Internationalisation, Global Capital and English Secondary Schools

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Background

- Internationalism increasingly important worldwide
  - Desires of parents
  - Active pursuit of growing market by schools
  - Encouragement by national governments
- Within UK, discussed extensively in relation to HE
  - Less known about schools sector
Methods

- Analysis of websites & prospectuses of 30 ‘elite’ schools
  - Interested to explore extent to which discourses of internationalism evident in ‘public face’
- 3 groups of schools:
  - ‘Influential’ Private
  - ‘High-Performing’ Private
  - ‘High-Performing’ State
- Focus on ‘consciousness of appearance’ (Marginson, 1993)
  - Content analysis – extent to which certain themes mentioned
  - Discourse analysis – construction of themes
International activities

- ‘The international’ rarely celebrated; largely geographically circumscribed ‘public face’
- Four types of ‘hidden internationalism’
  - Overseas HE destinations
  - International pupils
  - International curriculum
  - Sister schools overseas
Overseas HE destinations

- Considerable number progress to overseas universities each year, e.g.
  - Influential Private 3 – 29 in 2011
  - High-Performing Private 4 – 10 in 2012
  - High-performing Private 10 – 10-15 each year

- Dedicated support for admissions

- But largely hidden on websites
  - Information hard to find
  - Oxbridge positioned as most desirable location
In the constantly shifting and unpredictable climate of higher education, [High-Performing Private 4] is rightly proud of its excellent record in guiding its students to successful applications to Oxbridge and the leading Russell and 1994 Groups of leading universities. We aim to ensure that Careers and Higher Education advice is absolutely appropriate for the individual student to help give them the best possible chance of succeeding in their ambitions. (Website)
International pupils

• Significant proportion, e.g.
  ○ 17 per cent at High-Performing Private 10 (boarding)
  ○ 20 per cent at High-Performing Private 7 (day)
• But only mentioned in small number of schools
• Only two had dedicated webpages
• International composition not mentioned, e.g.

While [Influential Private 10] provides a distinctively British education, our programmes include extensive international links with a group of schools around the world through which exchange of educational practice and ideas and cross-cultural encounter can be developed over the long term. (Website)
International curriculum

- Over quarter of schools offered IB
- Not presented as a qualification that would develop ‘global competence’
- But more academically-rigorous alternative to A Levels, e.g. High-Performing Private 4

The IB ensures that pupils further develop their core skills in English, mathematics, languages, and science, whilst allowing them also to pursue options in areas of strong personal interest. Its combination of depth and breadth makes it an ideal preparation both for university and working life. (Website)
Sister schools overseas

• 5 had one or more ‘sister schools’ abroad:
  ○ Influential Private 2: 5 (in China, Singapore and South Korea);
  ○ Influential Private 4: 3 (China, Hong Kong and Thailand);
  ○ Influential Private 5: 1 (Malaysia);
  ○ Influential Private 8: 1 already running, 2nd being established (both in China)
  ○ High-Performing Private 7: 1 in the process of being established (South Korea)

• Given little prominence

• Presented as discrete activity, separate from British school
Theorising hidden internationalism

- Variation in national fields
- The negated (international) other
- Circumscribed nature of cosmopolitanism
Variation in national fields

- Contrast to other parts of the world
- Relative value of the ‘international’ differs markedly between national fields
- Explained by:
  - Reputation of some English private schools
  - Dominance of English language worldwide
  - Assumptions about high intrinsic worth of an English education
- Similar to findings re spatial disparities within HE sector
- Underpinned by persistent neo-colonialism
Negated (international) other

- Where pupils figure prominently, typically as residents of overseas countries, for pupils to visit
- Linked to foregrounding of the ‘English’
  - Greater representation may be thought to deter British families & also those from overseas
- Similar to construction of ‘ideal pupil’ subjectivities, and other ‘hidden’ populations
- Peripheral position of multicultural discourses
  - Within schools & HE
Circumscribed nature of cosmopolitanism

- Overseas trips routinely celebrated
  - Wider discourses of ‘well-roundedness’, ‘concerted cultivation’

- Presented no threat to schools’ dominant ‘English’ identity
  - Mobility for short period of time only
  - Unlikely to affect school practices
  - Any encounters with overseas ‘others’ are fleeting

- Vertovec’s ‘cosmopolitan tourism’, which requires no profound ‘engagement with the Other’
Conclusion

- International activities important, but downplayed in websites
- Emphasis instead on English identity
  - Strongly desired by international pupils
  - Also by British families
- Tends to support Rizvi and Lingard’s contention:
  Cultural meanings are...reduced to the benefits that students are able to accrue within the global marketplace. In the process, it converts students into economic units, with the implication that only those aspects of other cultures that are commercially productive are worthy of attention. (2010: 175-6)
Conclusion

- Brings into sharp relief differences across space in way global agendas played out
- Articulates with broader concerns about nature of internationalism:
  - Matthews and Sidhu (2005: 50): Australian schools with a significant proportion of international students tend to give rise to ‘profoundly conservative ethno-cultural affiliations’
  - Tamatea et al. (2008: 168): even international schools ‘place by far the greatest emphasis on the construction of an individual self, as opposed to a community or global self’