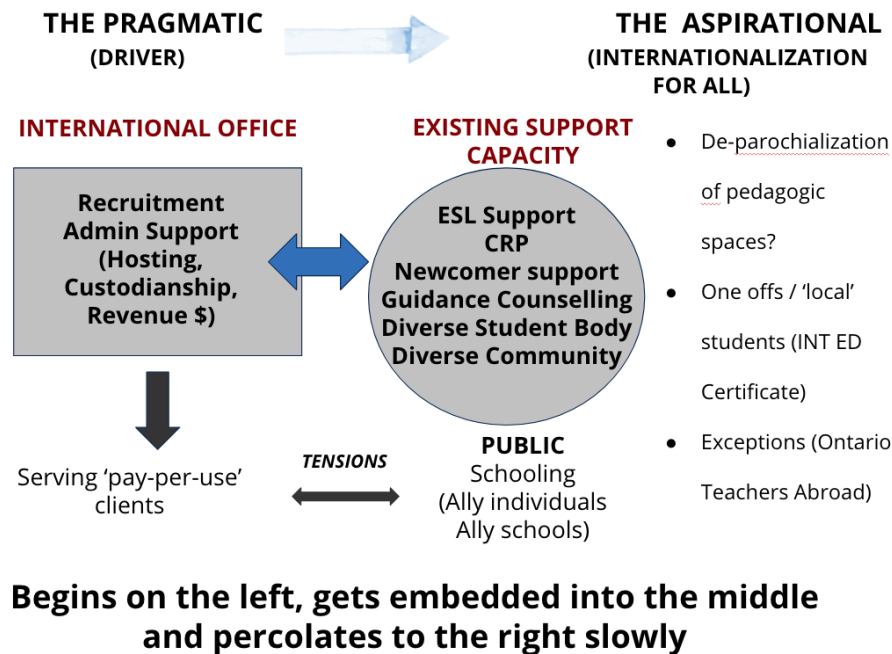
Discussion

In response to our first research question, we see that there is a range of activity in the recruitment, admission standards, accommodation, and programming support for the ESA students who study in On-tario. The variation in practice seems driven by the size and stage of the program and the school/board's assessment of the level of risk involved in decisions about their care. There is a genuine concern for the education and well-being of the ESA students, in the limited number of boards and schools we analyzed, but the academic, linguistic, and intercultural experiences of the students is largely the responsibility of allies such as teachers, and counsellors at the school level, whose experiences we did not examine in this study.

The answer to our second research question – How do these policies and practices reflect Ontario's official vision for International Education? – requires consideration of how *Ontario's Strategy for K-12 International Education* discursively frames what we saw as a largely pragmatic enactment of its goals.

Figure 2

The Pragmatic and Aspirational in Ontario's K-12 International Education

THE PRAGMATIC
(DRIVER)

THE ASPIRATIONAL
(INTERNATIONALIZATION
FOR ALL)

INTERNATIONAL OFFICE

EXISTING SUPPORT
CAPACITY

Recruitment
Admin Support
(Hosting,
Custodianship,
Revenue $)

ESL Support
CRP
Newcomer support
Guidance Counselling
Diverse Student Body
Diverse Community

- De-parochialization of pedagogic spaces?
- One offs / 'local' students (INT ED Certificate)
- Exceptions (Ontario Teachers Abroad)

Serving 'pay-per-use' clients

TENSIONS

PUBLIC
Schooling
(Ally individuals
Ally schools)

**Begins on the left, gets embedded into the middle
and percolates to the right slowly**

It is evident that the pragmatic agenda of increasing the numbers of ESA students in Ontario is the main driver, with the international education office instrumentally responding to the recruitment and support of ESAs. However, ESA students are educated in the schools by allies on the ground, including ESL specialists, who respond to their educational and well-being needs. Some boards and schools are more equipped institutionally to provide this support than others, either because they have an existing infrastructure that supports other minority-language students with similar academic challenges, or because the numbers of ESA students are so small. The more aspirational end of internationalization for all students is much less developed. Beyond a few initiatives, such as the international education certificate for Canadian students piloted in a small number of schools and some international student committees, there is little sense that the presence of ESA students is "internationalizing" their school environments in terms of intercultural and intersocietal awareness and understanding.

The Ontario Ministry of Education (2015) states that the strategy's "success will be determined through a broader evaluation of outcomes" (p. 15). Yet in our study we see the boards and schools most focused on the two subgoals of growth and financial stability. A more robust internationalization manifest as deparochialization that necessitates going beyond facilitating ESAs success or improving access to an Ontario education, thus remains aspirational. To move beyond a reactive and transactional internationalization approach we suggest two main interpenetrating foci: proactively supporting the integration and well-being of ESAs inside and outside of schools and cultivating a substantive international education for all students. Future actors, including both researchers and practitioners, would do well to explore how these interconnected aspirations are being or might be more fully realized.

Author Note

References

Andreotti, V., Stein, S., & Pashby, K. (2016). Social cartographies as performative devices in research on higher education. *Higher Education Research and Development, 35*(1), 84–99. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2015.1125857

Bacchi, C., & Goodwin, S. (2016). *Poststructural policy analysis: A guide to practice*. Springer.

Ball, S., Maguie, M., & Braun, A. (2012). *How schools do policy: Policy enactment in secondary schools*. Routledge

Bell, N., & Trilokekar, R. D. (2022). "We just try to work with the needs in front of us": How teachers in secondary schools enact Ontario's International Education Strategy. *Comparative and International Education/* Éducation *comparee et international 50*(2), 50-67. https://doi.org/10.5206/cieeci.v50i2.13982

Cover, D. (2016). The discursive framing of international education programs in British Columbia. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy, 180,* 169–201.

Deschambault, R. (2019). Fee-Paying English Language Learners: Situating International Students' Impact on British Columbia's Public Schools. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 21*(2), 46–79. Retrieved from https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/CJAL/article/view/24907

Elnagar, A. (2021). Internationalization policies of public schooling and neoliberal discourses in Canada: A Stephen Ball informed analysis. *Comparative and International Education/* Éducation *comparée et internationale, 50*(1). https://doi.org/10.5206/cieeci.v50i1.11075

Elnagar, A., & Young, J. (2021). International education and the internationalization of public schooling in Canada: Approaches and conceptualizations. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy, 195*, 80-94. https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/ index.php/cjeap/article/view/69563

Fallon, G., & Poole, W. (2014). The emergence of a market-driven funding mechanism in K-12 education in British Columbia: Creeping privatization and the eclipse of equity. *Journal of Education Policy, 29*(3), 302–322. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2013.82035

Fraser, N. (2019). *The old is dying and the new cannot be born: From progressive neoliberalism to Trump and beyond*. Verso.

Government of British Columbia. (2012). *British Columbia's International Education Strategy*. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/post-secondary-education/international-edu-cation/internationaleducationstrategy_web.pdf Government of Canada. (2014). *Canada's international education strategy: Harnessing our knowledge advantage to drive innovation and prosperity*. The Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Development. Retrieved from: https://international.gc.ca/global-markets-marches-mon-diaux/assets/pdfs/overview- apercu-eng.pdf

Government of Canada. (2019). *Building on success: International education strategy 2019–2024*. Government of Canada. Retrieved from: https://www.international.gc.ca/education/assets/pdfs/ies-sei/ Building-on-Success-International-Education-Strategy-2019-2024.pdf

Government of Canada. (2021a). Canada-Study Permit Holders by province/territory of intended destination and country of citizenship. *Temporary Residents: Study Permit Holders – Monthly Updates – (Archived) Canada*. Retrieved from https://www.cic.gc.ca/opendatadon-neesouvertes/data/IRCC_M_TRStudy_0004_E.xls

Government of Canada. (2021b). *Custodianship declaration—parents/guardians for minors studying in Canada*. https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/study-canada/study-permit/prepare/minor-children.html#caring

Government of Manitoba. (2016) *International Education Act*. https://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/ statutes/ccsm/i075e.php

Heng, T. T. (2018). Different is not deficient: Contradicting stereotypes of Chinese international students in US higher education. *Studies in Higher Education, 43*(1), 22–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2016.1152466.

Kuo, B. C. H., & Roysircar, G. (2006). An exploratory study of cross-cultural adaptation of adolescent Taiwanese unaccompanied sojourners in Canada. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 30*(2), 159–183. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.07.00

Ma, W., & Wang, C. (Eds.). (2014). *Learner's privilege and responsibility: A critical examination of the experiences and perspectives of learners from Chinese backgrounds in the United States*. Information Age.

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2007). *Policies and procedures for Ontario elementary and secondary schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12*. http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/esleldprograms/esleldprograms.pdf

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2015). *Ontario's strategy for K-12 international education*. http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/international_education.html

O'Sullivan, B. (1999). Global change and educational reform in Ontario and Canada. *Canadian Journal of Education, 24*(3), 311–325.

Peterson, A. D. C. (1987). *Schools across frontiers: The story of the International Baccalaureate and the United World Colleges*. Open Court.

Pike, G. (2015). Re-imagining global education in the neoliberal age: Challenges and opportunities. In R. Reynolds, D. Bradbery, J. Brown, K. Carroll, D. Donnelly, K. Ferguson-Patrick, & S. MacQueen (Eds.), *Contesting and constructing international perspectives in global education* (pp. 11–25). Sense Publishers.

Poole, W., Fallon, G., & Sen, V. (2020). Privatised sources of funding and the spatiality of inequities in public education. *Journal of Educational Administration and History, 52*(1), 124– 140. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220620.2019.1689105

Popadiuk, N. E. (2009). Unaccompanied Asian secondary students studying in Canada. *Interna- tional Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, *31*(4), 229–243. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10447-009-9080-6

Popadiuk, N. E. (2010). Asian international student transition to high school in Canada. *Qualitative Report*, *15*(6), 1523–1548.

Rizvi, F., & Lingard, B. (2010). *Globalizing education policy*. Routledge.

Schecter, S. R., & Merecoulias, M. (2023). International students in Ontario secondary schools: Demystifying the stereotype. *Comparative and International Education/*Éducation *comparee et internationale, 51*(2) 68-82. https://doi.org/10.5206/cie-eci.v51i2.13973

Schecter, S. R., & Bayley, R. (2004). Language socialization in theory and practice. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 17*(3), 605–625.

Schecter, S. R., & Bell, N. (2021). Supporting early study abroad students in Ontario: Case study of a collaborative action research initiative, with conditions changing underfoot. *Canadian Journal of Action Research, 22*(1), 4–26.

Shin, H. (2014). Social class, habitus, and language learning: The case of Korean early study-abroad students. *Journal of Language, Identity and Education, 13*(2), 99–103. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2014.901821

Stier, J. (2004). Taking a critical stance toward internationalization ideologies in higher education: Idealism, instrumentalism and educationalism. *Globalisation, Societies and Education, 2*(1), 1–28.

Tarc, P. (2009). *Global dreams, enduring tensions: International Baccalaureate in a changing world*. Peter Lang.

Tarc, P. (2011). How does "global citizenship education" construct its present? The crisis of international education. In V. Andreotti & L. M. Menezes de Souza (Eds.), *Postcolonial perspectives on global citizenship education* (pp. 105–123). Routledge.

Tarc, P. (2013). The rise of international education: Expanded opportunities, new complications. In P. Tarc, *International education in global times: Engaging the pedagogic* (pp. 1–18). Peter Lang.

Tarc, P. (2019). Internationalization of education as an emerging field of study? A conceptualization of international education for cross-domain analyses. *Policy Futures in Education, 17*(6), 732–744.

Tarc, P. (2021a). *The capture of international education by progressive neoliberalism: Illuminations, qualifications and educating beyond* [Manuscript submitted for publication]. Faculty of Education, Western University.

Tarc, P. (2021b). Transnational governing for the pedagogical ideals of K–12 international educa- tion: Contrasting PISA and IB. *Educational Review.* Advance online publication. https://doi. org/10.1080/00131911.2021.1965095

Tarc, P., & Budrow, J. (2021). *Seeking the cosmopolitan teacher: Internationalising curricula in a Canadian preservice teacher education program* [Manuscript submitted for publication]. Faculty of Education, Western University.

Thevenot, S. (2021, July 31). *Immigrants and international students grew Canada's population in Q1 2021.* CIC News: The Voice of Immigration. https://www.cicnews.com/2021/07/ immigrants-and-international-students-grew-canadas-population-in-q1-2021-0718522. html#gs.7crhttpdi

Trilokekar, R. D., & El Masri, A. (2019). Ontario's K–12 international education strategy: Policy impacts on teacher education for international, intercultural and multilingual sensibilities. In D. Martin & E. Smolcic (Eds.), *Redefining teaching competence through immersive pro- grams: Practices for culturally sustaining classrooms* (pp. 95–126). Palgrave Macmillan.

Trilokekar, R. D., & Jones. G. A. (2020) Federalism and internationalization. In M. Tamtik, R. D. Trilokekar, and G. A Jones (Eds). *International Education as Public Policy in Canada.* McGill-Queens University Press.

Trilokekar, R. D., & Tamtik, M. (2020). A comparative analysis of K–12 international education policies of Ontario and Manitoba. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy,* 193, 32–48.

Wang, Y. J. (2013). *Making and remaking the youthful Chinese self in an Australian school: The complex logics of cultural, class and ethics* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Monash University.

Waters, J. L. (2006). Emergent geographies of international education and social exclusion. *Anti- pode, 38*(5), 1046–1068. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2006.00492.x

Weenink, D. (2008). Cosmopolitanism as a form of capital: Parents preparing their children for a globalizing world. *Sociology, 42*(6), 1089–1106.

Wu, X., & Tarc, P. (2021). Chinese international students in a Canadian private secondary school: Becoming flexible citizens? *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Educa- tion*, *51*(6), 901-919. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2019.1684242

Wu, X., & Tarc, P. (2022). Chinese international secondary school students as flexible citizens: Toward cosmopolitan learning. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *43*(4), 645-658. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2021.1904382

Appendix A

Interviews

Private school #1	Administrator
Private school #2	Principal & administrator
Large urban public board	Two IE administrators (2 interviews)
Mid size urban board (Catholic)	IE Administrator
Mid size urban board (Catholic)	Retired IE Administrator
Mid size urban board	IE administrator
Smaller urban/rural board	IE administrator

Appendix B

Interview Protocol: Early Study Abroad Students in Ontario Schools Policies, Practice & Protocols

Background

1. How many Early Study Abroad students (ESA) are enrolled in your board? How many schools are involved (ie are they concentrated in several schools or spread across the board)
2. How long has your board been hosting ESA's?
3. Which countries do they come from?
4. Do you anticipate much growth in the number of ESA's?

Recruitment, Admissions and custodianship

5. Can you tell me about how you recruit students to your school (recruiter, internet promotion etc?)
6. What is the administrative structure that supports the recruitment, programming and support for ESA's in your board?
7. Can you tell me a little bit about the admission protocols for ESA students? When do they apply? Are there any restrictions on
    a. Age
    b. Language requirements (how are these established)?
    c. Prior academic performance
    d. Any other requirements
8. What sort of accommodation do most of your ESA's have (e.g Homestay)? Does the board help them find housing?
9. Is the board involved in the custodianship of the students? If not, is there any regular communication between the board/schools and the students' legal custodians?

In-school supports

10. In your opinion, what are the most significant issues that these adolescent youth encounter? Probe: Are there aspects of Canadian culture/society that they have difficulty adjusting to? Probe: Do you find they are able to make friends at school? social and cultural adaptation. Probe: How does your board support their cultural integration?
11. What in school supports are in place to identify and support students who are struggling academically emotionally, or socially?

Bigger picture

12. How is the program evaluated in your board? Do you track the students? What are your indicators of success
13. What is the board's larger vision for internationalization? How does the recruiting and hosting of ESA's fit into that vision?

Appendix C

Summary of Findings

Policy Area/Activity	Public board (urban	Public Catholic board (urban)	Public board (urban)	Public board (urban)	Public Catholic board (uban/rural mix)	Private school (urban)	Private school (Urban)
ESA Demographics	2,000	225	480	226	25	26	10
	China, Korea, Vietnam, Japan, Central America, Brazil, Germany	China, Vietnam, Korea, Brazil, expanding to India,	China, Korea, Vietnam	China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Brazil & Spain	Germany, Spain and Mexico	China	Russia, Vietnam, China, Ukraine, Kazakhstan
	Primarily long term	Primarily long term	Long term	Long term	10 months (average)	Long term	Long term & online
Recruitment Methods	Agents OASDI/CAPSI recruitment fairs Word of mouth	Agents OASDI/CAPSI Recruitment fairs	Agents OASDI/CAPSI Recruitment fairs	Agents OASDI/CAPSI Recruitment fairs	Agents, Online tool Direct contact	Agents	Agents, Word of mouth
Admission Criteria **- Age**	14 +	14 +	14 +	14 - 18 (upper limit)	14 + (mostly grade 11)	14 +	14 +
- Academic	All language levels	All language levels	All English levels	All language levels	All English levels (but most are proficient)	All English levels, depending on grade	Intermediate English (Entrance exams)
- Linguistic	Flexible academic prerequisites	B average is baseline	No academic prerequisites		Prefer B+ standing	Interview with principal	70% on STEM, "Steadfast rule"
Custodianship/ **Homestay**	Board not involved in housing or custodianship	Most live with homestay Custodianship - board will provide if wanted (preferred)	Homestay (through agency, privately or live with family) Students must have custodian (even if living with family)	Homestay - 3rd party (required) Custodian - 3rd party	Homestay - recruit families and manage in house Program administrator is custodian for all	All student board at school Custodianship provided by school••	Homestay or live with relatives Custodianship – 3rd party
Internal Support **- Linguistic** **- Cultural/social** **- Emotional**	Summer orientation (in 2019), ESL programs in 40 schools, workshops, trips offered centrally (in 2021), camps and other activities Itinerant centralized guidance support (5 counsellors)	ESL program in six schools Provide centralized support to coordinate ESL/guidance/ counselling	11 schools with ESL programs (3 from beginner level) Other supports (cultural, emotional, academic) vary from school to school	ESL programs in 3 school Initiating centralized committee & ESA student club Support system is not centralized	ESL support Formal orientation Peer support club High level of interculturality	ESL support (all levels) Field trips Celebrate Canadian holidays Principal provides emoti support when needed	ESL program - intensive summer program for beginners Family visits, field trips Promote interculturality
Internationalization **- definition & rationale** **- other programs** **- vision for future**	Increase student enrollment number	"No consistency, but some programs are being developed", sending teachers abroad for professional development	"Interculturality" is not formalized. Struggle with how to promote it. International certificate program	New program, "no vision yet"	Vision: more students, more countries, focus on student well-being	The school is almost exclusively Chinese, primarily immigrants, but the ESA cohort is growing.	"Wide vision" of mutual learning and high quality education
Evaluation/ **success criteria**	Focus groups, survey in past.	No formal evaluation consider degree of internationalization as a success indicator	No formal evaluation	Unclear, "don't know where they go"	No formal evaluation	No formal evaluation in place	Track university entrance