Washing the world in whiteness; international schools' policy

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Washing the world in whiteness: international schools’ policy

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Abstract

In this study of International Baccalaureate international school Directors the international school emerges as a paradoxical space of progressive futures cloaking injustice, whiteness and privilege. Senior leadership upholds an enduring bastion of injustice in the international sphere. This is enacted daily through policy, recruitment, teaching and remuneration which privileges the empowered, exploits the marginalised and thereby delivers a critical education of questionable efficacy.

This original research applies the theory of Bourdieu; social agents (directors) lead a field wherein symbolic violence is normalised in recruitment and operations towards the non-white, non-Anglo Europeans. Schools emerge as idealised islands of whiteness and Anglo-Englishness in response to, and drivers of ‘the international gaze’. By deploying whiteness theory, these directors of diversity champion norms of internationalism, but do not ‘see’ the advantage of white, that defines the field. In turn, students learn to engage in whiteness and understand that the knowing, being and doing of whiteness and Englishness is synonymous with internationalism and power.

International schools are strongly advised to formalise recruitment/remuneration/teaching policy that operationalises the progressive educational values which cloak these intolerable practices. This paper recommends fundamental change in international schools to reverse the ‘unseen’ yet automatic injustices levied at the non-white/non-Anglo European.

Keywords

Washing the world in whiteness: international schools’ policy

Introduction

This research article explores IB international school senior leadership and whiteness, in an educational sector which promises interculturalism and diversity but is defined by monotone white (leadership) staff and white thinking.

This paper is significant because international schools hold great potential as transformative spaces to initiate planetary action for peace, equality, justice and environmental change (Author, 1; 2; IBO, 2019). The approach taken is critical, drawing upon whiteness research, and deploying the social theory of Bourdieu to better understand field/habitus, doxa, symbolic violence and colonisation by asking “How is leadership success achieved” “Who profits and who loses?” and “How can international schools overcome systemic injustice?”

Internationalism, blindness, business and domination

Most schools and schooling systems are conceived to reproduce the power structures and subjectivities required or demonstrated by the political state in which they are located (Bourdieu, 1996). However, International Schools - such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) authorised – are globally diffused, and therefore quietly, yet profoundly different. Nonetheless, these institutions continue to reproduce the dominant ideology of contemporary education in western-style democracies which has come into being over the last 40 years and is popularly known as neoliberalism. With over 5 million students international schools belong to no nation and educate for no particular system of power. Freed from this constraint, they educate on a neoliberal track. In doing so, they offer their own product of cultural domination to serve a very 21st Century hegemony. This globalised neoliberal dominion is as privileged as it is turgid, as powerful as it is opaque; and as this paper will argue,
international schools play an increasing role in a process of globalising, white, cultural replication.

Though exceptions pervade particularly in English speaking contexts such as India, or in schools with lower fee requirements (Blinded), the most prestigious schools in this sector: the global leaders and those who define ‘the field’ (Bourdieu, 1977) – are predominantly staffed with white educators, steeped in internationalised ‘whiteness’.

Whiteness is said to be socially constructed, and able to adapt frequently for different contexts (Marx, 2004). Bartoli et al (2016: 7), found that schools often have ‘addressing racism’ as their focus (in assemblies for example), yet such approaches can and do ‘reinforce the idea that racism is only overt and individual and not also covert and systematic’. IB international schools address global issues through progressive emancipatory values and critical thinking (Autor 2016; 2018; Cambridge, 2002; Doherty, 2009; IBO, 2020; Xoà, 2020), yet also operationalise and model a form of implicit racism which is blind to, and uncritical of, whiteness power:

How often did we as international students feel unrepresented in the course topics that were assigned to us?

And how many of us, upon the death of George Floyd, felt the jolt of realisation that we know nothing about systemic racism, colonialism and its undisputed modern successor?

(Xoà, 2020, p. website)

By turning to the policy of whiteness in international education, in this case, as manifest in international IB schools, this article shows how policy makers there reinforce a ‘covert and systematic’ ontology of whiteness and Anglo ‘Englishness’ through a hegemonic understanding of what it is to be international. This contribution speaks to the field of educational leadership and its literatures through lenses of whiteness and diversity (see Villavicencio, 2016; Wilkinson, 2008; Whitehead, 2007), international schools and
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internationalism (see: Gardner-McTaggart, 2016; 20018: 2019; Bunnell, 2019; Caffyn, 2010; Cambridge, 2002; Doherty, 2009; Keller, 2014; Kenyon, 2018; Pearce, 2013; Walker & Dimmock, 2002 etc.), and post-colonialism/hegemony and knowledge generation (e.g. Gunter 2012; 2013: McLeod, 2012; Waite, 2007; Gardner-McTaggart 2020).

**IB international schools**

International education is booming, going from 2,584 English-medium schools teaching fewer than 1 million students in 2000 to 11,627 today, teaching 5.98 million students and generating USD $51.8 Billion in school fees. This growth is accompanied by a shift in role and function where ‘[most] enrolments (approximately 80%) are now children of local families attending an international school in their native country.’ (ISC, 2020, p. website).

Most international schools offer an internationalised version of (Anglo) national curricula, such as iGCSE/A-levels, SAT/Advanced Placement, and/or internationally conceived and oriented curricula such as the International Primary Curriculum and the International Baccalaureate: the latter has an emphasis on English (IBO, 2015).

This paper is concerned with IB international schools. Of the estimated 11,627 international schools worldwide, IB international schools make up around half. Between 2012 and 2017 the IB experienced a 39% growth (IBO, 2012; IBO, 2020). This progress continues, and the IB made US$ 233 million in 2018 (up by 9.3% from the previous year) with total assets of US$ 288 million (IBO, 2018). In 2012 67% of all IB schools were in the four main developed English speaking (Hegemonic-white) countries termed ‘inner circle’ English countries (Kachru, 1985). In the less ‘Westernised’ countries, where IB schools occur, they invariably operate as private-schools and thereby appeal to a privileged demographic. In developed Anglo Saxon countries, many of the IB schools are state run (in US English ‘Public Schools’) (IBO, 2012) and this successful trend continues (IBO, 2020). For some, these ‘Anglo’ state-run
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Schools using the IB entice middle class families back into state schooling (Resnik, 2012). This underlies the cultural capital this program conveys, and the subsequent distinction (Bourdieu, 1984) parents feel they enjoy by being part of an IB school.

The IB is based upon Western humanist values, reflected in its mission statement: ‘...to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect ...to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right. (IBO, 2020, p. website).

International (IB) schools are joined together only through loose umbrella bodies (such as the IB, the ‘Council of International Schools’ (CIS), European Council of International schools’ ECIS) et cetera. Authorisation as an ‘IB world school’ is highly valued as a seal of quality in a largely unregulated, competitive and sometimes chaotic market. These schools most aptly reflect the Neo Liberal market-place, exploiting the opportunities of globalisation.

Field and Habitus

Bourdieu (1977) posits that humans act in groups which can be termed ‘fields’. The field is defined by the agents in it and therefore, those most successful in the field are those whose ‘habitus’ fits best with it. The head in the school occupies a dominant position of power defining this ‘field of struggles’ where actors seek to maintain or improve their situation (Hatcher, 2010). By looking at six of the most successful international schools in the world (in desirable locations, with good pay and benefits, with ample resources and very high fees), this study has been able to explore what defines the field by better understanding who succeeds in it and why. I suggest that the reason why white people take on positions of power within international schools is twofold. For one it is a simple matter of supply and demand; it reflects the dominance of Anglo-European systems which produce individuals with qualifications and competencies that suit the field. Two, and in correlation, it is because the
field seeks habitus in line with the ‘successes’ within it and thereby continues and intensifies ‘symbolic violence’ (a rejection) of those who do not fit the field (Bourdieu, 1977).

Symbolic Violence (or racism) as recruiting tool

There is little in the way of representation or voice for international schools’ employees, yet Keller (2014) explores the online forum ‘The International Schools Review’ (ISL) to this end. This global network recently highlighted the implicit racism inherent in the recruitment process and questioned the likelihood of any shift in practice because, ‘… recruitment companies benefit directly from the racist hiring practices of these schools. They have no incentive to change, and have monetary incentive to institute racist practices of their own’ (ISL, 2020, p. website). In a field (Bourdieu, 1977) reflective of hegemonic power, the result of such practice is whiteness, blind to its own advantage glossing over issues of diversity by employing a ‘tick box’ culture (Gunter, 2001; Xoà, 2020) in order to achieve instrumental goals. It does this not because international education has its own intrinsic value or that it could help the make the world a better place but because surviving in the market is the defining goal of the school (Gardner-McTaggart, 2016; 2019; 2020). This research exposes the fact that being one of the most successful members of the international schools’ sector (a director of a significant Austrian, German or Swiss school) is a journey that starts in Anglo-English whiteness and wittingly or not, actively operationalises it, overriding or reinterpreting the organisational values of the IB through leadership’s own white, privileged lens.

Context

Cultural hegemony

The distinct and privileged position of whiteness in the world can easily be viewed as being integral to the domination of a particular group, with ongoing, pervasive and neo-colonial
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overtones. For the ‘dominated’, this is experienced in education as an emotionally draining, never-ending struggle (Miranda, 2003; Phillips, 2003). Picower (2009, pp. 202-205) finds three inherent forms of hegemonic understandings amongst white teachers in the USA: 1. *Fear.* 2. *Deficit construction of urban schools, students and families,* and 3. *Whites as victims.* This means that white educators fail to understand their own white status, applying a shared schema of ‘bruised’ (blind) power. Such national experiences of whiteness are an inward manifestation of the hegemonic system-world.

The international context is different. The cultural power of whiteness is less restricted by democratic conceptions of shared citizenship and international schools unabashedly market the advantage of the hegemonic system-world to ‘… the ‘remnant’ structures of power established by colonization and extended by capitalism [which] have given rise to a new transnational capitalist class of ‘international bourgeoisie’ (Matthews & Sidhu, 2005, p. 54). In doing so they generate doxa ‘… normalizing discourses of nationality, race and ethnicity [that] permeate international education to reinforce old ethnic and national affiliations while stimulating new ‘racial’ formations’ (p. 50). Doxa is described as ‘the misrecognition of forms of social arbitrariness which creates the unformulated, non-discursive, yet internalised and practical recognition of that same social arbitrariness.’ (Deer, 2012, p. 114). This manifests as assumed, unspoken, shared knowledge where ‘… what is essential goes without saying because it comes without saying … the tradition is silent, not least about itself as a tradition’ (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 165-7).

International schools and particularly the IB market themselves as being global-minded teaching higher-order critical thinking ‘for a better world’ (Doherty, 2009; IBO, 2006; IBO, 2015). However, the interpretation of global-mindedness and criticality is enacted by mostly white staff and leadership in individual schools. White persons are in a ‘distinct’ position, historically privileged and may be blind to their ‘white advantage’ and not think about ‘their’
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group and race (Frankenberg 1993; McIntosh 2008) in the same way that families of colour teach their children about bias, mistrust and pride in the group (Hughes, et al., 2006). This is typical of a ‘cultural hegemony’ which denotes the domination of a ruling class over a culturally diverse society though manipulation of beliefs, values and perceptions. This manipulation justifies this status quo as natural and inevitable and beneficial for all, despite the fact that it benefits only the ruling class (Adamson, 1980).

International schools provide an environment where whiteness-power (Picower, 2009) is de-urbanised, de-nationalised sophisticated and in demand. This contrasts with the US national situation where whiteness power faces challenges from civil rights movements and citizens. The common denominator in both of these contexts, is how ‘the white’ remains blind to the implicit power and agency of whiteness.

From imperial gaze, to international gaze

The word imperial remains in common use in the modern context and this is misleading in understanding the internationalisation. This is because colonisation is now less about armies and flags, and more about language, knowledge and communication (Habermas, 1981); at times (and decreasingly) this means a national initiative, but more commonly a private one (Ball, 2010; Courtney, 2016; Held & McGrew, 2007; Gunter, 2013, Author). The term imperialism is misleading when describing sophisticated, information-driven and cosmopolitan globalising exploitation. Moreover, Imperial is itself colonising and draws upon doxa that supposes colonisation and subjugation are ‘historical’. It consigns this manipulation to a past of nations and the governments. By doing so, it suppresses the 21st Century reality that colonisation and subjugation are now private initiatives serving corporate interests. This colonisation is increasingly driven by a system-world; which is polycratic,
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anarchic, meta-national and global. I contend here that the term ‘international’, far from evoking a sense of international solidarity and freedom, now acts as a reification of luxury, advantage, and leadership whether in this context or even more broadly. ‘International’ can and does provide powerful, and universal distinction through a word that distances the subject semantically from imperialism, whilst clandestinely reinventing and prolonging its influence. The shift from imperial to international opened up a new demographic; resident in formerly colonised nations to becoming a part of a capitalist initiative which is modern and individual, rather than colonial and national. In short, international status is now part of the ‘Passepartout’ to internationalism, particularly for the overseer class, producing a field (Bourdieu, 1984) within these international schools which appears to cater for a broader hegemonic field of power. It views whiteness, and various Englishnesses to be of instrumental value, or in other words ‘…English medium international schools are elite class reproducing institutions. The role of English is one of the major imperatives of global capitalism…’ (Song, 2013: 136).

It is therefore interesting to find that this cultural Englishness of the dominant equates as cultural capital (as a signifier of distinction and advantage) highly prized for being ‘international’: not necessarily British or US American. This complicity between English and international finds clear articulation in the following extract from an international schools’ student of the Global South:

Our families have skewed the business that way. There is such adulation of the Western world across the Global South; international schools need a conspicuous number of Western teachers to be deemed desirable by the local elite. Parents dream of sending their children to Ivy League schools, to Oxford and Cambridge. They want their kids to internalise whiteness as a standard. The denigration of our own cultures has been going on for so long, and enforces the narrative of Western superiority.
(Xoà 2020; website):
Internationalism through international schools is often an extension of Englishness and whiteness, an Anglo-Internationalism steeped in post-colonialism at once derivative and constructive of what it means to be international. This Englishness grants symbolic capital to those who have it, and enacts *symbolic violence* towards those who do not (Bourdieu, 1984).

In explanation, symbolic violence may be gentler in some ways than physical violence, but no less real as it is a form of forcefulness which is unseen. It maintains social hierarchy (Schubert, 2012, p. 180) when dominant field agents apply social force towards those who do not ‘fit’ within the field.

The international school frames the experience of internationalism in an English way and allows stakeholders access to the value preferences of the dominant white, English hegemony. This exemplifies the ‘imperial gaze’ where ‘… the observed find themselves defined in terms of the privileged observer’s own set of value preferences’ (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2000, p. 187). These preferences contribute towards field-appropriate habitus: ways of talking, thinking, and even being. These are behaviours and practices that reify whiteness and ‘English’ as the symbolic capital required for a better life in the international community, in other words, the field (Bourdieu, 1984) - when deployed instrumentally. In this way, the gaze that defines the object experiences a semantic shift from colonial to international, going from imperial gaze, to international gaze; and a substantive shift from sourced, to source-less domination.  

These schools offer a magic mantle of cultural power. Educators and leadership define the field as white and ‘English’. The student learns/adopts/adapts language, hexis, and habitus through acquisition of cultural capital (language, thinking, knowing, acting) and social capital (friendships, mentorships, partnerships), symbolic capital (international

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1 Emphasis added
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diplomas, cosmopolitanism, Anglicised-ways) in a Bordieuan process of change. It follows that international schools operate a process of social alchemy (Bourdieu, 1984) – turning the ordinary metal of the non-white, non-English (student) to gold. In doing so, they afford instrumental advantage within the structures and systems of domination that make up the ‘system-world’ (Habermas, 1981) of the transnational, neoliberal, 21st Century. Many international students and their parents recognise and demand this advantage and this in turn represents a potent market requirement to the schools. It is this way, because totalitarian capitalism is so powerful and pervasive that it is able to will from its objects a globalising form of ‘false consciousness’ (Marx & Engels, 1968) or blindness. Put simply, the international gaze compels the object to respond and become what it is not.

**Methodology**

This output is based upon naturalistic, inductive research into senior leadership of IB international schools. The original focus was the source and nature of leadership, rather than its technical skills or attributes, I used a critical phenomenology, much as pioneered by Bourdieu in his Béarnaise study (Bourdieu, 1977). The objective here was to be close to the phenomenon, but theoretically and critically reflective. Western Europe was chosen due to my linguistic, professional and societal familiarity with the context of Austria, Germany and Switzerland.

The aims were exploratory in nature. Firstly, to explore leadership in IB Schools and secondly, to investigate leadership approaches through the lens of the IB learner profile. A reanalysis of this data thematising whiteness and Englishness formed the basis of this output.

*Design*
The research was designed to capture real-time experience of leadership activity and practice, (Gunter, 2001, p. 56), but also to place my own understanding of the context as a core facet of getting close to, and understanding this particular phenomenon of leadership (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). To this end, I was embedded in a (separate) IB international school as teaching middle manager for the five years of the study, which enabled me to contribute authentically in this discourse community, providing contextual understanding of work and life as an expatriate in and around an IB international school (Ibid). Analysis was further assisted by the use of relevant social theory (particularly Bourdieu), and also empirical and theoretical work on educational leadership management and administration in exploring the nature and source of influence (Bush, 2011, p. 17).

Sample

The Council of International Schools database helped identify 110 IB international schools that were grouped by city, and equally spread by country. Participants were solicited affirmatively to maximise the diversity of ethnicity and gender. Despite attempts at locating multiplicity, the 13 IB school directors invited, all were white, and three were female all being Anglo - white, with the exception of one white Swiss director – who declined to take part. Anglo here is set to mean those who come from an ‘inner circle’ (Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand South Africa, UK & USA) Anglo culture (Kachru, 1985). The six participants who finally emerged included two female directors, all were Anglo (2US & 4UK). One (white, male, Anglo) participant in England served as the pilot for the study.

Although the study is rooted in Western Europe, this sample offers some generalisability at a global level owing to these participants’ international networks and careers. Participants see themselves as representative of the global leadership of international schools (see figure 1), viewing worldwide postings as part and even ‘perk’ of the job.
Location-wise, two schools were placed in the outskirts of significant Austrian, German and Swiss cities. One Austrian school was in a more urban area. Generally, these schools have generous facilities, and students pay significant fees comparable with prestigious and well-established private schools in the UK or USA.

**The study**

Data was collected via emailed open-ended questionnaire (pre-interview data collection) face-to-face observation, and face-to-face unstructured interview.

This exploratory research built six case studies of individual directors in collective case study (Punch, 1998, p. 152). The first questionnaire instrument sought personal (defined broadly as *societal*) and professional (*operational*) data (Walker & Dimmock, 2002). This was achieved by using the filter ‘Global Citizenship Education’ and a general understanding of the IB’s own operational values (the IB learner profile). Observation served as a source of data (providing insight that was not always forthcoming when the recorder was switched on), but mainly to support the third phase of data collection in unstructured interview. This third phase was recorded and transcribed. Being unstructured, it allowed participants to talk as they saw fit, thereby allowing them to choose what they felt was important in building on the initial data collection. Trustworthiness was achieved by involving participants in review of their transcript data. Further, each participant had a dedicated findings chapter, and they were also involved in reviewing this, and commenting as they saw fit. In this way, the data presented in original findings were truly representative of the participants’ own individual understandings of who they were, and what they did.

**Positions, Statements, Values and Views**
The data show greater loyalty to societal values influencing and determining organisational values (Walker & Dimmock, 2002) and thereby leadership outlook (see figure 2). This means that directors draw significant cultural/symbolic capital from their white Englishness, which contributes to success (but not necessarily effectiveness) in educational leadership (Blinded; Blinded).

INSERT FIGURE 2

Observation data show a diverse and multicultural mix of students in these six schools shown in figure 3 below. These data support the introductory observations from grey literature (ISL, 2020; Xoà, 2020) which identify a disproportionately white staff.

INSERT FIGURE 3

Alfred. With one or two token exceptions, the majority of teachers in his school are white: mostly inner-circle English. In later job interview meetings for vice-principal positions, both candidates are white, inner-circle English and female. Other senior leadership interaction shows all are white.

Alfred talks power; he is globally instrumental in the IB on policy, more locally he has rewritten his school’s handbooks, and indelibly changed school policy. This director also makes it clear that his formative years were characterised by early mornings, long walks to church, then home, then school (rain or shine), and an early appreciation for service. As a young teacher he taught in underprivileged areas of Northern England:

[I] left university and went to work in the prison service.
I did that my first year of teaching. And then I worked in the north of England in mining communities, tough mining communities in the Thatcher years when Thatcher was demolishing society. And that was important for me. It was important to be in places where people were disadvantaged.

And on his job as director and the pressures of globalisation and diversity:

On a very immediate level globalisation means that we have a transient population of students in a school like this with 104 nationalities amongst the student body. Diversity is an absolutely integral part of the work that we do here.

And further, Alfred stresses the diverse nature of the school’s recruitment policy:

That same sense of globalisation puts responsibilities on us to try to make the organisation reflective of the diversity that we have within the student body amongst the employees. So we recruit people, we have an active programme of trying to recruit people who are also diverse in their beliefs and experiences.

Barry. This is a smaller, more compact school: the odd one out in this sample as it is visibly lower status than the others. Unaware that the researcher is fluent in German the porter on the door speaks in animated fashion to his colleague about the poor management and then turns to the researcher and politely directs him (in English) to the office.

The school population appears to have a higher number of local children, mostly white. Teachers too, appear to be nearly all white, the researcher sees no non-white teachers. The Leadership Team meeting with both principals and Barry is a meeting of three white UK/US teacher managers. However, he is the only director who actively discusses whiteness:
You know, whether it's just like the idea that Western society we use the term expat for anyone who's white who travels, but an immigrant for anyone who's of colour. And I don't think if you were in the UK…even think about that for one second. You wouldn't even think about it, and yet you also have to see things where people think it's good to disconnect themselves from other elements of Europe or society.

Such discourse feels ‘right at home’ for the researcher in this international context, yet it is unique in this sample. Barry speaks most honestly about his experience of growing up in rural England and his formative experience of meeting a black person for the first time.

Because there was a scholarship program and I can remember I must have only been eight or nine … and he opened the door, because I rang the bell, because I wanted to see my friends. A black face came out and I can just remember my mouth being completely open. I don’t know what I looked like, but…so, I don't think I would have been in international education or possibly education at all if it hadn't been for my best friend's family. They opened my eyes to different possibilities.

Charles. The director occupies a dedicated building a short walk from the teaching buildings on the pleasant green campus.

Students appear relatively diverse, although teachers are mainly white. Charles and his principals are white, inner-circle English (Kachru, 1985).

Charles relates how his childhood was relatively undistinctive, and typical of the South East English middle class. Charles makes connections to the constructivist IB curriculum by saying that he went to a very progressive junior school: ‘… where to some extent you could decide what you wanted to do.’ Charles believes the mix of a very progressive junior school, and a highly instrumental grammar school, was a good, enjoyable
Charles relates his values’ centrality to his decision making, rather than the IBLP’s organisational values:

Is it the values of the school that drove me to say that? I doubt it. It’s my makeup. It’s our makeup. Where that comes from is helped by the values but it’s not solely due to that fact we have the learner profile.

Dorothy. The senior leadership team are all white. The student body is relatively diverse.

Dorothy relates her background, explaining she is of mixed Central European / North American parentage. She firmly believes that competitive swimming, which was promoted by both parents, helped with discipline. She relates being up very early every morning; with tough swim drills in the pool while most other children at school would still be in bed. She also believes that religion(s) played a very important part in her upbringing, and recounts her parents’ consistently attending church services of many different religions. On international education, Dorothy says:

So I see it as a great opportunity. I mean, international education in total, I mean, for me, it is that being able to get two completely different background people together, working together and understanding each other so that you don’t have what's going on in the world and whether
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it’s ISIS or Israel, you don’t have that. Because if you’d have two leaders that come up next to each other and they were both graduates of international school. I would be…you know, that’s what it should be, so yeah.

This well-intentioned view of international education does not recognise that international schools cater solely for a small, privileged, elite. Nevertheless, Dorothy regards connection and contact as vital in the system to overcome fear and xenophobia:

Something someone once told me is that what you don’t understand, you fear; what you fear, you hate; and what you hate, you kill

Again, these statements reveal unproblematised economic and cultural advantage.

Elvin. Elvin is observed chairing a meeting with middle-school mothers. He speaks charismatically to a large seated crowd. Later, I sit in with the two ‘sub’ directors: both white males.

Elvin relates how an early ambition to be a church pastor stoked his desire to work with people and make a difference. He relates strongly how he is an introverted personality, which is not reflected in data set two. He views his job as people focused: this inner realisation and truth are key to Elvin’s sense of being and agency in discharging his professional responsibilities.

Elvin reports his self-sufficient individualism:

One of my favourite groups was this cross-country group – what a group of nerds, what a group of misfits that really were somewhat isolationist. You know, that’s something I would do. They were lonely people. They really didn’t have large groups or networks of friends. Right?
Concerning character, the ‘Nerd’ appeals to Elvin, through his identifying as a self-sufficient social individual and an introvert. This favourite group may be ‘like-minded’: cross-country running being solitary, punctuated by collegiality. These elements constitute his leadership personality, and derive from his white biography.

**Fiona.** This director’s school has an international mix of children. Teachers appear mainly white. I observe an all-white leadership-team meeting of eight.

Fiona, like Dorothy, stresses the importance of the leadership team and the school community in creating policy. This director points to her own childhood and being ‘Third culture kid’ supported her in leading an international school:

A third culture kid is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside their parents’ culture. (TCkid, 2008, p. 1)

Fiona refers frequently to her international upbringing as formative.

There's a great deal of empathy that I can use in relation to the children that we have in the school. … And actually try to understand the way they express themselves, you know, the philosophic foundations that they use, the values, the beliefs, you know, the non-tacit elements of that cultural background. And that enriches you as an individual as you generate more flexibility to interact with any one culture at any one time. So that’s the third-culture child environment.

Fiona draws significant cultural capital from her background as an expatriate child of an advantaged British businessman in South America. She relates further cultural capital
through her backgrounding in Opus Dei: a conservative faction of the Catholic Church. Her narrative is also critical (regarding transnationality) when she points out an example of classroom practice she encourages: pointing out the difference between a ‘risk taker’ in Manhattan and a ‘risk taker’ in an African village demonstrating comparative cultural awareness.

**Discussion**

Observation data show that teachers and administrative staff in all six schools are predominantly white, and exclusively white; respectively. However, directors narrate diversity and inclusion, which obviates their cultural dominance and contrasts their schools’ racially monotone (white) personnel realities. In turn, the lack of diversity in (leading) staff exposes the field characteristics of these international schools. Whiteness has adapted (Marx, 2004) to this international schools’ context, allowing these policy-makers to be complicit in whiteness which is a social construct they benefit from (Applebaum, 2008). This, the common denominator of their leadership profile, advantages them. Thinking with Bourdieu’s concepts of field (1977) and habitus (1984) (Bourdieu, 1977; 1984) the educator’s success in establishing advantage in the field with the expert players, (moving from head of department, to coordinator, to assistant principal, etc.) depends upon their habitus. Alignment with the Field means success within it, conversely, non-aligned habitus is punished by symbolic violence (Courtney, 2016): seen here in form of systematic racial discrimination as operationalised in international schools. This symbolic violence is perhaps unrecognised by successful field agents - being white, and perhaps blind to their advantage - but it is experienced by recipients as emotionally draining and a continual struggle (Miranda, 2003; Phillips, 2003)
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In interview, Alfred speaks as a powerful individual and deploys potent cultural capital in his narrative of supporting social justice in a Thatcherite Britain, in what comes across as a selfless endeavour, but ultimately one born from an experience of Church, Scouts, and a feeling for duty and service. Alfred’s story is moving yet, in analysis, it emerges that Alfred is foregrounding experiences that elegantly intersect between criticality, social justice and education all the while ignorant (or silently accepting) of ‘the elephant in the room’; *himself*, and his white staff. What makes Alfred special for the school, is uncomfortably, also to a large part what makes him white. As pointed out, whiteness is blind to its own advantage and power (Frankenberg 1993; McIntosh 2008), and his wish to recruit people ‘diverse in their beliefs and experiences’ does nothing to speak to a diversity of culture or race.

Barry speaks more directly on whiteness repeating that he is in a mixed marriage and has mixed children. His narrative shows the affiliative power of student exchanges and intercultural experiences as a child in developing global mindedness. However, his school, like all others, is staffed white. He speaks at length about how his school struggles to keep up financially with others. His talk hits points of criticality and race yet, has this has evidently not resulted in more diverse staff, or even an attempt to unpick white dominance in his school. Here, it could be argued that Barry is able to engage notionally in the discourse, but due to the school’s need for ‘strategic action’ (Habermas, 1981) the discourse privileges the business, effectiveness, efficiency and the bottom line, over collegiality (Gardner-McTaggart, 2020)- contrary to what Barry may like to believe: or have me believe. Interestingly, Barry’s school is less successful than the others. According to field analysis (Bourdieu, 1984), this could mean *he* is less successful, and yet he is the only director in this sample to discuss race and whiteness
throwing up questions as to whether the field punishes criticality and self-reflection pertaining to whiteness.²

Charles, like Alfred, relates a middle-class home-counties (white) upbringing, with good schools, and the chance to study, become a science teacher, and move into international teaching. He highlights meritocracy as being very important; reward following hard work. Firstly, his upbringing is field-aligned, reflecting hegemonic advantage that fills the demand international schools have for teachers and teacher-leaders. Secondly, his understanding of meritocracy evidences:

A. system-level knowledge generation that propagates an ideology of meritocracy advancing an elite agenda (Littler, 2018).

B. white blindness to power and advantage as outlined by Frankenberg (1993) and McIntosh (2008). This makes it very difficult for Barry to teach criticality (or lead such teaching) being unable to impart knowledge on issues of bias, trust and pride as others would (Hughes, et al., 2006). This is because he is white, and like all other directors here, experiences reality as a white person.

Dorothy. This director’s senior leadership team are white. The student body is relatively diverse.

Dorothy presents a cultivated power-narrative which draws upon the most progressive aspects of white US America (intellectual parents, pan-religious, open-minded) with the traditionally valued aspects of the same: competitive sports, large extracurricular commitment as student, successful, religious background and worked in business. Dorothy exemplifies most completely being educated, open-minded, pluralistic, and blind to whiteness. Her outlook is

² Emphasis added
that skin colour doesn’t matter (because she won’t judge you by it) and so racism becomes individual and overt, not systematic and covert (Bartoli, et al., 2016, p. 7). This means:

1. The educational leader does nothing to subvert and challenge implicit racism, because she cannot ‘see’ it.

2. The international school’s market-driven teleology elevates ways of thinking and leading that draw upon system-knowledge through strategic action (Habermas, 1981; Autor), and so issues that appear minor such as whiteness (due to a market focus) and do not impact schools’ success are irrelevant, even detrimental. ³

Elvin, similarly, is US American, influenced by sports and religion, and all the cultural accompaniments to being empowered and privileged in a dominant system-world. It is difficult to pick such biographies apart without questioning: “Well doesn’t everybody do sports at school / go to University / get involved in groups and clubs?” However, as with Bartoli (2016) (the opportunity to undertake) these activities are not identically experienced, and so Elvin’s and Fiona’s and others’ expressions of fulfilment, challenge, growth and success will undoubtably act as symbolic violence to those either unable or unwilling to partake based upon race or heritage. It is unlikely that the non-white candidate at a recruitment fair can draw upon the same Anglo-rich narrative.

Fiona’s narrative reveals significant white cultural capital. She appears clearer about her British heritage: a point of distinction resulting from her expatriate upbringing. However, she talks at length of being a Third Culture Kid (TCK), understanding other’s cultures and being more open minded. Two theoretical flaws in the TCK arise:

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³ Emphasis added
1. TCKs functionalist ontology assumes people are assigned a particular identity, yet to others, international students are notable for their fluidity, diversity, fiscal agency and as is implicit in this article (Xoà, 2020), a lack of critical engagement.

2. Reification: this assumes that just being a TCK brings an automatic understanding of oppression, when it is unlikely that the privileged, self-identifying TCK will have experienced systematic and covert racism (Bartoli, et al., 2016), or a critical appreciation of racism (Xoà, 2020).

Whiteness has adapted to this different context. (Marx, 2004) and participants link their upbringing and societal values directly to their leader identities and practices. The implications of this causal relationship are as follows: white, ‘English’ directors, form policy and decision-making based upon personal values. Secular, international and shared values of the IBLP are a secondary consideration, as the leader ‘knows what is best’ thanks to a pre-formed moral framework. Generally, this viewpoint is steeped in cultural whiteness, and helpfully analogous to the IB itself.

All participants highlight the equitable and open-minded nature of their work. These leaders engage with internationalism, and global-mindedness. However, (excepting Barry) none of the directors engage critically with these topics and none have used their considerable policy remit to initiate substantive change in staffing to reflect their values. Just as with Bartoli (2016), the implicit implementation of white policy amounts to a covert and systematic operationalisation of advantage. These participants create power-narratives that position them as diviners of internationalism, where the dominance of their own whiteness is meaningless, because the conversation ‘does not exist’. When directors talk of diversity, it is with an inter-national focus and does nothing to address individual agency in upholding
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white advantage: i.e. *making the world a better place* (IBO, 2020). In all the narratives exploring these leaders’ character, there is no engagement with ‘the dominated’ (Miranda, 2003; Phillips, 2003) through skin colour. Instead, colour-blind ‘doxic’ conversations pervade; rich in cultures and nationalities yet in a way which accepts and reproduces white privilege (Frankenberg 1993; McIntosh 2008), as eternal, normal, and natural.

Global or Cosmopolitan

Directors’ data show a normative affinity to GCE yet their lacklustre engagement with issues of power and domination suggest that beneath a veneer of equitable discourse is lies cosmopolitanism. Unlike Stoic cosmopolitanism, this can be criticised for banality, concerned with brands, icons, food and travel, yet more relevantly, ‘…for its reliance on masculinist, individualist and elitist dispositions’ (Matthews & Sidhu, 2005, p. 53) such as those associated with whiteness and a cultural hegemony. Directors sit uncritically in their group and race (Frankenberg 1993; McIntosh 2008), not just living but modelling systematic injustice. The opportunity to engage critically with bias and mistrust in whiteness (Hughes, et al., 2006) is not given, supporting international-schools’ research findings of inaction concerning global-mindedness and criticality. This is reported to occur in historically revisionist and political school-driven ‘censorship’, expressed by one teacher as: ‘It’s not enough for it [the school] to pay lip service through using carefully placed “buzz words” and the arbitrary provision of tick boxes that schools use to appear “inclusive.”’ The systemic racism at international schools needs to be stamped down and rooted out’ (Xoà, 2020, p. website).

This research finds that policy makers do not utilize the unique opportunity of running an international school to bring awareness of injustice or whiteness, and its pervasive power - nor do they embed related policy. Whilst there exists a ‘… critical understanding of’
multicultural education…’ there is no ‘… anti-racist education as well as the pedagogy necessary to enact it’ (Kenyon, 2018, p. 29). Rather, it appears that international schools systematise individualised neoliberal freedom and somewhat blatantly promote an internationalising cultural hegemony.

Implications and Recommendations

Policy futures

It is inconceivable that International Schools be a part of whiteness, yet this research analysis shows their teleologic orientation is marketing ‘heavy’ and ethics ‘light’. They are promoting whiteness and Englishness through a market-orientated constitution in a field of cultural dominance and hegemonic colonisation.

Policy implications for international schools are significant, and well overdue and as yet invisible. Despite many functional attempts to classify these schools, this critical analysis finds their futures falling into one of two categories.

A. White International schools - these recruit the ‘best field agents’ (defined by degrees, experience, Englishness and skin colour) continue to operationalise the international gaze by providing islands of whiteness and Englishness generating corresponding habitus, and providing a banal-cosmopolitan education for the overseer class by paying lip-service to criticality and global mindedness.

B. Global schools – these recruit staff politically (much in the way the United Nations does based upon degrees, experience, diversity and global representation) seeking more balance in cultural origin, and connecting critically with issues of domination versus positive futures acting as islands of transformation for staff and students.
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The deepening crises of capitalisms are at hand, as witnessed in race-inequity (e.g. police murder of George Floyd in the year 2020), Brexit, Trumpism, ecological collapse, Corona virus, rising inequality, and global inequity. International schools work with highly influential international stakeholders yet must do better or be understood as School A: out of touch, and left behind. Directors, principals and boards of international schools face growing critical scrutiny (Gardner-McTaggart, 2016; 2018a;b;c; 2019; ISL, 2020; Xoa, 2020) These voices will inevitably mature and demand justice in the form of action, rather than marketised wordplay.

International schools should prioritise becoming School B through concrete policies that foreground racial diversity through recruitment. This must affect leadership but also the teaching of criticality and global-mindedness in the classroom. It is the director who must drive this by first removing white invisibility. This requires a fundamental rethinking of international schools’ organisation and will include the provision of competency building for teachers from less-privileged demographics (as part of the ‘ex-pat package’ which has until now profited already privileged white Anglo-Europeans) drawing upon subjects’ knowledge and heritage, rather than dominating white-Anglo knowledges.

Decolonising the business model; initiating the educational future

Bourdieu (1984) relates how symbolic power upholds dominance in both gender and racism. However, engaging with the emancipatory, if unrelated to strategic direction and success, is likely to be bad for business (Habermas, 1981). This means that the organisation need only incentivise and formalise emancipatory measures as strategic goals and central to policy, but in order to do so, it must subvert the international gaze and alter the field through policy.

The focus of this study on the character of leadership and not the characteristics has shown the value and supremacy of ethnicity and race. As a researcher, I felt the power of these
narratives and the collective story. These compelling tales feed into these policy-makers’ work-life, and leadership practice. Such whiteness and Englishness cannot be learned, it must be lived. In this way, the dominance of this cultural capital and symbolic power supplies the international gaze with vision and enacts symbolic violence against those who cannot partake in its whiteness, and Englishness. It is therefore a simple matter to see how this symbolic capital is reified and sold on the global market. This is the product international schools offer, and the director is the face of the firm. In this way, the international gaze meets symbolic violence, and the market turns whiteness and Englishness into profit.

The above supports the idea of there being a *transnational capitalist system* (Robinson, 2004), yet seen from the social perspective, it is a cultural hegemony that promotes white epistemic and ontological ascendancy. It is a quiet domination of whiteness leading monotone diversity. Just as racism becomes viewed as something individual and overt, not systematic and covert (Bartoli, et al., 2016, p. 7), so too is educational policy in this context viewed as the overt individual vision of the director and leadership, which deflects from the systematic and covert racial injustice which defines the field.

Participants’ remarkable field success as notable directors goes hand in hand with their blindness to whiteness. In turn, Barry’s thoughtful but less successful directorship is perhaps indicative of a field that punishes a self-reflective stance towards white advantage. This manifests much in the way a corporate field would disadvantage a field-agent critical towards ‘the product’. This analysis demonstrates that whiteness is the product. Needless to say, the prominent role these participants play, and the cultural power they access and dispense through being white is for sale. Buyers are the upcoming overseer class, who subject to the international gaze demonstrate that, ‘One can participate in whiteness even if one is not white.’ (Kenyon, 2018, p. 16).
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Wittingly or not, (IB) international schools scaffold the facilitation of whiteness as internationalism, with advantage removed from ideology or critical review.

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