



# Transnational accreditation for public schools: IB, PISA and other public–private partnerships

Gita Steiner-Khamsi<sup>a</sup> and Leonora Dugonjić-Rodwin<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Teachers College, Columbia University, New York; <sup>b</sup>Humboldt University, Berlin

## ABSTRACT

This article examines a particular type of public–private partnership (PPP) that is rarely studied in comparative educational policy studies: one in which a government funds privately run international schools. The aim of this PPP is to enrich and thereby improve the regular curriculum or to the quality of education in *public schools*. As the exponential growth of International Baccalaureate (IB) illustrates, such forms of PPP have increased significantly over the past few years. The authors show that transnational accreditation holds a special appeal for the middle class that is committed to cosmopolitanism, international mobility, and global citizenship. However, international standards schools such as IB are not alone with advancing a transnational accreditation of their educational programmes. Symbolically, Programme in International Student Assessment also provides a transnational accreditation, albeit not on individual education programmes but rather on entire educational systems. The article examines the reasons for the popularity of this type of PPP, analyses the interaction between the private and public education sectors, and investigates how governments explain, and what they expect from, the close cooperation with private education providers.

## KEYWORDS

Public–private partnerships;  
comparative policy studies;  
international schools; PISA

A growing body of literature addresses the exponential growth of international schools and educational programmes of the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO), the Cambridge Assessment International Education (CAIE) and other private providers of international education. Most scholars, however, frame their studies in the broader context of elite education, international student mobility or the privatization of education (Dugonjić-Rodwin, 2014a; Kenway et al., 2017; van Zanten, Ball, & Darchy-Koechlin, 2015; Wagner, 1998). A closer examination of recent trends in international education reveals the rise of international schools and programmes *within* public education systems. We focus here on the following question: Is the development of transnational accreditation likely to result in more international public education systems?

## 1. Internationalization within national school systems

The internationalization of school curricula is a recurring theme in curriculum studies. For example, Buckner and Russell (2013) analysed the content of 500 secondary social studies, civics and history textbooks from more than 70 countries, published over the period 1970–2008, in terms of references to a global frame or a global dimension. One of the foci of the study was on the semantics of ‘globalization’ and ‘global citizenship’ used in varied national contexts. The co-investigators found an exponential rise of globalization in the textbooks over time. The term and

the concept did not exist in textbooks published in 1970 but was treated as a topic in almost 40% of the textbooks published in 2005. Similarly, 'global citizenship' needs to be regarded as a relatively new concept discussed in schools. By 2005, a quarter of the 70 countries' textbooks explicitly mentions the term. It would be wrong to assume, however, that the notion of global citizenship replaced national citizenship. Buckner and Russell (2013) found that the two concepts nowadays exist side by side. They argue that 'conceptions of global citizenship emerge as complementary rather than substitutive for national citizenship, indicating a vision of plus-national, rather than post-national, citizenship' (Buckner & Russell, 2013, p. 5).

A similar growth of international curricular content is present in the private school sector some of which explicitly use, among others, notions of global citizenship. In fact, the number of international private schools has grown considerably over the past 50 years. There were only 372 registered international schools in 1969; in 2017/18, there are 9318 according to the *Global Report of International Schools Consultancy (ISC)*. The same report (International Schools Consultancy, 2018) predicts an explosive growth of international schools over the next few years and projects the establishment of nearly 6000 new ones over the next 7 years. In other words, ISC projects the establishment of 15,100 international schools worldwide by the year 2025. According to Hayden and Thompson (2016), 23% of all schools with an international curriculum are schools affiliated with the IBO, thereby constituting the largest group of schools, followed by those that associate themselves with CAIE.

A nuanced analysis is needed here to understand the reasons for the exponential growth of international schools. Hayden and Thompson (2016), for example, differentiate between three different types of schools: Type A represents the traditional schools that cater to globally mobile expats, Type B are 'ideologically' driven and pursue an international curriculum and finally Type C cater to wealthy national elites. The greatest growth occurred among the Type C schools. As a result, the majority of students enrolled in international schools are nowadays nationals rather than children of a globally mobile elite workforce. Brummitt and Keeling (2013) estimated that 80% of seats in international schools are taken by national students. This shift from expats to nationals is, however, accompanied by a second, less explored trend within the Type C schools: governments that make contractual arrangements with private providers either to (1) offer an elective or international track within the public school or (2) use private international schools as hubs of innovation to serve as models of emulation for surrounding schools and catalysts of change for the entire public school system. In the first type of public-private partnership (PPP), international educational programmes exist side by side with national ones. In the second type, international educational programmes serve as hubs of innovation to internationalize or reform national public education.

The growth of stand-alone international (private) schools that exist side by side with (national) public schools, on the one hand, and international education programmes, integrated into public schools, on the other, reflects in large part the changed, pro-choice policy environment (see Verger, Fontdevila, & Zancajo, 2016). In addition, the flexibility in how the programme of an international private provider, such as the IBO, is adapted by governments or schools explains the popularity of transnational accreditation. In the case of the International Baccalaureate (IB), the flexibility trickles down to the actual curriculum. In preparation for the IB exams, students are given several choices. They may prepare either a diploma or a certificate in one or more individual IB subjects. The diploma programme comprises six groups of subjects: first language, second language, individuals and societies, mathematics and computer science, experimental sciences and the arts. The students must take one subject from each of group, with the exception of the arts. Students may choose to substitute one of the subjects in the arts (e.g. music, art or theatre) with another subject from the other five curriculum areas. In addition to the six subjects, the student must write an extended essay in an area of their choice, follow a theory of knowledge course and participate in an extracurricular programme named 'Creativity, Action, Service' which comprises a large spectrum of electives.

As Figure 1 shows, IBO programmes experienced close to 40% growth over a 5-year period. The most popular programme is the diploma programme, offered for students aged 16–19. The number of

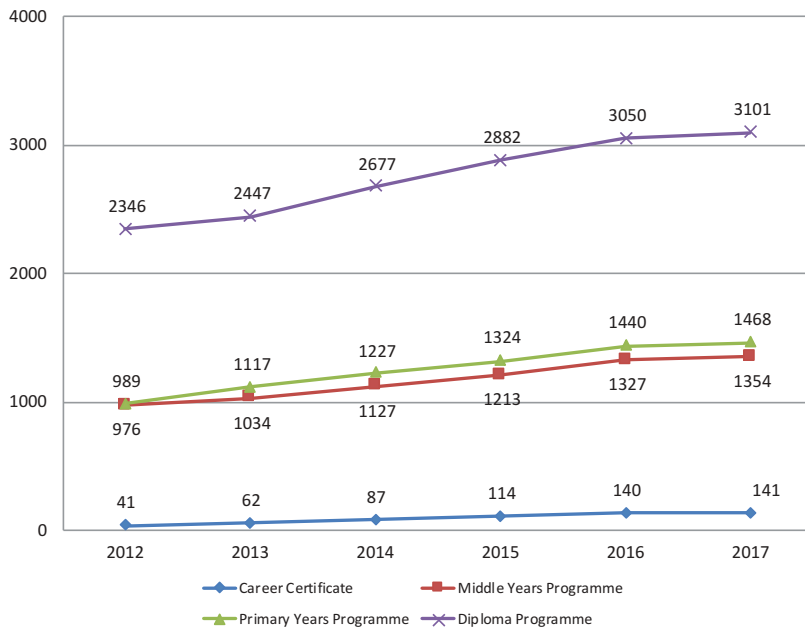


Figure 1. Growth of IB programmes, 2012–2017.

diploma programmes increased from 2346 to 3101 schools over the period 2012–2017. IBO offers four types of educational programmes (primary years, middle years, diploma and career-related programmes). By 2018, 150 countries adopted one or more IBO programmes. Over half of IBO schools are located in the Americas. More specifically, in 2008/9, over a third were located in the United States and close to 91% of these were local public schools (Dugonjić-Rodwin, 2014a).

The list of governments that enter a PPP agreement with the IBO grows continuously (International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO), 2018a). The Organization lists the following 10 governments that, by the year 2018, offer one or more IBO programmes as part of the national education system: Canada, Ecuador, Germany, Japan, Malaysia, Republic of Armenia, Republic of Macedonia, Spain, United Arab Emirates and the United States of America. In reality, however, there are more districts and countries (such as Kazakhstan) that have adopted IB programmes and collaborate with the IBO.

### 1.1. International tracks within public schools

The term ‘curricular markets’, coined by Doherty and Shield (2012), best describes the wide array of educational programmes offered in IB schools. In fact, the International School in Geneva pioneered one such market already in the 1930s, 20 years before the inception of the IB. Conceived as ‘a kind of Miniature League of Nations’, the school was coeducational, bilingual—teaching in the two official languages of the League—and international. The first group of students (four Swiss, four Americans and one French) and teachers (one American, one German/Russian and one Swiss) were seen as ‘nationalities represented’ in the school or the micro-cosmos of the League of Nations, respectively. The students were prepared for the French *baccalaureat* or the Swiss *maturité* on the so-called French side and the College Board examination, the Cambridge entrance or the Canadian matriculation on the ‘English side’ (Dugonjić-Rodwin, 2014b). Although the 1930 curricular market was locally confined to Geneva, the continuous interest and establishment of such schools in other countries boomed in the 1950s and led the School to gather a dozen others into an international network, first under the name International Schools’ Association (1951) and

later on the International Schools Examination Syndicate (1964), an autonomous organization that developed a private high school curriculum and diploma—originally the ‘international schools baccalaureate’, through workshops and conferences uniting teachers and education specialists with heads of state, officers and ministers of education. The latter was renamed the IB Office in 1968 and came to be known by governments and universities around the globe as the International Baccalaureate or the ‘IB’ (Dugonjić-Rodwin, 2014a).

The main feature of the curriculum is, in the words of the IB founders, ‘general culture through specialization’ (Peterson, 2003, p. 42). Conceived as a ‘third way’—neither encyclopaedic nor overspecialized knowledge—the vision of general knowledge, taught in IB schools, was seen as a curricular reform movement that could potentially promote innovation among national education systems around the globe. The new conceptualization of general knowledge signalled a clear departure both from the traditional ‘encyclopaedic’ approach to education, often embodied by the French model, as well as the opposite, the overspecialization attributed to the English system in the 1960s (Peterson, 2003). For the founders of IB, general knowledge in secondary schools had to transcend the study of the traditional humanities:

Taste, reasoning and culture can be developed through any subject, provided that the aim in teaching it is to ensure study in depth and not encyclopedic knowledge. A pupil may be a truer ‘humanist’ as a result of a well-conceived course in history, in world literature in translation or in a science than he will be after six years of dry grammatical exercises in Latin. (ISES/SEEI Archive 1966 cited in Dugonjić-Rodwin, 2014a)

Thus, in a strategic shift from content to form, the IB programme considers ‘learning to learn’, ‘critical thinking’ and ‘international mindedness’ as the core elements of its curriculum. Today, with the IB offered in some countries either in parallel or partially integrated in public schools, the founders’ vision of a reform movement has come true. On the one hand, the IB curriculum has greatly resonated with some governments, school districts or schools that respond to requests of middle-class parents to offer a transnationally accredited diploma programme in addition to the regular national exit exam in upper secondary school. On the other, IB schools have grown ever more inclusive of public institutions over the past 40 years. The modalities of this inclusion vary across regions, nations, provinces, municipalities and sometimes even individual schools.

Based on the sources of funding and the actors involved in decision-making, Resnik (2016) uses the lens of actor-network theory to identify a continuum of three ‘assemblages’ that are located between two extremes: ‘IB private’ and ‘IB national’, with ‘IB public’ in the middle. One extreme designates a local context where private IB schools prevail as in Argentina and Chile. In this ‘assemblage’, the expenses are distributed among parents and the main actors (school boards, principals) negotiate the integration of the IB in their schools directly with the IBO. The other extreme refers to a situation where national governments are involved in setting the terms of the contract with the IBO, as in Ecuador, where the IB is seen as a means for improving secondary education. In this case, expenses are covered by the central government and the main actors are officers at the Ministry of Education, the provincial educational authorities, although they also involve senior school staff. Finally, Spain is a good example of the ‘IB public assemblage’, which groups all other modalities of IB integration situated between these two extremes. There, the proportion of IB public and private schools is relatively balanced since the mid-1980s, when the first schools joined the Organization. As Resnik explains, individual actors with close ties to IB have played a key role for establishing PPPs. For example, the former principal of an IB school in Quito, Raul Vallejo, was appointed as Minister of Education and was in a position to actively propel the spread of the IB model throughout Ecuador. Another example is the Municipality of Madrid, which played a key role in bringing the IB to public schools in Spain. It helped alleviate the financial burden from schools that were candidates for membership in the Organization (Resnik, 2016). While the distinction between national and public assemblages may be confusing for scholars from the Japanese or English system, this typology usefully sums up how the IB is embedded in local schools.

The question of who covers the cost is essential, as the IB is expensive. While the IBO’s activity consists in developing school programmes, examinations and evaluation criteria, assessing

candidates as well as awarding diplomas, subscriptions and examinations are the organization's main sources of income. Member schools' contributions are financially proportional to the number of candidates they prepare for the exams and the number of subjects taught. Admission fees per candidate and evaluation fees per subject can thus vary among IB schools.<sup>1</sup> In addition to the cost per capita, the school must also make funds available for the professional development of its teachers and other quality assurance measures determined by IBO.

The questions of cost and of curriculum being closely related, the IBO offers certificates as an alternative to the expensive diploma. Although the philosophy of the IBO is to promote the diploma rather than the certificates (IBO, 2018d), candidates may choose certificates in one or few subjects only. The certificates are less challenging for the students and less expensive for the school. To use Bourdieu's terminology, schools that present many certificate candidates tend to be relatively poor in terms of both economic and cultural capital. The IB Diploma programme is academically more demanding, because candidates must study six subjects (five of which are compulsory) while those enrolled in a Certificate Programme choose their subjects à la carte. In Ecuador, for example, budgetary constraints have resulted in a scripted curriculum with little choice: the IB Diploma Programme prepares students in first-language Spanish, second-language English, history, mathematics, biology or chemistry and entrepreneurship and management (Resnik, 2014).

Costs also determine the availability of teachers for delivering the IB. Recruitment modalities vary according to countries and the legal status of schools. In private schools such as the United Nations International School in New York, teachers are recruited in international education fairs (Dugonjic-Rodwin, 2014a). While the education sector of Ecuador lacks qualified teachers, let alone qualified IB teachers (Resnik, 2014), in states such as Florida, IB teachers receive a \$50 bonus for each student that earns a qualifying score on the exam (Resnik, 2015). More generally, IB teachers are trained to teach the IB as part of lifelong learning. Moreover, in lieu of inspectors, a teacher takes up the position of IB Coordinator in a given school. As a centralizing agency, the IBO thus favours the circulation of teachers within its own network of schools. Once trained, teachers can teach in any IB school, thereby establishing in itself a segmented job market, where anglophone teachers, especially British, have a bit of a lock-hold on teaching and managerial positions partly due to their language skills and partly to the private character of their national education systems (Benson, 2011; Canterford, 2003). Thus, the implementation of the IB requires a certain level of restructuring which may have profound effects on national education systems and markets. Although the IBO intervenes at a later stage of teacher education in comparison to state systems, the IB-specific in-service training may have long-lasting effects on schools too, as educational values, techniques and practice all converge in the classroom. Short as they are, these are rare occasions for teachers to discuss evaluation criteria in view of standardizing their practice.

In an earlier empirical study, Dugonjic-Rodwin (2014a) performed a multiple correspondence analysis (MCA)<sup>2</sup> drawing on IBO's database for IB candidates from 1579 schools in 124 countries in 2008–9. Based on this analysis of the market for the IB, she characterized it as an 'economy of symbolic goods' (Bourdieu, 1985). The findings vary based on the distribution of schools according to the volume and composition of what she calls 'candidate capital', arguing first that the transaction between the IBO and its member schools is not exclusively economic and, second, that the symbolic dimension is prevalent in international education. The results of the MCA show the global community of IB schools structured around two main axes, the character and the volume of their candidate capital according to the following key features: seniority (duration of the school's membership in the IBO), size (number of IB candidates that the school prepares for the IB), geographic origin (nationality of IB candidates), candidates' choices of language and of IB format (diploma or certificates). In sum, the horizontal or symbolic axis distances private international schools from local state schools, while the vertical or economic axis opposes large established schools to small recent ones. Finally, the more established schools also tend to be more internationalized, i.e. they assemble candidates of a greater range of nationalities and offer a larger spectrum of IB subjects. In contrast, schools newer to the IB emerge as outsiders, in the MCA, i.e.

they are diploma-oriented and anglophile, with a strong focus on learning or consolidating candidates' English. Thus comparing schools according to their candidate capital takes into account the salient cleavages.

Reasons why the IB resonates, and how it is translated or implemented in a local context, vary widely. Ecuador and Japan, two economies at opposite ends in terms of GDP (gross-domestic product), have a similar use of the IB. Both are what Resnik calls 'IB national assemblages'. An important difference, however, is the language barrier—which is beyond the reach of the 'assemblage' typology. Due to the language barrier, the initial project of expanding IBO school membership in Japan had to be modified: the English-only option was replaced with the Dual-Language option in English and Japanese (Yamamoto, 2016). In the same way, the assemblage approach is limited if we are to understand the paradox of local state schools in the United States, which are economically established in terms of numbers of candidates they prepare for the IB, yet symbolic outsiders as their candidates are largely local (Dugonjić-Rodwin, 2014a). While an approach using MCA is a powerful empirical tool to compare IB schools beyond their country-specific determinants and reconstruct structural cleavages on a global level, it is rarely sufficient because cleavages tend to be enacted in IB teachers' discourse or individual school strategies. It is thus best combined with ethnographic fieldwork as well as historical inquiry.

## **1.2. International schools as reform hubs: spilling over and scaling up of innovation**

In this study, we differentiate between two types of PPPs. The first type, described in the previous section of the article, captures IB programmes that are established with public financial support and are offered side by side with regular public schools. In some countries, this particular type is made possible because of choice, voucher schemes or 'endemic privatization' in education (see Ball & Youdell, 2008). In contrast, the second type represents IB schools that are supposed to serve as hubs of innovation for the education system. Whereas the first type of PPP exemplified in the integration of the IB diploma programme as a track *within* public schools, the second type of PPP envisions the use of private providers for innovating or internationalizing *all* public schools. In fact, the government expects in the second type of PPP the innovation, implemented in a few pilot international standard schools (ISS), to first spill over to neighbouring public schools and to subsequently scale it up to the national level. This second type of PPP is briefly sketched in this section of the article.

This second type of PPP is a remarkable case of transnational (private) accreditation of national (public) schools that deserves attention and investigation (see Hartmann, 2016; Resnik, 2012; Verger, Steiner-Khamsi, & Lubienski, 2017). This particular kind of partnership with the private sector to infuse and disseminate innovation in the public sector is especially pronounced in developing countries. Different from many other pilot projects, the ISS are not donor-driven but are government initiated. Nevertheless, similar to the more common type of donor-funded pilot schools, sometimes labelled partner or project schools, several governments in low- and middle-low-income countries have established over the past decade ISSs as centres of innovation with the expectations that the 'best practices' from these schools spill over to other schools in the district and are scaled up nationwide.

Perhaps the most ambitious initiative of using International Standards-Pilot Schools as catalysts for improving the quality of education was the International Standards (ISS) scheme in Indonesia. Over a period of 10 years, only (2003–2013) 1339 schools were established under the scheme. It would have been necessary to transform 884 more regular schools into ISS in order to achieve the government's nationwide reform plan. The 2003 Education Law (Article 50, paragraph 3) mandated the establishment an 'international standard educational unit' in each district to ensure that eventually all schools in a district benefit by means of spillover and scale-up. The full-fledged ISS had to fulfil nine rigorous quality assurance criteria including the use of English as a language of instruction in math and the natural sciences and certification by a

school accreditation body from one of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) member states. The quality assurance criteria were rigorous to the extent that by the end of the reform, not a single of the 1339 schools was in a position to provide sufficient evidence that it had fulfilled all nine requirements (ACDP, 2013; Coleman, 2011). Furthermore, the evaluation of the ISS initiative demonstrated that the schools had admitted 88% of students who had an upper- and middle-income socio-economic status, thereby violating the requirement that 20% of the students had to be recruited from low-income families (ACDP, 2013). Clearly, the scheme was not only applauded for systematically targeting quality improvement in schools but was also heavily criticized for disregarding equity concerns given that parents were expected to financially contribute. What is more, the Government of Indonesia was attacked for allocating four times more financial resources from the national education budget to the ISS than to regular schools. Finally, in January 2013, the Constitutional Court of Indonesia ruled against the ISS and determined that they were unconstitutional, because access to them was unequal and equal educational opportunities therefore not warranted. The Court contended that charging fees had led to a 'commercialization of the education sector' and implied that 'quality education would become an expensive item that only the rich could afford' (Johnson, 2011).

Regardless of equity and cost-effectiveness concerns in Indonesia and other countries where ISSs were implemented, the concept of International Standards-Pilot School as a reform modality for piloting, demonstrating and disseminating 'best practices' in education has spread like wildfire in developing countries over the past few years. Proponents argue that training a few schools in depth and providing resources to these schools in order to disseminate 'best practices' is a more effective and sustainable reform modality than distributing the limited human and material resources to all schools in the country. As a result, the proponents of ISSs have developed interesting strategies of how to effectively target spillover and scale-up, using a variety of train-the-trainers, peer-training and cascade programmes, in which the trained teachers provide the same training to teachers in surrounding schools, who in turn train others in the catchment area of their school etc.

The Indonesian concept of ISS included, among other accreditation criteria, an adoption of borrowed curriculum standards from an OECD country. Any national curriculum standards were eligible for ISS accreditation as long as the standards originated in an OECD country. Thus, the transnational accreditation was bilateral and country-specific. In the case of Kazakhstan and Mongolia, however, the governments collaborated with the global private sector: with IBO and Cambridge International Assessment Education (CIAE), respectively. The international schools, which serve as catalysts for reform, are called Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS). The NIS network comprised 21 schools in 2017. With the purpose to serve as the channels of translating best practices across the country, these schools are located in different regions of the country. More specifically, they are based in all the 17 major cities of Kazakhstan including Astana and Almaty. In Mongolia, there were supposed to be 20 schools tailored after the curriculum of the Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education. Bending under pressure from civil society, however, the incoming Minister of Education and Science reduced in 2014 that number to three schools, based in Ulaanbaatar, and highlighted the important role of these so-called Cambridge-Standards Laboratory Schools for mainstreaming competency-based curricula, the use of instructional technology and high-stakes student tests at critical stages of their school careers. Similar to the NIS that adopted IBO educational programmes in 21 schools of Kazakhstan, the Cambridge-Standards Laboratory Schools in Mongolia receive technical assistance from Cambridge International Examinations. In both countries, English as a language of instruction in the STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and math) constitutes an attractive feature of the international schools.

Over the past 20 years or so, the two countries have developed in different directions, both in terms of economic growth and educational development. Kazakhstan grew within a period of two decades from a lower middle income to an upper middle income country and its GDP per capita in

2016 is \$10,518. Mongolia experienced, thanks to the mining sector, for a few years a period of explosive economic growth and has nowadays a GDP per capita of \$4370 (World Bank data). Governments in both countries emphasize the importance of establishing a 'world class' education system that rigorously pursues international standards. Politicians in both countries point at the importance to boost English language as well as technology skills in the country. They see these skills as a foundation for not falling behind economically in a global market place and for becoming a knowledge society. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Science in Mongolia, in particular, sees the move to a competency-based curriculum reform and the focus on critical thinking, cooperative learning, environmental responsiveness and other competencies, as essential for sustainable development.

The opportunities and limitations of the NIS have been well documented (e.g. Bridges, 2014; Bridges, Kurakbayev, & Kambatyrova, 2014). Similarly, the bilingual 'Cambridge Schools' in Mongolia have drawn great media attention. But there is a lack of empirical studies that examine whether the reforms from NIS or Cambridge Schools, respectively, have spilled over or were scaled up nationwide. Critics of the PPP model in Kazakhstan and Mongolia assert that the spillover and scaling-up argument is purely rhetorical and politically motivated to justify the large amount of financial resources that governments channel into a few elite schools at the expense of improving the masses of schools in the country. The developments in Kazakhstan and Mongolia serve only as an illustration for a new trend in developing countries: to introduce transnational accreditation which, due to their international stature, only international organizations such as IBO, CIAE and the global education industry are in a position to provide.

However, national governments are not helpless victims and observers of the fast advance of private transnational accreditation organizations. They too are, at a symbolic level, in the business of transnational accreditation. As discussed in the next section, participation in OECD's Programme in International Student Assessment (PISA) may be partly driven by the quest to have the quality of one's education system symbolically accredited by the powerful transnational regime OECD.

## **2. Understanding the receptiveness towards transnational accreditation**

The desire of middle class parents to equip their children with an education that enables them to be cosmopolitan, mobile and professionally successful is hardly new. However, the fact that governments use public funds for promoting private elite schools, as an elective or a track within public schools or as a reform modality for all public schools, is novel. They do so with the argument of world class education, international student mobility and twenty-first-century skills and with the promise of eventually benefiting all public schools in the country. The receptiveness of national education systems towards transnational accreditation is a result of several changes in the policy environment that deserve mention here. Three of them are sketched in the following: the introduction of the Market Model in education, the 'scandalization' of public education and the mainstreaming of twenty-first-century skills propelled by PISA.

First, the market model in education has been sufficiently described and does not need to be reiterated here (see Robertson and Verger, 2012). Accompanying the neo-liberal market model has been the shift from government to governance that most OECD countries introduced in the wake of the new public management reforms of the 1980s and 1990s. In the education sector, the shift implied a new role for the state, new ways of regulating the education system and new tools for generating or alleviating reform pressure. The reforms were undertaken with the rhetoric of breaking the 'state monopoly', using 'market forces' (demand and supply) to improve the quality of public education and cutting inefficiency in the 'state bureaucracy'. Regardless of whether the public education system was high- or low-performing, governments were under political pressure to selectively borrow new public management policies that encouraged non-state actors such as businesses, churches, communities and families to open and operate schools with funding from public resources. Within a short period of time, the governments scaled back the role of the state in



education from one in which it was at the same time provider and regulator to one in which it could withdraw to being only a standard-setter and regulator. Target-setting and benchmarking became the key governance tools. In education, the outcomes orientation of new public management reform triggered a proliferation of standardized student assessment. The tests have, for a variety of reasons, been utilized as the primary monitoring tool for governments to assess the quality of teachers, the school, the district and the education system and to make policy decisions based on these standardized assessments. The shift from government to governance has not only fuelled a 'governance by numbers' (Ozga, 2009) but also required from governments that they engage in 'network governance' (Ball & Junemann, 2012) in which non-state actors, including education businesses, are not only seen as providers of goods and services but also as key partners in the policy process. The empowerment of non-state actors in the new millennium, notably businesses and non-governmental organizations, as key policy actors has been interpreted as a clear sign of the 'disarticulation and diversification of the state system' and the 'destatalization' of the policy process (Ball & Junemann, 2012, p. 24) which neoliberal reforms of the past century intended to achieve. Over the past two to three decades, governments introduced a set of policies that make the market model operational. The most visible signposts, implemented in some countries more rigorously than in others, were new policies enabling or promoting (parental) choice, voucher schemes and standardized student tests to oversee the quality of public and private school providers. Against this policy backdrop, it is clearly discernible that the expectation of a spillover effect is especially pronounced in countries, such as Mongolia and Kazakhstan, that guarantee school choice and use per-capita financing of schools, known in some parts of the world as 'voucher scheme'. In these systems, public funds follow the students and, as a result, reward schools that manage to attract a great number of students. The assumption is that schools have an incentive to improve the quality of education by imitating the better performing school in the district of fear of losing students and funds. Whether the surrounding schools compete with and therefore voluntarily adopt, copy or selectively borrow 'best practices' from the international school is a question for empirical inquiry. In addition, the international school model in the two countries differs in terms of how they are supposed to disseminate their innovations to schools in the country. As mentioned before, unsurprisingly, both governments justify their large financial investments in international schools with the expectation of spillover effects and scale-up plans.

Second, the spectacular growth of privately run international schools may be understood in the context of a widespread attack of public education. As an analysis of three major financial media outlets (*Economist*, *Financial Times*, *Wall Street Journal*) has shown (Steiner-Khamsi, Appleton, & Vellani, 2017) the three most common narratives in the business community are the following: (1) public education is in crisis; (2) there is no correlation between spending and educational outcomes; (3) school accountability, teacher performance and decentralization represent the most effective policies to improve the quality of education. Drawing on these narratives, financial media outlets present a vision of how to improve education in which the private sector is supposed to play a major role. In the United States, philanthropic arms of businesses, such as the Gates Foundation, have attacked public education and simultaneously advocated and funded political campaigns for choice, charter schools, vouchers and in general for a greater liberalization of the education market (see Au & Lubienski, 2016; Goldie, Linick, Jabbar, & Lubienski, 2014; Verger et al., 2017).

Finally, the symbolic or quasi-transnational accreditation effect of PISA should not be underestimated. The PISA international large-scale student assessment (ILSA) is completely detached from national curricula and instead measures so-called global twenty-first-century skills. In contrast, other ILSAs, such as Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, Progress in International Reading Literacy Study or other standardized tests, issued by the International Association of Educational Assessment, compare what students in a specific grade are supposed to learn (intended curriculum) with what they have actually learned. OECD administers PISA with a focus on language, math or science. It measures the students' required skills and knowledge in the

three subjects as well as in an additional domain (e.g. financial literacy in PISA 2012, or global competence in PISA 2018) that are presumed to be needed in a global economy. The deterritorialization or denationalization of the test is especially pronounced in the global competence concept, explained as follows by Andreas Schleicher:

PISA defines global competence as the capacity to examine global and intercultural issues, to take multiple perspectives, to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with people from different cultures and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development. (Schleicher, 2017, p. 120)

Not surprisingly, the trend to assess denationalized or global knowledge and skills has generated a demand for providers that operate on an international scale such as IBO, CAIE as well as other education establishments. In fact, what PISA 2018 measures in terms of global competence is strikingly similar to the humanistic and cosmopolitan orientation of some international private schools, notably the IB schools (Resnik, 2009). While PISA ascribes value to competence over knowledge in much the same way the founders of the IBO did in the 1960s, the effects of this shift from content to form differ. Despite the diversity of content in comparison to national curricula, the IB reproduces existing hierarchies between countries, languages and cultures, providing a strongly Eurocentric vision of the world through its programmes in 'World Literature' and 'World History' (Dugonjic-Rodwin, 2014a). As to PISA, by measuring competence independently from curricula, it allows comparison of contrasting education systems and thereby also constrains educational policy by defining 'best practice' and rewarding 'best performance' (Felouzis & Charmillot, 2012). Arguably, the transnational accreditation effect of PISA applies to educational systems that score well based on PISA's indicators for skills and knowledge needed in a global economy. For them, the positive PISA results assist in obtaining a symbolic transnational stamp of approval, which reflects how positive PISA results enhance quasi-transnational accreditation.

### 3. Conclusions: plus-national or postnational schools?

The economic standing of a school is undoubtedly a critical dimension for understanding why the same curriculum is implemented differently among different schools. Of course, the economic dimension also matters with regard to general policy. For example, the high cost of PPPs explains the insistence of governments that their funding of private schools benefit not only a few but also spill over and scale up to serve everyone over time.

In addition to such economic considerations, it is essential to consider the symbolic value of a school, or a particular kind of education. Once again, at the school level, this may be measured by the composition of the student body in terms of national origin and language choices. Arguably, the IB belongs to that specific category of goods that Bourdieu (2005) called symbolic, because the label 'international' carries a high symbolic value in today's world. Not surprisingly, IBO uses terms, such as global citizenship, critical thinking, and twenty-first-century skills, to describe the essence of the IB curriculum. For the same reason, the organization's mission is to 'create a better world through education' (IBO, 2018a). Endowed with the symbolic power of transnational accreditation, a school becomes international when the IBO says that it *is* international. This produces cleavages between 'established' and 'outsider' schools, in both objective and subjective realms.

Historically, the emergence of a market for the IB has been a unifying force for international schools in over a hundred nations, particularly in world cities and other urban centres. The progressive adoption of what began in the late 1960s as an 'experiment in international understanding' consolidated schools that would otherwise have had little or no contact with one another. In Ecuador, private and public sectors compete for English-speaking teachers after years of segmentation (Resnik, 2014). More recently, in Japan, the legitimate 'Article One' national schools are headed towards providing the same international curriculum as some of the so-called 'Miscellaneous schools' (Yamamoto, 2016). During its 50 years of existence, the IBO struggled to get the IB recognized by education authorities across the globe involving an array of positively inclined

actors occupying leading positions in national administrations, international organizations, American and British foundations as well as university admissions offices. One of the founders admits that 'the main difficulty in using the IB as a unifying factor was [...] the reluctance of the national authorities [...] to recognize the IB as an alternative track for their own nationals' (Peterson, 2003, p. 71). Times have changed. In fact, the current policy environment, notably, choice, the breakdown of public education and pressure to teach twenty-first-century and other transnational skills, discussed above, has benefited IBO and other international private actors in education.

For the time being, the international educational programmes of private providers, funded from state resources and either offered in parallel to other types of schools, integrated as a track within the public education system or established as a hub for innovating surrounding schools, do not replace regular public schools. They are, to use the term of Buckner and Russell (2013, p. 5), 'plus-national', that is offered in addition to national or public schools. They would be considered 'postnational' if international private schools actually functioned as 'best practices' for public schools, spilled over and scaled up innovation and managed to internationalize public education.

The expectation of mainstreaming an international curriculum overcomes several obstacles we have addressed. Nevertheless, it is important to analyse why government after government insists that their funding of private schools will help improve the quality of education nationwide and investigate empirically which innovations do, in fact, spill over and scale up, and which ones are confined to the private elite schools, mostly located in global cities, and increasingly financed with state subsidies.

## Notes

1. In 2018, in supplement to its annual membership fee (\$ 11,650), an IB school in the United States pays a registration fee per candidate (\$ 172) plus an assessment fee per subject (\$ 119) (see IBO, 2018b, 2018c).
2. MCA is a statistical method of data analysis that makes comparison possible where it is otherwise difficult, assembling schools that share the same characteristics and distancing those that do not. It thus provides a geometric representation summarizing relations between large numbers of categorized variables. Originating in France in the 1960s, it was notably used by Bourdieu in *Distinction* (1979) as empirical grounding for field theory, i.e. for constructing multidimensional social spaces, see Duval (2016) and Le Roux and Rouanet (2010).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Notes on contributors

**Gita Steiner-Khamsi** is Professor of Comparative and International Education at Teachers College, Columbia University in New York (fall semesters), and at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (spring semesters). She is Director of NORRAG, co-editor of three book series (Teachers College Press, Routledge, E. Elgar) and published widely on comparative policy studies, policy borrowing, and globalization in education.

**Leonora Dugonjić-Rodwin** holds a Joint PhD in Sociology and Education (2014) from Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) Paris and the University of Geneva. She is currently Visiting Fellow at the Department of History of Humboldt-University in Berlin/Germany. Her areas of research are International Baccalaureate schools, history and sociology of education, internationalism in education, international circulation of ideas.

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