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The contribution of the International Baccalaureate Diploma to educational inequalities: reinventing historical logics of curriculum stratification in a comprehensive system

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ABSTRACT

International education options have expanded in most school systems around the world with promises of curricular innovation. However, there has been limited attention given to the consequences of this shift for social inequalities embedded in pre-existing institutional hierarchies. The International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma, a two-year high school curriculum, has been prominent among recent private curricula, centred on notions of international mindedness and global preparedness. This article seeks to examine the consequences of the presence of the IB Diploma in a school system that is socioeconomically and academically stratified and shaped by strategies of academic distinction focused on local hierarchies. Using quantitative data on IB Diploma students and schools in Australia, it analyses the interaction of the IB Diploma with social inequalities in a system that combines a high level of between-school stratification and a comprehensive (unified) curriculum. We show how the IB Diploma has been successfully used by socially dominant and academically powerful families to consolidate their academic capital and secure educational advantage, thus contributing to the reproduction of social inequality in domestic circuits of schooling. Against its perceived innovative status, the IB Diploma has paradoxically contributed to fostering traditional forms of schooling – including within-school tracking – and a narrowing of the curriculum – including through its strong focus on examinations. It is argued that the social impact of emerging international curriculum options can only be adequately understood if they are simultaneously contextualised within historically constituted local school and curriculum hierarchies.

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Introduction

The rise of the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma has been most frequently scaled, spatially and temporally, by the recent phase of globalisation. As such, its relationship to inequalities has often been framed by a desire amongst socially dominant groups for transnational mobility. However, to fully appreciate the connection between the IB Diploma and educational inequalities, it is necessary to revise this spatio-temporal

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framing in order to bring into view historically constituted mechanisms of inequality in local settings. This revision is particularly relevant in settings where internationally mobile families are not the main audience of the IB Diploma (Tarc, 2009), as in Australia (Windle & Maire, 2019), our focus here. In these contexts, it is necessary to investigate its insertion in domestic circuits of schooling.

To make sense of the IB Diploma in Australia, we propose to theorise educational inequality at the intersection of Bourdieu's class reproduction theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, 1979), emphasising the role of unequally distributed economic and cultural resources (conceptualised as different species of "capital" (Bourdieu, 1986)), and Richard Teese's model of educational inequality in Australian education (Teese, 2000; Teese & Polesel, 2003), paying particular attention to the role of private schools, school segregation and the culturally restrictive nature of curriculum and examinations. These two theories, one more focussed on the "social class" side and the other on the "school system" side of social inequality in education, are particularly relevant when used together to understand the ways in which the IB is used as part of institutional and social strategies that contribute to contemporary forms of educational inequality in Australia.

In a broad historical sweep, Australian secondary education in the twentieth century moved from a small system of private schools, characterised by economic exclusion and (later) academic selectivity, to a mass system of public and private schools characterised by social and academic segregation (Campbell & Sherington, 2006). Alongside this transformation of the school system came a partial transformation of the curriculum. Until the 1960s, there was little concern with cultural exclusion in the curriculum, since it was aimed only at the small minority who went on to matriculate at university (Teese, 2014). Subsequently, as more and more students from more diverse social origins stayed on at secondary school, this narrow curriculum strained and eventually gave way to broader curriculum options (Connell, 1993). However, this curriculum diversification did not dislodge traditional subjects (English, mathematics and science) from the centre of the curriculum and did not undermine their status as the main vessels through which academic advantage could be channelled (Teese & Polesel, 2003).

Currently, all Australian states organise senior secondary curricula into a comprehensive leaving qualification that is aimed at all students, whether they go on to university or not. While university access has, itself, widened, it has remained disproportionately weighted to private schools and academically selective public schools (Teese, 2000). It is into this context that the IB Diploma has gained a presence in Australia as a curriculum explicitly aimed at university entrance (Bagnall, 2010; Doherty, 2009). That is to say, the IB Diploma has re-introduced an exclusive educational model that Australian secondary education had progressively come to shed from the 1960s onward. Through its association with families' investment of economic and cultural resources in a segregated school system, the IB Diploma is tied to a combination of exclusionary mechanisms responsible for educational inequalities in Australia. Rather than merely seeking to demonstrate its association with an elite group of students, we seek here to show how the IB Diploma is connected to historically consolidated and interconnected mechanisms producing educational inequalities at the local and national levels.

The International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma across the globe

The IB Diploma is a senior high school certificate administered by a private organisation based in Switzerland and organised around traditional academic subjects and external examinations, recognisable as the predominant model of academic secondary education in the European tradition. Students must study six subjects taken from six different curriculum areas (covering both humanities and science) over two years, leading to end-of-year examinations. In addition to this subject menu, students must also complete three core compulsory units, including service learning, a research project and a "theory of knowledge" course. Only students enrolled in accredited "IB schools" are allowed to prepare for the IB Diploma. Schools pay the IB organisation for accreditation and external grading of students.

Internationally, the relationship between educational inequality and the IB Diploma is often defined by economic exclusion, as it is offered primarily by fee-paying schools (Lee et al., 2014). In East Asia, Southeast Asia and Europe (England, Germany and Spain) most IB Diploma schools are high-fee private schools, access to which is economically out of reach for the majority of the local population (Keßler & Krüger, 2018; Lee et al., 2016; Outhwaite & Ferri, 2017; Wright & Lee, 2014). In these regions, selection into the IB Diploma thus operates primarily through economic barriers.

The relationship between the IB Diploma and educational inequality is also shaped by a logic of cultural exclusion and segregation in settings where it is primarily offered as an academically selective track in non-economically selective (including public) schools, such as in the US and Ecuador (Barnett, 2013; Siskin & Weinstein, 2008). This has been found to produce socioeconomic and racial selection into the IB Diploma (Caspary et al., 2015; Theokas, 2013). Existing research also suggests that the IB Diploma is not available to all public schools in these countries; they are rather carefully selected, including by local or state educational authorities (Resnik, 2014).

In most regions of the world, a number of "international schools" where more or less permanent migrant families are enrolled also offer the IB Diploma. Many of these private schools are considered to serve elite families, some of which may use it as part of their "globalising [class] practices" (e.g. Kenway & Fahey, 2014; Kenway et al., 2017; Kenway & Koh, 2015; Lee et al., 2016). Nevertheless, this category of schools is a minority student experience rather than the norm in most countries (Tarc, 2009). Where such schools exist alongside public IB Diploma schools, as in South America, the IB Diploma market serves both upper-class locals seeking bilingual education in elite private schools and as a track of "academic excellence" in public schools (Almeida, 2015; Beech et al., 2018; Prosser, 2014).

In Australia, the IB Diploma emerged as an alternative certificate during the 1980s. Although the first Australian IB Diploma school (accredited in 1978) was a public school, the IB Diploma soon became dominated by fee-paying private schools. In the process, families' economic resources became a primary barrier to accessing the IB Diploma. By the early 1990s, as educational authorities progressively allowed students to study for the IB Diploma without also completing the state high school certificate, a dozen schools – most of them private – offered the IB Diploma (Bagnall, 2010). The IB Diploma has remained concentrated in high-fee private schools, typically in affluent suburbs of Australia's major cities (Dickson et al., 2017; Kidson et al., 2019), especially those serving middle- and upper-class families (Doherty et al., 2012). From this point of view, the general landscape of IB

Diploma schools in Australia is comparable to what is observed in East and Southeast Asia and most of Europe but significantly different from the IB Diploma's situation in the Americas.

However, there is a second layer of cultural exclusivity and segregation at play in Australia, as even in these economically exclusive settings, qualitative evidence suggests that the IB may be used as an academic enrichment stream (Doherty, 2012). A decade ago, teachers saw IB Diploma students' intention to pursue university study as their most distinctive feature as a cohort (Doherty & Shield, 2012), and IB Diploma students indeed appear to be more successful at gaining access to elite Australian universities (Edwards & Underwood, 2012).

In summary, the two main mechanisms defining the role of the IB Diploma in the making of educational inequality internationally are socioeconomic exclusion at the school level and academic (formal and informal) selection at the curriculum level. The former mechanism is commonly found in Europe and Asia, while the latter prevails in the Americas. In Australia, the combination of economic barriers and cultural exclusivity through the organisation of the school system leads us to draw on Richard Teese's analytical model to supplement Bourdieu's focus on economic and cultural capital in order to better understand the contribution of the IB Diploma to educational inequality.

Theorising family resources and institutional strategies as engines of educational inequality

Bourdieu and Passeron's theory of class reproduction in education (1977, 1979), and Bourdieu's theory of social class more broadly (Bourdieu, 2010; Weininger, 2005), have given a central role to economic and cultural resources in the making of inequality in modern society. Alongside traditional economic assets and monetary resources (captured under the generic concept of "economic capital"), Bourdieu contends that families have at their disposal cultural resources (e.g. knowledge, competences, educational certificates and valuable cultural objects) that allow them to benefit from their engagement in various institutions and social contexts. In Bourdieu's theory, this "cultural capital" is particularly important to understand how educational inequality between social classes persists when economic barriers to access are removed and when countries transition to mass education systems. The unequal distribution of cultural capital relevant to school learning across families means that some are better equipped than others for educational success and the inter-generational consolidation of their "academic capital" (i.e. educationally certificated academic competence in the forms of higher education degrees and prestigious certificates, often awarded with high scores or marks) (Bourdieu, 2018).

Teese's analytical framework extends Bourdieu's theory of class reproduction in education by seeking to explain *how* unequally distributed social class resources can be converted into academic advantage. His analysis of the history of inequality in Australian education has shown that a decisive way in which economic and cultural resources can engender educational inequality is by being invested into the production of socioeconomic and cultural segregation and exclusion in the school system and in the curriculum (Teese, 2000; Teese & Polesel, 2003). In the Australian context, private schooling, socioeconomic segregation between schools, and the framing of the curriculum as a hierarchical structure of subjects have been central to social inequality in education.

Teese's analyses have shown that social struggles for academic advantage run through the modern curriculum, shaping even the unified curriculum into more or less socio-academically selective and academically rewarding "regions" (i.e. subjects and options) (Teese, 2000; Teese & Polesel, 2003). Most importantly for our analysis, Teese's research has shown that the distribution of social classes across schools and the distribution of students across the curriculum go hand in hand, as the accumulation of resources – including the accumulation of families' cultural capital – in specific schools is a decisive mechanism of production of academic distinction through the curriculum for socially dominant families.

Teese's research has important implications for theorising the role of the IB Diploma in the making of social inequality in modern education systems. It points to the need to jointly grasp (1) the distribution of this alternative curriculum across more or less socially segregated schools, and (2) how the IB Diploma fits in the curriculum landscape of the countries in which it is made available. In other words, we must consider both the school system, with its fortified sites where resources are concentrated and exposed sites where disadvantage accumulates, and the curriculum, with its dominant programmes, tracks or regions and its devalued areas and provinces (Teese, 2014).

Methods

In this paper, we draw on four quantitative datasets to gain insight into how social resources are converted into academic advantage through the IB Diploma, and how school structures and curriculum structures interact in this process in Australia, addressing the following questions:

- Where in the school system is the IB Diploma available, and how economically restrictive is access to these schools?
- Who studies the IB Diploma within these schools, and what academic resources do students bring to the IB Diploma?
- What is the academic trajectory of IB Diploma students into higher education?

The first dataset used is the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) national school database. Data from 2018 was used as the reference year. The analysis focusses on the 2,418 schools that offered senior high school, including all Australian IB Diploma schools, in that year.

The second dataset is the Longitudinal Study of Australian Youth (LSAY). LSAY surveys a nationally representative sample of young Australians annually, starting when they are in high school. For this paper, the two most recent LSAY cohorts – the 2009 and 2015 starting cohorts – have been merged and analysed together to obtain a sufficiently large sample of IB students. The overall grade 12 student sample contains over 11,000 records.

The third dataset is the annual statistical report on tertiary applications and offers in the state of Victoria, sourced from the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC). Since no integrated national database exists for the tertiary destinations of IB Diploma students, state-specific data is the best available option. The most recent annual data available was

used (2018 applications for 2019 university entry). The data includes information on 1,596 IB Diploma graduates and 42,956 Victorian certificate graduates.

The final dataset used in this paper is a survey of grade 12 IB Diploma students designed specifically for this project and administered in Australian schools in 2015. The sample includes 41 public school students and 106 private school students from two public schools and eight private schools. The sample is broadly representative of the school sector distribution of the total population of IB Diploma schools in Australia.

Data preparation and analysis involved several steps. First, for two of the datasets, data for different categories or cohorts of students had to be merged into a single file to allow for comparisons of IB and non-IB students. We then created group identifier variables for the relevant comparison groups (i.e. IB and non-IB schools and students) for two of the datasets, either based on existing variables or, if unavailable, through manual coding. In the school-level file, weights were created to account for differences in school size and for the share of grade 12 students in different schools. After cleaning the data and identifying or constructing the outcome variables of interest, we performed two types of comparisons: t-tests to compare mean group results for continuous variables, and cross-tabulations to compare group results for categorical variables.

The IB Diploma in a socioeconomically segregated school system

Economic barriers to access characterise the situation of around four in five IB Diploma schools in Australia. As of 2018, there were 72 Australian schools offering the IB Diploma, according to the IB organisation's website. The identification of these schools in the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) national school database shows that they represented approximately three per cent of schools offering grade 12, making the IB Diploma a niche curriculum. Close to four in five IB Diploma schools were private, while private schools accounted for less than half of all schools offering grade 12 in Australia in 2018. Since four in five private schools offering the IB Diploma did so alongside the mainstream state certificate, the arrival of the IB Diploma can be read as an internal segmentation of curriculum and students, rather than a complete shift away from the state certificate.

A more direct indicator of the socioeconomic restrictiveness of access to the IB Diploma can be found in the index of socio-educational advantage (SEA), constructed by ACARA, which offers an indication of the degree of socioeconomic segregation between schools. SEA is a proxy indicator of students' social class, attributing a socioeconomic score to all Australian students. The SEA scale is based on a proxy of family economic capital (parental occupational situation) and a proxy of family cultural capital (highest level of parental education). The socioeconomic composition of schools is reported as the proportion of students they enrol from each SEA quarter. If no socioeconomic segregation existed between schools, all schools would have an equal share (25%) of students from the four SEA quarters. For our purposes, these four quarters can be labelled as "lower class", "lower middle class", "upper middle class" and "upper class", although, in this paper, these labels must be taken as heuristic tools to facilitate interpretation rather than as concepts derived from a specific sociological theory of class.

Table 1 presents the proportion of lower-class, middle-class and upper-class students in three groups of schools: (1) the whole population of Australian schools offering grade

Table 1. Social recruitment of Australian high schools, private high schools and IB Diploma schools (weighted, 2018).

	All secondary schools	Private secondary schools	IB Diploma schools
Lower-class students	23.1	10.9	4.6
Lower middle-class students	24.4	20.7	11.2
Upper middle-class students	25.4	29.1	24.5
Upper-class students	27.1	39.3	59.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ACARA school data.
Note: Students' social class is derived from students' SEA scores calculated using parental levels of education and occupation. See Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA, 2014, 2018) for methodological details on the construction of the SEA scale.

12 classes, (2) all private schools offering grade 12 classes, and (3) IB Diploma schools. Since SEA is a school-wide indicator, for each category, the results are weighted based on schools' enrolments (to account for differences in school size) and the proportion of grade 12 students in the school (to account for differences in secondary-only versus combined primary-secondary schools).

The socioeconomic profile of high schools is fairly representative of the overall Australian student population, albeit with a slight skew towards upper-class students, as lower-class students are more likely than others to not reach grade 12. Next, the socioeconomic restriction of private high schools is evident in the fact that lower-class and lower middle-class students account for only three in 10 students in these schools. Yet, Australian private high schools are still less socially restrictive than are IB Diploma schools. In the latter group, one finds 13 upper-class students for every lower-class student. This is the case despite the fact that one in five IB Diploma schools are public schools. Access to the IB Diploma is thus highly socially restricted, primarily through the narrow band of elite (high-fee) schools in which it is made available in Australia.

Since the schools offering the IB Diploma are often the most socially and economically restricted in the system, including high fee-charging private schools, the IB Diploma itself becomes a marker of elite status. However, its use is not only for distinction in the education market, but for internal differentiation (i.e. as an instrument for responding to demands for academic stratification within the school), as the next section shows.

Cultural exclusivity and within-school segregation

While the IB Diploma expresses socioeconomic exclusivity through its availability in a narrow range of schools in Australia, the attraction to this curriculum is tied to the institutional, intergenerational, and class-based familiarity with historically embedded cultural models of elite schooling. The IB Diploma provides a mechanism for separating the top academic performers from their economically privileged or middle-class peers who are not guaranteed access to the pinnacles of the university system. Just as, in the 1940s and 1950s, Matriculation students often made up a minority of school leavers, even in private schools, so too do IB students constitute an academic minority of school leavers in the same schools today.

The academic and cultural capital selectivity of access to the IB Diploma is evident in the self-rated overall achievement and highest level of formal education of students' parents in the IB Diploma and non-IB Diploma cohorts, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Highest level of parental education and self-rated overall achievement of grade 12 students in Australia, by IB Diploma status (%, 2009–17).

	All grade 12 students	Non-IB Diploma students in IB Diploma schools	IB Diploma students
Self-rated overall achievement			
Very well	20.9	11.6	37.7
Better than average	37.4	48.3	44.9
About average	38.7	38.4	17.4
Not very well	2.6	1.7	0.0
Very poorly	0.4	0.0	0.0
N	6,810	172	69
Highest level of parental education			
University education	49.7	69.1	78.2
Non-university tertiary education	12.4	6.9	7.9
Upper secondary education (academic)	27.9	18.9	10.9
Upper secondary education (vocational)	6.7	4.6	3.0
Lower secondary education or below	3.3	0.4	0.0
N	10,960	259	101

Source: LSAY 2009 and 2015 cohort data.

Few students in any of the three grade 12 cohorts rated themselves poorly in academic terms. However, there are major differences between IB Diploma and non-IB Diploma students. The latter group are twice as likely to rate their own academic abilities as about average, while IB Diploma students are over three times more likely to declare achieving "very well". Since this self-assessment is conducted before students choose the high school certificate they wish to enrol in, it reveals that the IB Diploma tends to function as an academic enrichment programme in Australian schools, as it does in most countries.

Equally striking is the fact that, based on a proxy measure of family cultural capital (i.e. parental education), the IB Diploma also adds a degree of cultural selectivity at the curriculum level, above the school-level socioeconomic selectivity shown in the previous section. Close to four in five IB Diploma students have university-educated parents, a rate significantly higher than for their non-IB Diploma peers within the same schools.

What is distinctive about the Australian situation is that the IB Diploma operates as a socio-culturally selective programme within already socioeconomically exclusive schools, in a curriculum system characterised by a lack of formal tracking. The supplement of socio-academic selectivity into the IB Diploma is added to an already largely socially selective private school student population. In a context where most students are divided by the school system but brought together by the curriculum, the IB Diploma seems to particularly appeal to academically, economically and culturally endowed families due to its capacity to revive, in a context of mass education, a historically exhausted model of exclusivity.

With this revival taking place in a context of widened access to higher education, IB Diploma students are not alone in entering university, but walk a privileged path to the oldest and most prestigious universities and courses by virtue of stronger examination performances, while their peers often have to make do with second or third preferences for higher education studies. This is decisive because, in countries where higher education participation has become a majority experience, as in Australia, educational inequality is

increasingly made through horizontal stratification and segregation in higher education opportunities rather than through outright exclusion from higher education (Brown & Hesketh, 2004; Brown et al., 2010; Czarnecki, 2018; Marginson, 2016). This puts a premium on academic distinction at the secondary level, such as the ability to achieve high scores in the senior secondary certificate.

Using results reported by the organisation representing IB schools (IB Schools Australasia, 2020), the average score of IB Diploma candidates (34) converted to a university admission rank of 91.4 out of 100 (99.95, technically), a score giving graduates an opportunity to access the vast majority of tertiary courses, including at Australia's most selective universities (e.g. see Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre [VTAC], 2019). Moreover, 15.8% of candidates received an IB score superior to 40, converting into a tertiary admission rank of 98.7 out of 100, placing them well into the top two per cent of their age cohort. For a significant proportion of its students, the IB Diploma thus appears to function as an all but guaranteed means to constituting academic capital.

Systematic analysis of IB Diploma schools' websites shows that, in the majority of these schools, IB Diploma students obtain higher tertiary admission scores than their non-IB Diploma peers (Maire, 2016). This confirms the analysis of earlier tertiary admissions data, which also indicates that IB Diploma graduates outscore their school peers (Maire, 2021).

Tertiary admissions data from the state of Victoria can be used to illustrate how successful IB Diploma graduates are at using their academic capital to secure post-secondary educational opportunities. In the state of Victoria, the ratio of offers made by universities to first preference applications received by them is a useful indicator of the university hierarchy: the lower the ratio, the more selective the university. During their final year of high school, students submit preferences for courses at specific universities in rank order. Their likelihood of seeing their preferences satisfied can be considered as an indicator of their academic capital. Results for Victorian high school certificate graduates and Australian IB Diploma graduates are shown in Table 3.

The first data column shows universities ranked in order of student competition for places. The University of Melbourne makes the lowest number of offers relative to applications received, based on data from Australian and international applicants. It is

Table 3. Academic power of high school graduates in Victorian university selection, by IB Diploma status (%, 2018).

		First preferences (%)		Ratio of offers to first preferences (%)	
	Ratio of offers to first preferences* (%)	Vic. certificate graduates	IB Diploma graduates	Vic. certificate graduates	IB Diploma graduates
University of Melbourne	70.8	13.5	55.6	82.4	92.3
Monash University	71.4	21.1	33.9	80.6	96.0
Australian Catholic Uni.	83.0	4.8	0.6	88.3	130.0
Deakin University	97.9	13.7	2.9	95.9	175.6
RMIT University	99.7	18.8	5.1	103.9	148.1
La Trobe University	110.4	9.3	0.1	114.9	100.0
Federation University	130.8	2.1	0.1	133.8	200.0
Swinburne Uni. of Tech.	132.6	6.6	1.2	129.4	184.2

*: the overall ratio of offers to first preferences (first data column) includes Victorian, interstate and international applicants.
Source: VTAC Annual Statistics 2018–19.
The table includes the eight most selective universities in the state of Victoria.

followed by Monash University and the Australian Catholic University. The results in the next two columns reveal that IB Diploma graduates form more elite university aspirations than their peers do: over one in two IB Diploma graduates place the University of Melbourne as their first study preference, a rate four times higher than among Victorian certificate graduates. In fact, nine in 10 IB Diploma graduates have one of the two oldest and most elite institutions in the state as their first preference, compared to just over one in three Victorians graduating with a local high school certificate. The IB Diploma is thus significantly associated with elite aspiration formation that often reflects long-standing class and family traditions.

IB Diploma graduates are also *more* successful at receiving offers from the most sought-after universities in the state, despite being far more likely to apply to these in the first place. For every 10 IB Diploma graduates applying to the University of Melbourne and Monash University as their first preference, more than nine receive an offer. Taken together, these findings show that the IB Diploma is revealing of the power of economic and cultural resources in making educational inequality through segregation and investment in the curriculum.

The tertiary educational pathways paved by the IB Diploma provide a glimpse back in time to the early 1960s, when the only two universities were the University of Melbourne and Monash and virtually the only secondary students to gain entry were a minority group within private schools (Fensham, 1970). Or even to the 1950s and earlier, when the University of Melbourne was the sole university and controlled Matriculation examinations, attempted only by the most academically able school students in a small system made up almost entirely of private schools (Teese, 2014). A major difference is that whereas Matriculation students were frequently failed, IB Diploma students are all but guaranteed the pathway of their desired courses. This pathway is often not the international one which is called on to justify the existence of the IB Diploma, but the pinnacle of the local education hierarchy established in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The IB Diploma as a "premium product" in multiple hierarchies

What are the implications of the IB Diploma's presence in non-tracked systems such as Australia? The Australian case indicates that it re-introduces a hidden form of curriculum hierarchy between certificates. IB Diploma students not only enjoy higher academic self-esteem, but perceive their curriculum stream as more in-depth, fast-paced and challenging than the local curriculum (Figure 1). This is true in both public and private IB Diploma schools. This is in part linked to the internalisation of laudatory discourses circulating about the IB Diploma (Wright & Lee, 2020) but can also be related to the degree of socioeconomic segregation at the school level. Our results show that the degree to which the IB Diploma effectively operates as an academic enrichment stream, creating a within-school curriculum hierarchy in an otherwise comprehensive curriculum, varies from school to school and, more specifically, depends on the degree of socioeconomic, cultural and academic diversity in the school. The survey of IB Diploma student perceptions suggests that demand for academic isolation and concentration into an elite stream may be somewhat attenuated – although still very significant – in schools that already select their students socioeconomically and, therefore, academically, i.e. Australia's elite private schools.

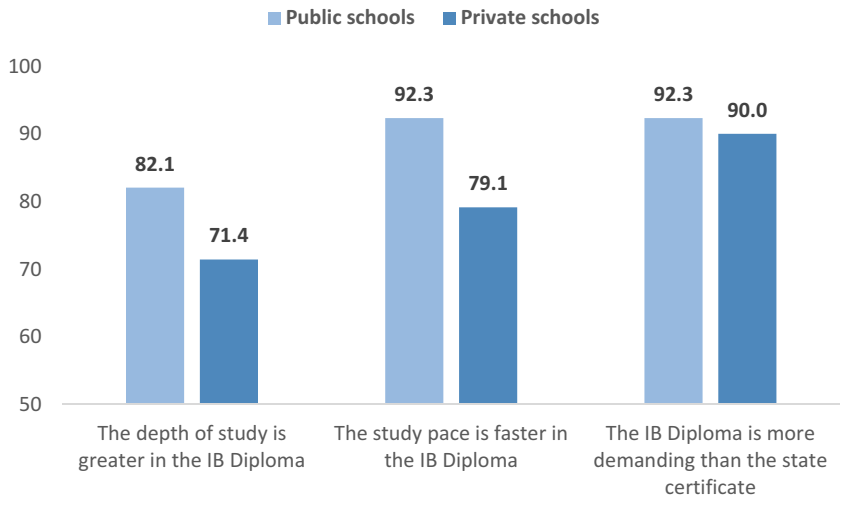

Figure 1. Percentage of IB Diploma students who agree or strongly agree with comparative statements about the IB Diploma curriculum, by school sector (2015).
Source: IB Diploma student survey data.

These student experiences of higher-levels of academic depth and challenge reflect the fact that the IB Diploma disproportionately recruits high achievers, who are regularly able to obtain high academic results in their high school certificate and gain access to selective universities and courses, as the VTAC data shows. This means that this alternative certificate sits at the apex of the academic hierarchy of the curriculum, both in terms of academic recruitment and academic profitability.

But this specific position of the IB Diploma in the curriculum structure can emerge only if this private curriculum can be used to consolidate academic capital. Teese's research has shown that the high school curriculum in Australia is typically dominated by subjects where decontextualised, theoretical learning is a condition of success (Teese, 2007; Teese et al., 2009). The finding that Australian IB Diploma teachers and students consider that the IB Diploma curriculum requires greater theoretical depth of learning than does the state curriculum is thus critical (Dixon et al., 2014; Maire, 2021). It makes the IB Diploma a suitable candidate for use as a programme that exploits the curriculum hierarchy and sets itself up as a "premium product" that intensifies many of the socially and culturally exclusive qualities of the traditional academic curriculum.

In the Australian school system, with its highly unequal concentration of academic and social power in different schools (Windle, 2015), a major line of inequality in the appropriation of the curriculum is whether it is mastered collectively or individually – or, more specifically, the extent to which collective resources pooled into specific schools can be used to foster individual mastery, not by individual accident but as a rule. The more socially (i.e. economically and culturally) and academically exclusive schools are, the more they are able to engineer collective mastery as a matter of course. Given the historical trajectory of Australian public and private schools and the guarantee of government funding to private schools in the last 50 years, these are overwhelmingly private schools (Teese, 1981), against which only a handful of academically selective public schools can

compete in mastering the academic curriculum. This is why the concentration of the IB Diploma in elite private schools is a crucial indicator for explaining the articulation of two hierarchies, i.e. school and curriculum hierarchies, in the making of educational inequality.

While the investment of economic and cultural capital in a hierarchical curriculum and a stratified school system has a long history in Australia, the IB Diploma has emerged at a time of widening resource gaps between schools. The IB Diploma has provided an additional layer of resource concentration within schools where resources were already concentrated. Indeed, smaller classes, better teachers (according to students) and additional learning opportunities (e.g. supplementary tutorials) have all been reported in qualitative research on the IB Diploma in Australian schools (Coleman, 2009; Doherty, 2013; Doherty & Shield, 2012). As an alternative curriculum calling for dedicated institutional arrangements for learning, the IB Diploma thus reproduces, within (elite) schools, the logic of academic segregation and economic and cultural resource concentration already observed between schools.

Conclusion

The permeation of the IB Diploma in education systems is often taken as an indicator of their internationalisation and corresponding modernisation in a shifting global context. From the point of view of social inequalities in education, however, our analysis shows that the IB Diploma has become used as part of domestic class reproduction strategies, through investment of economic and cultural capital and where access to selective courses in prestigious local universities is at stake. In this respect, the academic standing of the IB Diploma appears more decisive than its international recognition.

The first theoretical implication of our analysis is that grasping schools and the curriculum as an inter-related opportunity structure delivers important insights for understanding the IB Diploma and educational inequality more broadly. These two systems determine how family economic and cultural resources can be invested in the education system as part of social reproduction strategies. In weaving together the analysis of the IB Diploma in Australia's school system and curriculum landscape, we have sought to argue that the schools in which the IB Diploma is offered, the students who opt for this curriculum and the academic results they achieve through it must take account of the specific structures of the education system in which it becomes embedded. If the social logic of academic distinction is as important to make sense of social struggles played out in the education system in Australia as it is in other countries, it nevertheless manifests itself into different school system hierarchies and curriculum hierarchies across countries. This has methodological implications for the analysis of the IB Diploma in any country. Detailed contextualisation of the IB Diploma within local and state education system structures (as opposed to stand-alone analyses of IB Diploma schools and students), as well as systematic comparisons of the social and academic properties of IB and non-IB Diploma schools and students, are likely to provide theoretical benefits to understand the different realities of the IB Diploma in the United States and Australia, for instance, (Maire, 2021).

The second theoretical implication of our analysis is that the historical trend from elite to mass education systems and from tracked to comprehensive curricula is not a unidirectional story of ever-expanding "democratisation" and equalisation of opportunities. Progress towards less rigid hierarchies and less stratified curriculum systems is

a fragile state of affairs, one that is at stake in the struggle between competing social interests for academic distinction. Bringing together the study of curriculum and of the school system, Teese concluded that the Australian education system is divided by its stratified school system but united by its curriculum (Teese, 2014; Teese & Polesel, 2003). However, under pressure from mass participation and the intensification of academic competition, a form of curriculum separatism by the most advantaged users of the education system is becoming evident. This is a means of generating academic advantage by "opting out" (Hirschman, 1970) of the public, common curriculum structure. Just as some families segregate themselves in schools that appeal to them because they are not open to all, so do some families from the dominant classes shift their curriculum "choice" from the mainstream to a private curriculum because it is not a curriculum for everyone. In the Australian context, even if only in a limited number of schools, what the IB Diploma has produced is the reintroduction of an informal tracking mechanism in a curriculum that had progressed historically towards (at least formal) comprehensiveness.

The Australian example shows that the coexistence of a unified high school curriculum with a large state-sponsored private school market where middle- and upper-class families can pool their resources produces an environment where demands for curriculum distinction can become compelling. This can lead to the emergence of a domestic IB Diploma market where this private curriculum becomes used for seeking academic advantage in the domestic competition for selective university entrance rather than for international study mobility. This mode of investment in the IB Diploma provides conditions for it to contribute to reinforcing existing educational inequalities. This role is tied to an exclusive focus on preparation for university entrance through a traditional academic curriculum that intensifies some of the demands of traditional academic subjects also present in the mainstream state-accredited curriculum.

On the other hand, the presence of the IB Diploma in countries where the curriculum is formally tracked calls for comparative analyses of the relationship between the IB Diploma and curriculum structures internationally. Leaving aside the question of international schools, is the IB Diploma more prevalent in tracked or non-tracked systems? Does social selectivity into and academic profitability of the IB Diploma vary across tracked versus non-tracked curriculum systems? From a qualitative perspective, the rhetoric of choice in the Australian context, where market discourses are prominent in educational policy-making, provides ideological justification for the re-introduction of curriculum hierarchies as "curriculum choice". A comparative analysis of the different argumentative repertoires called on to re-introduce (informal) tracking or further stratify an already-tracked system would also yield important theoretical gains.

Finally, our analysis has focussed on the embedding of the IB Diploma in domestic circuits of schooling to grasp its contribution to the making of social inequality in Australian education. As a result, we have left aside the students whose use of the IB Diploma is inserted in international social trajectories. While this is justifiable in the Australian context, where most IB Diploma students go on to enrol in domestic universities, this is not equally true in all countries. More generally, few longitudinal studies have been conducted to date on the mobility patterns of IB Diploma graduates, especially those engaging in international study mobility. Both quantitative and qualitative studies would be welcome in this area: the former could examine the effective prevalence and duration of international study mobility (as well as whether it leads to permanent

migration to another country), while the latter could assess the conditions under which aspirations for international mobility common among IB Diploma students become realised. This would help answer the question of whether the success of the IB Diploma and other "international" schooling options can also be explained by an emergent process of global middle- and upper-class formation.

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