“Creating a Better World”: The International Baccalaureate and the Reproduction of Social Inequality in Australia

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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September 2016
Table of Contents

List of Tables .......................................................................................................................... vi
List of Figures .......................................................................................................................... viii
Abbreviations .......................................................................................................................... ix
Abstract ...................................................................................................................................... x
Declaration ............................................................................................................................... xi
Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. xii

Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter One  The Education-Based Reproduction of Social Inequality ......................... 9

I. The opportunity structure ................................................................................................... 9
   1. From opportunities to social inequality ....................................................................... 9
   2. The distribution of social inequality ............................................................................. 11
   3. Jobs, labour income and life chances ........................................................................... 13

II. The education system and the opportunity structure ...................................................... 16
   1. The credentialisation of life chances ......................................................................... 16
   2. Credential scarcity ...................................................................................................... 20
   3. Unequal distribution of educational chances ............................................................ 23
   4. Conclusion: education in the opportunity structure ................................................... 26

III. From social inequality to the reproduction of social inequality ....................................... 28
   1. Reproduction and (re)production .............................................................................. 30
   2. Educational opportunities and outcomes .................................................................... 33
   3. The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme and educational opportunities ... 34

Chapter Two  The International Baccalaureate Diploma and the Reproduction of Social Inequality .......................................................................................................................... 39

I. The International Baccalaureate organisation .................................................................... 39
   1. Overview ..................................................................................................................... 39
2. An ‘IB education’? ................................................................. 41

II. The IB Diploma in Australia: a paradigmatic case of alternative curriculum .... 44
   1. The Diploma Programme in Australia ........................................ 44
   2. Alternative curricula and educational differentiation ........................ 48
   3. The case of the DP in Australia .............................................. 50

III. Some landmarks in the study of the DP within the structure of educational opportunities .......................................................... 53
   1. The DP and future educational and occupational chances .............. 53
   2. The social topography of the DP ............................................. 61

Chapter Three From Theory to Empirical Research .................................. 65

I. Social theory and the school-mediated (re)production of social inequality ...... 65
   1. Relational sociology .................................................................. 66
   2. Dispositional sociology ............................................................. 70
   3. On inheritable capital ................................................................ 74

II. Producing sociological knowledge ..................................................... 77
   1. The epistemological foundations of sociological research ............ 77
   2. Knowledge ideals and research practicalities ............................... 79

III. Constructing tailored tools: the empirical manufacture ....................... 81
   1. Data sources and survey instrument ......................................... 81
   2. Designing the questionnaire ...................................................... 86
   3. From principles and concepts to variables .................................. 88
   4. Sampling .................................................................................. 95
   5. Ethics, validity and reliability ................................................... 99
   6. Data analysis and research presentation ..................................... 102

Chapter Four The Quality of the DP Opportunity: DP Outcomes ............. 105

I. Academic outcomes in DP schools .................................................. 105
   1. Year 12 student outcomes ....................................................... 106
   2. School NAPLAN Year 9 scores ................................................. 109

II. Outcomes and future opportunities in the DP program ......................... 122
   1. DP students’ results in comparative perspective .......................... 122
   2. DP students’ educational aims .................................................. 125
   3. DP students’ occupational aspirations ....................................... 128
   4. DP students’ trajectory aspirations .......................................... 130

III. The DP and the unequal distribution of academic results .................... 133
Chapter Five  The Quality of the DP Opportunity: The DP Experience ..........137

I. DP schools’ resources .................................................................................................................................137
   1. DP schools’ human resources ..............................................................................................................138
   2. DP schools’ economic resources ..........................................................................................................141

II. DP students’ comparative learning opportunities ..................................................................................144
   1. DP students’ reasons for enrolling in the program .................................................................................145
   2. The qualitative superiority of the DP experience ..................................................................................147

III. The quality of the DP opportunity: relating DP experience and outcomes ..............................................152
   1. DP schools’ economic resources and performance ..............................................................................152
   2. DP schools’ human resources and performance ..................................................................................154

IV. Conclusion ..............................................................................................................................................156

Chapter Six  The Social Topography of the DP .........................................................................................161

I. The profile of DP schools ..............................................................................................................................161
   1. The geography of the DP ..........................................................................................................................161
   2. DP schools and the ‘great Australian divide’ ..........................................................................................162
   3. DP schools’ socio-educational advantage ..............................................................................................164
   4. Students’ economic and cultural backgrounds in DP schools ..............................................................168

II. The social origin of DP students ................................................................................................................173
   1. The level of education of DP students’ parents ......................................................................................175
   2. The occupational situation of DP students’ parents .............................................................................178

III. Relating the quality and social topography of the DP opportunity .........................................................184
   1. The relation between DP students and schools’ economic and cultural profiles ..................................185
   2. The relation between students’ social origin and resources in DP schools ........................................190
   3. The primacy of student backgrounds for explaining DP schools’ academic outcomes ....................194

IV. Conclusion ..............................................................................................................................................199

Chapter Seven  The Social Selectivity of the DP Curriculum ........................................................................201

I. The curricular determinants of the social distribution of educational chances .........................................201
   1. The cultural and cognitive demands of subjects and curricula ..............................................................203
   2. The social determinants of academic competence ...............................................................................205

II. The DP curriculum structure ....................................................................................................................209

III. Assessment in the DP ...............................................................................................................................212

IV. Mathematics subjects in the DP ..............................................................................................................216

V. Science subjects in the DP .......................................................................................................................225
Chapter Eight  The Supply and Consumption of the DP in Australia: Elements of Socio-Historical and Economic Explanation ........................................ 243

I. The social origin of the DP ........................................................................ 243
   1. The original DP market segment .......................................................... 244
   2. Explaining the emergence of the DP ....................................................... 247
II. A social history of the DP ......................................................................... 249
   1. The evolution of the DP offer ............................................................... 249
   2. Academic and social inequality in the DP ........................................... 252
III. The DP in the Australian school system: a structural history ............... 255
   1. The early social functions of Australian universities ......................... 255
   2. Massification in secondary education and the first Australian DP schools .... 257
   3. The neoliberal tide and the progression of the DP ................................ 260
   4. The twenty-first century and the success of the DP ............................ 268
   5. Conclusion: the DP and neoliberal education reforms in Australia ........ 273
IV. The political economy of the DP in Australia ......................................... 275
   1. The consumer cost of the DP in Australia ........................................... 275
   2. The retailer cost of the DP to schools ............................................... 279
   3. The exchange value of the DP credential ........................................... 281
   4. Conclusion ......................................................................................... 285

Chapter Nine  The DP and the Reproduction of Social Inequality in Australia: Theoretical Implications ................................................................. 287

I. The DP and reproduction of social inequality in Australia........................ 287
II. On regimes of curricular alternatives ....................................................... 292
   1. Curricular alternatives: some conceptual developments ..................... 292
   2. Curricular alternatives and the educational opportunity structure ........ 295
III. On consumer choice in education .......................................................... 299
IV. Features of a neoliberal education ........................................................... 307
   1. Neoliberalism as a political agenda .................................................... 308
2. The Australian face of neoliberal education ................................................................. 314

Chapter Ten  Changing Education: Pragmatics and Utopia ........................................... 325

I. The DP opportunity in Australia: an overview ................................................................. 326
II. Moral foundations of education politics ......................................................................... 329
III. The supply and consumption of the DP ........................................................................ 333
   1. System-level reforms ..................................................................................................... 334
   2. School-level reforms .................................................................................................... 340
IV. The DP curriculum ......................................................................................................... 342
V. Alternative curricula and the DP exceptionality ............................................................. 346
VI. On the educational order ............................................................................................... 350
VII. Educational utopia ........................................................................................................ 353
VIII. Some limitations and possibilities for further research ............................................. 358
    1. The legitimacy of pragmatic DP recommendations .................................................... 358
    2. Some methodological limitations and propositions ................................................... 360
    3. Theoretical orientation and future research ............................................................... 363

Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 367

Appendices ........................................................................................................................ 374

Bibliography ....................................................................................................................... 407
List of Tables

Table 1: List of DP schools that participated in the survey by questionnaire in 2015 ...99

Table 2: Distribution of DP schools in the Australian states and territories in 2014....110

Table 3: Comparison of mean NAPLAN Year 9 reading scores (2014) between the average DP school and the average Australian school ........................................111

Table 4: Comparison of mean NAPLAN Year 9 reading scores (2014) between DP schools and Australian metropolitan schools...............................................................112

Table 5: Comparison of mean NAPLAN Year 9 spelling scores (2014) between DP schools and Australian schools ..........................................................................................113

Table 6: Comparison of mean NAPLAN Year 9 spelling scores (2014) for DP schools and average Australian metropolitan schools ............................................................114

Table 7: Comparison of mean NAPLAN Year 9 grammar scores (2014) for DP schools and average Australian schools..................................................................................116

Table 8: Comparison of mean NAPLAN Year 9 grammar scores (2014) for DP schools and average Australian metropolitan schools ............................................................116

Table 9: Comparison of mean NAPLAN Year 9 writing scores (2014) for DP schools and average Australian metropolitan schools ............................................................118

Table 10 Comparison of mean NAPLAN Year 9 scores (2014) on five tests for DP schools and average Australian and metropolitan schools ..................................................120

Table 11 Percentages of extensive and limited manpower DP schools amongst high-performing and low-performing DP schools across NAPLAN skills in 2014 ...........155
Table 12: Comparisons of the average Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) for DP schools and Australian schools in the three school sectors in 2014 and 2015

Table 13: Average Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) for DP schools in Australian states and territories in 2014

Table 14: Australian labour income brackets as categorised in the *Australian Jobs 2015* document

Table 15: Comparison of mean NAPLAN Year 9 scores on five tests for DP schools and Australian schools serving students from statistically similar socioeconomic backgrounds in 2014
List of Figures

Figure 1: Tripartite model of the credential-based educational opportunity structure ...27

Figure 2: DP students' responses to six questions about the quality of the DP experience in 2015 ........................................................................................................................................151

Figure 3: Proportions of students from each socioeconomic quartile in DP and Australian schools in 2014 ..................................................................................................................................170

Figure 4: Four series (Q4, Q3, Q2, and Q1) of the mean percentages of students from a given socioeconomic quartile in four clusters of DP schools grouped by increasing proportion of students from that socioeconomic quartile in the school ...............172

Figure 5: Percentage of DP students’ mothers' occupations belonging to each income bracket based on the level of socio-educational advantage of the school attended by their offspring in 2015 ................................................................................................................186

Figure 6: Percentage of DP students’ fathers' occupations belonging to each income bracket based on the socio-educational advantage of the school attended by their offspring in 2015 ........................................................................................................187

Figure 7: Percentage of university-educated DP students’ mothers based on the socio-educational advantage of the school attended by their offspring in 2015 .......................188

Figure 8: Percentage of university-educated fathers based on the socio-educational advantage of the school attended by their offspring .................................................................189
# Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AC</td>
<td>Australian Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACARA</td>
<td>Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATAR</td>
<td>Australian Tertiary Admission Rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP</td>
<td>Career-related Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DP</td>
<td>Diploma Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IB</td>
<td>International Baccalaureate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBO</td>
<td>International Baccalaureate Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICSEA</td>
<td>Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MYP</td>
<td>Middle Years Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRIPS</td>
<td>Net Recurrent Income Per Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PISA</td>
<td>Programme for International Student Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PYP</td>
<td>Primary Years Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>Most Advantaged Socioeconomic Quartile of the Population Considered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>Second Most Advantaged Socioeconomic Quartile of the Population Considered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>Second Most Disadvantaged Socioeconomic Quartile of the Population Considered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4</td>
<td>Most Disadvantaged Socioeconomic Quartile of the Population Considered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEA</td>
<td>Socio-Educational Advantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>Socio-Economic Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
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Abstract

The role of education in the reproduction of social inequality has been consistently demonstrated since the seminal research on the subject in the 1960s. Yet changes in the structures of education systems constantly re-problematise the (re)production of social inequality. In particular, new forms of educational differentiation bring the question of the social distribution of educational opportunities to the fore. One recent form of educational differentiation has been the development of curricular alternatives, and the most prevalent of these alternative curricula are the programs developed by the International Baccalaureate organisation. In this project, I attempt to understand the contribution of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme, a two-year pre-university credential, to the reproduction of social inequality in Australia. To that effect, I examine the quality of the Diploma Programme opportunity, in comparison to alternative programs. I then assess the social background of students choosing the Diploma, in order to evaluate the implications of the introduction of this alternative senior secondary curriculum for the social distribution of educational opportunities. I conclude the analysis by addressing some elements of explanation for the Diploma Programme’s contribution to the reproduction of social inequality. Finally, I propose some modest reforms for using this new form of educational differentiation as an instrument for devising a fairer distribution of educational chances.
Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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Quentin T. Maire

September 2016
Acknowledgements

From the reader’s point of view, the acknowledgements that precede the content of a publication often are of little interest. For the author, however, they provide an opportunity for recognising the collective dimension of what seems to be the most personal academic exercise.

First, I need to pay a tribute to those who have made the objective and subjective conditions of possibility of my doctoral labour a reality. It starts, on the personal side, with my partner Delia, whose unconditional support and seasonal reminders to spend time away from my research have sustained my interest for completing this thesis; my brother Jérémie, an accomplished researcher, role model, and indefectible source of inspiration; my parents, Jacques and Denise, whose indirect contribution to this text is self-evident; and all my friends on several continents who have not despaired of my intermittent existence in their eyes or on their screens.

On the French side, I am infinitely indebted to my intellectual mentor, Bernard Michon, who has been at the very heart of my sociological awakening. His commitment to sharing some of his erudition with an apprentice-thinker for countless hours will be remembered. Bernard Michon patiently allowed me to develop my interest in sociology, after a number of academics had shared their passion for this discipline with me at the very early stages of my tertiary education. Amongst these, I deeply thank Julien Pierre, William Gasparini, and Michel Koebel. I am also obliged to Christophe Schnitzler, Gilles Erb, and Jean-Claude Frery, without whom I would never have been able to move from one continent to another.

On the Australian side, I can only start with Grant Rodwell, the guiding figure who believed in me before anyone else, not based on a rational assessment of my situation, but drawing on an acute capacity for interpersonal understanding. Grant is a true educator with a characteristically tranquil confidence in the worth of caring for his students. Immediately after, I owe many thankful words to all the academics and administrative staff in the School of Education at the University of Adelaide, who supported and trusted me when the adventure seemed impossible: Margaret Secombe,
Andrew Hope, Vegneskumar Maniam, Jan Keightley, Edward Palmer, Christopher Dawson, Julia Miller, Shamira Barr, Janine Donnell, and many others.

As it happens, three of these selfless individuals also supervised my research: for their sheer generosity and altruism, Margaret, Grant, and Vegnes no doubt deserve to be mentioned twice in this note. For her indefectible commitment to helping me despite her absence from my initial supervisory panel, I will finally repeat my inestimable gratitude to Margaret, who has been committed to supporting her students beyond any expectation. She has certainly been the principal supervisor any doctoral candidate can only dream of. And because the role of academic peers does not stop at the supervision team, I am tremendously beholden to two informal supervisors and academic mentors, who have smoothly transformed my doctoral experience into an academic apprenticeship: Julie Matthews and Andrew Hope. For my doctoral companions, a simple sentence of appreciation is enough to reiterate what they already know: they have been the most direct collaborators to my deceptively individual journey.

At an intellectual level, it is my duty to duly express my thankfulness to all these anonymous or acknowledged authors, translators, sociologists, historians, novelists, economists, anthropologists, philosophers, and educators who have made this academic product possible. Dead or alive, the authors of many books and articles have participated in the collective transcendence of the spatial and temporal anthropological boundaries of the encounter of thoughts. I have been able to learn invaluable ways of reasoning and conducting research from some of the very best thinkers. My thesis is an unmistakable testimony to their unintended participation in a text that has the merit of existing largely thanks to them. It is evident, however, that all defects in this text are attributable to nothing else than the limitations to my intellectual labour and my imperfect writing skills.

It goes without saying that a research project cannot take place without all the participants who contribute to the construction of research data. I am appreciative of all staff in participating schools, especially their principal, Diploma Programme coordinator, and teachers who agreed to and supervised the collection of data. I also thank the students who took the time to complete the questionnaire that was distributed to them.
Finally, I must thank the International Baccalaureate organisation. My encounters with numerous academics or educators affiliated with (or working for) the educational provider I dissect in this work have always been pleasant, insightful, and enriching. Those I have come across representing the International Baccalaureate have displayed a commendable and sometimes unexpected degree of open-mindedness in the face of a sociological enterprise that could have easily been interpreted as an attack en règle. Whereas most organisations would be averse to a genuinely sociological analysis of their practices, the International Baccalaureate has demonstrated, in public spaces as much as in private communications, an invaluable aptitude for listening to objectivising research. I am confident that they will be able to maintain this level of integrity and welcome with the critical scrutiny they deserve the conclusions and recommendations I present in this work. Part of the social utility of this research depends on the use that the IB organisation and Australian educational authorities will make of it.