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Doherty, Catherine A. and Li, Mu and Shield, Paul G. (2009) *Planning mobile futures : the border artistry of IB Diploma choosers*. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 30(6). pp. 757-771. (In Press)

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Planning mobile futures: the border artistry of IB Diploma choosers

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Final word count with references: 6983

Planning mobile futures: the border artistry of IB Diploma choosers

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This paper reports on a study of students choosing the International Baccalaureate Diploma (IBD) over state-based curricula in Australian schools. The IBD was initially designed as a matriculation certificate to facilitate international mobility. While first envisaged as a lifestyle agenda for cultural elites, such mobility is now widespread with more people living ‘beyond the nation’ through choice or circumstance. Beck (2007) and others highlight how the capacity to cross national borders offers a competitive edge with which to strategically pursue economic and cultural capital. Beck’s ‘border artistes’ are those who use national borders to their individual advantage through reflexive strategy. The study explored the rationales and strategy behind the choice of the IBD curriculum expressed by students in a focus group interview and an online survey. This paper reports on their imagined transnational routes and mobile orientations, and how a localised curriculum limits their imagined mobile futures.

Keywords: International Baccalaureate, choice, mobility, reflexivity, curriculum

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Planning mobile futures: the border artistry of IB Diploma choosers

Introduction – the problem of why this choice

This paper explores the identity projects that students in Australia are pursuing through their choice of the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma as their senior secondary certificate. Historically, the IB Diploma's globally portable curriculum developed in the 1960-70s as a response to the mobile family lifestyles of educated elites working for the UN in Geneva to promote their children's access to university study (Fox 1985). The IB Organisation (IBO) through its Diploma curriculum has maintained a commitment to a 'well-rounded' education, requiring study across six disciplinary areas, including a second language, with additional core requirements of an extended essay, the interdisciplinary subject 'Theory of Knowledge', and participation in 'community, action and service'. This required breadth distinguishes it from most other secondary certificates that encourage specialisation. The curriculum is infused with values of 'internationalmindedness' which might also distinguish it from curricula developed within nations or regions to serve national identities and solidarities. The IB Diploma is further distinguished by its academic focus on university entrance in contrast to more instrumental/ vocational orientations emerging elsewhere. The Diploma's assessment regime of culminating high stakes external exams is also very different to the more progressive practices of moderated school-based assessment in some parts of Australia.

The IB Diploma has been strongly associated with the 'international schools' movement (Dolby and Rahman 2008), however its popularity has outgrown this specialist sector (Bunnell 2008). According to the IBO's webpage, in 2009, the Diploma was offered in 1,956 schools across the world, with the greatest

concentration in the US, Canada and UK. 57 schools in Australia now offer the Diploma, making it the fourth largest host.

In Australia, the IB was initially established in niche pockets around the diplomatic community and expatriate business communities in some capital cities (Bagnall 2005). Over the 1990s, the program expanded into some wealthy private schools in capital cities. There is a further wave of interest in the IB as a curriculum of choice over local alternatives for local populations as opposed to mobile elites (Doherty 2009). Two state governments in Australia, Queensland and Victoria, both of whom manage their own 'local' curricula, have recently revised legislation to allow alternative curriculum, in particular the IB, to be offered in government schools, and extra fees charged. This second wave in the government sector is understood to be enabled by neo-liberal policies and market strategies to arrest the drift of middle class students to the private sector (Doherty 2009). This ecology is markedly different from the growing uptake of IB Diploma in the US as a strategy for school reform in disadvantaged districts (Siskin & Weinstein 2008).

The uptake of the IB exemplifies what Robertson and Dale (2008) describe as:

the shift away from a predominantly national education system to a more fragmented, multi-scalar and multi-sectoral distribution of activity that now involves new players, new ways of thinking about knowledge production and distribution, and new challenges in terms of ensuring the distribution of opportunities for access and social mobility. (p.19)

Increasingly complex local contexts demand fresh theoretical orientations. Robertson and Dale (2008) identify methodological assumptions in much educational research

that, if unchallenged, restrict the field's capacity to understand emergent education configurations. These assumptions include methodological nationalism which takes the nation-state as the default 'container of "society"' (p.21); and spatial fetishism which is 'a conception of social space that is timeless and stasis' (p.28). This analysis documents how students themselves are starting to challenge such assumptions.

This paper examines how IB-choosers in Australia account for their curricular choice and relate it to their imagined life trajectories. Focus group data is augmented by data from an online survey of 240 students in 23 IB schools across Australia. The IB choice is investigated as an individualised biographical strategy to sponsor future mobile lifestyles and global aspirations. By these accounts, the IB is chosen by some in order to produce a transnational identity, rather than merely reflect it.

The paper is presented in five sections. Firstly a brief literature review situates the research problem on an emerging tangent to two existing fields of enquiry – curricular choice and school choice. Secondly, the research problem is understood through social theory regarding the global imagination, transnationality and strategic cosmopolitanism. Then the empirical study is introduced, the analysis of choice rationales is explicated, and the findings discussed with reference to curricular debates and implications.

Literature review – choices, curricula and borders

Matters of curricular choice are typically researched as subject choice within a singular curriculum framework. The focus of such studies has been on the relationship between subject choices and class position (for example, Teese and Polesel 2003) or gendered pathways through school into the world of work (for example, Weis 2004). In essence, such literature explores how different patterns of

subject choice deliver different futures for different groups and thus ensure social reproduction.

Matters of school choice have emerged as an important sociological research agenda around neo-liberal policy (Ball 1993, 2003; Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz 1996; Wells and Crain 2000). The focus of such studies has been on how different class fractions engage with the marketisation of schools, and how some groups are better resourced and more willing than others to manipulate school choice to their individual and collective advantage. Again, educational settings emerge as sites of social reproduction.

On one hand, both literatures explain aspects of the second wave of IB uptake in Australia. The IB Diploma requires students to study a second language and a philosophy subject, 'Theory of Knowledge'. In Australia, these two subjects would distinguish the IB curriculum as a relatively privileged/privileging set of subjects. Similarly a school's decision to offer the IB could be understood through the second literature as a marketing strategy to acquire a brand of distinction with which to attract desirable 'value-added' clients, to whom it would appeal as a 'strategy of closure' (Ball 2003).

On the other hand, these two literatures do not adequately capture the phenomenon in question in two ways. Firstly, such literature is largely restricted to matters of choice within national or local systems, and secondly they have yet to account for the emergent practice of offering curricular alternatives (one locally governed and more locally oriented, the other externally governed and more globally oriented). In other words, families are potentially making complex nested choices - which school and which curriculum. The added complexity of these empirical developments shifts the focus from understanding curriculum as largely a form of

social reproduction, to understanding how curriculum can also work as a form of social production opening new identity trajectories.

Regarding the first research gap, there needs to be more recognition of transnational fields in school choice, that is, of the fact that more families are making choices in a global market, not just a local or national market. Australian schools, like Australian universities, now host a growing number of international students whose parents trawl the globe looking for the kind of educational opportunities they want their child to have at a price they are willing to pay. The well-resourced can now uproot and move to greener pastures in search of transnational advantage. There are also various shades of citizenship that enable families to relocate temporarily or permanently in order to educate their children elsewhere (Ong 1999; Pe-Pau, Mitchell, Castles and Iredale 1998). The local market can also include 'international schools' which dispense another nation's cultural knowledges, or the offering of an internationally branded curriculum. The IB is part of the transnational market, as well as the local market. The 'border crossing' practised through transnational education strategy is individualistic, speculative and strategic. It is in this frame that the choice of the IB by local students at their local school alongside international students becomes particularly intriguing.

Regarding the second research gap, more research needs to be done on how families are actually negotiating the increasingly complex decision matrix as educational choices multiply. On what grounds are they choosing a school and then between curricular alternatives? Which choice comes first and how might these decisions interact? Ball (2003) highlights the 'prudentialism' exercised by middle class parents, being the process of carefully analysing pros and cons, risks and benefits associated with any possible choice. He also highlights the degree of care and

research that goes into middle class strategy around school choice, while other ‘non-choosers’ (Ball 1993, 13) effectively select themselves out of the market of choice by failing to engage with alternatives beyond default pathways. It is reasonable to expect that similar degrees of care, research and prudence will be exercised by some groups and not others over the matter of curriculum. Of particular interest to this study, Wells and Crain (2000, 620) make the additional point that choice behaviours are not simply ‘rational economic’ decisions, but rather are matters of aspiration and identity projection: ‘decisions about symbolic social institutions such as schools are strongly affected by where the choosers see themselves fitting into a highly stratified society.’ Hence these choices work as identity projections into the future.

Theoretical frame – globalisation and the social imaginary

As with the literature reviewed above, this section argues that social change tends to outstrip the social theory with which we understand and interpret our world (Beck 2004), and purposefully draws on theorists who are re-thinking the social under conditions of globalisation. Early definitions of globalisation (Waters, 2001; Robertson, 1992) acknowledged not just growing interconnection of technologies, economies and communities, but also the growing consciousness of this trend and its consequences for social action. Appadurai (1990, 5) emphasised the heightened role of imagination and its larger canvas under conditions of globalisation as ‘a form of negotiation between sites of agency (“individuals”) and globally defined fields of possibility’.

Mobility is another more common condition of life that needs to be better accounted for (Urry 2000). Mobility affects not just the mobile, but also the sites the mobile pass through and inevitably change. Thus the entry of an internationally

governed curriculum into the offerings of a local school can be expected to impact on the local institution's practices and its participants' lifeworlds as lived or imagined. The IB being both an educational commodity and an ideological product that has entered locally governed institutions will inevitably affect how things are done around 'here'.

Bauman describes these more mobile times as 'liquid modernity', a condition marked by the 'melting' of what was previously solid, more stable or given, in particular, 'the bonds which interlock individual choices in collective projects and actions' (Bauman 2000, 6). Beck (1992, 3) similarly argues that life conditions are becoming increasingly individualised. Rather than inhabit ascribed collective identities, individuals are increasingly invited to 'free of these structures, reflexively construct their own biographies'. Archer (2007, 4) defines such reflexivity as '*the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa*' (original emphasis), or more simply, 'the means by which we make our way through the world' (p.5). The common ground between Beck's and Archer's work suggests that the human condition is less a matter of living out routine scripts, and more reflexive strategy applied to projects of conscious design and intent 'in order to promote our concerns' (Archer 2007, 7). In this paper, the choice of senior schooling curriculum will be explored as such an exercise of individualised reflexive strategy, played out through what alternatives are available, towards an aspirational personal goal.

To benefit from the fluid conditions of liquid modernity, Bauman (2000, 13) argues that it pays to 'travel light': 'It is now the smaller, the lighter, the more portable that signifies improvement and "progress".' Being anchored in one locality by social or material ties is no longer considered the asset it used to be, but rather an

obstacle to overcome. From this perspective the localised curriculum, hard won for equity and relevance purposes, could now seem limiting in the way it curtails mobility in the global field. In contrast, the portable, globally recognised certificate allows one to ‘travel light,’ free of local anchorage and to profit from such mobility.

Beck (2007) and others (for example, Weiss 2005; Ong 1999; Sklair 2001) highlight how the capacity to move and live across national borders offers a competitive edge with which to exploit and strategically pursue economic and cultural capital. Ong’s (1999) work on flexible citizenship describes advantaged communities who have honed the biographical strategy of transnational mobility and temporary dwelling to their advantage. Weis’s (2005) study of skilled migrants highlighted their ‘spatial autonomy’ and purposive border crossing. Such freedom of movement derives benefits in transnational spaces: ‘Those who are able to choose optimal environments for themselves and their resources are in a superior position to those who are limited by a nation-state frame’ (Weis 2005, 714). For Jain (cited in Weis 2005, 714, original emphasis) ‘it is the *option* to move to better places or to exploit differences between locations’ that constitutes the advantage. Again imagination, choice and reflexivity become crucial social processes.

Beck (2007, 696-697) uses the term ‘border artistes’ to describe individuals who legitimately and illegitimately use national borders, ‘slipping under the border, using the border, setting the border, bridging the border’ to their individual advantage: ‘The greater the spatial autonomy of individuals ... the less important the border becomes’. Border crossing thus constitutes a valuable resource or capacity that is unequally distributed. Mitchell (2003, 389) uses a cognate term, ‘the strategic cosmopolitan’ to describe ‘the globally oriented economic player, one able to work with, but also around the de-territorialized, highly flexible nature of individual states’

constructions of citizenship'. Mitchell particularly highlights the institution of public education as the social site where 'the strategically cosmopolitan citizen is clearly of growing relevance' (p.389).

To summarise this theoretical frame, in today's social conditions, imagination is a significant social force that can shape individualised biographical strategies, including that of 'travelling light' to enable 'border artistry' to benefit the individual's trajectory and their reflexive projects. Educational choices will play an important role in these projects. These theorists have provocatively foregrounded what they understand to be changing in the social fabric. Their arguments may inflate the degree of change, but serve to indicate trends underway. Not all people in all places are equally able to exploit the opportunities made available in liquid modernity, and therein lies the point of this paper. The analysis suggests some students are positioning themselves through curricular choice to better be able to do so.

The study's design and methodological considerations

The larger sociological project is interested in which families and which schools choose which senior schooling curriculum for what reasons, then what experiences and implications flow from the choices made by parents, students and schools. It uses mixed methods across three phases: a pilot study; online surveys of student, parent and teacher populations in Australian schools offering the IB Diploma as an alternative curriculum; then case studies in three such schools. Empirical data for this paper was generated firstly in a focus group interview conducted in 2008 as the pilot study to inform the design of survey items. This data is supplemented by data from the online survey of students with 240 responses (160 choosing the IB, 71 choosing the local curriculum, 9 unspecified) from 23 schools offering the IB and

another local curriculum across Australia. The students as a population should be understood as already demographically filtered through the effect of school choice.

The focus group interview offers certain advantages (Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook 2007; Fern 2001; Goldman 1962) for the generation of qualitative data, in particular for exploratory pilot studies. Firstly, the focus group method stretches beyond the mere search for ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers into the why or how of an issue (Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook 2007). The focus group method allows researchers to ‘observe how and why individuals accept or reject others’ ideas’ (Stewart et al 2007, 10) and how attitudes and perceptions are developed through interaction. More detailed information can be obtained by allowing group members to react to, and build on, the responses of others (Fern 2001). The environment thus created is a ‘carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions in a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment’ (Kreuger 1994, 18). The synergy of the group can stimulate new ideas about the topic that may not occur in individual interviews. Members of a group can make comments and ask questions of one another in ways that an interviewer could not without substantial risk to rapport (Goldman 1962).

There are also problematic aspects to the focus group approach (Stewart 2007) which this study sought to mitigate. In particular, the risk of ‘group think’ or of artificial consensus was actively addressed in the interviewer’s opening: *‘no one has to agree with anybody. In fact we are encouraging you say something different from others’*. At points in the interview, the group were encouraged to explore alternative perspectives, and quieter members were offered the floor (Fontana and Frey, 2005).

The scope of the survey was conceptualised in four domains – the IB choice, the IB experience, IB outcomes and understanding the IB philosophy. The pilot study

guided the development of items for the survey which were then trialled to ensure readability, clarity, and online functionality. The necessary ethical permissions were sought from relevant government education departments and principals.

Ultimately, this paper only reports students' re-constructions of their decision process. Their claims about the IB curriculum and alternative curricula are their impressions and not necessarily factual truths. However, given the theoretical frame of reflexivity, it should be recognised that individuals' decisions will nevertheless be premised on such 'self talk' (Archer 2007, 2) and beliefs.

Student population characteristics

The focus group interview involved ten Year 11 students enrolled in the IB at a government school in Australia which offers both the IB Diploma and the local state government curriculum for the final years of schooling. The group knew each other well and were comfortable speaking in front of each other. Of the 10 students:

- 2 were International students;
- 1 held two passports including an Australian one;
- 1 had permanent resident status in Australia;
- 1 was in Australia on a temporary visa while applying for permanent residence;
- 1 had migrated to Australia but still identified as a European citizen;
- 4 were born and raised in Australia as Australian citizens, with a variety of ethnic backgrounds.

This constitutes a significantly transnational cohort. The local school, as argued above, has thus become a site of intersection of vastly different life routes. The clustering of such transnationality around the IB curriculum might be expected

given its historical origins, but this would not explain the presence of the four local students in the mix. In the survey data, IB students as a cohort displayed more varied forms of citizenship than their counterparts (Table 1). Nevertheless, the vast majority were Australian citizens.

Table 1
Citizenship status of student survey respondents

What is your citizenship status? more than one category may apply.	Choosing the IB (N = 159)		Not Choosing the IB (N = 71)	
I am an Australian citizen	71.7%	114	84.5%	60
I hold dual citizenship	25.8%	41	18.3%	13
Though I'm not an Australian citizen, I have permanent resident status in Australia	7.5%	12	0%	0
I am an international student	11.3%	18	5.6%	4

The analysis asks three questions of the empirical data:

- What reasons did the students give for choosing the IB?
- How do these students imagine their futures?
- How do these students link their IB choice with their imagined future?

We acknowledge that such decisions also involve parents, but the accounts given here are the students' versions of how their IB decision was arrived at, and how they made sense of their choice.

What reasons did the students give for choosing the IB?

In the focus group, students offered a number of intertwined considerations behind their choice of the IB. This section draws themes across their considerations which demonstrate purposive individualised strategy by the students.

For one student, the IB curriculum was a pre-emptive choice to guarantee future continuity given a globally mobile family lifestyle:

I decided to do the IB since I was in America doing Grade 9 for my dad used to move a lot. ... I thought if I change to the International Baccalaureate, I could just stay and keep doing that. (S4)

The IB choice in such cases was prudential risk management to ensure continuity, given the unpredictability of the transnational family lifestyle. This rationale would cohere with the IB Organisation's original mission of providing consistent education for mobile families.

For other students, their pursuit of educational continuity via the IB choice was differently oriented and more about local markets. For two students it was the obvious, '*quite logical*' choice for their senior secondary as a continuation from the IB Middle Years curriculum in their former local school. This rationale can be expected to become more common because the IB Middle Years and Primary Years programs are becoming more popular in Australian schools. Part of another student's decision was to follow an older sibling's choice of the IB, thus continuity within the family unit.

For some focus group students, the IB Diploma choice was about seeking quality. These accounts often drew a contrast between features of the IB Diploma and the local curriculum. For example, in one student's eyes, the extended independent essay was highlighted as an attractive and motivating educational opportunity: '*If you have something you're interested in, you can actually do something about it*' (S8).

The IB Diploma was associated with academic challenge ('*I want to do IB because it*

is so full on' S9) but this was balanced with their consideration of the associated risks discussed below. One student also considered teachers in the IB program to be better and more motivated: *'It's not just a lottery if I got a good teacher'* (S10). Whether or not these comparative claims can be substantiated is incidental. What is significant is the students' reflexivity and strategy demonstrated in their processes of weighing up the individuated pros and cons to come to their decisions.

One student made an explicit comparison between the local curriculum and the notionally global IB in terms of what opportunities each avails the student: *'If I did the [local curriculum] then I won't have a lot of choices. If I did the IB then I can choose any university and I would have a lot more choices'* (S4). Thus the choice was not about progressing a particular aim, but rather on the more diffuse goal of maximizing options and delaying decisions.

Three students talked about how which curriculum they chose decided which school they would attend. By choosing to enrol in the IB, their choice of schools was limited: *'My parents told me if I was going to do the [local curriculum], then I should stay at [School B] or I could come here to do the IB'* (S8). For other students, they had enrolled in the school first, and then made their curriculum choice within that context when the time came – thus its presence in their local setting made that choice available.

Across these students' accounts, it becomes apparent that curriculum choice is not a one dimensional practice. Different families undertake different sequences with different factors in their analysis of alternatives. What they do share however is reflexive strategy in the exercise of their choice. The next section probes the specific consideration of future international mobility and how strongly that aspiration was associated with the IB choice in the survey data.

Future international mobility

Survey respondents were asked to indicate on a Likert scale, from 1 (not a consideration) to 7 (major consideration), to what degree certain factors impacted on their curriculum decision. For those choosing the IB, the two factors that strongly emerged as major considerations were ‘future university entrance’ (ranked 6 or 7 by 77.5% of the respondents), and ‘future international mobility’ (ranked 6 or 7 by 68.1% of the respondents). While responses from students who did not chose the IB similarly considered ‘future university entrance’ important (ranked 6 or 7 by 63.4% of respondents), ‘future international mobility’ was not a major consideration (ranked 6 or 7 by only 33.8% of the respondents). The error bars in Figure 1 represent the 95% confidence bands for the mean rating of this consideration as the dependent variable (future international mobility) across the independent variable (IB enrolment or not). The lack of overlap of the confidence limits suggests a significant statistical difference between the groups and this combined with the size of the distance between group means (1.75) suggests a moderate effect size.

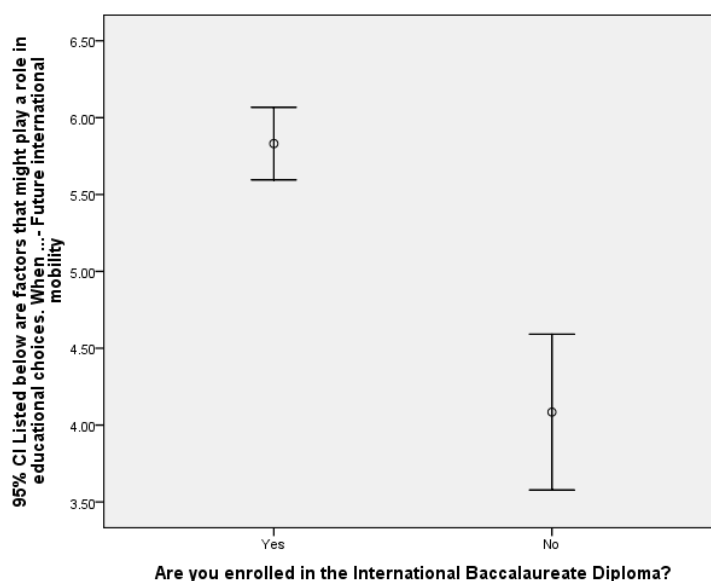


Figure 1: Curricular Choice by mean rating of Future International Mobility as consideration in curricular choice, all respondents (N = 231)

To test this hypothesis the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (K-S Z) was chosen over other non-parametric tests due to the dissimilar distributions of scores for the two groups. However the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test requires similar sample size groups. The “not enrolled in IB” sample size is 71 while the “enrolled in IB” sample size is 160. This condition was satisfied by randomly drawing with replacement three samples of size 71 from the “enrolled in IB” group. These subsets were then compared in turn to the “not enrolled in IB” group. This low level “bootstrapping” provided a measure of the reliability or stability of the comparisons. The results of the comparisons are reported in Table 2.

Table 2

Means, standard deviations, level of significance and effect sizes for “IB-non IB” group comparisons on Future International Mobility

Group	Mean	Standard deviation	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z (IB vs non-IB)	Significance (2 tailed)	Effect size r
In IB 1	5.86	1.55	2.43	<.0001	0.43
In IB 2	5.83	1.50	2.35	<.0001	0.42
In IB 3	5.86	1.55	2.43	<.0001	0.43
Not in IB	4.08	2.14			

All comparisons between ‘in IB’ groups and ‘not in IB’ group are highly significant.

An effect size of around .4 is consistently reported. This represents a moderate statistical effect (Cohen, 1988) and is important contextually.

It could be argued that the transnational students enrolled in the IB would place a high priority on international mobility, perhaps confounding the reported difference. To test this, the analysis was repeated with just ‘Australian citizens only’

respondents with 54 Australian citizen ‘in IB’ being randomly selected from the larger cohort to match the 54 ‘not in IB’ Australian citizen group.

The results were similar to the previous analysis of the full cohort of IB enrolled students and can be visualised in the 95% error bar graph in Figure 2. On average the “in IB Australian citizen” reported statistically significantly greater consideration of Future International Mobility ($M = 5.59$, $SD = 1.52$) than the “not in IB Australian citizen” group ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 2.11$, $K-S Z = 1.64$, $p < .01$, $r = .35$). The statistical effect size is slightly smaller than that reported with the full cohort but is still approaching moderate in magnitude.

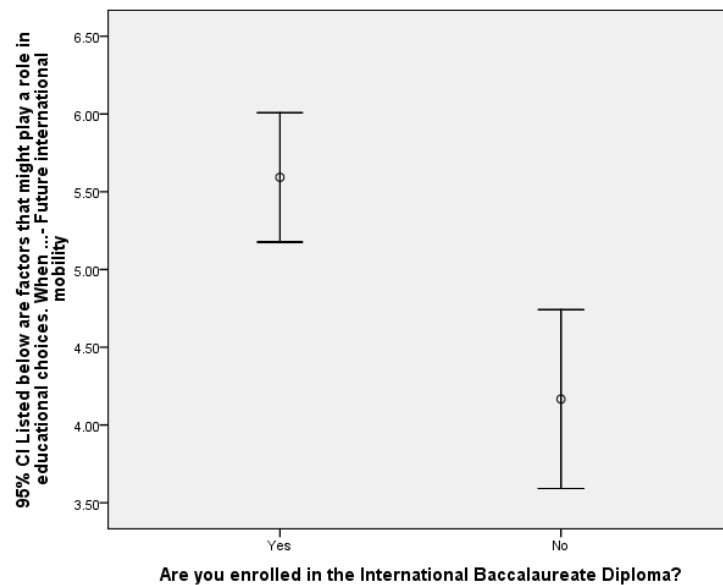


Figure 2: Curricular Choice by mean rating of future international mobility as consideration in curricular choice, ‘Australian citizen only’ respondents (N total = 108)

How do these students imagine their futures?

When the pilot study students were invited to describe their imagined futures, their responses were couched in terms of their future spatial location, rather than an

occupation. While this could have been an artefact of the focus group method, the degree of transnationality in the cohort, or the IB's branding as an internationally portable curriculum, all ten students articulated their futures as geographical routes plotting transnational lives.

University study was taken for granted and featured more as the hope of gaining a scholarship to enable the mobility they imagined: *'I'm probably going to study in Australia, but I don't want to... because if I can do it well I may get a scholarship... I may go somewhere else'* (S6). Spatially, some students had a particular destination in mind. For some the future was a matter of *'going back'* (S5) to their home country, and keeping doors open for their alternative citizenships. For others the future was more about leaving Australia, *'I really don't want to stay here'* (S4), with no particular destination in mind: *'I may go somewhere else'* (S6).

In the survey, the plan *'to study overseas'* was repeatedly included in students' optional description of their rationales. One respondent elaborated: *'We don't do IB cause we're nerdy, we do it because we don't wanna be stuck in Australia or wherever else you may be living'*. In response to the survey question, 'Where will you apply to do further education after school?' (Table 4), the IB choosing cohort expressed relatively more interest in international mobility for study, than the other cohort.

Table 4

Future study plans

Where will you apply to do further education after school? More than one choice is OK.				
	Choosing IB (N= 159)		Not choosing IB (N= 70)	
not interested in further study	0.6%	1	7.1%	5
at a TAFE college or equivalent	1.3%	2	14.3%	10
at a local university	72.3%	115	71.4%	50

at an interstate university	48.4%	77	55.7%	39
at an international university	54.1%	86	27.1%	19

Specifically focusing on the intention to attend an international university a Fisher Exact test was conducted to plumb the strength of any relationship between this intention and enrolment in the IB. The Fisher Exact test was significant, $p < 0001$. This seems to indicate based on the odds ratio that those enrolled in the IB were 3.14 times more likely to indicate intention to study at an international university. These responses may seem like the ambit claims of teenage dreams, but the next section demonstrates the strategic link being made between the choice of the IB Diploma and these imagined futures.

How do these students link their IB choice with their imagined future?

The students made explicit links between their IB choice and the kinds of future such a choice enabled: *'I am glad that I am doing IB ... it opens so many doors'* (S3). The idea that the IB Diploma would maximise future options was mentioned repeatedly by the focus group students but their elaborations interpreted this link in different ways. For some it was through the particular dispositions and skills developed over the curriculum: *'The analytical skills learned with IB can be applied to our future tertiary studies'* (S3); or its international recognition and portability: *'I thought I may go overseas with it'* (S9). What was not mentioned in their accounts were the tertiary study options and academic pathways enabled by the required breadth of subjects studied in the IB Diploma.

As perhaps the most extended example of IB choice as biographical strategy, one international student explained the strategy behind her choice of IB in an Australian public school in the following way:

I am doing this because I don't want to stay here. I want to go to America or somewhere else. Because I just can't afford the university if I stay here. It's too much for me and they won't give scholarships to international students. So I thought there are more opportunities to get a scholarship in American universities than here. (S2)

This student's opening statement casts the IB Diploma at this school as a transit lounge – an educational space this student is passing through en route to the intended destination. This family, despite the limited finances alluded to, is willing to consider global offerings, and will craft opportunities to maximise the students' chances. This is sophisticated 'border artistry' executed with sharp risk assessment and long term strategy, that brings this student through this local setting. In another case of conscious strategy, the IB choice was from the outset about eventual relocation: *'I want to go back to England after I finish school here. So I thought if I do the IB then it will enable me to do that'* (S5). These students are using this curriculum to facilitate future border crossing. Their presence also exposes their locally recruited classmates to new social and spatial horizons.

Risk assessments in strategies

When the students talked about doing the IB Diploma, it became evident that the IB choice is considered a high stakes decision which promises life rewards but also carries significant risk which is worn by the student over the two year program: *'To me IB is stressful. But I can see a lot of good things will come out in the end and that's also what my parents keep telling me'* (S7). For students, the link between the

IB and the futures it promises is risky and not guaranteed: *'it's really, really scary and it's all there for the whole two years'* (S9). It was in this discussion around 'doing' the IB as opposed to 'choosing' it, that the IB Diploma's distinctive requirement of a broad spread of subjects featured: *'I think the pressure is you have to do well across the board. ... If you fail one subject you will stuff everything up'* (S3).

The survey listed the variety of 'risks' reported in the pilot study, and asked IB Choosing respondents to rank each one according to what degree it was considered a risk in their individual IB choice (1 being 'not considered a risk', to 7, 'considered a major risk'). The riskiest aspects were reportedly 'managing the anticipated work load' (a mean rank of 4.8), 'the degree of difficulty' (4.3), followed by 'exams as the major form of assessment' (4.1), and 'having to continue in a subject I'm not that good at' (3.8). These responses suggest the IBD is undertaken knowingly as a risky challenge thus there is a degree of speculation in their choice.

For the purposes of this paper, the students' responses demonstrate reflexivity and prudentialism behind their choice and its link to their imagined futures. In short, they also imagine a future in which they could fail the final exams. The weight of the various 'cons' serves to heighten the relative desirability of the 'pros' they are pursuing through this choice.

Conclusion – planning mobile futures through the IB Diploma choice.

The introduction argued that educational sectors are becoming more complex with new players offering new educational possibilities that can unsettle local or national frames. The analysis has highlighted how students account for their choice of the IB Diploma amongst alternatives, and how they link it to spatial autonomy and

mobility in their imagined futures. By their reports, along with geographic mobility, IB choosing students prioritised matters of continuity with the past and the imagined future, educational quality, and a more diffuse goal of ‘keeping doors open’ to maximise options. Their social imaginaries did not stop at national boundaries, but typically projected transnational futures. These students as border artistes intend to make their way in the world beyond and despite national boundaries, with the IB as part of this plan.

It is this capacity to choose, this lifestyle of having options and this potential mobility, which distinguishes the border artiste (Beck 2007) or ‘strategic cosmopolitan’ (Mitchell 2003) rather than any actual mobility. The IB choice was shown to be associated with conscious reflexive design to promote the individual’s transnational project. These students and their families appear savvy operators – monitoring global offerings, weighing up the benefits and risks – while acknowledging that their strategy is not without risk. As a curriculum newly offered in settings that are positioned simultaneously in global and local fields of choice, the IBD is understood to enable local students to imagine and pursue new identities with wider horizons.

The IB brand has historically been associated with transnational mobility and thus benefits from being the pioneer in portable education. While the students might represent the local curriculum as limiting, such a forced binary between local and global may best be considered an historical artefact. There are increasing mechanisms for recognition and translation of credentials between state and national systems given growing mobility. The official translations of IB scores for university entrance purposes in Australian states are themselves evidence of this fusion between local and global fields. Where the Bologna Accord has allowed higher education mobility in

the European Union, similar educational reforms and articulations may well emerge around the secondary education sector as its flow of international students increases. Such developments however may not detract from the IB's established brand association with transnational mobility. With regard to broader curricular politics, these students' rationales might invite local educational systems to revisit their own spatial 'fetishism'. For example, public debates around Australia's national curriculum currently under construction have focussed on how the curriculum might reinvigorate national sentiment. It would seem that at least some of Australia's children are pursuing more mobile futures.

Acknowledgments:

This research is funded by the Australian Research Council.

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