8 Assessment and international schools

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In a totally pedagogised society, schooling appears to see much of its relevance confined to its function of accreditation, of distributing diplomas.

(Magalhaes and Stoer 2009: 245)

Perhaps the most important consideration in encouraging the spread and development of multilateral international schools is the prospect that graduates of such institutions be assured of university placement.

(Leach 1969: 45)

Opportunity, access and credentials

The second half of the twentieth century saw a steady increase in the aspirations of parents and their children in developed and, latterly, developing countries alike. These aspirations were fed and consolidated mid century through substantial economic development and a significant expansion of employment opportunities in business, government and, perhaps most of all, in transnational corporations. Many of these jobs demanded high-level skills that could only be produced through expanded secondary and then tertiary educational institutions. As the size of the middle class increased through access to mass education and employment growth, it appeared for a while that the democratisation of education would lead to middle class jobs for everyone.

However, simultaneously with this increase in aspirations and hopefulness, inequalities in income and wealth were also increasing, particularly towards the end of the century. The result is that while the coming of the 'knowledge society' has indeed resulted in increased demand for 'knowledge producers' and 'symbolic analysts' at some levels, the reorganisation of work on a global basis has, despite its enlargement of the middle class, led to only modest transformation of opportunity for large numbers of populations in both developed and developing countries.

As Michael Young observes:

global changes towards more flexible economies have not turned out to be as progressive and evenly distributed as predicted by political economists such as Priore and Sabel (1984) and Reich (1991). The majority
of people in work still stay in the same field if not the same company or organization for most of their working lives. The new industries of the e-economy with their new learning demands have had much publicity, but quantitatively they create remarkably few jobs. Furthermore, not only has the transformative capacity of the new technologies, at least in the short term, been vastly exaggerated, but some of the most characteristic jobs of the new economy are in call centres and the fast food and security industries, none of which require many highly qualified ‘knowledge workers’. In other words, the increasingly mobile and qualified society on which the claims for qualification frameworks are based bears little relationship to the realities of modern economies.

(Young 2008: 133)

Nonetheless, (and while this may be a particularly Western viewpoint), qualifications frameworks are springing up everywhere and present a new form of control of both knowledge and individuals. As Bernstein has observed, within the emerging knowledge-based economy where information and expertise are coded, stored and made available electronically, knowledge becomes literally disembodied and dehumanised. In this form it ‘flows like money’ (Bernstein 1996: 86). Moreover, qualifications frameworks are increasingly tied to competencies that codify and certify the knowledge and performance required by particular employment categories – categories that shift and alter as institutions and occupations are continuously restructured, thus giving a new meaning to the idea of lifelong learning.

Such frameworks are transforming traditional demands on education systems in two significant ways. First, the role of education in socialising the individual into the adult role of citizen as broadly conceived (Durkheim 1965 in Brown 2006) is being altered to a narrowed focus on socialisation for work. This is particularly the case where qualifications frameworks are focused on the production of specific competencies and performance. Here

Knowledge ... instead of qualifying the individual, transforms the individual into a set of cognitive-driven competencies. Knowledge no longer educates the individual and society, rather it becomes a tool for positioning individuals on (or excluding them from) the labour market. One of the results of this transformation is a process of individualisation where individuals are reduced to their ‘performance’.

(Magalhaes and Stoer 2009: 236)

This leads to the second of Durkheim’s educational roles – that of the selection and allocation of individuals in various hierarchies of talent on the basis of common examinations. Credentials valorise a supposed hierarchy of talent through which individuals are allocated to various positions within the credentialed society. This function is particularly important where there is a mismatch between supply and demand for particular competencies.
This mismatch is important at two levels. First, in terms of high-level skills, (both technological and cultural), there is currently a war for talent. As economies shift towards reliance on knowledge-based industries 'the differential value of highly talented people continues to mount' (Michaels in Lauder 2007: 445). Simultaneously, as processes of internationalisation and globalisation proceed it is clear that 'those who have a strong multilingual (including English) and cultural background will have a head start in this war for talent' (Lauder 2007: 445). The implications for schools are an increased emphasis on high level knowledge-based curricula combined with cross-cultural and multilingual studies, specifically including English. These are particularly important concerns for international schools.

Second, as Brown (2006) points out, educational credentials are positional goods, goods that are significantly affected by the availability of and access to particular forms of education. As availability of and access to general education increases, (as was the case in advanced economies during the last century), the competition for positional advantage intensifies, leading to both an inflation in the demand for credentials at more and more advanced levels and to increasingly desperate measures through which families attempt to ensure positional advantage through access to elite education.

The difficulty here is that governmental attempts to increase educational opportunity and reduce inequalities forces previously privileged individuals and their families to try to find ways out of the social congestion that builds up around popular institutions at all levels. The paradox however, is that if there is an insufficient increase in available high-level employment, competition intensifies as opportunity calcifies. But few can afford to withdraw from the competition for a livelihood; a competition that continues to intensify in what Brown (2006) calls the 'Opportunity Trap'.

In such a situation

Absolute performance is not sufficient, because cashing in one's opportunities depends on access to scarce credentials, jobs and networks. For societies, this means that what can be offered to the winners cannot be offered to the population as a whole. There are simply not enough good jobs to go around. An important part of the attraction of elite universities or blue-chip companies is the fact that they offer social status and lifestyles that are in short supply. They are sought after because they are exclusive rather than inclusive.

(Brown 2006: 387)

This is not only an issue within nation states, but also increasingly an issue within the globalised economy. In particular the globalisation of higher education is changing the nature of educational hierarchies, which are themselves becoming globalised. As Lauder observes: 'Higher education systems are becoming increasingly global, coalescing in a hierarchy based on reputation and starting to form a winner-takes-all global market (Lauder 2007: 444).
Assessment and international schools

In this situation Leach’s (1969) observation at the head of this chapter is particularly pertinent: one of the reasons for the spread of international schools is that their assessment processes are seen to increase the chance of admission to university and often to elite universities. Lowe endorses this view:

One interpretation of the rapid expansion in many countries of the numbers of schools offering ‘international’ qualifications is that they are a response by local elites to a stiffening of the local positional competition on the one hand and a globalization of that competition on the other. As more people gain local educational qualifications, those who can afford to do so seek a new competitive edge by taking qualifications that they hope will give them a local advantage. At the same time, it is hoped that these international qualifications will give access to a labour market that is becoming increasingly globalised – for the most advantageous occupations at least.

(Lowe 2000: 24–5)

One key element of such an international education is that it includes and is often conducted partially or wholly in English. This is not exclusively characteristic of international schools. For instance, as Member States of Europe move towards a common European policy in education, approximately 90 per cent of pupils at upper secondary levels learn English, regardless of whether it is compulsory or not (Enever 2009: 187). While this move provides competition for international schools, the fact that many international schools offer a curriculum in English as well as other frequently used international languages such as French, German and Spanish as well as local national languages suggests that ‘education at an elite international school may provide a head start not only in access to the top universities but also for subsequent entry to the fast track management systems of the [Multinational Corporations]’ (Lauder 2007).

International schools and access to higher education

Top universities and elite international schools have a tendency, therefore, to articulate their assessment/examination systems and admissions policies through a number of specific mechanisms. Some of these arrangements provide for direct admission to universities from individual schools that are seen to produce ‘good’ students. However, many international schools rely upon more systematic arrangements brokered by international organisations. For instance, the IBO has agreements with nearly two thousand universities that the IB Diploma will be accepted as an entry level qualification, and, in some instances, will also gain students credit within the first year of their degree. Moreover, of the 1,837 universities listed as having such agreements with the IBO in the 2007 Yearbook an overwhelming number (1,243) were located in English-
speaking countries including the USA (986), Canada (126), the United Kingdom (91), and Australia and New Zealand (40). Japan was the only other individual country, and the only non-English speaking country, with a significant number of such agreements (305).

Not surprisingly, the examinations offered by international schools reflect this orientation towards English-speaking universities. Some 518 schools provide details of the examinations they offer in the ECIS International Schools Directory 2008/2009. As many schools offer access to more than one examination some 943 examinations were available from major internationally recognised examining authorities. Within this total, 306 schools offered the IB Diploma (IBDP); 289 offered the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) (USA); 118 offered the Advanced Placement Program (AP) (USA); and 230 offered the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) (UK). Small numbers of schools offered particular examinations relevant to the national origins of their students (German, French, Spanish, Canadian, Australian, etc.) or examinations required by the host country.

Clearly, the majority of these key examinations are conducted in English and are oriented towards the overwhelming number of English-speaking universities mentioned above.

Such an orientation towards particular examinations and destinations presents international schools with both advantages and challenges. The advantage is that the schools are clearly responding to parental demand for English/American examinations and destinations. But there are significant differences between the American tests and English examinations which are both norm referenced and without articulation to a whole school curriculum, and the IBO Diploma which is both criterion referenced and articulated with curricular programmes designed for Primary (PYP) and Middle (MYP) years.2

The complexity facing schools attempting to provide students oriented towards different destinations with appropriate certification is exemplified in Ramalho’s case of an international school where

All students ... were to receive on completion, a high school diploma from an official accredited institution. At the same time, some students needed to be able to merge back in any U.S. school at any grade level, and benefit from transferable diplomas. In addition, some students were seeking preparation to enrol in U.S. colleges and universities, as well as local universities ... . Because of the different students’ needs the school granted local diplomas for students planning to attend local colleges and universities, an American diploma for students planning to attend U.S. colleges and universities, as well as an International Baccalaureate (IBO) diploma aimed at facilitating the mobility of international students (from one country to the next) while at the same time, providing students with college-preparatory advanced diplomas.

(Ramalho 2007: 3)
But complexity does not reside solely in the requirements of individual students and their destinations, nor in the different principles of assessment of particular American and English norm referenced examinations and the criterion referenced IBO Diploma. It also lies in the curricular principles that underlie the various examinations.

Curriculum, assessment, examinations and tests

For instance, The IBO offers a three-level programme starting at the Primary Years (PYP), then the Middle Years (MYP) and finally the last two years of high school the Diploma Programme (DP). Each of these levels has an explicit curriculum framework that provides the scaffolding upon which schools and teachers build their approach to learning.3

In the Primary Years Program (PYP) six trans-disciplinary themes of global significance provide the framework for exploration and study: who we are; where we are in place and time; how we express ourselves; how the world works; how we organise ourselves; and sharing the planet. Teachers are guided by these six trans-disciplinary themes as they design units of inquiry that both transcend and articulate conventional subject boundaries.

The programme can be illustrated by a hexagon with the six trans-disciplinary themes surrounding six subject areas: language, social studies, mathematics, arts, science, and personal, social and physical education. The trans-disciplinary themes and subject areas form the knowledge element of the programme.

These themes and subject areas are linked with five ‘essential elements’, which guide the pedagogy of the programme, emphasising concepts, knowledge, skills, attitudes, action, so that students are given the opportunity to:

- gain knowledge that is relevant and of global significance;
- develop an understanding of concepts, which allows them to make connections throughout their learning;
- acquire trans-disciplinary and disciplinary skills;
- develop attitudes that will lead to international-mindedness;
- take action as a consequence of their learning.

The result is a highly articulated framework of academic subjects, trans-disciplinary themes and pedagogical principles.

The Middle Years Programme (MYP) offers a similarly integrated approach to curriculum through five areas of interaction: Approaches to Learning; Community and Service; Homo Faber; Environments; Health and Social Education. These five areas of interaction serve to integrate the learning of particular subjects as they

- are embedded in the subjects and developed naturally through them;
- provide both an organisation and an extension of learning within and across the subjects, through the exploration of real-life issues;
• inspire special activities and interdisciplinary projects;
• form part of the framework for student inquiry and take investigative learning further than subject boundaries;
• are a vehicle for refining conceptual understanding through different perspectives;
• guide reflection and lead from knowledge to thoughtful action.

Subject curricula are offered in nine areas, all of which must be covered by the student. These are: Language A, Language B, Humanities, Technology, Mathematics, Arts, Sciences, Physical Education and Personal Project. The curriculum as a whole is underpinned by an emphasis on the fluidity of the curricular framework and the interrelatedness of the subjects. Aspects of the areas of interaction are addressed naturally through the distinct disciplines. In particular, the framework is flexible enough to allow a school to include other subjects not determined by the IB but which may be required by state or national authorities.

The overall philosophy of the programme is expressed through three fundamental concepts that support and strengthen all areas of the curriculum. These concepts are based on: intercultural awareness, holistic learning and communication.

Similarly the Diploma Program (IBDP) is constructed as an integrated curriculum, this time around three core components. The Extended Essay, with a prescribed limit of 4,000 words, offers students the opportunity to investigate a topic of individual interest and acquaints them with the independent research and writing skills expected at tertiary level. The interdisciplinary Theory of Knowledge (TOK) course is designed to provide coherence by exploring the nature of knowledge across all disciplines, encouraging an appreciation of other cultural perspectives.

Participation in the school’s Creativity, action, service (CAS) programme encourages students to be involved in artistic pursuits, sports and community service work, thus fostering their awareness and appreciation of life outside the academic arena.

Surrounding these three core areas are the six subject areas of which three are studied at ‘standard’ level and three at ‘advanced’. They are: Language A1, Second Language, Individuals and Societies, Experimental Sciences, Mathematics and Computer Science, and The Arts.

Associated with each of these three integrated curricula is a written assessment policy that is available to all sections of the school community. The policy is a lengthy series of guidelines and rules that are available for individual subjects and programmes of the IBO through the Online Curriculum Centre (OCC). All participating schools have access to the OCC and their staff are expected to stay in touch with their teaching areas through the internet. The website is updated regularly. The various curriculum groups that decide what is to be taught meet on a regular basis and are constantly
Assessment and international schools

fine-tuning the content and assessment criteria for their subject area. The members of these various groups are selected by the IBO on the basis of regional balance, experience in the subject area and willingness and ability to take part in regular meetings both nationally and internationally.

The IBO encourages schools to view assessment as being integral with planning, teaching and learning. Learning expectations and integral assessment strategies are made clear to students and parents. The school uses a balanced range of strategies for formative and summative assessment, which are reviewed regularly. Learning at the school involves students in both peer- and self-assessment. The levels of students' current knowledge and experience are assessed before embarking on new learning. Students are provided with regular and prompt feedback to inform and improve their learning. Assessment at the school provides students with regular opportunities for reflection on their own learning.

The assessment process allows for meaningful reporting to parents about students' progress. Assessment data is analysed to provide information about the individual needs of students. There are efficient systems for recording data about student learning, which are in keeping with the requirements of the programme. Assessment data is analysed to inform the evaluation and subsequent modification of teaching and learning strategies.

Assessment within the PYP addresses all the essential elements of the programme. Data, including evidence of development in terms of the IB learner profile, is reported to all participants in the learning process: students, parents, teachers and school administrators, and other schools at the time of transfer. Assessment at the school requires the storage of and easy access to student work showing evidence of the process of learning and progress over time. While the IBO has guidelines for schools offering the PYP, individual schools have a degree of independence as to just how to provide feedback (reporting) to parents. The summation of the PYP is an exhibition at the end of the academic year where students show a particular project they have been working on all year. This is a method used to prepare students for later work within the MYP and DP.

Assessment within the MYP is a continuous process and is designed to address the MYP objectives in each of the eight subject groups and the personal project, according to a criterion-referenced approach. The assessment focuses on process as well as product. Teachers/supervisors participate in the standardisation of assessment, where appropriate. Schools have the option of choosing to moderate the MYP on their own or by selecting a range of projects and course work from their student body, are able to have certificates provided by the IBO.

Student learning within the Diploma Program is regularly assessed against the objectives and assessment criteria specific to each subject. Student work is criterion-referenced rather than norm-referenced. Teachers provide an estimated grade list to IBO and any deviation over two grade points is referred to central assessment centres and is reassessed.
The IBO is moving to replace its single assessment centre in Cardiff with a network of assessment centres as the demand for their services has made it impossible to administer all aspects of their programmes through the Cardiff examinations centre. The centre at Cardiff will be replaced by centres at three other locations: The Hague, Washington and Singapore. The replicated centres will have the task of ensuring that all IBO schools worldwide have the same standards and offer the same criteria for assessing student's work.

Another international assessment system, and arguably the oldest, is that offered by Cambridge University. Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) formerly known as the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES), was set up in 1858. It is a non-teaching department of the University of Cambridge, and a not-for-profit organisation. Its mission is 'to work in partnership with education providers worldwide to deliver high-quality and leading-edge assessment services' (www.cie.org.uk).

Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) is the world's leading provider of international qualifications for 14-19 year olds. Qualifications include IGCSEs, which were pioneered by CIE over 20 years ago, O Levels, A and AS Level, and business qualifications in disciplines such as ICT, management and office administration. CIE's qualifications are recognised by universities, education providers and employers across the globe. CIE provides assessment and related syllabi for some sixty-eight subjects at both IGCSE and A Level examinations. It also provides assessment and reporting services at various levels of primary and middle years in key areas such as literacy and numeracy.

However, unlike the IBO programmes, the CIE does not provide an integrated curriculum, but is focused upon assessment and examination in various subjects at various levels. Associated with these examinations in a wide range of subject areas are syllabi, but these are not grounded in an integrated theory of curriculum, teaching or learning. Indeed, CIE is focused almost exclusively upon processes of summative assessment, leaving issues of curricular and pedagogical integration to individual schools. If the IBO operates on the basis of an integrated code, then the CIE operates on the basis of a collection code (Bernstein 1971).

Running parallel with the CIE examinations are the Cambridge ESOL Examinations (www.cambridgeESOL.org). Cambridge ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) exams are the world's leading range of certificates for learners of English. Each year they are taken by over 1.75 million people, in 135 countries.

Again, as with the IB Diploma the important thing about the CIE and CESOL qualifications is that they are recognised for entry to higher education institutions across the world. They provide summative assessment in particular subject areas that is standardised against a huge population, a process capable of providing data on comparative performance within and between schools and countries.

Admission to American universities is governed by a significantly different process: a process of testing that seems to be divorced from curricular or
pedagogical processes and relies for its validity on standardisation of performance against large student populations. While, because of this process, such tests can claim statistical validity and reliability, it is a moot point as to their face (or content) validity across complex curricular differences. The tests most often used are the SAT and AP tests which are conducted by the American College Board (www.collegeboard.com/). These tests are explicitly ‘curriculum free’ in that:

Students take the SAT Subject Tests to demonstrate to colleges their mastery of specific subjects such as English, history, mathematics, science, and foreign languages. The content of each test is not based on any one approach or curriculum but rather evolves to reflect current trends in high school course work (www.professionals.collegeboard.com/testing/sat-subject/about).

Hour-long tests are available in some twenty subjects in multiple choice format and are machine scored. In this they differ significantly from both the IBO assessments and those of the CIE. They are supported by a Subject Tests Preparation Center and a variety of publications that assist students to prepare for the tests. But while students are encouraged to prepare for the format of the tests they are explicitly advised that they cannot study specific content for the DSAT or AP examinations. So, while it is a popular programme among United States colleges and hence students trying to gain access to them, it is not an integrated curriculum like that provided by the IBO or even the syllabus-based programme offered by CIE. Indeed, it might well be called a curriculum-free assessment system.

Difference, contradiction and assessment in international schools

In the face of such different assessment and examination systems, international schools are presented with some rather difficult choices. Clearly the curricular and pedagogical demands of the various assessment and examination systems are quite different, making the internal provision and coordination of teaching and learning problematic. The resolution of tensions between curricula and related assessment procedures may well depend upon the location of the school and the composition of its staff. For instance, Hayden notes that

Based on quite different philosophies (holistic, reflective and constructivist in the case of the MYP, and more compartmentalised, prescriptive and skills-based in the case of IGCSE) the MYP assessment structure is more likely to be familiar to those with a background in countries of, for example, continental Europe while their British counterparts, for instance, are more likely to identify more strongly with the external examinations and certifications of the IGCSE.

(Hayden 2006: 143)
Ellwood has argued that such differences can be overcome and that some work at school level and 'some adjustment' might 'provide a possibility of synthesis' (1999: 36). On the other hand, Guy argues that an 'examination driven programme' such as the IGCSE works against the fundamental goals of student-centred learning and constructivist pedagogies that are fundamental to the MYP where 'assessment procedures should reflect precisely the aims of the pedagogy' (Guy 2001: 14).

Moreover, while the IB programmes were designed from the start as curricula aimed at developing international-mindedness, the IGCSE programmes are adaptations of the English GCSE. So while IGCSE examinations and syllabi are international in terms of offering and access, they are not international in a curriculum sense.

The attempt to develop assessment techniques and structures that are truly 'international' is however a very challenging process as Roger Brown (2002) makes clear. Using the work of Hofstede (1991, 2001), Brown argues that the values embedded in particular national cultures shape both what knowledge is thought to be worthwhile (the problem of curriculum) and the processes by which that knowledge is evaluated (the problem of assessment). Brown takes the issue of national/cultural differences as the starting point for arguing that the most appropriate form of 'international' assessment would be one that relied to a substantial degree upon internal rather than external assessment in that 'if an assessment system has sufficient flexibility within it, then it may be able to be adapted to match more closely the values of a particular group' (2002: 76).

This is not only a superficial issue related to the technical construction of assessment procedures, but one that addresses the issue of substantive (deep structural) epistemological and valuational differences between cultures (Van Oord 2007). A truly international assessment process would need to reflect the differences in curriculum and pedagogy that such epistemological and valuational differences call for. As Brown suggests 'An internal assessment component can provide flexibility for the matching of cultures and assessment, in a way that is not possible with the necessarily more standardised approach of external assessment' (2002: 76).

Such assessment goes, however, against the grain of rapidly developing systems of international assessment based upon comparisons of national performance such as TIMSS and PIRLS run by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (www.iea.nl/) and PISA run by the OECD (www.pisa.oecd.org/). Such programmes of comparative assessment are designed to allow policy makers to adapt their educational systems so as to improve relative performance. While such comparisons are highly problematic in a technical sense and open to varied and contradictory interpretations (Torrance 2006), they are a crucial component in the political process of ensuring international economic competitiveness (Benveniste 2002; Bonal and Rambla 2009). Moreover, such tests are increasingly used by nation states
to define measurable objectives or benchmarks that education systems must achieve. In this they have contributed to globalising the explanatory and normative frameworks for education and development ... [and had] an interesting effect on the convergence of the means ... countries are planning to use to improve the quality of their education systems.

\[\text{(Bonal and Rambla 2009: 154)}\]

Associated with such tests are measures directed towards the setting of standards in all curriculum areas and at all levels of schooling. While the development of such standards is more often than not the preserve of state agencies, and concerned with key subject areas such as literacy, numeracy and science, and while ‘the development of standards for K-12 international education has ... lagged behind the national school process’ (Oden, 2006: 179) attempts are also being made to develop international standards for ‘international mindedness’. The argument here is that

\[\text{If schools are to promote ... global awareness, then they should develop standards and benchmarks that reflect an international multicultural perspective. Students should be able to demonstrate their understanding that there are valid perspectives other than their own and that there is a relationship between our dispositions and behaviour. (Lewis 2005 in Oden 2006: 179)}\]

However, such attempts to develop standards for international mindedness are rare and stand rather outside the international press towards the development of standards and assessment (especially in areas of international competitive achievement such as English, Mathematics and Science) and the articulation of national development policies directed towards increasing national performance and international competitiveness.

Such developments quite understandably create a sense of unease in international schools. If those sending their children to such schools are seeking positional advantage in their own communities as well as access to international employment opportunities as argued above, then they are likely to also demand proof of performance. As MacClelland suggests ‘Quality control issues in assessment are essential in marketing the school; parents will want to know that the assessment results are reliable and hold up well to schools of similar standing’ (2001: 49).

This is a particular problem for international schools in remote communities, operating in countries where local performance standards are not high and where linguistic and cultural custom is foreign to the cultures to which the graduates aspire.

‘International schools often feel quite vulnerable about assessment as they are frequently isolated schools trying to ensure that the standard of education
they provide is the same quality as that in national systems possibly thousands of miles away' (MacClelland 2001: 54).

Adding to this sense of vulnerability is the discontinuity felt by many schools due to the high turnover of staff, students, parents and often governing bodies. This may provide for continuous challenges to curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and performance as the diverse aspirations and destinations of students mix and re-mix within the school.

In order to provide continuous reassurance (or possibly to confirm the extent of the problem!) various commercial agencies provide international schools with services that allow comparisons to be made between schools, classes and individuals against national and international norms. One such organisation is the International Schools Assessment (ISA) service developed by the Australian Council for Educational Research and used by 28,000 students from 174 international schools in 70 different countries. 4

Based upon the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) it is a 'high quality' test that international schools may use to monitor student performance in mathematical literacy, reading and writing and to confirm that their internal assessments are aligned with international expectations of performance. The ISA allows schools to compare the mathematics, reading and writing performance of individual students, class groups and grade levels within their school and with all other ISA international schools and students. ISA reports also provide schools with detailed diagnostic information about student performance. 5 Similar services are provided by the Curriculum, Evaluation and Management Centre, (CEMC) at Durham University (www.cemcentre.org/).

Choice and compromise in international school assessment policies

Thus assessment is a complex but crucial issue for international schools, particularly as it structures their association with prestigious examination bodies, standardised assessment organisations and, perhaps especially, higher education institutions. As Cambridge argues, such attachments are part of 'global product branding' for international schools where schools act as the retailers of products (i.e. academic qualifications) that are 'manufactured' by the examination boards. Schools and examination boards are joined in a symbiotic relationship giving mutual benefit, because the examination boards require schools' knowledge of local markets while schools derive benefit from their association with the name and reputation of the branded product that they are retailing . . . . The establishment of quality standards through accreditation constitutes an important part of the franchising process.

(Cambridge 2002: 231)
The issue for international schools is at least in part one of choosing the particular franchise to which it wishes to belong and also of gaining accreditation from the franchising body. In the case of schools that are overseas outposts of national systems (such as some British and American schools abroad, military schools and company schools) the preferred franchise is fairly unproblematic. The assessment system that is current in their home country is preferred. For other schools that attract multiple nationalities or parents who want 'additional opportunities' (Theresa 2008: 80) on a world-wide basis the choice is more difficult as Cambridge makes clear:

These contrasting curricula and associated assessment systems appeal to different sections of the client population for international education, depending on whether they require a qualification that is specific to college entry in the USA, as in the case of the College Board examinations, or one that has wider currency (e.g. IBO, CIE).

(Cambridge 2002: 239)

Some schools, as Ellwood (1999) suggests, may attempt to integrate various curricular, pedagogical and assessment options. But combining different curricular, pedagogical and assessment principles may produce inconsistencies and contradictions (Guy 2000, 2001). Moreover, while international schools may brand themselves as 'internationally minded' parents who choose an international school for their children do not necessarily do so because of its proclaimed international-mindedness. Indeed, Theresa, for instance, reports that students and parents in her case study school were not at all interested in the international orientation of its IB programme

I anticipated more favourable responses about international-mindedness in the IB Program and curriculum, but my findings produced an unexpected outcome: the stakeholders at AISS-E shared a view of the IB curriculum that was not at all reflective of the IB mission statement of international-mindedness. The stakeholders generally did not link the IB with international-mindedness.... [S]tudents all experienced IB curricula, and yet not one of them viewed their IB courses as internationally-minded.... [For] parents the difficulty level of the curriculum was more significant than its international outlook or global ethos. These findings pointed to IB curricula that provided academic rigor and not international-mindedness.

(Theresa 2008: 79)

Matthews and Sidhu (2005) report similar findings from Australian schools in which 'international students do not experience Australian schools as sites for sponsoring new forms of global subjectivity and imagination' (2005: 62). Quite the contrary: international students in the schools they studied 'do not
experience schools as culturally dispassionate institutional spaces . . . but as sites of racialization, prejudice and racism' (2005: 61). Despite (perhaps because of) these findings Matthews and Sidhu go on to argue the need for an international education that is not solely driven by attempts at market and positional advantage, but are truly driven by 'intercultural sensitivities, including identification with a global community, [as] important preconditions for effective participation in 21st century civic life' (2005: 63).

The question of assessment in international schools can, therefore, be seen to be driven by more than one impulse and by attachments to various contradictory curricular, pedagogical and assessment practices. How these are resolved in practice depends very much upon the particular circumstances, clientele and personnel of individual schools. But perhaps those schools that use the term 'international' in their title as more than simply a marketing, positioning or global branding exercise might need to consider carefully whether their assessment practices (and their associated curricular and pedagogical practices) do indeed promote international mindedness and identification with the global community, for schools can surely only legitimately call themselves international if they are committed to the encouragement of global citizenship and if their curricular, pedagogical and assessment practices demonstrate such commitment.

Notes
1 Nigel Bagnall of the University of Sydney helped with an earlier version of this paper.
2 For instance the IB Diploma grading system is criterion referenced and anyone achieving 75 per cent against the criteria for a particular subject will be awarded a 'perfect' pre-tertiary score of 7. This is quite different from other norm referenced examinations where regardless of score only a predetermined percentage can achieve a 'perfect' pre-tertiary score.
3 The following description is adapted from the IBO website www.ibo.org/general/what.cfm.
4 The following description is derived from www.acer.edu.au/isa.
5 The use to which such data can be put may be examined by the Principal's Report to Parents at the Swiss International School available at: www.swissinternationalschool.ch/fileadmin/basel/pdf/ISA_SIS_RESULTS_2008.PDF.

References


