EDUCATING GLOBAL CITIZENS

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ISSN 0129-8186
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The *Working Papers Series* is edited by Maribeth Erb. This series was established by the Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore in 1973, as a forum for staff members, graduate students and visitors to the department to circulate their work in progress. Please refer to the back for a list of all past working papers.
Abstract: Based on a case study of international schooling in Singapore, the paper examines a nascent development that pushes education to denationalize and to expand both the cognitive horizon and affective attachment of students to the entire globe. The key agents driving this process are private, nationally unaffiliated schools with highly diverse student bodies in which no particular group dominates all others. Unlike schools that cater primarily for certain groups of nationals and/or offer nationally specific curricula, they must, for sheer lack of alternatives, orient their pedagogic efforts toward educating global citizens. The problem is, however, that nobody really knows what that means, forcing the schools to experiment and innovate. The paper shows how they deal with this challenge and speculates about some of the implications of their endeavors – locally as well as globally.

Key words: denationalization; global community; global citizenship; global schools; International Baccalaureate Organization

1. Introduction

Education’s historical roots lie in the preparation of nobility’s offspring for a position of elevated status in premodern societies that used stratification as their primary mode of differentiation (Luhmann 2002). In Europe, with the exception of universities and some specialized schools that imparted knowledge needed by civil servants, priests and physicians, education took place primarily in the households of aristocratic families where it was provided by semi-professional teachers who possessed valued skills. Both the concept and the content of education changed as it was gradually extended to the entire population. Mass education, which is often traced to the Protestant Reformation (see e.g. Becker and Wößmann 2009) and which begins in late 18th century northwestern Europe, is intricately intertwined with processes of nation-building in the emerging state system (Ramirez and Boli 1987). It is provided by public or state-regulated private schools tasked with creating subjects/a citizenry whose loyalties shift(s) from village, region and/or dynasty to the larger community of an “imagined” nation which, being a rather abstract entity and involving the need to visualize bonds of solidarity with people the majority of whom one will never meet in person (Anderson 1983), requires skillful engineering.

In this paper, we examine a nascent development that pushes education to denationalize and to expand both the cognitive horizon and affective attachment of students to the entire globe, thus inducing it to project a yet more abstract referent for citizenship formation, the “global community” made up of

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The authors gratefully acknowledge comments and suggestions they received on an earlier draft from Jürgen Gerhards and Anne Raffin.
“global citizens”. The key agents driving this development are international schools that cater for mostly foreign residents (“expatriates”). International schooling has grown enormously since the 1990s and is expected to grow further in the foreseeable future. This changes not only the nature of international schooling itself, but potentially the educational system as a whole. What used to be the experience of a negligible, extremely small minority, is rapidly building scale and thus, while still largely the privilege of the socially well-off, beginning to transform the entire landscape of schooling by adding a new hierarchical layer to existing systems and setting new standards of best educational practice for all.

The primary focus of our analysis is a subset of international schools, private schools without any national affiliation or base to speak of. These schools are interesting because, unlike international schools that cater primarily for certain groups of nationals and/or offer nationally specific curricula, they must, for sheer lack of alternatives, orient their pedagogic efforts toward educating global citizens. The problem is, however, that nobody really knows what that means. Two centuries of mass (public) schooling and of negotiating the semantics of national citizenship have left us with a reasonably clear sense of what it takes to qualify as an acceptable member of a national community, but we lack a similarly coherent understanding of global citizenship.

There is, to be sure, a largely normative literature which advocates the principles and virtues that an education of global citizens should commit itself to and/or warns of the vices “true” internationalism should avoid. But while this discourse doubtless contributes to an evolving understanding of what “global citizenship” might mean, it offers little guidance of how to implement ideals which are not only contentious amongst the participants themselves, but also far from representative of all parties that have a stake in the globalization of education. For practical purposes, this literature is hence of limited utility.

Given the lack of sufficiently canonical conceptions of global citizenship and, even more so, efficacious technologies for translating them into daily educational practice, schools without genuine recourse to national curricula (or suitably adapted variations thereof) are forced to develop, in processes of trial and error, their own working definitions, in short to experiment and innovate. At the same time, being private schools, they also enjoy the requisite freedoms because they are subject to fewer legal,

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2 Developing “cosmopolitan” identities, fostering “inter-cultural awareness” and a sense of “solidarity” with people, especially disadvantaged people, from around the world, etc., on the one hand (cf. Hayward 2002; Tsolidis 2002; Mitchel 2003; Gunesch 2004; Oxfam 2006; Simandirakai 2006; Haywood 2007; Golmahomad 2009), and guarding against “west-centrism”, “neoliberalism”, etc., on the other (e.g. Grimshaw 2007; Lauder 2007; Hughes 2009).

3 To some extent, they may be aided in this endeavor by materials developed in efforts to sensitize national education systems to issues of ethnic and linguistic diversity. However, whereas the purpose of these efforts was/is to broaden notions of national citizenship (see Banks 2008: 316 for a list of examples), the ultimate trajectory of global citizenship points toward transcending, at least de-prioritizing the national community.
political and financial constraints than most of their public counterparts. But how do they actually handle this challenge? That is the question our research seeks to address. We begin with a brief history of international schooling (section 2). This is followed by a case study of international schooling in Singapore, based on a small exploratory project. Singapore is an interesting site for research of this kind because the city state hosts a large number of international schools located in close proximity to each other and educating several ten thousand students from around the world (section 3). Following the analysis of some of the measures that the schools in our sample take to globalize their profiles and educational programs, we conclude with a few speculations about the likely consequences – for the city state and beyond (section 4).

2. A brief history of international schooling

International education began to appear in earnest only after the First World War (Knight 1999; Sylvester 2002). Proposals for educating young people beyond the horizons of the nation-state appeared practically as soon as the latter began to take shape. However, many of the earliest calls to international education did not materialize until far into the 20th century. Embryonic international schools such as the International College at Spring Grove (1866 – 1889), Odenwaldschule in Germany (1910 – present), the International School of Geneva (1924 – present) and Yokohama International School (1924 – present) tended to be independent initiatives born of local demand from parents in the diplomatic and globally mobile business communities (Sylvester 2007). One of these schools, the International School of Geneva, later became the springboard for the founding of the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO), for which teachers from the school, joined by educators from other locations, developed a two-year pre-university program, the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IB DP, introduced in 1969). This was arguably the first program deliberately aiming to transcend a nationally focused curriculum (Hayden 2011). At the instigation of teachers who were familiar with the Diploma Programme (Hill 2007), the IBO later added the Middle Years Programme (MYP, introduced in 1994) and the Primary Years Programme (PYP, introduced in 1997), thus enabling it to offer a complete sequence of internationally oriented curricula from early childhood to pre-university age. Today, close to 3,400 schools around the world, collectively enrolling over 1 million students, offer one or more IBO programs

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4 In contrast to the UNESCO Associated Schools Project (see Suárez et al 2009), with whose educational philosophy it shares key tenets such as fostering respect for human rights, this program emerged as a bottom-up initiative at the school level. Unlike the former, it does not target nations and national school systems, even though today it is beginning to have a growing impact on them (see below, concluding section).
(http://www.ibo.org/facts/fastfacts/; accessed 9 May 2012), with 120,000 IB DP graduates expected to enter university each year by 2014.5

The IBO’s initial impact was minimal. As shown in the graph below, IBO programs became visible only in the 1980s, spread more quickly in the 1990s, and increased dramatically in the new millennium, largely coinciding with the rapid globalization of the economy.

Figure 1: IBO program growth statistics, all programs from 1971 to 2012:


The IBO is one of the most recognizable icons of international education today. Its success stimulated the development of other, competing programs of international education which, however, are bracketed out here because none of the schools in our sample employs them. Also left out of consideration are English-medium foreign schools that cater for the wealthy local population in parts of the non-English speaking world. They constitute the bulk of schools in the rapidly emerging field of international education (ICS Research n.d.), but offer mostly American or British curricula and thus fall outside the scope of our subject matter – whatever the effect of the educational experience they provide,

5 Unless otherwise specified, all information about the IBO and its development is taken from the organization’s website. For additional information about its history and evolution, see e.g. Cambridge 2010.
they are neither expected, nor do they consciously strive, to educate global citizens. Instead, they mostly contribute to the reproduction of local elites (Bunnell 2008). The IBO, on the other hand, while not explicitly invoking the concept of global citizenship, actively promotes the functionally similar concept of international-mindedness, understood broadly as awareness of socio-cultural diversity, respect for “otherness”, and a sense of shared responsibility for global affairs. The language of inter-nationalism is partly misleading because, other than established conventions of thought and the geopolitical realities of a world order that divides the planet into territorially delimited nation-states, there is in fact little in the philosophy of the IBO that requires adopting any nation-centric perspective whatsoever. For what this philosophy is really about is the transcending of boundaries, its ultimate point of reference being humankind. It is therefore no wonder that schools authorized to offer one or more IBO programs attain the status of an IB world school.

The concept of a world school is ill-defined but presents a challenge: the challenge to specify its meaning and to translate whatever this is taken to be into concrete educational precepts and guidelines. The IBO addresses this need by centering curricular frameworks on globally relevant themes and generic concepts that must be fleshed out by the individual school, depending on its specific needs and profile. The common core of its otherwise self-contained programs is the “IB learner profile” (see IBO 2008) comprising ten aims and values they all seek to achieve. And while this profile clearly privileges attributes that induce students to think in global terms, it provides ample scope for including location-specific content as well.

The potential for denationalization inherent in IBO programs is reinforced by its organizational structure. The IBO provides a common language and administrative architecture that allows member schools to communicate with each other across the world. On top of a framework of accessibility, IBO regulations generate isomorphic structures and roles across member schools, which facilitates exchange among professional counterparts. Finally, communication between IBO members is rendered not only plausible but also necessary by the regulated devolution to the schools of curricular planning around defined but ambiguously delineated principles. This ensures the constant generation of new problems to

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6 To be sure, to the IBO a world school is simply a school that offers one or more of its programs. But that does not answer the question of what, substantively speaking, distinguishes a school that orients itself, at least nominally, to “the world” from a school with a socially and spatially more delimited horizon.

7 For a theoretical statement of how isomorphic structures emerge in various organizational fields including education, see DiMaggio and Powell 1984. Throughout this paper, our account is informed by a broadly neo-institutionalist perspective combined with a dose of Luhmannian differentiation theory. Given the research question pursued here, explicit references to specific bodies of theoretical work are limited, but readers familiar with the pertinent literature will note the influences.
be solved within an IBO framework, which in turn reinforces and elaborates the roles and interdependence of actors in the field.

Scholarly work on international education dates back to the 1960s and has since grown considerably. The pertinent literature is diverse and covers a wide range of issues, including the evolution of the IBO. As indicated above, a sizeable fraction of this literature is normatively/prescriptively oriented. However, to our knowledge few, if any, serious studies exist on how international schools position themselves as frontline actors, vis-à-vis each other and in relation to the tenet of educating global citizens. This is surprising because schools are important sources of bottom-up initiatives (Vanderstraeten 2004) and ultimately responsible for the emergence of new configurations of relationships within the entire international schooling community. Our study is an attempt to begin to fill this gap.

3. The case study: International schools in Singapore

According to statistics released by the government of Singapore, there were about 45,000 international students in the city state as of 2008 (Council for Private Education, 2010). The number of international students in Singapore has grown steadily during the past few decades and continues to grow further, due mainly to the presence of a large expatriate community that plays an important role in the city state’s vibrant economy; in addition to that, Singapore is also increasingly becoming a destination of choice for students from the greater Southeast Asian region who seek a state-of-the-art education. Most of this education is provided by private schools, some of which are for-, others non-profit organizations. These are the schools that we are looking at.

Even excluding foreign schools targeting national citizens of host countries, international schools are far from homogeneous. At least four sub-types can be distinguished. The first is basically a national school transplanted to foreign lands where it caters for an expatriate community of the nation in question and offers a curriculum from, as well as is accredited by the authorities of, that country. A second category comprises schools that attach themselves to a national educational system or ethos but offer both country-specific and international curricula. The third type is schools which are nominally tied to a particular country, but whose curricula are largely decoupled from that nation or are in the process of being denationalized. And finally, there are those with no national base whatsoever, teaching a purely international or, as we prefer to call it (for reasons that will become apparent below), globally oriented curriculum.

8 Different proposals have been made for the (sub-)categorization of international schools (for a recent example, see Lallo and Resnik 2008). Our own categorization, while influenced by this work, largely reflects the differences found in our sample.
In Singapore, all four types are present. Because we wanted to know how international schools construe the “global citizen” and how they go about translating this construct into daily practice, we excluded schools of the first type from our sample. Information about the other three types was gathered through browsing the schools’ websites and through interviews with leading school representatives, mostly high or middle school principals. Altogether eight semi-structured interviews were conducted between November 2010 and February 2012. The interviews, which lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, were then transcribed and coded for analysis. Given the explorative nature of our study, we did not aim for representativeness. The study does, however, cover the leading players in categories three and four, i.e. those schools which embrace “internationalism” most strongly, and one player from the second category.9

Several schools have switched categories in the past few years, transforming themselves either from purely national into hybrid schools which offer both national and international programs, or from the hybrid type into “truly” international schools by shedding those curricula that initially signaled a particular national affiliation. For example, the German School added an English-language European section in 2004 and changed its name into German European School following this move. The Australian International School, by contrast, retained its name but started re-positioning itself as a predominantly international school, a process that was formally completed in 2010; it now offers an (optional) Australian curriculum only in high school to facilitate interested students’ entry into Australian universities (the New South Wales Board of Studies Higher School Certificate). And Canadian International School took the even more radical step of completely phasing out all Canadian programs (the last of which prior to this move was the Ontario Secondary School Diploma) as of 2013, thereby making it a fully international school in all but name.10

The reasons for transitions toward greater internationalism are largely demand-driven. Competition amongst international schools is fierce in Singapore. Clients are well aware of developments in the field, of the programs and facilities offered by the various schools, and given that many of these schools enjoy excellent reputations, have a genuine exit-option that they readily exercise when they feel

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9 They are the United World College of South East Asia, Overseas Family School, Chatsworth International School, Australian International School, Canadian International School, and German European School. Since complete anonymity would have subverted the purpose of our research, participants were informed (and agreed) ex ante that, while codes would be used as a safeguard against personal identification, references to the respective schools would be unavoidable.

10 This difference in policy probably reflects differences in the composition of the two schools’ clientele. Thus, whereas about two thirds of the students at Australian International School hail from Australia (the next biggest group are New Zealanders), Canadian students comprise only about 15% of the student population at Canadian International School, making them a minority which does not even constitute the largest national group on campus.
they can get more value for their money. Moreover, many of these clients are highly mobile, moving into and out of the city after just a few years and, rather than returning to their “home” countries, lead an expatriate life in different locations around the world for extended periods of time, sometimes indefinitely. This can be quite difficult for their children, and the transition from one location to another is obviously smoothed by the availability of schools that offer globally similar/adaptable curricula. Moreover, a growing fraction of expatriates defines itself in global terms, as parts of a global community comprising socio-economically similarly positioned people who feel they have more in common with each other than with “compatriots” with whom they share little more than the legal status of a passport holder (Freeland 2011). This self-understanding elevates a globally oriented education to a value in its own right rather than just being a concession to the circumstances under which expatriates lead their lives. For this and other reasons, the demand for an education that transcends national horizons has been growing continually.

The two leading schools offering fully international curricula in Singapore are the United World College of South East Asia (UWC) and Overseas Family School (OFS), neither of which have ever been nationally aligned. They stand out from their “peers” in both size and student composition. With the exception of the Global International Indian School, which caters primarily for Indian nationals, they outnumber all other international schools in Singapore, with currently roughly 4,400 and 3,800 students enrolled, respectively. Their student bodies are highly diverse, representing around 60 nationalities in the case of UWC and more than 70 in OFS’s, with no group exceeding 20% (UWC) and 16% (OFS). Consequently, there is no dominant nationality in either school. UWC is also one of the oldest schools for expatriate children in Singapore. It was opened in 1971 with 900 children and grew rapidly. Initially a secondary school, it gradually expanded its age range to include primary and kindergarten students from 1998. Today, it is not only the largest international school in Singapore, but also within the United World School movement, of which it has been a member since 1975. OFS started in 1991 with 35 students. By 1994, enrolment had surpassed 1,000, and by 2003 the number had risen to over 2,000 students from kindergarten through high school levels. The school is planning to relocate to a new, custom-built campus that can accommodate 5,000 students by 2015, at which point UWC expects to have increased the combined enrolment at its two campuses to 5,450.

11 Boli and Petrova (2007: 109), reviewing data from the World Values Survey, claim that by around the mid-1990s, self-identification as “world citizens” had become quite widespread, with about one fifth of respondents covered by the survey choosing the “world as a whole” as their first or second locus of “belonging”. This finding suggests that the potential demand for a global education far exceeds the “transnational capitalist class” (Sklair 2001), including a growing fraction of urban professionals in a broad range of occupations.

12 As is well known, the United World School movement is one of the pioneers of global education and strongly aligned with the IBO, of which it has long been one of the most influential members. The student body of the Singaporean branch is larger than that of all other UWC schools combined.
The two schools have much in common, but they also differ from each other in important ways. Thus, whereas UWC is a non-profit organization, OFS is a commercial school. UWC has a closed-entry system and long waiting lists, accepting students from other schools only if they have top academic credentials. At OFS, by contrast, admission is non-selective and new students are accepted at any time of the year. Both schools’ clientele, while culturally diverse, is socially homogeneous, with the majority having a high socio-economic background. But whereas UWC openly embraces an elite image, OFS keeps a lower profile and distances itself from “elitism”, emphasizing its focus on inclusion and the determination to help students achieve personal academic goals rather than expecting top performance from all. Both UWC and OFS fully depend on tuition fees. And despite OFS’s stated aversion to elitism, there can be no doubt that the school, like the rest of expatriate schools in Singapore, is involved in the education of future business, professional and academic leaders.

Given the size and cultural heterogeneity of their student bodies, UWC and OFS more or less “define” the meaning of internationalism within the landscape of expatriate schools in Singapore. Their leadership in teaching global curricula both makes them models for emulation and exerts pressure on others to follow suit. Especially OFS’s open-entry policy poses a “threat” to any expatriate school that teaches a national curriculum and has a sizeable number of students whose parents might be tempted to switch schools because they believe a more internationally oriented education gives their children a competitive advantage in admissions to prestigious universities and/or in global labor markets. To retain this segment, which may be crucial for sustaining a viable student population, or to expand their market share/student numbers beyond a targeted but limited group of nationals, several schools that started out as “national” international schools have therefore added or even decided to prioritize international curricula. Other, new entrants start out as wholly international schools right away, and still others offer hybrid programs only because they want to tap into a sizeable national pool of expatriates residing in Singapore while not confining themselves to this market segment.13 Over time this has led to a situation where today easily 15,000 children of all age groups are receiving an education that exposes them to a purely or mainly international curriculum at IB world schools. Preliminary research suggests this number is

13 An example of this hybrid type would be Stamford American International School which started in 2009 and will be operating at full capacity only in a few years. With about 50% of the students from North America, it offers a US curriculum side-by-side with IBO curricula at all grade levels. It was thus never (conceived as) a “national” international school, and it belongs to the same company that owns Australian International, the Cognita School group, based in Milton Keynes, UK. On its website, Stamford portrays itself as an “International School with an American Ethos” (http://www.sais.edu.sg/superintendent-s-welcome.html; accessed 9 May 2012). This is echoed by the phrase “International School, with an Australian Ethos” that Australian uses in a Senior School Handbook to describe itself (http://www.ais.com.sg/Portals/0/docs/senior/HB%20Senior%20School.pdf; accessed 9 May 2012), suggesting both schools run on the same platform.
unmatched in any other world city, positioning Singapore at the forefront of developments in global education.

What, then, distinguishes a truly international (or indeed, global) education from a national one? A first and important difference is arguably rooted in the composition of the student body. With ten or more nationalities, three to four continents and often also several religious creeds present in the classroom, multiculturalism and interaction with “strangers” are routine experiences of all parties involved: students, parents, and teachers. When everyone is somehow a stranger, then no one “really” is. Ethnically and/or culturally construed distinctions of the “us” and “them” type, which pervade more homogeneous settings, do not make much sense in such an environment or are soon weakened in new arrivals. Diversity, rather than a “problem” that needs to be managed, is openly embraced and celebrated in the schools’ philosophies, mission statements, curricular and extra-curricular activities. Events such as UN evening/day/week, global concert, international book week, global picnic, and many others where artifacts, culinary specialties, dances, literature, plays and music from around the world are displayed, enjoyed, performed, are regular school calendar highlights.

Similar events are held at “national” international schools, but their “flavor” differs somewhat there because while they certainly add to and enrich a nationally defined “core”, here they express and confirm the schools’ very identity. Since, as an administrator from Chatsworth International School put it, non-affiliated schools have “no single nationality to start with”, the members of the community they visualize “belong to the world (…), so you don’t think of yourself as I, from so and so country”, but rather “as one of seven billion and growing humanity” (Chat1).

Taking “humanity” as one’s point of departure has several implications. It begins with simple things such as the rituals performed at the opening or closing of festivities or other school-wide events, e.g. general assemblies. At nationally affiliated schools, these mainly consist in singing national anthems, reinforcing a sense of national belonging at least in the majority grouping. “Free-standing” schools, by contrast, have their own anthems, projecting a global community from the outset. It continues in everyday activities inside and outside the classroom. For instance, at a school like Canadian International School, where “the general philosophy and feel of being Canadian permeates throughout” (Can2), deliberate efforts must be made to integrate non-Canadians. This holds even more strongly for schools that cater for a dominant nationality, such as Australian International School, where non-Australians visibly stand out

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14 If not through habitualization, then through the strict enforcement of legal norms and school rules that entail zero tolerance for xenophobia, racism or any other form of communication that vilifies a person on the basis of individual or group characteristics. Non-compliant students face expulsion from school.

15 This is a practical, everyday conceptualization of what Nussbaum (2002 :4) characterizes as the theoretical core of “cosmopolitanism”: allegiance “to the worldwide community of human beings”.

10
as different from the main student body. Teachers are therefore encouraged to “engage non-Australian students (...) Hi, tell us where you are from, about your background and your culture”, especially when they are new at the school (Aus3). No such engagement is required at non-affiliated schools.

The differences are reinforced by the composition of the schools’ faculty. The majority of teachers at all schools in our sample are from Western locations, mainly because they are believed to be more accustomed to teaching curricula which, like those of the IBO, place great emphasis on inquiry-based learning, making them “directly opposed to (...) the old method of rote learning” (UWC4) which prevails in much of the non-Western world. But whereas nationally affiliated schools tend to focus their recruitment efforts on their (imagined) “home” countries\(^\text{16}\) – “we have teachers straight from Australia”, says a representative from Australian International (Aus5)\(^\text{17}\) – the recruitment base for unaffiliated schools is evidently broader. Consequently, both UWC and OFS have teachers from 20 or more countries, with no singular nationality dominating all others. Like the composition of the student body, this too contributes to shaping an environment which is conducive to thinking in global rather than national terms.

But teachers, regardless of where they come from, are themselves mostly products of national educational systems and hence rarely “globally focused” (OFS website) from the beginning. Adopting such a focus needs to be learned. One aspect of this learning process is participation in professional development. Ongoing professional development of teachers is required of all world schools by the IBO. It encompasses the whole range of skills needed at such schools, which are regularly updated and upgraded at in-house seminars and external workshops. Especially the latter are important venues for meeting colleagues from around the globe, for exchanging ideas and experiences, and for undergoing formal training in “internationalism” which is taught in IBO courses explicitly designed for the purpose. Even more important is socialization on the job though. This too is facilitated by a culturally diverse environment. For non-affiliated schools, the shift from a nation-focused to a “more thoroughly international orientation” (Aus5) is “easy”, says an interviewee from OFS (OFS6); internationalism is, after all, their daily bread and butter. For schools whose teachers are predominantly from one country, it can be fairly “hard” (Aus5), as these teachers share a large stock of tacit, taken-for-granted assumptions which must be actively unlearned if the shift is to be genuine.

Differences such as these may be small, but they do shape participants’ perceptions. One indicator is the way in which representatives from different schools frame their attitudes toward ideals of

\(^{16}\) In some instances, the notion of “imagined” home countries is to be understood quite literally, as several of the schools in question are owned and lead by non-nationals and have few other links to these countries than their origins as national international schools, a symbolic identity constructed around a particular nation and a national group targeted as their (main) clientele.

\(^{17}\) The situation at Canadian International is similar.
promoting global citizenship on the one hand, and the nurturing/solidifying of national identities on the other. In keeping with the IBO philosophy, all schools in our sample emphasize the importance of a national identity and encourage students to study their “own” culture, language, traditions, to share them with their classmates, etc. At the same time, they embrace global citizenship as a tenet associated with open-mindedness, respect for (as well as recognition of the achievements of) other cultures, fairness, empathy for the plight of socially disadvantaged people, and related virtues. These commonalities notwithstanding, the idioms in which the merits of one or the other are expressed reflect telling nuances in valuation.

For instance, a member of Canadian International, elaborating on the significance of “a sense of belonging”, characterizes “true global citizens”, by which he means children with parents from different countries and/or who have spent significant amounts of time abroad, as being “a little lost” on occasion, lacking a clear, unambiguous identity. For this reason he finds fostering their identification “with some home country (…) definitely important. (…) You don’t want students to lose their own identity” (Can2). This concern, while shared throughout, is cast in a slightly different light at non-affiliated schools. Yes, says his counterpart from UWC, national identity does matter, and while the “tension of becoming a global citizen” is certainly real, on the whole the “advantages (…) in a world that’s changing so rapidly” are worth the effort. Such a citizen does not “have that clique-y idea of community – I’m part of the Singapore community, I’m part of the British community – but (…) understand[s] that a community is forged beyond national boundaries. It’s forged by common interests, shared understanding”. This understanding, however, is not to be had without a price: “If you want people to be (…) genuine global citizens, (…) then you must educate away from the confines and prejudices of (…) national systems” (UWC4).

How does one educate away from national systems? To answer this question it is probably best to begin with a short reflection on what a national system does. As mentioned in the introduction, one of the functions of national education has been and continues to be the building of a citizenry that identifies with the country in question. In the ideal typical case, curricula are shaped around country-specific concerns, taught in “the” national language (presumed, initially often counterfactually, to be shared by all students), and wherever possible filled with content drawn from the national context. Over time, students exposed to such an education tend to view the world through a national prism, with their “own” country at the center.

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But how does one actually know what a student’s “own” identity is? Typically, this is determined by ascription. However, there are students who have never lived in “their” passport country. Should one go by their parents’ place of origin then? But what if the parents “come from” more than one country/culture? And what if they do not observe the rituals, norms, customs identified with that culture? Once questions such as these are posed, it becomes clear how problematic received wisdoms about (national) collective identity can be.

18
and others coming into the picture only negatively and/or secondarily: in terms of what they are not, what they mean to, and how they compare with, “us”, etc. The nation always comes first and, even where its affirmation is free of chauvinism, presents itself as unique, as the most important source of identity formation, and that is no coincidence because the claim to uniqueness lies at the heart of its raison d'être.

As mentioned above, neither the IBO nor the operators of international schools intentionally set out to undermine national identities. Their latent function may nonetheless be to do precisely this (see also Resnik 2009). To understand why, consider the IBO’s PYP. Its curriculum is organized around six trans-disciplinary themes “of global significance”. These are broken down into more specific “units of inquiry” at the school level which typically last for several weeks and (ideally) involve all or most subjects taught in elementary school. Units of inquiry can, but need not be filled with national content. This openness makes them attractive to international schools, especially those of the unaffiliated, “global” type. For these schools have no particular nation or country to anchor their syllabi in. Whichever country they might choose would raise serious questions and objections from parents who, while not necessarily hostile to the country in question, have little reason to identify with it. They may even harbor strong national feelings themselves and send their children to an unaffiliated school only because no school catering for their own nationality is locally available. Alternatively, they may subscribe to a more cosmopolitan identity. Either way, an education that uses teaching materials strongly tilted toward one or another nation is unacceptable to most of these schools’ clients.

Whenever possible, they will therefore draw their materials and contents globally, as well as adopt neutral, non-partisan stances in matters that are contentious between countries, world regions, civilizations. What this means with regards to the spatial aspect of content is well illustrated by the case of Australian International which, at the time of interviewing, was “transforming itself from (…) a very New South Wales-centric Australian school” into a more “internationally-focused school” (Aus3). This transformation entailed substantial changes in course organization and syllabi construction. In history, for instance, “instead of saying Australian history”, lessons are now taught around more generic concepts: classes might look “at wars, not necessarily Australia’s involvement in World War II”. In other courses, rather than “studying Australian bushfires (…) we could look at responses to emergency situations (…) or disasters, and so on”. In other words, going conceptual allowed the school to denationalize its content, and denationalization is a must if one wants to cater for a “more global” clientele (Aus5), the main

19 The mission behind the establishment of both the first “truly” international schools in Geneva and Yokohama and the IBO was to pacify those elements of nationalism which can easily be mobilized for violence against “others”. It was not, however, directed against nationalism per se.

20 The themes are 1) Who we are; 2) Where we are in place and time; 3) How we express ourselves; 4) How the world works; 5) How we organize ourselves; and 6) Sharing the planet.
The impetus behind Australian’s internationalization drive. For as a colleague from a non-affiliated school explains, nationally focused syllabi are “largely irrelevant” when “I’ve got a classroom of kids from 20 nationalities.”

But not only are they irrelevant, they may, as indicated above, even be offensive given their role in forming national allegiances. Privileging nationally focused content directs students toward “naturalizing” the nation, toward viewing it as the self-evident point of reference, source of meaning, center of affection, etc., from which everything else flows. Denationalization cannot therefore but “educate away” from the nation because students never learn to see the world through national lenses in the first place. Instead of focusing on the particular, their attention is drawn to universals, and it is from these universals that the particulars derive their meaning, not the other way around. This need not hinder students’ identification with more delimited communities, but if and where such identification occurs, it is not of the schools’ making. The schools may encourage students to retain what already exists (or is ascribed), but in contrast to their state counterparts they cannot take an active part in shaping national loyalties. Moreover, even as they encourage students to embrace their “own” traditions, heritage, cultures, they must at the same time stress the importance of transcending them, of treating all as equally worthy of respect and recognition, lest they risk undermining the learning community on whose viability their very success as schools, as educational organizations, rests.

The alternative to nationally focused content selection is to organize courses around global themes and to draw teaching materials from potentially all parts of the world. In history, this involves moving away from national history (or histories) in favor of world historic themes and concepts. For example, courses on the “exploration of new worlds” might look into European endeavors such as the voyages of Magellan, Henry the Navigator or Columbus on the one hand, and those of Zheng He’s Star Fleet on the other, each time focusing on the links between technological innovation, trade, and cultural as well as socio-economic change. In other humanities courses, students might learn about the main regional cultures of North and Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, the Middle East, Europe, South Asia and East Asia. In courses on demographic change, they might study how populations are spread around the world, how birth and death rates affect population density, investigate the reasons for population density or scarcity in different areas, etc. In courses on social and economic development they might learn to use and apply the pertinent indicators, explore the reasons behind differential degrees

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The view that curricular changes are needed if one wishes to move away from orienting education toward national citizenship formation is indirectly supported by a study of “internationalizing” schools in Australia (Matthews and Sidhu 2005) which admit growing numbers of foreign students (mainly as a means for generating revenue), but otherwise remain essentially “Australian”. Neither the local nor the foreign nationals seem to develop what might qualify as (more) “cosmopolitan” identities in such a context. Instead, the heightened awareness and presence of (one’s own and the others’) “otherness” reinforces national self-identification in either group.
of development in different parts of the world and discuss specific aspects and consequences of development in various Asian, African and European locations. In drama courses, they might learn about theatre innovations in ancient Greece, India and Japan, in courses on musical history they might be taught the skills needed to identify European, Chinese, Indian, Indonesian and African instruments and musical styles, to understand the structure of the music from diverse locations, etc. In literature studies, a major fraction (sometimes up to 50%) of the texts selected for reading must typically be translations from non-English languages. The list goes on and on. Whatever the subjects and topics taught, a sustained effort is made to center them around world concepts and/or to explore the global significance/implications of the phenomena in question.

The decentering of world views and the relativizing of particularistic identities which results from the globalization of course content lies at the heart of the IBO’s understanding of international-mindedness. Another means by which this can be promoted are Model United Nations (MUN) conferences and activities. They simulate deliberations held at the United Nations where participants “act” as diplomats representing a country or non-governmental organization who advocate a particular cause and/or resolution for adoption by the UN. All schools in our sample offer MUN activities as extracurricular activities (ECAs) in high school. One of them, OFS, has gone substantially beyond that and, in addition to offering in-depth ECAs, integrated them into the regular curricula for all classes from grade 4 through to the last year of high school. Students are required to choose a country, which can be any country except their passport country, familiarize themselves with its history, culture and position in the “world system”, and then develop and defend its “stance” on a problem of global significance. Participation in MUN activities, in the words of OFS’s academic director, constitutes “an authentic way of motivating students to consider issues from the perspective of another” (http://www.ofs.edu.sg/munofs/welcome-message/; accessed 9 May 2012), and that was the reason behind the school’s initiative to make them available to most students rather than just the committed few who take them as ECAs in higher grades.

The initiative, viewed by OFS officials as a great success, is demanding, time-consuming and costly. Not only does it absorb much energy of curriculum leaders and teachers (more or less all of whom get involved in the process at some stage), it even resulted in the creation of a new school-wide position, the “Dean of International Relations”. Smaller schools do not necessarily have the means to engage in experiments of this scale. They can, however, benefit from them: through observation (e.g. by sending staff for campus visits), information sharing and networking (which is quite extensive in Singapore despite the schools’ strong competition with each other), access to materials supplied by other world
schools to the IBO, and so on. Over time, this leads to the diffusion of innovations generated by the larger players.

Size is not the only factor that acts as a constraint or catalyst of experimentation. Non-affiliated schools are generally more prone than affiliated ones to venture into uncharted terrain, as established models of global education and citizenship are hard to come by, and models of national education are of limited value to them. This assessment is corroborated in the field of community service, which is yet another vehicle for the promotion of international-mindedness. Students participating in such activities render various services, ranging from raising/donating money for the poor, doing voluntary work in homes for disabled people and orphans, to providing developmental aid, e.g. in the form of building a school, during week-long excursions to nearby or distant countries. Strongly encouraged by the IBO, all schools in our sample have service programs in place and emphasize their importance for the students’ personal growth. But their weights and sizes vary considerably between them. Here, UWC is the unchallenged leader in Singapore. Its “Global Concerns” program supports over 60 projects worldwide. In addition to aiding the targeted communities in taking “control of their lives”, it seeks to “develop a sense of lifelong responsibility within the students (...) so that they will always perceive these issues as important ones and grow into caring citizens who take action to support those less fortunate than themselves” (http://www.uwcsea.edu.sg/page.cfm?p=1281; accessed 9 May 2012).

4. Conclusion

So much for a brief overview of some of the measures which the schools in our sample take in their movement away from a nationally focused education toward greater internationalism and/or globalism. Not all of these measures are unique to international schools; many of them are also practiced at state schools in different parts of the world. Taken together, however, they do make a difference, setting the education offered by international schools, particularly those of the unaffiliated type, substantially apart from that delivered at state or state-centric schools, even elite ones. The rapidly growing demand for such an education suggests they might be at the forefront of developments in the educational field as a whole, making them into role models for others. To this aspect we shall now turn.

Beginning in Singapore and taking the spread of IBO programs as an indicator, the pull of internationalism is particularly evident in the private non-state sector catering for the expatriate community. Even the Tanglin Trust, which traces its history back to the 1920s and strongly emphasizes its tradition of providing British-based learning, recently (2009) had to introduce the IB DP as an alternative to study for A Level in the National Curriculum of England. Another prestigious British-based school, Dulwich College, which opens in 2015, aims to offer the IB DP right from the start, as a
complement to customary British programs. Several national “international” schools which are trying to keep a distance from this movement, on the other hand, can survive only on subsidies they receive from the governments of their “home” countries. At the same time, the state sector, targeting mainly Singaporean citizens, recently opened an avenue for international learning to attract more foreign students and to give Singaporeans more choice at least in secondary school. This is a significant move because the government, like that of many other countries, had long retained strict barriers preventing citizens from attending international schools in line with the goal of nation-building. Altogether three local schools were allowed to set up private international branches. They all offer the IB DP now, with enrolments climbing continually and showing no signs of abating despite high tuition fees (Straits Times, 28 February 2012).

Elsewhere in the region similar trends are observable. IB world schools are mushrooming, particularly in China. The German-Swiss International School in Hong Kong has an English language stream that is larger than the German language stream and is undergoing, in its English language stream, a transition from A level examinations to the IB DP scheduled to be completed by 2015. The principal of Canadian International School of Beijing is “extremely pleased that we deliver the Canadian curriculum for the Province of New Brunswick” (http://www.cisb.com.cn/page/detail_static.php?id=178&moduleid=9; accessed 9 May 2012), but since 2009, the school has also been offering the IB DP, and as international schooling is expanding in the Chinese capital, one wonders how much longer Canadian “provincialism” can be sustained; the IB PYP and MYP programs are already being introduced, suggesting the school might be headed in the same direction as its Singaporean counterpart.

The development is not restricted to (East and Southeast) Asia. IB world schools are spreading throughout the world, including North America and Western Europe, where both non-state and state schools have begun to offer especially the IB DP at rapidly accelerating pace. In fact, so strong is this trend that over 50% of all students in the IBO’s Diploma program are now enrolled in state schools (http://www.ibo.org/history/timeline/; accessed 9 May 2012).

The inroads IBO programs are making into the state sector suggest that states might slowly be losing control over education. Public schools offering such programs on the one hand strengthen or stabilize their position, and thus arguably that of the state sector as a whole, in an environment characterized by mounting private competition. On the other hand, they inadvertently subvert an important aspect of their own function by putting education on a denationalizing trajectory. This, in turn, establishes a new hierarchy within the public sector, where internationalizing schools are leaping ahead of
their non-internationalized counterparts. As the spread of international/global education is building momentum, national education is relatively devalued, because “the” international emerges as the new “gold standard” (Haynes 2011: 221) in light of which nationally focused programs appear somewhat lacking – the mere presence of an international alternative provincializes them. Such provincializing puts pressure on state systems to further open up to internationalization (see Weenik 2009 on the Dutch case), for if they do not, they may face growing middle class flight, which can set in motion a process of perpetual decline – decline of significance, because even the best national schools will only be second choice for a sizeable segment of the population, thus transforming them into a “reserve option” for those unable to make it into the first tier; and decline of quality because the more the middle class exits the national system, the less it will be prepared to pay taxes to finance services it does not use.

One result could be a widening gap between schools and the social groups using/having access to them; another, the increasing “emancipation” of education from political oversight and control. IB world schools are of course subject to state laws, and state schools offering IBO curricula may even have to adapt their programs to certain curricular requirements set by state authorities. But regardless of the type and substance of the regulation they face, all schools offering IBO programs “educate away” from the nation, some to greater, others to lesser extents, because these programs cannot help but undermine the epistemological primacy of national narratives. More subtly but inexorably, “denationalization” manifests itself as a shift in the locus of curricular, pedagogical and administrative planning from state agencies to a global community of IBO teachers and administrators, who rely on (horizontal) peer exchange and support rather than (vertical) centralized direction.

A third consequence of the spread of IBO programs concerns the organization itself. Because the IBO finances its activities to a large extent through membership and related fees, more member schools means growing revenue, and growing revenue means enhanced research and service capabilities, thus further boosting the organization’s attractiveness and potential for growth. Being a non-governmental organization, the IBO is answerable only to its clients, hence independent of state agencies and free to pursue its own educational philosophies and agendas. Its credibility increasingly serves as a magnet for

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22 In the Netherlands, public schools have even begun to introduce the IB MYP program rather than just the DP program preparing for entry into university (see Visser 2010). This further strengthens the movement away from nationally oriented curricula.

23 Fears that genuinely internationalized/globalized curricula, whether developed under the auspices of the IBO or not, have the capacity to undermine national allegiance and to give rise to what wary observers call “faceless citizenship” (see Zimmerman 2002; Huntington 2004), are thus probably not completely unfounded.

24 The IBO’s annual income, currently approaching US$ 120 million (excluding fundraising), has expanded enormously in recent years, following the rapid increase in authorized schools. The main sources of income are membership fees (24% of the total) and examinations (45%). As more schools seek and gain authorization, more fees are received, and as more students enrolled in IB world schools graduate, more examination fees are due (http://www.ibo.org/facts/annualreview/documents/Financialreview2010RevisedMay.pdf; accessed 9 May 2012).
schools that either want to move away from government supervision and/or need to gain trust and legitimacy through association with a reputable, globally recognized brand known for rigorous accreditation processes and quality controls. At the same time, the growing number of participating schools and the density of communication networks among them influence the character of the IBO itself, as well as the relationships to (and between) its members. Large schools that can devote substantial resources to organizing expensive, labor intensive events (such as Model United Nations conferences or professional development workshops) and to experimenting with new pedagogical ideas, play important roles in setting global standards. In so doing, they also raise the IBO’s profile. For these schools, in shaping benchmarks of best educational practice within an IBO framework, help publicize not only their own achievements and strengths, but also the IBO brand. As much as the IBO provides a platform for incorporating otherwise dispersed, often isolated and sometimes directly competing schools from around the world into a network of cooperation and mutual exchange, its own success depends on the standing of its most visible representatives/flagship practitioners. This is bound to serve as a powerful buffer against temptations to establish centralized organization structures and top-down communication channels within the network.

In conclusion, the trends and developments reported here may well contain the seeds of a radical transformation of the educational system, some of whose leading organizations and institutions are gravitating away from the mental and physical restrictions constraining their (national) “precursors” through being tasked with serving more particularistic communities. Needless to say, this transformation is still in its early stages. If it continues, the whole system is likely to gain more autonomy over its goals and programs, as well as to expand the horizon for its operations along the lines of other social systems such as the economy or science.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>117</td>
<td>Roxana Waterson</td>
<td><em>What to celebrate in the United Nations Year of Indigenous Peoples?</em></td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>55pp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>118</td>
<td>Zhang Xin Xiang</td>
<td><em>Education as a vehicle for social stratificational change: the case of Singapore</em></td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>38pp</td>
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<td>119</td>
<td>Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr</td>
<td><em>Nouns that sail through history: reified categories and their transcendence in Marx’s social theory</em></td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>50pp</td>
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<tr>
<td>120</td>
<td>Syed Farid Alatas</td>
<td><em>Post-colonial state: dual functions in the public sphere</em></td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>45pp</td>
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<td>122</td>
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<td><em>Statist democracy and the limits of civil society in Malaysia</em></td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>40pp</td>
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25