

IB Research Notes

Information for the IB research community

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In this issue of *IB Research Notes* Vicki Yin explores the reasons why South-East Asian students choose IB programmes and critically examines the impact of globalization and internationalism on student choices. She discusses the issue of language with particular reference to dominant cultures and the creation of elites. Judith Fabian, head of programmes division at the IBO, comments on the article and continues the discussion, suggesting that the questions asked about ideological and pragmatic interests are difficult but necessary.

We are always very keen to hear about prospective articles for *IB Research Notes*. If you are interested, please contact me at the IBRU e-mail address. We are continuing to look closely at *IB Research Notes* in order to improve its structure and address the needs of its audience more directly. I would greatly appreciate any feedback about the publication. Please send your feedback to: richard.caffyn@ibo.org.

Richard Caffyn

Editor of *IB Research Notes*

Head of research support and development at IBRU

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Feature Article

Vicki Yin was born in Lancaster, England and graduated with a BSc in food chemistry and applied nutrition. She went on to work in the hospitality industry, but found that the teaching profession was more conducive to bringing up a family, much more enjoyable and a great way to see the world. She has since taught in many countries including Brunei, Australia, UK, Papua New Guinea, Qatar, Sudan and Malaysia, holding a variety of posts from senior curriculum officer to principal, in both local and international education systems. She has a graduate diploma in education from Griffith University, Australia, and a masters in education management from the University of Southern Queensland. Vicki is married to a Malaysian, and now teaches at The International School of Penang (Uplands), where her daughter is completing her IB diploma. She would like to see the development of education systems that instill in students a sense of justice and respect for human rights.

International curriculum offerings: How are they addressing the aspirations of South-East Asian students?

Vicki Yin

The majority of students in international schools in Malaysia have until recently been of a “Third Culture Kid” (Pollock and Van Reken 2001) background: their parents expatriates whose jobs moved them from country to country. There is now, however, a significant increase in students from neighbouring Asian countries who are sent to Malaysia specifically for an international education, although what constitutes an international education can be “an ambiguous term because it is used in a variety of ways”—as Cambridge and Thompson (2004) make very clear—and can mean different things to different people.

These students bring with them a different set of skills and expectations. International schools should be examining how compatible their curriculum offerings (courses such as the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme) are with these students’ aspirations.

The IBO includes in its mission statement the development of qualities such as inquiry, knowledge, care, compassion and lifelong learning in an international context. It requires students to complete a creativity, action, service (CAS) programme, an extended essay and a common course in the theory of knowledge (TOK).

These are commendable inclusions, but at the same time can be seen as exclusive to students whose first language is not English, and whose educational background is Asian rather than Western.

While international schools move towards these curriculums, it is also unclear whether Asian parents and students are confident of their value. For them, it is much harder doing an IB programme than the conventional three or four A Levels (or even five as some students in Malaysia do). It requires a good command of English usage and higher level skills such as application, justification, evaluation and problem solving, which they may not have experienced in their home-country education systems. They are often latecomers to international education, whether for economic reasons or because of a desire to have a strong foundation in their mother tongue.

There are also other roads to university qualifications that are faster and therefore cheaper, such as through local colleges (whose numbers are rapidly increasing in Malaysia [Tan 2002]) linked to UK, Australian or New Zealand universities via twinning programmes. These programmes offer degrees whereby the first one or two years are completed in Malaysia, the rest overseas. Some even offer “3 + 0” courses, whereby the degree is awarded by the parent university overseas, yet the course is carried out entirely within Malaysia.

The strength of Asian currencies also plays a part in the pathways that these students choose.

International schools are therefore faced with the dilemma between ideological and pragmatic interests, as described by Cambridge and Thompson (2004: 164): the ideology of offering courses that promote international-mindedness, and the pragmatism of providing universal credentials.

Is it the case that South-East Asian students are shying away from programmes such as the IB Diploma Programme and going for the more narrowly focused vocational courses offered by local colleges, very few of which promote “internationalism”? Many of those who do choose the IB Diploma Programme find it a struggle because they do not have the language and application skills, and may end up with a poor diploma that is not a reflection of their academic ability, but rather a reflection of their lack of English language skills. Critically, are the students who can successfully manage the IB Diploma Programme the elite who have been educated in English from a young age, and is the IBO therefore perpetuating a wealthy, first-world-biased elite?

There are two strands to this problem:

1. the learning philosophy and its curriculum implications
2. the language of instruction.

In seeking to clarify some of the issues, my research led to an examination of the literature surrounding education for globalization and internationalism, with particular regard to the South-East Asian countries of Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia, Korea and Japan—the countries from which many South-East Asian students are sent to Malaysia.

The learning philosophy

It is interesting to note that the “knowledge society” foreseen by writers such as Drucker (1994) refers mainly to the future for developed nations that already have a technological base upon which to build their future. It applies to countries that have passed through industrialization, and moved on to third and fourth stage industries. There is little discussion of the plight of developing countries that are still heavily reliant on primary sector industries, or the needs of those countries that, in their rush to tackle globalization, are basing their education systems primarily on the needs of the economy. Writers such as Paquette (1996) and the postmodernists raise fears about the inequalities such societies may promote.

It is here that the concept of globalization (and its relationship to internationalism) should be carefully examined, as there are again many definitions and approaches. The reality of globalization was brought home to South-East Asia by the financial crisis of 1997. The Asian Tigers tottered, and it was eminently clear that the South-East Asian economies were under the influence of a global economy. It is therefore in this economic context that globalization has most meaning for the expanding middle classes of Asia and their children.

In such a context it is hard to reconcile globalization with internationalism, as Jones (1998, quoted in Cambridge and Thompson 2004) recognizes. Globalization requires “the establishment of a global marketplace marked by free trade and a minimum of regulation”, whereas internationalism promotes “global peace and well-being through the development and application of international structures”.

A survey of Asian curriculum development shows that South-East Asian countries are eager to keep abreast of global trends by updating their educational offerings. Measures include decentralization in regulation and governance; the promotion of lifelong learning; the

introduction of “internationalization” into the curriculum; the increasing use of evaluation and control measures; and the need to bring education and work closer together (Green 1999 and Cheng 2001).

The economic context of globalization in education in South-East Asia must also be recognized: Japan has sought to introduce education with a “global perspective” (Asano 2000: 106). However, Selby (1999) says that this is understood as an education for “global competitiveness” rather than global integration. Similarly, Singapore has regarded “education and economic performance [as] indivisible” (Tan 1992).

Although Cheng warns against the dangers of generalization (2000: 208), the common theme seems to be that much of this change is rhetoric from the top, with the actual implementation failing to achieve their objectives (Green 1999). The reasons for this failure are various, ranging from a basic mistrust in administration by teachers; the inability to attract quality applicants into the profession; the difficulty in dismantling a rigid bureaucratic system; to a simple, basic lack of funding in the educational sector.

The end result is that the goals have failed to filter down to classroom practice, and the students who leave these systems to join international schools find the transition from rigid “one right answer” (Borden 2003) systems to an ambiguity-tolerant, problem-solving, individualistic education system an extremely difficult one, which they must struggle to master in an unfamiliar language.

These students are also the ones whom Cambridge and Thompson (2004: 170) refer to as members of the Transnational Capitalist Class who have “turned their backs on their own educational system and embrace[d] the values of the economically developed world”. In the transformationalist thesis of globalization (Held et al. 1999, quoted in Cambridge and Thompson 2004), this leads to a social division of the world economy, an echo of Paquette’s predictions of the strengthening of the social elites of a country, so that the gap between rich and poor is not just between countries, but within countries themselves. Is the exclusivity of curriculums such as the IB Diploma Programme cementing the status quo?

In speaking to the parents of these students, it is rare to find any understanding of the attempts that their countries’ education systems are making to address their children’s future. There is very little understanding of the underlying principles of a programme such as the IB Diploma Programme, and even less understanding of its relevance to their children’s world.

It seems that there is a large, as yet unbridged gap between the objectives of Western-style curriculums and the aspirations of Asian students. But this is where reference needs to be made to what Quist (2005) refers to as the current discourse on international education.

Quist’s argument is that this discourse is “characterized in the main by the Western (developed) world talking to itself and demonstrating an unwillingness or inability to fully engage with the relevant perspectives and demands of colonial/post-colonial discourse”. The perspectives of a region such as South-East Asia are indeed very different from those of Europe. Both may have impressive trade blocs (the EU and ASEAN, respectively), but their “historical and contemporary realities” (Quist 2005) are completely different. To expect a Western-based education philosophy to fit their needs is naïve.

Quist calls for a “radical” approach, one where we examine the reasons for the rich–poor divide. In this sense the discourse on international education must face squarely the threat that, by its exclusivity, it is perpetuating and consolidating this divide. One may argue, as Desai (1996, quoted in Wilkinson 1998) does, that as “students at IB schools very largely represent a multinational elite” who will be the next generation’s leaders, their education should prepare them for leadership that will “create a more equitable world”.

But is this enough?

Programmes such as the IB Diploma Programme should be able to reach out to a wider sector of the student population and examine the values of justice and equal opportunity in a world context. For example, Asian countries become very cynical when the West preaches

internationalism, but is in no hurry to dismantle trade barriers when fledgling Eastern economies threaten established Western markets. Are there, therefore, circumstances when equal opportunity is expendable? These are the type of issues that are under the microscope.

Language of instruction

As the postmodernists such as Lyotard (1984) and Baudrillard (n.d.) point out, language is never neutral, and can in fact be used as a tool of exclusivity. Grimshaw (2005) underlines this with his point that “political and economic realities” determine the language of use. In a study done by MacKenzie (2000), the highest ranking factor for parents sending their children to an international school was a “desire for my child to be educated in [the] English language”: they did not do this to access British/American culture, but because they felt it was the “language of the future” for their children to succeed. They seek English proficiency to avoid exclusion from globalization.

As an illustration, Malaysia was determined to unite the country post-independence (Thumboo [2005] prefers this term to post-colonialism) with a common language: Malay. By 1982, classes at all national primary schools, secondary schools and universities were taught in Malay. But in its attempts to keep pace with globalization, there has been great concern over the loss of English proficiency in the work force, (“Jobless Due to Poor English”, *New Straits Times*, 11 December 2005) and in 2003, English was reintroduced as the language of instruction for maths and science, a move that has ignited much passion and debate.

By losing proficiency in English, Malaysia has been excluded from the economic progress it desires, an illustration of the influence of political and economic realities.

It is clear that English is the language of economic globalization, and that international schools have an obligation to ensure that non-native English language speakers become proficient in order to become equal players on the world stage, or they run the risk of being perceived “condescending and patronising” as Quist (2005) elegantly points out. Or, as Salt (1998) says: “language is only inherently unequal if it cannot be accessed equally”.

But it also brings with it other obligations: that mother-tongue languages are sustained in the curriculum, and that, as Grimshaw (2005) says in championing critical international education, we must be “aware of [our] own biases and [be] prepared to acknowledge the valid claims of others”.

This latter point lies at the heart of international education, whether it be language of instruction, or educational philosophy. Too often practitioners in international education do not recognize their own biases, and try, with evangelical zeal, to convert others to their own ethnocentric world view. It is easy to patronise cultures whose values are not the same as our own, but it is not so easy, and a “road less travelled” to seek out the answer to “why?”.

I would like to suggest that this is the way forward for further discourse on international education, to reduce the distance between the “others” and the “dominant and essentially dispossessing culture”, as Quist (2005) puts it. Whether it be at policy, curriculum or classroom level it would help international schools to reconcile the dilemma between “internationalist” and “globalist” approaches, as Cambridge and Thompson put it, particularly in a South-East Asian context.

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Response to the Feature Article

Judith Fabian is the head of programmes at the International Baccalaureate Curriculum and Assessment Centre (IBCA) in Cardiff. She has taught in international schools in Holland, Jordan, Tanzania and Germany. She was a teacher of English A1 and TOK in the IB Diploma Programme for 15 years and a high school principal at two IB World Schools before coming to IBCA.

Vicki Yin raises issues that are very pertinent to international education and the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO). Some of the questions she asks are not particularly comfortable, but they need asking. The struggle within the IBO is between wanting to broaden access so that different types of schools and, therefore, a wider range of students can study an international curriculum, while needing to keep fees affordable and standards high. The IBO is a small organization with a large vision.

The “dilemma between ideological and pragmatic interests” is a constant dilemma for the IBO, and not just with regards to South-East Asian students. There are schools all over the world that are interested in implementing, or are actually implementing, IB programmes primarily in order to increase enrolment, or achieve more university acceptances for their students, just as there are parents who see IB programmes only as a passport to a good university, with the added benefit of developing fluency in English. The IBO does not require an oath of allegiance to the mission statement when a school becomes authorized or when a student enrolls in a programme. Instead it works with schools, and encourages and enables schools to work with students, to explore together what it means to be internationally minded and how we can all contribute to “a better and more peaceful world” (in the words of the IBO mission statement).

Is the IBO “perpetuating a wealthy, first-world-biased elite”? Is the organization naïve to expect a Western-based education philosophy to fit students such as those from South-East Asia described by Yin? These are the uncomfortable questions, and the ones that need answering. With regard to the first, I believe the assertion could be argued quite strongly, though less so today than in the recent past. The majority of the 1,600-plus IB World Schools are now state or national schools, not international. Clearly there are national schools, among them many state-supported schools, that wish to teach an international curriculum. The MYP and PYP programmes can be taught in the local language; the Diploma Programme, of course, can't. Some of these national schools are in countries such as Turkey, Russia, China and Indonesia.

Is the organization naïve to expect students from the countries such as those listed above to adapt to and find relevance in a Western-based education? The IBO has to explore this question much more assiduously than it has in the past. The soon to be published IB learner profile is the IBO mission statement translated into a set of learning outcomes. It states that IB students and teachers strive to be:

- inquirers
- knowledgeable
- thinkers
- communicators
- principled
- open-minded
- caring
- risk-takers
- balanced
- reflective.

I have met with teachers all over the world, from a range of cultures and faiths, and this profile has been enthusiastically received. Have I consulted widely and thoroughly enough? Were people just being polite in their responses?

Of course the IBO could argue that its programmes are based on the most recent educational research, and that they represent the organization's best efforts to produce programmes that will meet the aspirations of the mission statement. It could also argue that no schools or students *have* to do an IB programme, that it is a matter of choice. The first argument would suggest a degree of self-satisfaction within the organization resulting in stale, Western-biased programmes that would, ultimately, fail to meet the needs of the 21st-century learner. The second argument would support Yin's assertion that IBO programmes support only a wealthy elite.

It is incumbent upon the IBO, and other organizations that purport to offer international programmes of education, to work to "reduce the distance between the 'others' and the 'dominant and essentially dispossessing culture'"(as argued by Yin, quoting Quist) by creating more opportunities, wherever and whenever possible, to explore differences in knowledge, values and philosophy. While it would be impossible and, arguably, inadvisable to produce an educational programme that fits all philosophies, values and interpretations of knowledge, the IBO should strive to ensure its world view is not ethnocentric, and strive also to recognize its biases.

IBRU News

Professor Jeff Thompson retired as Head of IBRU in December 2005. Jeff founded IBRU in May 2000 and his leadership of the unit formed the apex of a career with the IBO that has included work as chief examiner and academic director. His expertise and guidance will be missed by the research unit, though he is now professor emeritus at the University of Bath and will continue to work in international education. This year he will be working as one of the editors for the new *Sage Handbook of Research in International Education* and will be continuing his endeavours with the Alliance of International Education, preparing for their next conference in Shanghai in the autumn.

From January 2006 IBRU will merge with the professional development division under the leadership of Jonathon Marsh. This is a very positive development and we are looking forward to a strong and profitable future for research throughout the IBO.

In November 2005 the European Council of International Schools (ECIS) held their annual conference in The Hague and IBRU along with the IBO had its usual strong presence with a stand and a number of presentations within the programme. The IBRU stand this year was situated between the main IBO stand and the University of Bath's. Many brochures as well as information about IBO research were distributed, and various research issues and possible areas for collaboration were discussed with a number of delegates. We had several exciting conversations with *IB Research Notes* readers and contributors.

IBRU personnel gave the following presentations.

- ◆ Self-evaluation of international values by schools (with Clive Carthew, International Schools Association)
- ◆ Symbols in education and their role in the construction of cultural identity
- ◆ Internationalizing intergenerational learning: issues for students, schools and the elderly
- ◆ Cross-cultural management in international schools: a critical examination
- ◆ Practitioner research and the IBO

From these presentations, which related to projects and research areas IBRU is working on, there will be subsequent articles in *IB Research Notes* and related publications. There were a number of very interesting and dynamic discussions with members of the audience and these interactions, as well as the stand representation, were important aspects of the conference for IBRU.

The recently retired head of IBRU, Professor Jeff Thompson, received an award for lifetime service from the ECIS at a ceremony during the conference.

Practitioner Research Project

Differentiated questionnaires have been sent to 600 IB World Schools throughout the world and we are now collecting and collating replies. The data collected will be analysed during the first part of 2006 and we aim to report findings throughout the year. The evidence will enable us to better support researchers in schools and to develop research capacity throughout the IBO.

Research Noticeboard

Journal of Research in International Education

Information about this journal can be found at: <http://www.sagepub.co.uk>.

Research literature

Bottery, Michael (2006) "Education and globalization: redefining the role of the educational professional". *Educational Review*, Vol. 58, No.1.

This paper argues that current globalizing forces are profoundly affecting the policies of nation states, and particularly those in education, and producing a situation where educational professional work is both increasingly controlled and increasingly fragmented. This being the case, it is argued that professionals' understanding of the nature of their work and responsibilities needs to change quite radically. The article then argues the need for professional understanding of the global nature policy issues. It then examines some general meanings for "globalization", suggests a number of specific kinds, and argues that there are specific mediations that occur at a number of different levels below this. It then argues that the combination of these global forces and the different mediations produce both an excessive standardization/control and an excessive flexibility/fragmentation of professional work, leading to a number of tensions in practice. The final section of the paper suggests that because of these global forces, "normal" conceptions of the professional role need to be supplemented by further requirements if professionals are to have relevance in the twenty-first century.

Brown, George M (2006). "Degrees of doubt: legitimate, real and fake qualifications in a global market". *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, Vol. 28, No.1.

This paper provides an analysis of the global phenomenon known as credential/qualification fraud, a \$US 1 billion dollar "cottage" industry that has tainted higher education in Australia, and does not appear to be abating. The study is developed through a conceptual framework of credentialism, degree creep and screening theory, which the author theorizes spawns the demand for degree qualifications, both legitimate and "less-than-wonderful" along continuums of legitimacy and acceptability. The paper suggests several key resources and tools that can be used by administrators of universities, non-self-accrediting higher education providers and industry human resource managers. The paper concludes by reviewing key global practices currently employed as proactive measures to minimize credential fraud, moving towards a best practice framework for Australia.

International education research database

The international education research database has been updated and now contains nearly 3,000 research articles on international education and International Baccalaureate programmes. The international education research database can be accessed at <http://www.ibo.org>. Select “Resources”, which provides a link to the searchable research database.

IBO public web site

The IBO’s main web site (<http://www.ibo.org>) provides general information about the organization and its programmes.

Online curriculum centre

The online curriculum centre (<http://occ.ibo.org>) is available to all teachers in IB World Schools that subscribe to the site. The online curriculum centre is a valuable source of information for those considering research related to the IB programmes.