

International Education in the ‘Global South’: An International Baccalaureate Perspective

An emerging discussion about ‘international education’

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My article is a response to a piece that recently appeared in *International Teacher Magazine*. This magazine, published by Consilium Education, is an online monthly publication and may not have been widely seen by readers of this journal but will be of interest. The June 2017 edition contained a thought-provoking positional piece by Kyle Kopsick, who currently teaches IBDP History in Ecuador (Kopsick, 2017). His research interests focus on applying critical and postcolonial theory to contemporary contexts. Kopsick discusses the huge recent growth of ‘international schools’ catering for ‘locals’ alongside programmes offered by both the International Baccalaureate (IB), and Cambridge International Education (CIE), and critically applies postcolonial theory. Kopsick argues that: ‘While the IB and CIE vary in their history and missions, they share characteristics that should give pause for thought.’ In particular, Kopsick suggests three areas that require further critical discussion: the geographic spread within the North/South divide; the Western-centric curricula; and the extent of the non-local and Northern-oriented teaching force.

Kopsick’s rather short piece nevertheless offers a useful, and some would say valid, three-pronged framework (based on geographical spread, curricula content, and origins of the teaching force) for applying a critical analysis of the growth of international education. With regard to the geographical ‘spread’, Kopsick raises some pertinent questions based around the fact that the IB in particular is largely based in the ‘Global North’ yet is increasingly active in the ‘Global South’. Kopsick concludes that ‘The current state of international education currently overlooks implicit power dynamics’, and identifies a need to ‘encourage international education to focus its power on challenging and shifting unjust North/South imbalances.’

My article aims to add a platform for continuing this discussion.

In particular, I would argue that the discussion requires a stronger conceptual framework *ie* What/Who is the 'Global South'? The discussion at present rests on some rather vague and contestable terminology. Second, the discussion requires a stronger lens of analysis *ie* How big exactly is the geographic imbalance between international education in the 'Global North' and 'Global South'? The discussion lacks at present a statistical base for support.

Further, my article will focus on the programmes of the IB, as this adds to literature that I have previously produced in a range of geographical arenas (*eg* Bunnell, 2008; 2009; 2015 and 2016). In particular, I intend to give a concrete platform for identifying the 'Global South', and offer a statistical framework for discussing the current state of play of the IB in the 'Global South'. Having offered an IB perspective, this discussion can then be moved on to the CIE, and even be applied to the growing body of institutions being identified as 'international schools'.

A brief overview of the context

Of course, Kopsick's critical view about the current state of 'international education' is not entirely new, and has long been expressed before in this journal *eg* Gellar (2002); Lewis (2006). Further, it is widely accepted that the IB has always exhibited large global discrepancies; 'the pace and intensity of the development is not even: some countries embrace IB programmes and others are reluctant to expand IB schools' (Resnik, 2016 p.299). Indeed, the view is widely expressed within the IB community itself. Van Oord (2007, p.376), for instance, has commented that: 'In the IB community, however, one can still very often hear individuals complain that the IB is 'too Westernized' or 'Eurocentric.' This is a long-standing concern. It is worth recalling that Alec Peterson (1987, p.209), a leading 'architect' of the IB, had commented that: 'As far as the IBO is concerned therefore we seem to have arrived at an agreed policy... on maintaining within the organisation a cultural and geographical balance.'

Kopsick's call for a more critical discussion is timely. Cambridge (2017 p.10) has asked, in this journal, for a consideration of 'Who are the consumers of international education?' The IB looks set to reach the 5,000-school mark sometime in early-2018 and there is now a clear and well-established landscape of activity that can be investigated further. This is a significant point in time as it also represents the 50th anniversary of its foundation as a Geneva-registered entity. Much attention is now being paid to the geographical 'spread' of the IB, but it is still mainly at a local/national level. For example, investigators in Australia (Dickson, Perry and Ledger, 2017 p.75) have discovered that 'access to IB schools

in Australia is largely limited to families who reside in large cities and who can afford to live in communities with high housing prices or pay fees to attend a private IB school.'

One commentator (Gardner-McTaggart, 2016 p.1) considers the growing popularity of the IB 'particularly among the burgeoning middle classes of the South, not for reasons of equity, or global citizenship, but rather in pursuit of relative advantage.' Gardner-McTaggart (2016 p.15) goes on to offer a geographical breakdown of IB schools. This article notes at the distribution of IB schools that they largely exist 'firmly in the 'Inner circle' of English culture.' This 'Inner Circle' is defined as 'being predominantly English – Anglo-Saxon countries are home to established and dominant forms of English'. The reasons for the geographical discrepancies have always been complex, and differ from region-to-region; 'a combination of specific underlying factors - affordability, national requirements, pedagogical mismatch or language barriers - is limiting access to quality education and limiting access to an international education' (Guy, 2011 p.156).

The vagueness of the term 'Global South'

The term 'Global South' is widely used in academic literature. However, surprisingly little effort is made to identify or explain what the term means. It seems deemed as self-explanatory, or just plain obvious. Quite often the term is positioned within a broad geographical context *eg* Allen and Galiano (2017 p.99) identify the 'Global South' simply and rather crudely as encompassing 'Africa, the Arab Nations, developing Asia, and Latin America.' Dados and Connell (2012 p.12) suggest that: 'The phrase Global South refers broadly to the regions of Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania. It is one of a family of terms, including Third World and Periphery, that denote regions outside Europe and North America, mostly (though not all) low-income and often politically or culturally marginalized.' Sometimes the term 'South' is used within a post-colonial lens: it 'represents those formerly colonised countries that are affected by international aid agendas, as opposed to those in the 'North' that are identified as advanced industrialised countries' (Preece, 2009 p.585).

Recent discussion regarding 'elite international schools' has produced a more nuanced socio-economic/political interpretation. Tarc and Mishra Tarc (2015 p.50) state that: 'We recognize that 'Global South' is a contested term which risks reifying regional hierarchies, minimizing the interpenetrations between North and South and the differences within each, and advancing economistic western notions of poverty and development. We use this term here as a short form to refer to economically struggling countries, often former colonies of European

powers, where large numbers of the population are surviving with below-poverty wages and where elites typically send their children to elite private schools as opposed to the low-funded public-sector schools.’ Other commentators offer a similar view: “The ‘Global South’ is not a fixed, homogeneous entity; rather it is a term that captures states with differing economic and political systems, drawn together by their experiences of a power disparity with the global elite’ (Fung, 2016 p.35).

Referring specifically about the appeal of the IB in the ‘South’, it is remarked that: ‘The South is growing rapidly bringing the prospect of jobs, opportunity and wealth to countries that have until now been termed ‘third world’, ‘underdeveloped’ or ‘developing’” (Gardner-McTaggart, 2016 p.2). Further, the same author asserts that: ‘With the rise of ‘The South’, we are witnessing an unparalleled surge in international schooling – most rapidly in the Asia-Pacific region and the developing world’ (Gardner-McTaggart, 2016 p.10). Another paper specifically about the IB (Brown and Ohsako, 2013 p.155) also refers simply to ‘developing countries’.

All of these definitions involve a rather non-scientific conjuring up of a listing of nation-states, which make a listing feasible but contentious. The terms ‘developing Asia’, ‘economically struggling countries’, ‘developing world/countries’ and ‘underdeveloped’, seem especially problematic. They defy precise identification of nation-states, especially when we consider places arguably in the ‘middle’ such as South Africa, Thailand or Brazil.

An alternative method is to find a boundary set by mutual agreement between countries who *see themselves* and *accept each other* as comprising the Global South. This would seem a much more objective treatment. The most obvious would be the grouping of United Nations member countries titled the ‘Group of G77’, or the ‘G77’. This is used by many commentators as a consensus framework *eg* ‘China continues to view itself as a member of the Global South – symbolised by its membership in the G77’ (Fung, 2016 p.35). The G77 is identified as a key ‘marker’ of non-alignment with the Global North: it ‘was intended as a counterweight to the newly formed Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which represented the common interests of the advanced industrial countries.’

The G77 network, established in 1964 with 77 nation members, is now a much larger one and currently has 134 members. The official website of the ‘G77’ states that it: ‘is the largest intergovernmental organization of developing countries in the United Nations, which provides the means for the countries of the South to articulate and promote their collective economic interests and enhance their joint negotiating capacity on all

major international economic issues within the United Nations system, and promote South-South cooperation for development.’ This statement adds substantial weight behind seeing it as an image of the ‘Global South’.

The IB and the ‘Global South’

Having identified a platform for analysis, we can now calculate the geographical ‘imbalance’ (all figures correct as of 10th May 2017, at www.ibo.org). The IB has 1,251 schools in the ‘G77’ region. This is almost exactly one-quarter of all IB schools globally (25.6%, to be exact). Three nations stand out as having significant IB activity. Ecuador has 264 schools, India has 136, and China has 112. Together, these three nations account for 41% of the ‘G77’ schools, and 10.5% of the worldwide IB activity. At the other extreme, 51 of the 134 ‘G77’ nations have no IB activity. A further 20 have a solitary IB school. Only 28 nations had more than 10 schools.

It is worth noting regional ‘G77’ disparities, as they are worthy of further research. Gardner-McTaggart (2016 p.3) notes how ‘the IB is witnessing a strong growth especially in the South.’ This generalisation is especially true in the Andean Community customs union region, made up of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. This trade bloc region alone has 29.5% of all ‘G77’ schools, and 7.7% of all IB schools in the world (which is equivalent to Canada). Ecuador in particular stands out in 2017 as having experienced major rapid growth over recent years (Resnik, 2014), and it now houses the third biggest bloc of IB schools in the world. Here, there has been major change in both scale and nature of the schools: ‘Until the 2000s the majority of IB schools in Ecuador were private elite schools following the socio-education cleavage characteristic to South America. It was Correa’s administration that changed this pattern and today IB public schools outnumber the private ones’ (Resnik, 2016 p.306). It is worth noting that Peru also has a sizeable body of IB schools; Peru’s 61 IB schools is now more than Argentina’s 57.

Elsewhere in South America, Argentina and Chile in particular have seen rapid growth: ‘The increase in numbers of IB schools in Argentina and Chile corresponds to a growing demand of the IB in elite private schools and reflects the social cleavage that characterises these two countries based on high and persistent levels of socio-economic inequalities’ (Resnik, 2016 p.305). Argentina is a member of the MERCOSUR trade bloc, alongside Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Together, these six nations account for 112 schools, which is 9.2% of the ‘G77’ total, and 2.4% of the worldwide total.

The 22 members of The League of Arab States (the ‘Arab League’)

accounts for a further 112 schools. It should be noted that eight Arab League nations have no IB presence. It was noted previously by myself (Bunnell, 2008) that the Middle East region had only 48 schools offering 60 programmes, and comprising 2% of IB schools worldwide. The 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) trade bloc account for 177 schools, which is 14% of the ‘G77’ total, and 3.6% of the world total. This trade bloc includes nation-states that might arguably be seen as being slightly ‘more developed’ *eg* Brazil, China, India, Indonesia Singapore, and Thailand, than most ‘G77’ nations

At the other extreme, there is the Continent of Africa. As recently noted by myself (Bunnell, 2016) there has been no significant growth in Africa and the operational paradigm of the IB remains largely unchanged since the 1980s; the IB has a presence in mainly isolated ‘traditional international schools’ offering the Diploma Programme (IBDP). The 76 ‘IB World Schools’ in 25 countries located across the Continent of Africa account for just 1.8% of all schools worldwide. Twelve countries in Africa have a solitary ‘international school’ offering the IB programmes. Moreover, the IB has no state school presence in Africa, as conceded by the IB itself: ‘Where governments are struggling to meet millennium development goals, there is no access to IB programmes in state schools at all; this is the case in Africa’ (Guy 2011, p.149). North Africa has 23 schools, and sub-Saharan Africa as a whole had 54 IB schools. There is noticeably scant IB activity in Francophile Africa. In total, 28 African nations have no IB presence.

Lastly, it is worth contrasting the ‘Global South’ figures with the ‘Global North’. The OECD was mentioned earlier in my article. The OECD has 35 members, and 69.2% of IB schools are in OECD nations. The United States alone accounts for 37.6% of all IB schools, reflecting a most definite ‘imbalance’ that has been very noticeable now for almost a decade (Bunnell, 2010), and is not without its controversies (Bunnell, 2009). It is worth considering how Alec Peterson’s (1987, p.63) had further remarked on how it was felt in 1967 that ‘the IB schools should as far as possible be equally spread throughout the world, with no one area predominating’. Canada has a further 8% of all IB schools. If we include Mexico’s schools, North America accounts for almost half, 47.7%, of all IB schools. Only the United Kingdom’s (UK) figure stands out as being in serious decline (see Bunnell, 2015), and the IB has ‘lost’ almost 100 schools in the UK since 2010. This contradictory situation is complex and still lacks academic investigation.

Concluding discussion

The 'Global South' does appear vague but it does not defy definition, and an approach via trade associations and blocs (*eg* G77, Andean Community) is one practical way to escape the confusion of using sloppy terms like 'developing' nations. Hence, the presence of international education in the 'Global South' can be identified and measured. The 'Global South', identified in my article by its connections with the 'G77', accounts for almost exactly one-quarter of IB schools worldwide. In this instance, Kopsick (2017) is correct to highlight the geographical spread and imbalance between the 'North' and 'South'. It is a valid issue for discussion, and does give pause for thought.

However, the 'Global South' does have pockets of significant IB activity and they are all worthy of individual research attention: the Andean Community region is a major area of activity, followed by ASEAN, then MERCOSUR and the Arab League. Africa, on the other hand, remains an IB wilderness, as does the Middle East to a lesser extent. Fox's (1998, p.72) comment that 'the presence of the IB is still minimal in the Middle East and Africa' remains largely true. In short, Gardner-McTaggart (2016 p.15) seems correct to conclude that: 'If these data of school distribution are anything to go by, then the IB is at present a 'Western' to be more precise: an English Anglo-Saxon success story.'

As noted earlier in my article, this discrepancy is not a new situation, and the IB has always had reservations about its geographical growth and spread; 'The IB is constantly questioning its own claim to internationality' (Fox 1998, p.720). However, it arguably does matter; 'This may of course raise doubts as to the true intercultural nature of the system' (Gardner-McTaggart, 2016 p.15). Plus, it adds weight to the critical postcolonial lens of analysis being offered by Kopsick (2017). If this discussion is to be continued, and it probably should, then the landscape needs mapping further.

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