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# 'Curricular Choice' in Ontario Public Secondary Schools: Exploring the Policy and Practice of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Education

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'Curricular Choice' in Ontario Public Secondary Schools: Exploring the Policy and Practice of  
the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Wendy Baker

Graduate Program in Education

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
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## **Abstract**

This study applies the concept of ‘curricular choice’ to the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (IBDP)—a 2-year pre-university program—as it operates as an alternative curriculum in Ontario public secondary schools. The adoption of the IBDP by public schools is considered within a larger context of neoliberal educational reform which sees schools pressed to distinguish themselves from other schools in order to attract academically-able students and maintain enrollment (Tarc & Beatty, 2013). This study draws upon critical policy studies to interrogate how policy and practice affect equitable access to the IBDP in Ontario. A single-case study methodology with multiple units of analysis was deployed. This study confirms the IBDP to operate as a product of distinction in the Ontario education market—predominantly serving middle-class students. Findings of this research suggest a ‘policy vacuum’ regarding the IBDP in Ontario, in that the IBDP operates without any official policy to govern it at the provincial level. This is significant as it leads to an array of local interpretations on program enactment and resourcing, which contributes to a systemic problem of inequitable access. This study calls upon the attention of policy-makers to address this issue at the provincial level.

**Keywords:** International Baccalaureate, international education, globalization, neo-liberalism, critical policy studies, school choice, curricular choice

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Wendell and Barbara. Thank you for the love, support, and encouragement that you have given me throughout my educational journey. At no point was it more meaningful than in the final few months of this thesis. Thank you for always believing in me, even when I was not so sure of myself. Thank you for instilling in me the values of hard-work and perseverance. Thank you for the sacrifices you have made to ensure that I could have a good education. Thank you for loving me enough to let me find my own way, and being patient with my decisions, even when I have not made it easy. I love you.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction and Conceptual Framework

#### 1.1 Introduction

International curricula once used primarily by international schools to serve globally mobile students are now emerging as curricular alternatives in public schools. This reflects the trend to frame local educational policy and reform strategies in global terms as new skills and knowledge are deemed necessary for competition in aggressive global markets (Dehli, 1996). The curriculum offered by the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO), a non-profit educational foundation established in Geneva, Switzerland in 1968, is the most frequently adopted international curriculum (Resnik, 2012). The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP), a 2-year pre-university program administered and examined by the IBO, is a “prototypical global educational product” (Doherty, 2013, p. 379). International Baccalaureate Diploma (IBD) programs are said to be flourishing under neoliberal policies in countries such as the United States, Canada, the UK and Australia, where growth in publicly-funded schools far outpaces respective growth in the private sector (Doherty, 2013; Tarc & Beatty, 2013). The province of Ontario, Canada, is currently experiencing one of the highest regional growth rates of the IBDP (IB, 2010). As of 2012, 86 percent of IBDP programs in Ontario had been implemented in publicly-funded schools (Tarc & Beatty, 2013). This adoption of the IBDP by public schools can be considered in a larger context of neoliberal educational reform which sees schools pressed to distinguish themselves from other schools in order to attract academically-able students and maintain enrollment (Tarc & Beatty, 2013). As such, education has evolved to act as a service commodity within a consumer driven society, whereby students and parents are the service users (Hugman, 2009, p. 1).

This thesis focuses on the prominence of the IBDP in Ontario publicly-funded secondary schools. Approaching this study from a policy perspective, the trends in Ontario educational policy during the past three decades will be outlined in order to illuminate the context within which the IBDP growth has occurred. Provincial and school board policy which relates to the recognition and practice of the IBDP will be analyzed and discussed in order to understand how the program operates within the province. Comparisons to policy and practice in other provinces will be made in order to highlight the varying levels and forms of support for the program across the country. The primary goal of this thesis is to consider whether access to the IBDP is equitable to students across the province. This study also aims to uncover the reasons for the selection of the IBDP as an alternative curriculum by Ontario public secondary schools from the perspective of program administrators. In doing so, this study will reveal how the IBDP is distinguishable from the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), and the impact of the IBDP on the whole school community.

My interest lies less with the particulars of the IB curriculum itself, and more with “what it is imagined to be, how it is represented, and thus how it is produced and consumed in the social climate and politics around school choice” in Ontario (Doherty, 2009, p. 74). Informed by the work of Australian scholar Catherine Doherty (2009), this research will consider the IB curriculum as a “dynamic intervention that reacts with and responds to the ecology of local settings,” rather than a stable entity which produces uniform effects (p. 74). In other words, the IB curriculum will be viewed as a phenomenon whose meaning is constructed by and through the local contexts of its enactment. In order to understand how the IBDP is enacted within a climate of neo-liberal educational reform strategies, this study will carry out qualitative research in the form of a case study of the IBDP in Ontario public schools. This thesis will use the term

‘public’ to refer to government funded schools, and therefore includes both secular and Catholic boards. The term ‘local’ will be considered as an organizational level below the global, national, or provincial level; i.e. school board or school.

This chapter will begin by describing the background of the IBDP in a global context and discussing how I have come to this research. Then I will examine the IBDP at the national and provincial levels. Following this I will frame the research problem and my research questions by contextualizing education in Ontario. Finally, this chapter will describe the conceptual framework that guides my research.

## **1.2 The International Baccalaureate - A Metonym for International Education**

International Baccalaureate (IB) programs “are frequently used as a metonym for international education” (Cambridge, 2012, p. 232), even though other programs also lay claim to an ‘international’ curriculum offering (i.e. International Primary Curriculum (IPC) or International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE)). The original aim of the IB was to provide internationally mobile students with a curriculum and diploma that would be recognized for university entrance around the world. According to Cambridge and Thompson (2004) and Wells (2011), the mission of the IB has since expanded and now seeks to provide a truly ‘international education’ that fosters an understanding and appreciation of other cultures, languages, and points of view. In the four and a half decades since its origins, the IB has seen a steady, and in some contexts, prolific expansion of its three programmes: the Primary Years Programme (PYP), Middle Years Programme (MYP) and Diploma Programme (DP) (Wells, 2011). In 1978, IB programs were present in 47 schools which catered to a minority of children from mobile families (Resnik, 2012). By 2012, IB programs were present in 4,359 schools with 340 new programs being added that year alone and a further 500 schools going into candidate

status (IBO, 2012a). IB growth is projected to reach 10,000 schools by 2020 which would mean educating 2.5 million children worldwide (Bunnell, 2011, p. 162).

Recent growth of the IBDP is relatively comparable in private and public sectors across the globe. However, growth in these two sectors can be characterized geographically. The majority of IBDP growth in the public sector is in countries with an Anglo-Saxon, English language heritage (namely the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand), while private growth is predominantly in Asia and Latin America (Tarc & Beatty, 2013). In fact, Tarc and Beatty (2013) describe the growth in the ‘Anglosphere’ from the late 1990s until the late 2000s to have progressed at a ‘staggering rate’ equivalent to nearly 10 publicly-funded schools for every 1 private school (p. 348). My personal experience working with the IBDP stems from the latter of the two situations listed above – a private IB World School in Asia.

### **1.3 Positioning the Researcher**

I approach this research from my experience working at an IB World School in Dubai, UAE. The school was a private international school that hosted over 80 nationalities, and was truly ‘international’ in character. During my time at the school I had the opportunity to teach IBDP math courses, and oversee these courses for my department as Head of Mathematics. My school was owned by Global Education Management System (GEMS), a for-profit edu-business which uses a three-tier business model to distinguish its schools as either ‘mid-market’ (offering an Indian curriculum), ‘mid-market plus’ (offering national curricula such as English Advanced Levels), or ‘premium’ (offering the IBDP) (Bunnell, 2011). As my school offered the IBDP it was considered a ‘premium’ school and charged some of the highest secondary school tuition fees in the Emirate. My middle management position required me to work closely with Senior

Management and afforded me a great vantage point to witness the complexities of implementation of the program. The prestige of the program was used to draw students to the school, but the rigor of the program left many students struggling to succeed and administrators fearing the financial fall-out of poor results. We had a product to deliver to parents and students, and if we could not provide that product to their satisfaction, families would take their ‘business’ elsewhere. Nevertheless, the values and mission of the IBDP seemed to fulfill the needs of our diverse school population, and successfully sent many of our students off to some of the top universities in the world. When I returned to Canada, I became curious as to the role of IB programs in Canadian schools. I was aware that many provincial governments exported their own curriculum for international school use. What then would the IB curriculum have to offer Canadian students over and above the curriculum which is made publicly-available by provincial governments? Which students would choose the IB and how would they access it? These questions have led me to investigate the role of the IBDP in Canadian schools. The following section will describe the growth of IB programs in Canada and outline my reasons for choosing Ontario public schools as the specific focus of my research.

#### **1.4 Focusing In: The IB in Canada and Ontario**

The first IB Diploma Programme in Canada was authorized in 1974 at Lester B. Pearson Collegiate United World College of the Pacific—a private school in Victoria, British Columbia (IB, 2010). The first public schools to implement the IBDP were Sir Winston Churchill High School in Alberta and Mountain Secondary School in British Columbia in 1979 (IB, 2010). There were 32 IB World Schools in Canada in 1989, and the following decade saw the presence of the IB in Canada increase threefold (IB, 2010). It was during this time period that the first MYP was authorized in a private school in Quebec, and the first PYP was authorized at a private

school in British Columbia (IB, 2010). The presence of IB programs in Canadian schools has almost tripled again since 1999 (IB, 2010).

IB growth in Canada has been predominantly in public sector schools. In fact, 117 (84%) of the 139 schools in Canada which ran the IBDP in 2011 were public schools (Doherty & Shield, 2012; Doherty et al., 2012; Tarc, 2012). Therefore, this curriculum, with an ‘international ethos’, is being implemented in public schools to a greater degree than ever before in the Canadian context. In terms of distribution of the programs across the country, the total number of IB Schools per Canadian province in 2010 was highest in Quebec (124 IB Schools), and second highest in Ontario (67 IB Schools). Nearly two-thirds (64%) of all IB schools in Canada are located within Ontario and Quebec (IB, 2013). Figure 1.1 depicts this concentration of IB programs in central Canada. In terms of the distribution of the three IB programs within the Canadian provinces, less than 10 percent of Quebec IB schools offer the IBDP (favoring instead the MYP and PYP). Contrary to Quebec, the IBDP makes up 75 percent of IB programs in Ontario (50 of the 67 schools) (Tarc & Beatty, 2013). Eighteen schools have adopted the IBDP in Ontario since 2005, representing 35 percent growth (Tarc & Beatty, 2013). Hence, my research will focus on the IBDP in the Ontario public sphere, as it represents the highest rate of growth of any IB program in the country (Tarc & Beatty, 2013, p. 349).

Having chosen to focus this study on the IBDP in Ontario, I then selected my research school from the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) due to its unique policy regarding IB programs. IB programs are one of many alternative programs which the TDSB makes available



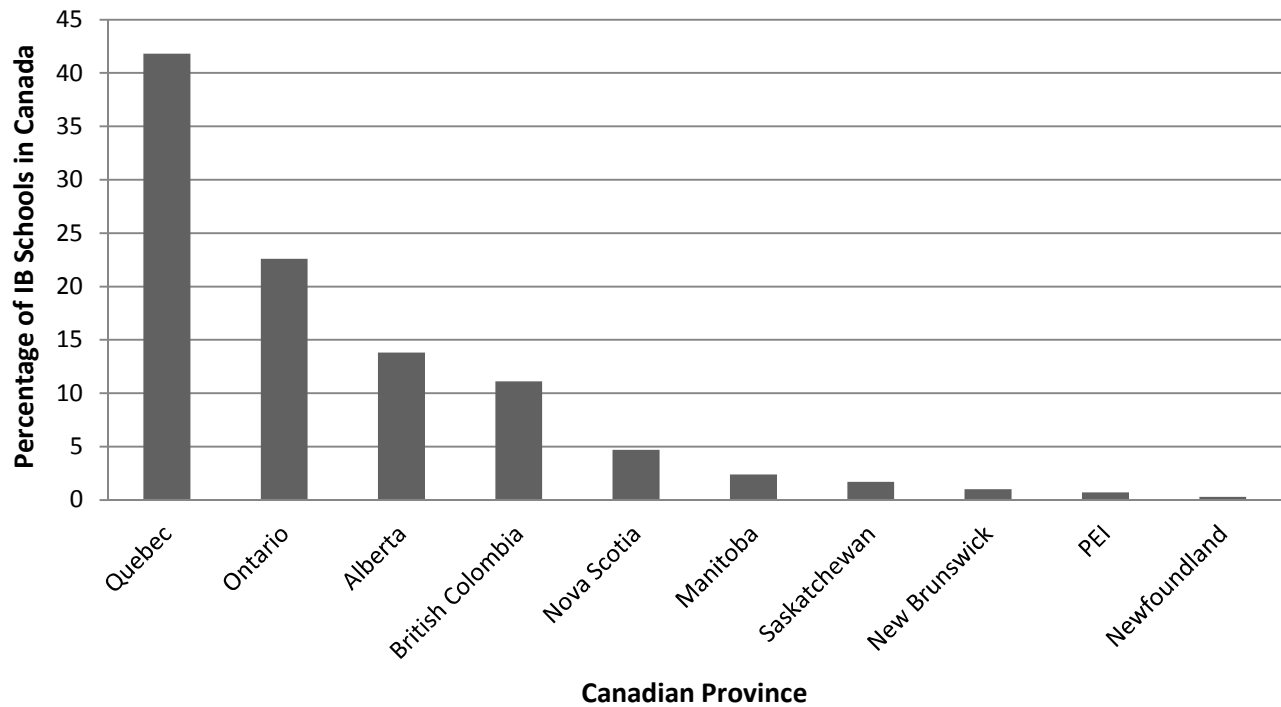


Figure 1.1. Percentage Population of IB Schools in Canada, by Province, in 2010. Adapted from Canada IB Profile, In *IBO Country Profiles*, n.d., Retrieved June 1, 2013, from <http://www.ibo.org/iba/countryprofiles/>. Copyright 2005-2013 by the International Baccalaureate Organization.

to its approximately 250,000 students free of charge (Levin, Glaze, & Fullan, 2008). A research report issued by the Board writes:

The TDSB’s *Vision*, sets the goals and necessary skills and knowledge to prepare students in a rapidly globalized world by providing the finest teaching and learning environments through regular, alternative, or specialized schools and programs in the TDSB. Currently, a diverse collection of alternative schools, specialized schools and programs is available through the TDSB’s *Programs of Choice*. For example, these include French Immersion programs, the International Baccalaureate programs,

alternative schools, arts schools, CyberARTS, and High Performance Athletes Programs. (Sinay, 2010, p. 8)

IB programs incur high costs and are not funded directly by the Ontario Ministry of Education. This leaves funding of the programs in the hands of school boards and individual schools and makes the TDSB's support for IB programs unique in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and in Ontario at large.

The financial support for IB programs relates to the TDSB's belief in a public education. Manon Gardner, the school board's chief academic officer, has been quoted as saying, "We've never charged fees....the trustees felt very strongly that we should not charge anything, even a nominal fee" (as cited in Baluja and Hammer, 2012). In June of 2013, the board of trustees for the TDSB voted against implementing a \$1,500 fee for the IB as a means of creating new revenue (Edmiston, 2013). The grounds for turning down the proposal were based on equity of access to the programs. The trustees criticized the proposal as "an affront to public education" (Edmiston, 2013, para. 5), and trustee Chris Glover asked, "Are we public education or a market commodity only affordable to those with money" (as cited in Edmiston, 2013, para. 5). Fees for IB programs outside of the TDSB can extend up to \$3,000 per student (Baluja and Hammer, 2012). A TDSB school was selected as a local research site for this study in order to understand who chooses the IBDP and benefits from the program when fees are not a barrier to access. I will now proceed to outline the research problem.

## **1.5 Framing the Research Problem**

The following section will frame the research problem by first situating the IBDP growth within the educational climate of Ontario over the last three decades. After contextualising the

IBDP growth, I will then outline the research problem, the research questions, and the purpose of this study.

### *1.5.1 The Evolution of Ontario Education in Neo-liberal times*

Ontario, the most populated province in Canada, has about two million children in its public education system (Levin et al., 2008). Levin et al. (2008) explain that Ontario's enrollment is extremely diverse, with 27 percent of the population born outside of Canada and 20 percent visible minorities. Such diversity brings with it the challenges of large urban areas and remote rural areas, significant urban and rural poverty levels, and high levels of population diversity (Levin, et al., 2008).

Educational reforms introduced in Ontario between 1993 and 2009 reflect the influence of neoliberal values that have characterized school board restructuring across Canada since the 1990s (Satler, 2012). During the 1980s and early 1990s, when the first IB schools were opening their doors in Ontario, concerns about the quality of Ontario education were frequently voiced in the media, with schools blamed for economic decline due to their perceived inability to prepare students for the new knowledge economy (Bedard & Lawton, 2000; Satler, 2012). Research studies at the time suggested "a thorough revamping of the education system to meet the emerging needs of a knowledge-based global economy" (Bedard & Lawton, 2000, p. 249), and "market-style modes of governance affecting education financing, curriculum, and student assessment were urged to promote global economic competitiveness" (Satler, 2012, p. 5). These trends in Ontario education were echoing a national shift toward a market-based neoliberal paradigm, which saw the Mulroney conservative government initiating policies set to promote economic growth and efficiency through competition, deregulation, trade liberalisation,

incentives for private sector growth, and reduction of public expenditures (Satler, 2012; Carpenter, Weber, & Schuguresnky, 2012, p. 147).

In 1995, Mike Harris came to power as premier of Ontario, representing the Ontario Progressive Conservatives. As premier, Harris introduced a series of major changes to the education system (Rezai-Rashti, 2009). The political agenda of the Conservative government, known as the ‘Common Sense Revolution’, included educational reforms such as: a new standardized curriculum; standardized report cards; changing high school from five to four years; reintroducing the tracking of students in Grade 9; higher graduation requirements; the reduction of high school streams from three to two; a literacy test requirement for high school graduation (Winton, 2012); and “the establishment of the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) as a semi-autonomous agency to develop and manage the provincial standardized testing program and report on results” (Satler, 2012, p. 14). All of these reforms had the effect of centralizing educational decision-making and increasing the Ministry of Education’s control over matters previously under the jurisdiction of local boards of education, such as finance and curriculum (Rezai-Rashti, 2009, p. 309).

In 2003, the election of Dalton McGuinty as premier representing the Liberal party signalled a new direction for education governance reform in Ontario. The Liberals campaigned on a willingness to enlist academics and policy intellectuals in defining problems and identifying solutions for education. Efforts were made to reverse some of the more contentious Conservative policy initiatives along with the promise to inject an additional \$1.6 billion into education spending by 2006 (Satler, 2012, p. 14). Regardless of political party, neoliberal tendencies towards accountability, marketization, and competition have endured in Ontario since the 1980s (Satler, 2012). Throughout these decades, policy models have followed international trends and

the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) recommendations, and focused on creating incentive-based markets for individual participation, and public/private partnerships for service delivery (Carpenter et al., 2012).

Having set the context for education in Ontario since the time the IB was initially implemented, I will now identify the specific research problem and research questions which will guide this study.

### *1.5.2 Problem Statement and Research Questions*

The main problem this study seeks to address is whether or not the offering of the IBDP is equitable to all Ontario public school students who wish to take it. ‘Access’ to the program can be thought of in three ways:

**Geographical/Spatial Access:** Are the IBDP schools distributed evenly across the province, thereby giving as many students as possible access to an IBDP school?

**Academic/Program Requirements:** In schools which do offer the program, are the programs openly accessible to all students wishing to take it? Are spaces limited by pre-requisites? If so, how do the pre-requisites determine the ‘type’ of student who can access the program?

**Financial:** For students who can geographically and academically access a program, can they meet the necessary financial obligations or are they in a school board which provides funding?

The issue of equitable access is difficult to evaluate at present, as there is minimal research regarding which individuals are currently accessing the program in the province and why it is being chosen by schools, parents, and students. Tarc and Beatty (2013) point out how “there is scant academic research with the specific focus of the IBDP in Ontario” (p. 349). Therefore,

there is a gap in the literature concerning the IBDP in Ontario in general, and its implementation in public schools, more specifically. Is it implemented due to its elite status, and thereby to draw top students to the schools which offer it (Doherty, 2009)? Is it implemented as a competitive strategy in terms of school enrollment? Is it implemented to prepare students for the global knowledge economy with its focus on international-mindedness and critical thinking? A greater understanding of the reasons for implementation is needed in order to support policy decisions on the subject.

Evaluating equitable access is also complicated by the fact that there appears to be an absence of provincial policy pertaining to the IB in Ontario. This leaves school boards and schools to establish local methods of governance for IB programs. Common practice dictates that public schools often charge fees to students to facilitate the operation of the program. A lack of policy to guide parameters or limits to these fees points to a potential “policy vacuum” (Baluja & Hammer, 2012, para. 1) regarding the IB in Ontario.

In terms of geographical or spatial access, the fact that the implementation of the IBDP has evolved from primarily private schools to public schools could be taken as a signifier of wider access to these programs. However, if this is thought of within the context of Ontario public education reform in the past two decades, and the changes which have seen public schools entering the competitive market, one may question just who is benefiting from these programs. Has access to the program been widened to all Ontario students, or has it merely been opened up to middle-class public school students who can afford the fees of the program? How does access to the program change if schools do not charge for it? Is the implementation of the IBDP curriculum alongside a local curriculum illustrating ‘curricular choice’ in Ontario education in the vein of ‘school choice’? Manon Gardner, the TDSB chief academic officer, credits the

program with boosting enrolment at an inner-city school that was struggling in 2008 with low enrolment and violence (Baluja & Hammer, 2012). Was it the IB curriculum itself that aided this struggling inner-city school, or was it what the IB is imagined to be that caused the change?

In consideration of these problems, the following questions are posed to guide the research:

1. From the perspective of administrators and key stakeholders working with the IB, why is the IBDP chosen as an alternative curriculum by Ontario public schools?
2. To what extent do local policies, and perceptions of IB programs, affect equitable access to IBD programs in Ontario?
3. In what ways has the insertion of the IBDP into public schools impacted the whole school community more broadly?

### *1.5.3 Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this qualitative research study is threefold. Firstly, it seeks to provide empirical evidence which can contribute to the gap in literature on the topic of the IBDP in Ontario. By deepening the understanding of the perceptions and role of the program in Ontario public schools, this research offers a starting point for future scholars working with IB programs in Ontario or other Canadian provinces. Secondly, this research could provide further insights to schools interested in adopting the IBDP in their school community. Finally, this study seeks to contribute to the topic of educational policy in Ontario by raising concerns over whether access to IBD programs is equitable, and drawing awareness to a potential ‘policy vacuum’ which may be perpetuating inequitable access.

## 1.6 Conceptual Framework

Education in Ontario is entrenched with neoliberal policy strategies. Therefore, it is important to consider this as the context within which the IBDP is being implemented in Ontario. This study will be framed within the concepts of neoliberal globalization and marketization of education, as informed by Stephen J. Ball (2012), Fazal Rizvi and Bob Lingard (2010) and Michael Apple (2000). The research will be viewed through the lens of critical educational research. The following sections will elaborate on these concepts.

### *1.8.1 Neoliberalism, Globalization and the Marketization of Education*

In order to understand how the IBDP exists in a local context, we must first attempt to understand what the IB is perceived or ‘imagined’ to be. Attempting to understand this requires a consideration of “the global spread of neo-liberal educational policy and its marketization discourse, middle class strategy, and the reactionary demands placed on school curricula in the face of widespread social change” (Doherty, 2009, p. 74). I will start by clarifying what is meant by ‘neo-liberalism’ and ‘globalization’, and why they are frequently uttered in the same breath. Here I take up Ball’s conception of neo-liberalism due to his focus on the relationship between neo-liberalism and the state, which is required to consider the IBDP in the public sector. Ball (2012) writes:

Neo-liberalism is not simply, as some writers portray it, a process of privatization, individualization and state attrition, although those are important components. Neo-liberalism also works on and in public sector institutions, and on and in the state – indeed the state is important to neo-liberalism as regulator and market-maker. (p. 15)

In terms of defining globalization, this is no small task. It is considered a phenomenon, a concept, and there are multiple theories for approaching it. For the purposes of considering the



IBDP in a globalized world, I will consider the description of globalisation offered by Rizvi and Lingard (2010) who write the following:

It refers not only to shifts in patterns of transnational economic activities, especially with respect to the movement of capital and finance, but also to the ways in which contemporary political and cultural configurations have been reshaped by major advances in information technologies. It is a concept that is used not only to describe a set of empirical changes, but also to prescribe desired interpretations of and responses to these changes. (p.23)

Rizvi and Lingard (2010) go on to suggest that globalisation represents “both an ideological formation and a social imaginary that now shapes the discourses of education policy” (p. 23). It is increasingly difficult to theorise ‘globalisation’ apart from the interrogation of ‘neo-liberalism’ because it has become clear that globalisation is advanced through a particular set of economic and political policies (Carpenter et al., 2012). Neoliberalism is a key paradigm of the social imaginary that Rizvi and Lingard refer to, and it “has received much deserved attention from educators because of its profound impact on the purposes, policies and practices of institutionalised education in all its forms” (Carpenter et al., 2012, p. 145). Lingard (as cited in Ball, 2012) describes neoliberal globalisation as the prominent form of globalisation experienced over the last 30 years: “an ideology which promotes markets over the state and regulation and individual advancement/self-interest over the collective good and common well being” (p. 2).

The resultant impact of neoliberal ideology on education is palpable; a prime example being increased role of parents as consumers who can, if it is within their means, choose the school which their child(ren) attend, or in the case of the insertion of programs like the IBDP, the curriculum which they subscribe to. Thus, education has transformed to include aspects such as

school choice, profit generation, and participation of private education providers (Song, 2013); in other words, education has been marketized. Like many other cities, Toronto, one focal point of this research, “has a local education quasi-market, with a combination of state control and market mechanisms” (Gulson & Webb, 2012, p. 168). Hence, the Toronto research school will be situated within a context of potentially conflicting forces—the state versus the market.

The hegemonic power of the neo-liberal ideology can be seen in Apple’s (cited in Song, 2013) assertion that neoliberals regard “consumer choice [as] the guarantor of democracy” (p. 138). This power is further evident in Apple’s (2000) clarification that markets are made legitimate by a depoliticizing strategy where they are considered natural and neutral in that they are governed by effort and merit, and opposition to these markets therefore implies opposition to effort and merit (p. 87). The role of the state in this transformation has been an interesting one; in many cases the increase of school choice has been to the detriment of state education (i.e. an increase in private schools funneling students away from state schools). However, the state can also be responsible for policies which foster consumer choice in education. Ball (2012) writes of the complexities of the state’s new role in education and explains that, “There is a beginning of the end of state education in its ‘welfare’ form, and the emergence of a set of new, blurred relationships and ‘interests’ which can be considered to represent the ‘neo-liberal imaginary’” (p. 15). Applying this to Ontario and the IB, I suggest that we are now in a new era that sees provincial education for the public good blurring together with market demands and the IBDP has found its place in this new scenario.

A very important consideration that comes out of an understanding of the effects of neo-liberal globalisation on education is whether or not it has contributed to the inequality of social outcomes. Proponents of neoliberal globalisation would argue that, “Integration into the global

economy increases economic activity and raises living standards, enhancing the capacity of national governments to invest more in education and other areas of social policy” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 142). However, Dei (1999), asserts that the government's market-based educational reforms are placing the struggles of marginalized youth low on the political agenda (p. 120). Dei (1999) clarifies that, “Market-driven choice and competition serve the whims of the wealthy and most powerful in society, those who would benefit by having access to Ontario schools determined by income, family status, race, and social power” (p. 121). Similarly, Olssen, Codd, and O’Neill (2004) stress that markets breed inequality along the battle lines of neglected/prosperous, high earners/low earners, wealth/poverty and success/failure (p. 179). Local contexts are very important when considering how choice programs work (i.e. who is able to take advantage of them, and how effective they are) (Dehli, 1998, p. 5). This is very relevant in terms of this research with the IB in Ontario, as the specific school board and school dictate how these programs are accessed, and in turn, who can access them. In the following section I will discuss the lens through which I will view my research.

### *1.8.2 Critical Policy Studies*

In order to situate this work in the field of critical policy studies, it is necessary to take a stance on what ‘policy’ actually is. I agree with the definition of policy as “an authoritative allocation of values” (Prunty, 1985, p. 136; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2012) also offer a useful description of policy as “texts and ‘things’ (legislation and national strategies) but also as discursive processes that are complexly configured, contextually mediated and institutionally rendered” (p. 3). Finally, Codd (2007) aids in the understanding of policy when he describes it as “any course of action (or inaction) relating to the selection of goals, the definition of values or the allocation of resources. Fundamentally, policy is about the exercise of

political power and the language that is used to legitimate that process” (p. 167). Of particular importance is Codd’s inclusion of ‘inaction’, and Ball et al.’s (2012) use of ‘discursive processes.’ I draw attention to these points, as provincial policy in Ontario is lacking in ‘texts’ which refer to IB programs. However, there is meaning to be found in the inaction, and there are still discursive processes at work which result in the current practice of the IBDP in Ontario.

The importance of a consideration of policy stems from how it frames social or educational problems and their solutions, thus generating ‘truths’ that come to be embedded in the common sense processes and practices of schooling (Gulson & Webb, 2012). Ball et al. (2012) explain that policies make particular sets of ideas obvious, or common sense, by organizing “their own specific rationalities” (p. 121). They also specify that “policy enactment involves creative processes of interpretation and recontextualisation,” (p. 3) and that these enactments are influenced by competing sets of values and ethics with the surprising result that “principles of social justice are less than obvious components of the policy process” (p. 10). What are the competing sets of values and ethics schools and school boards must consider when they bring the IBDP into their school? Where do issues of social justice lie? I believe that principles of social justice should be the most fundamental part of the policy process, and thus subscribe to a *critical* approach to educational policy studies. A critical approach to educational policy studies highlights “the importance of power in the construction and justification of knowledge claims” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 47). I view this research through the lens of critical policy studies, as it provides a means for interrogating the relationships between school and society; specifically, how schools perpetuate or reduce inequality; the social construction of knowledge and curricula; and whose interests are served by education and how legitimate these are (Cohen et al., 2012, p. 32).

A final point to make while considering policy surrounding the IB is the nature and role of curriculum. Cohen et al. (2011) state that because all knowledge cannot be included in the curriculum, the curriculum is a selection of knowledge, and therefore deems *what* knowledge is worthwhile. In justifying this selection of knowledge, the ideologies and power of the stakeholders involved in policy-making are revealed (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 36). Thus, just as the curriculum takes on the values of those responsible for designing it, the policy upon which curriculum is chosen takes on the values of the policymakers responsible for choosing it.

The significance of critical policy research is immense, in that it questions rather than accepts given agendas for research (Cohen et al., 2011). As will be discussed in Chapter 3, the paradigm for this research must go beyond technicist research. With this in mind, I feel that the goals I have set out to achieve in this thesis, which seek to inform and transform current policy, call for a critical approach to educational policy research and it is in this vein that I will proceed with my research.

## **1.9 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has outlined the history and context of the IB in Canada, described the educational context in Ontario, and framed the research problem that is addressed in this thesis. This qualitative study is framed by the concepts of neo-liberalism, globalization, and the marketization of education, and will take a critical approach to educational policy studies. The following chapter is focused on the literature which relates to the implementation of IB programs alongside a local curriculum.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A Review of the Literature

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the literature informing this study. There is a small but growing body of literature documenting IB programs from a variety of theoretical orientations, both critical and supportive in nature (Doherty & Shield, 2012). Doherty et al. (2012) offer this description of the current body of literature:

There has been little rigorous empirical research on the IB. Published work tends to be practice- or advocacy-based, anecdotal, small scale survey with convenience samples or essayist critique. What empirical research is available is limited by sampling only IB graduates or students without any comparative foil, and failing to account for the effect of selectivity when reporting its outcomes. (p. 314)

The majority of the empirical research contributing to this study comes from Australia (Bagnall, 1994; Whitehead, 2006; Hugman, 2008; Doherty, 2009; Doherty & Shield, 2012; Doherty et al., 2012; Doherty, 2013) and the United States (Culross & Tarver, 2007; Bunnell, 2009; Mayer, 2010; Hanover Research Council, 2010; Coca et al., 2012), while theoretical research is most predominant in the UK (Cambridge & Thompson, 2004; Tate, 2012). Very few empirical studies have been conducted in Canada, but those that have provide valuable insights from the perspectives of IBDP students (Bagnall, 1994; Taylor & Morpath, 2006; Tarc & Beatty, 2013), and IB coordinators (Bagnall, 1994). This study will contribute to the gap in Canadian based research on the IBDP—who is choosing it and how it is accessed—and specifically to Ontario

based research on the IBDP from the perspectives of key stakeholders and administrators involved with the program.

The literature has been grouped into themes. The chapter starts off by describing the mission and curriculum of the IBDP, and methods for understanding some common tensions inherent in international education programs. Then it hones in on the IBDP as an alternative to national or local curriculum—outlining who is choosing the IB in this context, what makes it a ‘choice’ option, and the rationales for this choice. Next, it will report on the few studies which attempt to address this issue of access to the program. The chapter will conclude by drawing on the literature that describes the obstacles and successes affiliated with implementing the IBDP as an alternative curriculum.

## **2.2 Getting to Know the IBDP: Mission and Curriculum**

Understanding the mission of the IBDP is an essential first step in understanding the role the IBDP plays in Ontario public schools. The IBDP is governed by the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO), and therefore subscribes to the following mission statement of the IBO:

The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect. To this end the IBO works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programs of international education and rigorous assessment. These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right. (IBO, 2013)

Though the IBO mission is universal to all schools who subscribe to its curriculum, how that mission plays out in local settings may not be universal.

To truly understand the IBDP experience, one must also have a sense of the curricular requirements of the program. The IBDP curriculum draws heavily from liberal arts principles, and stresses “student-centred instruction, dialogue, independent learning, an ethic of service and philosophic reflection on the world, aesthetics and knowledge,” while also consisting of substantive content which “provides a more traditional focus on canonical scientific, literary and cultural texts and knowledge” (Doherty et al., 2012, p. 313). The IBDP requires students to complete a total of six subjects (one from each of the humanities, sciences, mathematics, arts, first language, and second language), and complete three ‘core’ components which include an extended essay on a topic of their choice, participation in the ‘Creativity, Action, Service’ (CAS) program, and the ‘Theory of Knowledge’ (TOK) course (IBO, 2013).

The International Baccalaureate (2012) explains that the assessment procedures for the IBDP come in the form of written examinations taken at the end of the program which are marked by external IB examiners. There are also assessment pieces which are conducted throughout the program that are either initially marked by teachers and then moderated by external moderators, or sent directly to external examiners. The IBDP scoring system awards marks for each course on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 7 (highest). There are also up to three additional points available for students’ combined results on TOK and the extended essay. IB diplomas are awarded to students who gain at least 24 points and have met minimum levels of performance across the whole program and have satisfactorily participated in the CAS requirement. The highest total that a Diploma Programme student can be awarded is 45 points. Assessment of IB courses is criterion related, which means that “student performance is measured against pre-



specified assessment criteria based on the aims and objectives of each subject curriculum, rather than the performance of other students taking the same examinations” (International Baccalaureate, 2013, p. 4).

Another important element of the IBDP curriculum, which is intended to be woven throughout the whole program, is the Learner Profile—a 10 point attribute list which suggests IB students should strive to be “inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers balanced and reflexive” (IBO, 2013). Seefried (cited in Bunnell, 2010) characterizes the Learner Profile as creating two sets of skills in IBDP students:

The ‘IB Learner Profile’ combines the attributes students will need to develop *a business school brain*: inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers and communicators with *a social worker heart*: principled, open-minded, caring and balanced, attributes enabled by the capacity to be at the same time reflective and risk ‘takers’. (p. 359)

Thus, the IBDP curriculum has the ambitious goal of melding “liberal values, rights and responsibilities with a commitment to a new internationalism which values cultural exchange, intercultural communication, multi-lingualism, active global citizenship and mutual understanding” (Doherty et al., 2012, p. 313).

An irony that surrounds the IBDP is that the mission of the IB may not be coming to fruition in schools due to the design of the program which satisfies both neoliberal and neoconservative political agendas. The use of ‘agendas’ is not meant to imply a conspiracy theory, but instead to show that the development of the IB, both historically and currently, can be seen to follow two different paths (Bunnell, 2010, p. 358). This can result in the program being adopted by governments, organizations, and schools to fulfill a variety of needs—some of which may match the IB vision and some of which may not.

For Apple (2001), the current style of neoliberalism exists symbiotically, yet contradictorily, with neoconservatism. The neoliberal agenda is satisfied by the IB as it “discursively serves as a symbol and archetype ‘alternative’ for ‘choice’ advocates which resonates with neo-liberal values” (Doherty, 2009, p. 85). Neoconservative advocates, however, may oppose the student-centred pedagogy and philosophic enquiry embodied by the IBDP—an example being the US Conservative action group, Edwatch, going as far as to put the IB on notice as a “dangerous form of internationalism unacceptable to ‘patriotic Americans’” (Doherty et al., p. 316). At the same time, the IB resonates with neoconservative approaches to curriculum due to the highly prescriptive courses of study in traditional disciplines, and high stakes external examinations (Doherty et al., 2012). Doherty (2009) proposes that the current appeal of the IB is based more on its “opportunistic fulfillment” of these political agendas than the actual curriculum (p. 86). Therefore, the IB exists within a reality where the resultant perception and uptake of the program may stem more from forces outside the IB than from the curriculum itself. The following section outlines the literature which attempts to understand the IBDP, and international education more generally, from a theoretical standpoint.

### **2.3 Understanding Tensions within the IBDP and International Education**

The literature makes reference to a variety of conflicting tensions that have troubled international education programs, such as the IBDP, since their inception. These tensions must be reconciled when the IBDP is implemented in local settings, so it is beneficial to turn to theoretical approaches for understanding them. This section will address the tensions surrounding the dual aspirations for the IB, and the tensions relating to global and local interests.

The first tension relates to opposing standpoints on the aspirations for the IB. One of the IB’s early advocates, Alec Peterson, regarded the IB as having been marked with a mixture of

the “idealism of those who see international education the best hope of promoting international understanding...and the pragmatic realism of those who demand more international schools to serve the growing mobile business community” (as cited in Whitehead, 2006, p. 3). UK scholars James Cambridge and Jeff Thompson (2004) propose a means for understanding these aspirations: the conflicting discourses of *internationalism* and *globalization*. They describe *internationalism* as an ideological current of international education which is associated with the moral development of the individual and responsible for world citizenship. *Globalization* is described by Cambridge and Thompson (2004) as the pragmatic current of international education which is concerned with the transferability of educational qualifications between education systems and the spread of global standards through accreditation. These two currents of international education are seldom seen in their pure form, and “the dual aspirations for international understanding and global free trade have formed the ideology of international education since its inception” (Cambridge & Thompson, 2004, p. 163). Cambridge and Thompson (2004) describe how the current practice of international education reconciles the dilemma that ensues from these competing discourses:

Not only is international education influenced by globalisation but it also facilitates the spread of free market values. Indeed, the presence in a country of schools offering international education may introduce competition with the national educational system. Thus, the ideological underpinning of international education as currently practised constitutes the reconciliation of a dilemma between the contrary trends of cooperation through international relations and competition through economic globalization. (pp. 168-169)

Therefore, a compromise has been made in the relationship. Bunnell (2010) suggests that this compromise was also necessary for the IB, in that the only way for the idealist goals to be realized was for a large body of schools to support it and this involved appealing to the commercial and elite (p. 356).

Another conflict that arises with the local adoption of international education programs is the demand for them to educate for both global and national interests. These competing interests have become blurred together in an era of globalization. Rizvi (cited in Doherty, 2009) states that we now live amongst many social imaginaries—not only those that are dictated by the dominant national bodies (p. 75). However, despite economic globalization and the growing limitations of national governments, many decisions still occur at the local or national level (Tate, 2012). Sassen (as cited in Resnik, 2012) writes the following on the effects this situation has on education:

When international organizations and international programs interact with national systems, they produce a frontier zone and a new institutional form, which is neither completely national nor international. Education frontier zones represent distinct forms of the global embedded in the territory of the national. (p. 251)

In the context of education, the curriculum is the medium through which these interactions occur. Doherty (2009) states that all curriculum “constructs, transmits, and legitimates certain versions of the desired group identity, be it local, class, national or cosmopolitan,” and that “such constructions fuel and sustain the shared social imaginary as it evolves over time and generations” (p. 75). Curriculum flows are being increasingly subject to global trends and ideas which inevitably mean that ideologies and value systems are transported into new contexts and reworked (Loh, 2012). Loh (2012) writes:

The curriculum thus becomes contested space for the social imaginary of both nation and world to be negotiated and put into effect. The construction of actual curriculum in such circumstances becomes a negotiation of what counts as knowledge at both national and global levels, and whose knowledge counts. (pp. 222-223)

The IB is unique in that it offers the idea of nested national and global forms of citizenship in its mission of producing internationally-minded students (Doherty, 2009). Contrary to utterings that IB programs compete with national systems of education, the IBO has stressed that IB education is intended to complement national systems, and that collaborating with national systems is the way to fulfill the IB's goals of creating a better world (Halicioglu, 2008). The following section will address the idea of the IBDP as a 'curricular choice' in public schooling.

#### **2.4 Curricular Choice: The IBDP as an option in public schools**

The prevalence of neoliberal discourses in education has resulted in markets of educational distinction (Doherty, 2009) whereby the privileged middle class now practices 'school choice'. Ball, Bowe, and Gewirtz (1996) assert that "choice is thoroughly social" and is a process that is informed by "position within a social network...set against a background of material and social differences" (p. 93). However, Doherty (2009) brings forward the idea that the work of Ball and others (Ball & Vincent, 1998; Vincent & Warren, 1998) focus on school choice where the curriculum comes as part of the package. The situation which is emerging involves not only choosing the school, but choosing the curriculum within the school (Doherty, 2009). The idea of 'curricular choice', therefore, is more specific and relevant to this study than 'school choice', though the school could be chosen based on the curriculum offering.

### 2.4.1 *Who Chooses the IBDP?*

Though there is not extensive literature on ‘who’ is choosing the IBDP in public schools, the existing literature paints a clear picture that it is middle class, socioeconomically advantaged students that most often subscribe to it (Sinay, 2010; Resnik, 2012; Doherty et al., 2012). Resnik (2012) provides a global comparative study which traces the diffusion of the IB in England, France, Israel, Chile and Argentina and concludes that it is middle/high income families who are choosing the IB. While it is important to note that this study included both private and public schools (18 private, 10 public), it is a valuable starting point given its inclusion of five countries on three continents.

There is minimal research to attest to who chooses the IB in Canada, but the few studies available coincide with Resnik’s findings. A report released by the TDSB shows that the ten IB schools (6 DP, 2 MYP, 2 PYP) in the board largely serve students from the most affluent families (i.e. high SES families, two-parent families, and parents with a high level of education) (Sinay, 2010). Considering level of education as an indicator of affluence, Tarc and Beatty (2013) reported that the parents of their Ontario IBDP participants were generally very well educated—with 65 percent of mothers and 80 percent of fathers having at least a Bachelor’s-level degree. In terms of the mobility and background of IB students in the TDSB, the following results were found:

A greater percentage of students enrolled in the IB Diploma Program have immigrant parents compared to TDSB students in general. White students have the highest participation in all three programs compared to students from other racial backgrounds. There are relatively higher percentages of students from East Asian, South Asian and

Southeast Asian backgrounds in the IB Diploma Program compared with their representation in the TDSB in general. (Sinay, 2010, p. 4)

Similar findings in Australia showed that IB students represent more transnational lifestyles as evident in their varied citizenships, multiple languages, and household mobility (Doherty et al., 2012).

Research in the US shows that 90 percent of American IB World schools are government-funded and represent a diverse set of educational institutions (Bunnell, 2009). While diverse in nature, these schools still present a strong image of being “an elite and academically prestigious grouping” (Bunnell, 2009, p. 63). This diversity can be seen in American based-literature which reports a rise in IB programs being implemented in Title I<sup>1</sup> designated schools (Tarc & Beatty, 2013). Mayer (2010) reports that as of 2010 there were 42 Title I schools offering the IB in the US, which serve 74,000 socioeconomically disadvantaged students. At first glance this implies a large number of socioeconomically disadvantaged students now have access to the IB, but the report does not clarify *which* students in the Title I schools are choosing the IB. A study of IB programs in Chicago showed that while students in IB programs were representative of students across the school district, there was a concentration of programs in schools which predominantly served Latino communities (Coca et al., 2012). Again, this could show a spread of IB programs to minority groups in America, but Coca et al. (2012) point out that the programs in these schools were very small in size and therefore it is hard to tell exactly which students in the schools are accessing the programs. Research from the UK sheds a bit more light on this subject. This research highlights two scenarios which typify state IB schools, which make up more than half of all UK IB schools (Resnik, 2009). The first scenario is that the schools are located in privileged areas and enroll mostly middle class children. This fits with the

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<sup>1</sup> Title I schools are so named if a minimum of 40 percent of students are from low-income families.

majority of research in the US and around the globe. The second scenario is that the schools are located in less wealthy areas but run the IB program for only a very small proportion of their students (Resnik, 2009), which is also comparable to the American literature. A participant of the UK study, a principal of a large college, was asked whether it was sensible to provide the IB program to only 30 or 40 students per year, and the principal responded, “It is good for marketing the school” (as cited in Resnik, 2009, p. 237).

#### *2.4.2 What makes the IBDP a choice option?*

The literature provides a variety of reasons for why the IBDP is chosen as an alternative curriculum. These reasons are relative to the perspectives of the stakeholders involved, such as school administrators, teachers, students and parents. As well, the IBDP has different meaning and uses across geographic contexts (Tarc & Beatty, 2013). Therefore, I feel it is important to include the perspectives and contexts of participants, where possible. This section outlines the results of the few empirical studies available to provide evidence for why the IBDP is chosen.

Research from the perspective of students (which most often aligns similarly with the perspective of parents), shows that the most common reason for choosing the IBDP is its ability to equip students with the skills, academics, and credentials necessary for a successful future. This is articulated in a number of different ways and, depending on the context, some results show more emphasis on the academic challenge, and some on the opportunity for university admission and advanced standing. For instance, Bagnall’s (1994) dissertation work in two Ontario private schools in the early 90s found that the major reasons for students completing the diploma were to prepare for university, for a challenge, and because they had no choice. More recent results in Ontario from Tarc and Beatty’s (2013) pilot study in a Catholic high school showed that when asked to recall their motivations for choosing the IBDP, most students said it



was for the academic challenge, the recommendations of family and friends, and for enhancing access to university. Culross and Tarver's (2007) study of a quasi-public US laboratory school, located on a major college campus, showed that students who chose to participate in the IB did so first to gain an advantage in the college admissions process, then to better prepare themselves for college study, to broaden their horizons, to increase their breadth and depth of knowledge, and finally, to improve their writing skills and study habits (p. 57). Though there is a difference in how these motivations are prioritized, there is definitely consistency of results in the North American studies. To offer a comparison to the North American studies, Resnik's (2012) global comparative study suggests that middle/high income families choose the IB as a means of acquiring skills and credentials for success in the global market. However, it should be noted that Resnik's study was conducted from the perspectives of key stakeholders and administrators working with the IBDP, and therefore represents their *perceptions* of why the IBDP is a chosen by students and parents.

Empirical evidence from the perspective of school administrators on why the IBDP is adopted into public schools is minimal. Bagnall's (1994) study of Canadian IB schools addressed this area of research in 1992, but there has been no work to elaborate on these findings in Canada since. This is a gap that this research hopes to fill. Bagnall's (1994) study received questionnaire responses from 39 of 47 Canadian IB Coordinators at the time. Bagnall (1994) asked why schools had initially chosen to take part in the IB, and a wide array of responses were reported:

Eighteen schools wanted to offer a 'substantive honors program to their students', five schools wanted to have an 'international focus within the school' and a further five schools wanted to offer a 'challenge to our choice students', with four schools wanting to 'see how they measured up to international standards'. The remaining responses

concentrated on such aspects as, the ‘desire to prepare students for university’ (three schools), to ‘maintain academic excellence’ and to ‘attract more students’. (pp. 122-123)

Bagnall’s research was conducted at the onset of the implementation of IB programs in Canadian schools. As the implementation of IB programs in Canada has shifted to a larger proportion of public schools since that time, it would be beneficial to compare results of present day studies with Bagnall’s research.

Other reasons for schools choosing the IBDP as an alternative program include: to address achievement gaps (Mayer, 2010); the rigorous accreditation process which assures parents and students of a high quality education; the extensive training for teachers; the readily available resources and materials to pursue advanced learning (Culross & Tarver, 2007); the external assessment procedures (Culross & Tarver, 2007; Resnik, 2012); university recognition of the program; and the IB’s flexibility to adapt to different types of schools and students (Resnik, 2012). The latter point on flexibility refers to the fact that an IB school may also offer other programs, that not all students must take DP courses, and that although schools must offer the full DP curriculum, some students may opt to take a few DP courses and receive an IB Certificate (Resnik, 2012, p. 259). The DP is also offered by many jurisdictions as an option for gifted secondary students (Taylor and Morpath, 2006) even though the official stance from the IBO is that the Diploma Programme is suitable for highly motivated secondary students aged 16 to 19 (IBO, 2013).

Going beyond the school level to the national level, a report conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research recommended the IB as a prototype for a single Australian Certificate of Education (Doherty, 2009). The reasons given in the report for choosing the IB as a

desirable model included its international standing for university entrance, its reputation for academic rigour, and its breadth of studies and its non-academic core components (Doherty, 2009). The committee eventually decided that the IB was not the best model for providing flexible pathways to accommodate all students in the country and was better suited as an alternative curriculum for those students moving on to post-secondary education (Doherty, 2009).

### 2.4.3 *Marketing and Choice Rationales*

The existence and popularity of the IBDP as a choice option for secondary schooling invokes an array of analytical registers such as school reform due to neoliberal globalization, educational markets, symbolic capital (Tarc & Beatty, 2013), social scarcity, and IBO marketing and branding. This section will look at each of these analytical registers as a means to understanding the rationale for how the IBDP has got to be such a ‘choice’ alternative.

*Neoliberal globalization and school reform.* The literature supports the fact that current educational agendas have taken up the IBDP as a strategy to gain advantage in the ever competitive global economy (Tarc & Beatty, 2013). Resnik (2012) asserts that economic globalization is to account for the global spread of IB programs in that it fulfills the neoliberal agenda by accruing “exchange value for the individual in terms of institutional access, mobility and employability” (Doherty et al., 2012, p. 315). Evidence of this can be seen in Whitehead’s (2005) review of IBDP school advertisements where she concluded the focus on academic excellence characterized pragmatic realism (understood by Cambridge and Thompson’s (2004) ‘globalization’ discourse) instead of the IB’s humanitarian and socially just ideals. Resnik’s (2012) conclusions provide a helpful summary of the mechanisms which foster the spread of IB programs globally: the *insertion* of the IB as a ‘golden standard’ in national systems of

education; the IB's *adaptation* to different national contexts; and the *percolation* of IB program aspects into national curricula (Resnik, 2012).

*Educational markets.* Tied to the rationales from neoliberal discourses in education, the growth of the IB can also be contextualized as an aspect of the marketisation of schooling. Culross and Tarver (2007) suggest that programs like the IB are perceived to raise the level of instruction for all students and to provide a foundation for later educational experiences (p. 59). This perception is used to lure students to IB schools, irrespective of any proof that the IB actually fulfills these aims. In fact, the IB has recently attracted the interest of public-sector administrators as a strategy to win back the drifting middle classes (Doherty, 2009, p. 78)—giving them a playing piece in the competitive game of education markets. Caught up in this market dynamic is the desire to sell social advantage which problematically outweighs any desire to sell social justice (Whitehead, 2006).

*Symbolic capital.* Other literature analyses the IBDP as a choice option for schools from the point of view that it grants an amount of cultural or symbolic capital within the school. Research into the growth of the IB in Canada and Australia concluded that “many schools were interested in the ‘symbolic imposition’ it bestowed, and it has become a provider of global cultural capital” (Bagnall, 1994, p. 3). Bagnall (1994) explains that parents and students are also aware of the potential cultural capital the program offers them, and “the advantages offered by this international diploma are likened by Bourdieu to trumps in a card game” (p. 3). Drawing similar conclusions, Loh (2012) writes that opening national schools to international curriculum such as the IB “can be seen as the acquisition of a form of cultural and symbolic capital that eventually contributes to a country’s overall worth in a market-driven economy” (221).

*Social scarcity.* Doherty (2013) claims that in order for the IBDP to preserve its particular brand of distinction based on rigorous academic standards and its assurance of positional advantage, it needs the condition of “social scarcity” (395). Social scarcity is carried out in schools as they attempt to persuade consumers to buy education from them, while at the same time deploying strategies to suggest that limited spaces are available and thus they can afford to be very selective about the kinds of students they are prepared to choose for their school (Whitehead, 2005, p. 6). Therefore, it is produced as both attractive and repellent at the same time: attractive in its ambitious goals and promise of advantage beyond graduation; repellent in the way it discourages certain types of students from choosing it (Doherty, 2009, p. 86). Doherty (2013) hypothesises that the popularity of the IBDP as a solution to ‘falling standards’, or lack of curricular choice, may be to its own detriment, for as its popularity grows it will no longer serve to distinguish the institution or graduate. She suggests that early adopters will reap more benefits than the later comers who feel obliged to ‘jump on the band wagon’ (395).

*IBO strategies for growth.* A final means of analysing how the IBDP has become a choice option looks at the strategies deployed directly by the IBO. For example, Bunnell (2010) considers how the IB has re-shaped its image in the interest of marketing. This is seen in the IB’s launch of a new visual identity in 2007 with a single logo and re-branded ‘IB’ rather than ‘IBO’ identification. It also launched its Learner Profile which forms a generic IB vocabulary of humanistic behaviour, forming its own internal discourse (Bunnell, 2010, p. 355). Bunnell (2009) also explains that the IB is aware of what markets it works best in, hence its success in Canada and the US is not surprising “as these countries have an important advantage for the IB; a devolved public education system. The IB has found that the more heavily centralized the system, such as found in France, the more difficult to penetrate” (Bunnell, 2009, p. 63).

## **2.5 Accessing the IB: Issues for Consideration**

Issues of access are inextricably linked to issues of equity and are therefore important to consider as a matter of social justice. In the context of ‘curricular choice’, the IBDP becomes a way of streaming because not all families have the ability to access the resources necessary to take part in the program (Tarc & Beatty, 2013). The IBO (2013) itself is concerned with matters of access and equity, and has even delegated this matter the status of a ‘strategic priority’. The IBO is now actively promoting the IB in inner-city schools and beginning initiatives in developing countries, other than elite private schools (Tarc, 2009). This section includes literature on issues of access in terms of finances, academics, and geography.

Equity in terms of funding is a very important issue which concerns the IB, and literature often refers to this topic. In the case of publicly funded schools, IB families are either required to pay fees for their children to participate, or the funds must come out of the school’s general education budget which inevitably has bearing on the rest of the student population. In regards to funding, Bagnall (1994) reports that in 1992, 32 of 39 Canadian IB schools were public schools, and these schools tended to make students pay for examination and subject fees while the schools covered the operation fees out of their school budget. Tarc and Beatty (2013) raise the question as to whether or not the IB uses more than its fair share of resources, and state that research of this kind is now being taken up by scholars. Bunnell (2009) addresses this topic in the following passage:

The IB is expensive. Not only does funding it transfer money away from other schools, but it leads to tough decisions over who should host the programs. Parents at a school in Minnesota raised objections to the spending of monies on opening an 11<sup>th</sup> IB school,

whilst cutting the education budget overall. This is bound to lead to resentment by parents, and competition between schools for limited funds. (p. 63)

Therefore, matters of funding and equity are quite complex and it would be beneficial to have more input into this multi-faceted topic.

The geographical spread of IBDP schools and the size of the program in each school also has a direct affect on who can subscribe to the program. The IB is aware of its failings in a geographical sense (Bunnell, 2009), but this is relative to the uptake of its programs across the globe. No research was found which directly addresses how students can access the program based on their relative positioning to an IBDP school. However, some studies do describe the relative positioning of the schools within a city. For example, Mayer's (2010) study of a US high school explains that the IBDP was implemented by a particular school district as part of the district's plan to draw back affluent families who had moved to neighborhoods in the North of the city. Location also relates directly to context. Doherty & Shield (2012) describe one of their public case study schools as being largely in a middle-class area and that the school was located in a competitive market environment as nearby schools prepared to offer the IB as well. This study hopes to make a contribution to the literature in this area by examining the geographical orientation of IBDP schools in the TDSB and Ontario.

The final access issue relates to how the students are accepted into the IBDP. Some schools have open access to the program while some have very stringent entrance policies. Staff of some IB schools express concern over open enrollment policies as they feel some students may struggle to meet the challenges of the highly academic program (Hugman, 2008). Bagnall's (1994) 1992 Canadian study reported that 20 of 47 schools opened the IB to all students and 19 restricted entry to students with the predominant factor affecting entry being grade average.

However, even schools which said the IBDP was open to all students, reported “intensive interviews with parents and students” along with past performance data to assist in the decision (p. 118). Therefore, ‘access’ to the IB can require more than just financial resources; support and time of parents may also be needed to get into these programs which could be very taxing to single-parent families or families from low SES backgrounds.

## **2.6 Stumbling Blocks to operating the IBDP**

No new educational reform strategy is implemented overnight without any difficulty. There is a wide array of literature to attest to the difficulties encountered when implementing and running the IBDP.

One of the most commonly cited issues encountered by IBDP schools when adopting the program relates to costs affiliated with the program. Firstly, there are fees owed directly to the IBO each year the program runs. Valid to 2015, the annual school fee to host the IBDP program is 10,820 USD and the assessment fees incurred by each IBDP student include a 180 USD registration fee and 125 USD per subject fee (IBO, 2014a). Not only is it costly to cover the basic fees of the program, but school heads claim that it is a very costly endeavour to maintain the IB program in accordance with the standards of the IBO (Resnik, 2012). Resnik (2012) explains:

To maintain the IB World School license, schools have to respect highly demanding standards; comfort of their facilities, number of classes, availability of laboratory equipment, minimum number of books in the library, advanced computer services, preservice and inservice teacher training (often carried out abroad), and acquisition of costly programs and IB texts...public schools find it difficult to meet the IB demands. (p. 261)



There are two common approaches to meeting the financial demands associated with running the IBDP. In the cases of private schools, and some public schools, fees are charged to students in order to run the program. An IB case study of Turner Fenton Secondary in the Greater Toronto Area reported that the school developed a fee-based financial plan that covered general IB expenses as well as exam fees, teacher training, and bursaries or scholarships available to students based on financial need (International Baccalaureate, 2007). The other method of meeting the financial demands requires schools to bear the costs of IBO membership fees, student fees, and examination fees (Hugman, 2008). This method comes at the expense of the regular curriculum offered in the school or other alternative programs.

Literature shows that the role of the IB coordinator and how it is approached and viewed is vital to running a successful IB program (Williams, 2013). The IBO recognizes program coordinators as the primary program administrators (Mayer, 2010). A problem can develop when school administrators do not value the IB coordinator and ensure they are allocated sufficient time to develop the program. Mayer's (2010) study of a US high school reported that the principal provided only an advisory role in the programs' daily operations and gave full reign to the IB Coordinators to run the program as they saw fit. The coordinators reported that maintaining good relationships with principals was important for support on matters such as teaching assignment and the discretionary budget. The coordinators also "relied on goodwill" of the vice principal who was in charge of timetabling for the school, as his cooperation was necessary to balance IB teaching assignments and IB student scheduling with the rest of the school (Mayer, 2010, p. 97). Even with administrator support, allocating time off for coordinators can be difficult depending on the program's funding model and available resources. Doherty and Shield (2012) discussed the role of the IB coordinators in each of their three case

study schools and showed that support given was very specific to the individual school. For example, the coordinator of one public school, with a well-established program, carried a sizeable teaching load and did not receive the mainstream office support that the local curriculum would receive. In another public school with a relatively new IBDP program, the coordinator's role included everything from leadership to student counselling but with regular administrative assistance. The final case study school was a high-fee independent school where the IB coordinator's role was intense and open-ended but only required two and a half lessons per week (Doherty & Shield, 2012).

Another theme that is starting to crop up in the literature involves the logistical demands of implementing the IBDP alongside a local curriculum. Doherty and Shield (2012) describe these issues from the perspective of Australian public school teachers:

The case studies displayed a variety of pragmatic solutions to enacting tandem curricular offerings. Each school had embraced and embedded the IBD as an alternative in their school culture, but each site's *modus operandi* had produced rubbing points as the ambitious expectations of the IBD design were shoehorned into schedules and workload formulae designed for another curriculum. The novel practices of piggybacking one curriculum on another, bifurcating lesson plans, stealing time and outsourcing subjects were described with accounts of their professional strains. The survey suggested that divergent attitudes towards the alternative curriculum can form between teachers differently positioned in the market. (Doherty & Shield, 2012, p. 438)

Other studies show that timetabling and rooming were key organisational issues, and these often revolved around IBDP enrollments and the viability of running all of the subjects on offer (Hugman, 2008). Enrollment issues, which limit course selections, can have the knock-on effect

of IB students not having access to the introductory university courses that mainstream students have (Tarc and Beatty, 2013).

Enrollment issues also have a direct impact on the teaching staff, as subject cuts and program changes can leave staff who had committed considerable time and effort towards preparing for the anticipated courses (Hugman, 2008) feeling disappointed and frustrated. Other staffing concerns stem from whom to choose to teach the IBDP. Should an early career teacher be chosen (which may complicate the first demanding years of teaching), or should it be a more professionally confident teacher (who may find the challenge energising and rewarding) (Doherty & Shield, 2012)? Doherty & Shield (2012) argue that “employing only the professionally confident teacher on the branded curriculum would be short-sighted because it would exacerbate the inequitable relational impact on the local curriculum’s programs” (p. 439).

Literature which concerns the reporting of grades when enacting an alternative curriculum is scarce, but one Swedish study touches on this point and emphasises its importance. Drawing from the minutes of a Swedish IB Diploma coordinator meeting, Williams (2013) reports that the conversion of Swedish grades into IB grades, or vice versa, is a major issue for schools in Sweden.

It is plausible to suggest that there are inconsistencies in relation to grade conversions (IB to Swedish) resulting in confusion, frustration and some resentment towards official bodies such as the IB and in particular the Swedish National Agency...it is important to note that the conversion issue of such grades between systems is not just a local one.

(Williams, 2013, p. 16)

The only reference to this topic which could be found in Canadian literature was in Tarc and Beatty’s (2013) study where students were asked to list the three worst features of the program.

The third most common response from students was ‘translated marks’, which in this context refers to “the students’ perceptions that their IB scores may not be fairly translated or well understood by university admissions offices” (Tarc & Beatty, 2013, p. 358).

Schools also face difficulties trying to meet local requirements and the requirements of the IB simultaneously. In order for IB students to meet local requirements, some schools have had to alter their scheduling. For example, Turner Fenton Secondary in the GTA added humanities and American history courses in grade 10, sacrificing one of their free electives (International Baccalaureate, 2007). In terms of meeting the needs of the international program, some staff find it difficult to incorporate the aim of international mindedness into their classrooms. IB Chemistry and Mathematics teachers reported that they felt it was the role of other subjects or parts of the IB to foster the aim of international mindedness, highlighting the fact that this is something compartmentalized by subjects despite the IBO’s conception of having it integrated across the curriculum (Tarc & Beatty, 2013). Another challenge reported in the literature raises concerns over how the IB Learner Profile is to be implemented throughout the IBDP curriculum. Wells (2011) writes that there are few texts that address the ‘theoretical underpinning’ of the Learner Profile attributes, just as advice to IB educators is lacking in detail on how to deliver the curriculum to promote the Learner Profile. Wells (2011) states, however, that the IB is making attempts to rectify these two deficiencies.

Another issue which schools should consider when deciding to implement the IBDP is how students in the regular school body and the IBDP cohort will interact. As the IBDP is typically brought into the school for a subset of students, it has the potential to contribute to a dynamic of inclusion versus exclusion (Doherty & Shield, 2012). Culross and Tarver (2007) go

as far as to suggest that one of the biggest areas of concern regarding the IBDP as an alternative curriculum is this interaction between IB and non-IB students.

## **2.7 Success Stories of the IBDP Experience**

Despite all the obstacles and difficulties associated with the IBDP listed above, it is not without its successes or it would not be implemented to the extent it is. This section outlines the success stories associated with the IBDP as they relate to the whole school, faculty and students.

Literature corroborates the story that the IBDP has benefits for the whole school community. In one way, this can be connected to the image and expectations the IB brings. Turner Fenton Secondary attributes the philosophy of the IBDP to attitudinal changes which resulted in a more successful, multi-ethnic, multicultural school (International Baccalaureate, 2007). Fewer students left the school before graduation and the CAS component of the IBDP helped to cultivate a change in attitude and academic work ethic that affected IB and non-IB students alike (International Baccalaureate, 2007).

In another way, this whole-school success can be attributed to specific program components of the IBDP. Resnik (2012) suggests that this can be understood as the IB's 'percolation power' in that it has the power to influence curricula and programs that are not related to the IB (p. 263). Examples of this percolation can be seen in the creation of critical thinking classes and Extended Projects in some England state-schools due to the success of the TOK course and the Extended Essay in the DP. Another example exists in how the TOK and French language courses in an Ontario Catholic school became the most productive mechanisms for encouraging students to learn more about the world and the perspective of others (Tarc & Beatty, 2013). In fact, the French program had flourished since the implementation of the IBDP,

which offers a substantive example of the positive effect the IBDP can have on the whole school (Tarc & Beatty, 2013).

Empirical studies involving IBDP teachers consistently report that teachers view the IBDP as requiring substantial preparation (Culross & Tarver, 2010) and professional strains (Doherty & Shield, 2012) beyond which is required of the regular curriculum. However, despite the increased workload, IBDP teachers reported greater satisfaction from teaching the IBDP due to agreeable classrooms (Doherty & Shield, 2010), the focus on global issues, requirement of higher level thinking skills, applied learning, development of links between concepts, and covering a broader spectrum of topics (Culross & Tarver, 2010, p. 234). Teachers also reported that their experience teaching the IB curriculum had challenged them to become better teachers (Culross & Tarver, 2010) which led to an increased interest in obtaining an advanced degree in their subject area (Mayer, 2010).

There is a wide array of successful outcomes experienced by students in the IBDP. One report from a Superintendent even suggests that if some students don't pass the IB exams, the experience in and of itself is beneficial and rewarding (Mayer, 2010, p. 99). Students themselves rated the program highly and as having contributed to their creative and critical thinking skills developed through a greater breadth and depth of topics in the curriculum (Taylor and Morpath, 2006; Culross & Tarver, 2010), and improved oral and written communication skills (Culross & Tarver, 2010).

In terms of preparedness for university, 87.5 percent of IBDP students in two B.C. public schools felt they were better prepared than those not in the IB (Taylor & Morpath, 2006), and students in an Ontario Catholic school reported positively on the relationship between the IBDP and future academic success in university (Tarc & Beatty, 2013). IBDP graduates also reflected

on their IBDP experience as having increased their international cultural awareness (Culross & Tarver, 2010). Students also reported feeling that the additional university credits given to IBDP students improves their chances of being accepted to a prestigious university and also ensures that they have the skills they need to do well once they are there (Mayer, 2010). An interesting policy consideration which comes out of the research is that British Columbia students graduating in 2000 were granted more university credits than those graduating in 1996, reflecting the changing attitudes of Canadian universities toward the perception of the IB curriculum (Taylor and Morpath, 2006).

In terms of measurable outcomes for students while still in high school, IBDP students from the TDSB had a higher success rate than students in all TDSB schools on all of the secondary success indicators (Sinay, 2010). These indicators included the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), EQAO Grade 9 Mathematics, Grade 9 credit accumulation, Grade 10 credit accumulation, and the proportion of graduating 17 year-old students (95 percent for IB students as compared to 61 percent for all TDSB students) (Sinay, 2010, p. 65).

## **2.8 Chapter Summary**

This literature review has illustrated that the small body of literature which exists to contribute to the topic of the IBDP as an alternative curriculum represents both critical and supportive viewpoints. Though there are few large scale studies to contribute to this body of work, there have been some very revealing qualitative studies conducted that aid our understanding of the who, what, and why of the IBDP as an example of ‘curricular choice’ in public education. Though most studies have been conducted in Australia and the United States, the studies by Bagnall (1994), Taylor and Morpath (2006), and Tarc and Beatty (2013) have helped to illuminate the Canadian context. The gap in the literature was shown specifically to be

research from the perspective of IBDP administrators in Canada, and research which addresses access to the IBDP.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological considerations for this research. Punch (2009) defines methodology as “what lies behind the approaches and methods of inquiry that might be used in a piece of research” (p. 15). These methods of inquiry are based on three assumptions: assumptions about the nature of the reality being studied (ontology), about what constitutes knowledge of that reality (epistemology), and about what therefore are appropriate ways (or methods) of building knowledge of that reality (methodology) (Punch, 2009, p. 15). These assumptions make up what is referred to as the *research paradigm*, or way of looking at the world. Cohen et al. (2011) assert that research planning depends on research design which is, in turn, dependent on the following: the research paradigms in which one is working; the philosophies, ontologies and epistemologies which underpin those paradigms; the kinds of questions being asked; and the purpose of the research (p. 116). Below I will situate my research within the constructivist and transformative research paradigms, describe the ontologies and epistemologies which underpin these paradigms, and relate these to my ‘how’ and ‘why’ research questions and the purpose of my research. Then, I will outline my research strategy and methodological plan by first describing the data which is necessary to address my questions, and then stating how I will collect and analyze this data.

#### 3.2 Research Design

Punch (2009) writes, “At the centre of the design of a study is its logic or rationale—the reasoning, or the set of ideas by which the study intends to proceed in order to answer its

research questions” (p. 113). As stated above, the research paradigm is a pivotal part of the research design. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describe a paradigm as follows:

...a set of basic beliefs (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimates or first principles. It represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of ‘the world,’ the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts. (p. 107)

Punch (2009) lists interpretivism and constructivism as two paradigms that are *likely* to be associated with qualitative methods. I realize that I subscribe more to the constructivist paradigm, as I agree with its ontological and epistemological underpinnings. Patton (2002) states that constructivism “begins with the premise that the human world is different from the natural, physical world and therefore must be studied differently” (p. 96). Guba and Lincoln (as cited in Punch, 2009) describe the nature of reality associated with constructivism to be local and specific, socially and experientially based, and dependent upon the individuals or groups holding them. In terms of ontology, the nature of my reality as it relates to my role as a researcher stems from my experiences as a teacher and middle manager of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) in an international school in Dubai. This experience has allowed me to evaluate international education and the IB, and conclude that as a curriculum, the IBDP has the potential to fulfill the mission statement of the IBO, but the values of the school authority have the power to steer the curriculum in many different directions. Epistemologically, I believe that the knowledge of my reality in terms of the IBDP has been determined by my two official IBDP training sessions (IB Higher and Standard Level Mathematics), my experiences working closely with Senior Management, and the process of leading the Mathematics department through two whole school inspections where the outcomes of IBDP students, pedagogy of

teachers, and leadership of the management team were judged against criteria set by the local government.

As shown above, the constructivist paradigm fits with my research questions in that it considers knowledge to be socially and experientially based; however, there is an aspect of my research which it does not address. As discussed in Chapter 1, my research into the IBDP as implemented in Ontario schools is based on critical educational research, which seeks to “uncover the *interests* at work in particular situations and to interrogate the legitimacy of those interests, identifying the extent to which they are legitimate in their service of equality and democracy” (Punch, 2009, p. 31). In other words, while constructivist research is primarily interested in the voluntary actions of individuals, critical qualitative research is concerned with the constraints that limit such actions (Clark, 2014). In terms of my research questions, I wish to uncover the interests served by current policy regarding IB programs, and examine whether or not there are constraints that result in inequitable access to these programs. A key component to this is the power that comes from the policy-making authority, whether it be the province, school board, or school, and whose values are represented in said policies. As such, my research intentions reflect a transformative paradigm which has an emancipatory interest at heart. The transformative paradigm draws on the constructivist—as well as interpretive—paradigms, but goes beyond them as it concerns an interrogation of power. Mertens (2007) describes the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the transformative paradigm:

The ontological assumption of the transformative paradigm holds that reality is socially constructed, but it does so with a conscious awareness that certain individuals occupy a position of greater power and that individuals with other characteristics may be associated with a higher likelihood of exclusion from decisions about the definition

of the research focus, questions, and other methodological aspects of the inquiry (p. 216).

Mertens (2007) acknowledges the ontological assumptions and the questions which are posed by this paradigm. She asks, “What are the social justice implications of accepting reality that has not been subjected to a critical analysis on the basis of power differentials?” (p. 216) I subscribe to this reality in regards to my work with the IBDP, as I feel that there is a certain status quo in terms of policy in Ontario at present, even though there has yet to be any critical research with policy as a focal point. Further to this, Mertens (2007) writes the following in regards to epistemology:

To know realities, it is necessary to have an interactive link between the researcher and the participants in a study. Knowledge is socially and historically located within a complex cultural context. Respect for culture and awareness of power relations is critical (p. 216).

I feel that my personal experience working as a middle manager with the IBDP, and my interactions with senior management of an IBDP school, will be beneficial to understanding my participants’ realities. However, I must also appreciate that the knowledge of my participants will be located within their own unique context. Acknowledging the ‘complex cultural context’ also serves as a reminder that power relations are constructed through many different mechanisms such as age, salary, experience, or title, and that this is itself culturally relative.

Based on the discussion above, we can see that the three sets of identified assumptions have direct implications for the methodological concerns of researchers, “since the contrasting ontologies, epistemologies and models of human beings will in turn demand different research methods” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 6). To this end, Mertens (2007) writes:

Methodological inferences based on the underlying assumptions of the transformative paradigm reveal the potential strength of combining qualitative and quantitative methods. A qualitative dimension is needed to gather community perspectives at each stage of the research process, while a quantitative dimension provides the opportunity to demonstrate outcomes that have credibility for community members and scholars. In considering this, and the link between constructivist paradigms and qualitative research, I have chosen to employ a qualitative research design. Specifically, this research takes the form of a case study. The following section will outline the justification for choosing the case study as methodology for this qualitative study.

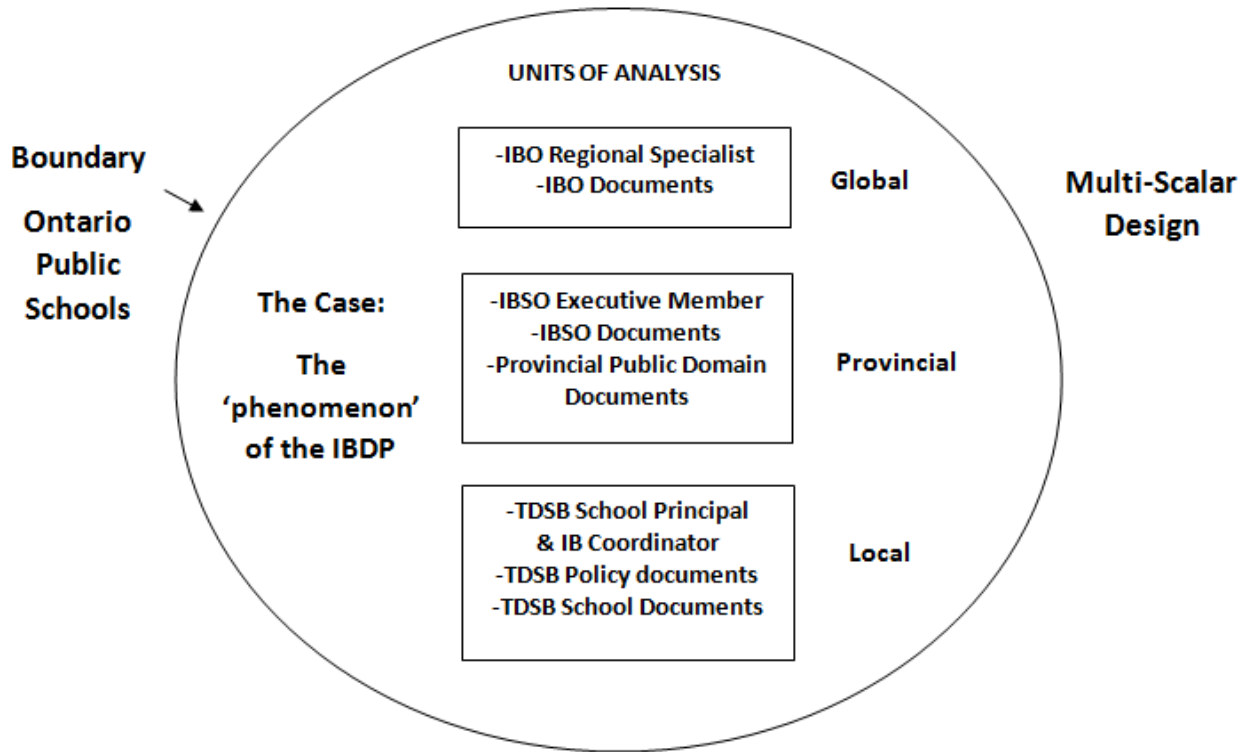
### **3.2 Justification of Methodology**

I have chosen to conduct a qualitative case study based on the approaches to case study methodology articulated by Creswell (2003), Yin (2004), and Stake (as cited in Punch, 2009). Firstly, I draw upon Creswell's (2003) description of a case study as in-depth exploration of the case, where the case is bounded by time and activity, and where researchers collect detailed information using a variety of methods (p. 17). In order to ascertain *why* the IBDP is being chosen as an alternative curriculum by Ontario secondary schools and families, and *how* this curricular choice is experienced from the perspective of administrators, an in-depth exploration of the case is required. Somewhat contrary to Creswell's definition, Yin (cited in Cohen et al., 2011) suggests that the boundary need not be so well defined—that it may in fact be blurred—“as a case study is a study of a case in *context* and it is important to set the case within its context” (emphasis my own; p. 288). Yin's definition is relevant to this research, as the boundary of the case is not as well-defined as just one institution or individual. However, the *context* can

be set by focusing on the IBDP as it exists in the Canadian province of Ontario, and in schools which are government funded.

In order to describe the type of case study reported in this thesis, an understanding of what is meant by a 'case' is necessary. Yin (1994) describes a *case* as something which empirically represents the interesting topic of the study. In this study, the case is the phenomenon of the IBDP which is bounded by Ontario public schools. Further to the justification of case study as methodology, a justification of the *type* of case study is required. Yin (1994) further distinguishes between a single case and multiple case design, and states that single cases are often chosen to represent rare or unique events, whereas multiple cases are used when the desire is to replicate or contrast results. Therefore, this research design will be characterized as a single case study, as the case is a single phenomenon—the IBDP.

Yin (1994) highlights the importance of selecting cases and units of analysis carefully when using a single case design. A unit of analysis can be defined as the actual source of information—be it the individual, organizational document, or artefact (Yin, 1994). When considering the unit of analysis, it must also be decided if the case study will employ a holistic or embedded design. The former includes a single unit of analysis in order to study the global nature of the phenomenon, while the latter includes multiple units of analysis, which may exist on different levels, and seeks to provide consistent patterns of evidence across units, but within the case (Yin, 1994). Likewise, Stake (2000) suggests that even though a case is singular, it can have various layers or sub-sections which add to its complexity. This study has multiple units of analysis and is therefore an embedded design. Figure 3.1 illustrates the complexity of the case design with units of analysis on three levels. This multi-scalar design was chosen to take into account the global, provincial, and local levels involved with the IBDP in Ontario. This study



*Figure 3.1.* An Illustration of the Case and Units of Analysis. The boundary of the case is Ontario public schools and the units of analysis are multi-scalar.

will consider the ways in which the different levels interact to either encourage or hinder the propagation of the IBDP (Resnik, 2012) in Ontario. Each level consists of one or more key informant(s) on the IBDP in Ontario. Each level also consists of documents subjected to analysis such as IBO public domain documents, provincial policy documents, local policy published by the TDSB, and local (school-based) documents. Hence, this research design can then be described as an embedded, single case study.

The final description of the case study which I will draw upon in my approach to this research comes from Stake's (cited in Punch, 2009) assertion that different types of cases must also imply different types of case studies. He distinguishes the three main types of case studies as

intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. The current case study can be described as instrumental, as an instrumental case study is one in which “a particular case is examined to give insight into an issue” (Punch, 2009, p. 119). In this instance, the case is being examined to give insight into how the IBDP has become a popular ‘curricular choice’ within Ontario public education. Punch (2009) notes that an instrumental case study is “generally a single case study, and can sometimes be thought of as a ‘negative case’, in that it is markedly different from the general pattern of other cases, perhaps even completely opposite to them, creating the need to understand why this case is so different” (p. 121). This case can be thought of as a negative case in that its boundary—the province of Ontario—does not currently possess any policies enabling IBDP governance at the provincial level, thus making it unique among Canadian provinces. Also, the local unit of analysis, the TDSB, has been chosen because it is markedly different from all other Ontario school boards in that it offers students the opportunity to participate in the IBDP without financial barriers. To illustrate this, in contrast to the TDSB policy, schools in the York Regional District School Board (YRDSB), which includes the affluent neighborhood of Richmond Hill, charge the highest fees in the country—approximately \$3,000 per student (Globe and Mail, 2012). It is implicit that fees such as these would have a large impact on the demographics of students able to participate in the program, and thus I will turn to the TDSB in order to consider the program in a setting where fees do not limit participation.

In considering the justifications outlined above, I will proceed with the description of my research as an embedded single case study.

### **3.3 Recruitment**

Cohen et al. (2010) stress that when planning a case study, consideration must be given to negotiating access to the sample (p. 298). The International Baccalaureate Organization and the



International Baccalaureate Schools of Ontario both publish a list of the schools which offer IB programs in Canada and Ontario, respectively (IBO, 2013; IBSO, 2013). I began my recruitment phase by accessing the IB Schools of Ontario (IBSO) website. On this website are the contact details for all of the Executive members of the IBSO, and a list of all the IB schools in Ontario and their contact information (the name and location of each school; the email address and telephone contact for the Principal, IB Coordinator, and in some instances Guidance Counselor). From these contact details, I chose three members of the IBSO Executive involved specifically with the Diploma Programme and contacted them via email to see if they would be interested in participating in my study. The email template which was used to contact participants is taken from the UWO Research website and has been included in Appendix D. A letter of information (included in Appendix A) which explained the details of the study was also included. I received an email response from one of the members expressing his interest to participate in my study, and thus acquired an informant at the provincial level—Participant 1. Recognizing that gaining access to a participant at the global, or IBO, level might be more difficult, I opted to use snowball sampling to acquire a contact at the IBO. Therefore, at the time of my interview with Participant 1, I asked if he knew of anyone at the IBO who might also be interested in participating in my study, and he kindly provided me with the name of an individual whom he thought would be interested and would have valuable insight into the IBDP in Ontario. I then contacted this person via email, and they agreed to conduct a telephone interview with me. As a result, I acquired a participant at the global level—Participant 2.

To gain access to participants at the local level, I submitted a request to conduct research in the Toronto District School Board. The TDSB, an English secular board, was sampled based on its policy to provide IB programs to its students free of charge. With TDSB approval, I began

sending email invitations with letters of information to the four principals of IBDP schools in the TDSB that had their email addresses available on the IBSO website. I received responses from two of these principals with questions regarding the timeline of the study and the commitment required. After these questions were answered, one of the principals agreed to participate, and I asked her if the IB Coordinator of her school would also be willing and available to participate in the study. The principal arranged for the IB Coordinator to contact me and she told me she would be interested in participating as well. Accordingly, the TDSB school principal, Participant 3, and the TDSB school IB Coordinator, Participant 4, became my key informants at the local level. The TDSB school will be referred to henceforth by the pseudonym Toronto High School (THS).

### **3.4 Data Collection**

Choosing to do a case study is as much a choice of what it is to be studied as it is a methodological choice; therefore the case may be studied in a number of ways (Flyvbjerg, 2011). This case study will consist of multiple qualitative methods, as case studies are intensive in their design, containing more detail, richness, and completeness than cross-unit analysis, and the use of qualitative research affords the opportunity for thorough and comprehensive understanding of observable and non-observable meanings, actions, attitudes, and behaviour of research participants (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 219; Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 301). As such, a case study relies on multiple sources of evidence to add breadth and depth to data collection, to assist in bringing a richness of data together in an apex of understanding through triangulation, and to contribute to the validity of the research (Yin, 2003). This research is triangulated by the collection and analysis of data from (1) public domain documents published by the IBO, provincial and school board policy documents, and school-based publications such as the IBDP application, (2)

interviews with key informants to the IBDP in Ontario, and (3) the data from the literature review.

#### *3.4.1 Document Analysis*

The research process began with a search through provincial Ministry of Education websites for any documents or texts relating to the IB. Official documents from the IBO were collected and read, and a search through the TDSB website was also completed to acquire any documents which addressed the IBDP in some form or another. It was important to start with these documents so as to establish an understanding of the context within which the participants would be operating. Hodder (1994) explains that document analysis is significant for the following reasons: "The information provided may differ from and may not be available in spoken form, and because texts endure and thus give historical insight" (p. 395). Document analysis of THS school-based publications proceeded once participation was confirmed by the principal. This included a review of the school website and the school's IB application package.

#### *3.4.2 Participant Interviews*

In order to provide a deeper meaning of the context from which the participant realities have been formed, information on their experience with the IBDP will be provided; however, in the interest of confidentiality, I have generalized the information on years of experience and withheld specific titles which may infringe upon confidentiality. The participants varied in their years of experience working with the IBDP, but none of them were 'new' to the IBDP.

Participant 1 has worked with the IB in a variety of capacities for many years. These experiences include teaching pre-IB and the IBDP, and working as an IB Coordinator, an IB Examiner, and an IB workshop presenter. He has also been serving as an Executive Member of the IBSO for a multitude of years. Participant 2 has held a variety of roles during his twenty-plus year career

with the IB, and currently works as a Specialist for the IB North America (IBNA). Participant 3 has worked as a TDSB principal for many years. Her appointment at THS was her first experience working with the IBDP, though she has been familiar with the program for some time. Participant 4 has also only worked with the IBDP at THS. She has taught IB Prep and the IBDP, and is currently working as the IBDP Coordinator. Table 1 summarizes my participant information.

**Table 3.1**

Summary of Participant Interviews

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Interview Date</b>
Participant 1	IBSO Executive Member	In Person	February 3, 2014
Participant 2	IB North America (IBNA) Specialist	Phone	February 6, 2014
Participant 3	TDSB School Principal	In Person	February 19, 2014
Participant 4	TDSB School IB Coordinator	In Person	February 19, 2014

To contribute to the context of Participants 3 and 4, I will provide a brief overview of THS. THS has operated the IB program for over five years. Participants described THS as culturally diverse and diverse in terms of the socio-economic status (SES) of school families. The IB cohort represents a slightly higher average SES than students in the wider school population. This situation was explained by Participant 4 as none of the IB students requiring school lunches, which differed from the rest of the student body. Some IB students struggled in single-parent families where they had to look after siblings, and others did not have internet at home and required extra support (Participant 4, personal communication, February 19, 2014). Similar to many other IBDP schools in the province, the ‘IB program’ at THS refers to the grade

9 and 10 Pre-IB program and the grade 11 and 12 IBDP. The latter is sometimes referred to as ‘the Diploma proper’ (Participant 3, personal communication, February 19, 2014). THS is an ‘all diploma’ school, in that students must attempt to meet the full Diploma requirements by taking six subjects and the three core components (TOK, CAS, and the Extended Essay). The norm in many schools, and one officially recognized by the IBO (2014b), is to award certificates to students who elect to take fewer than six subjects and successfully complete examinations in these courses. This is not an option for students at THS. In terms of the size of the program, approximately twenty percent of the school population is involved in the program—twelve percent with the Pre-IB and eight percent with the Diploma proper.

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were used to gather the stories of the four participants. Silverman (cited in Cohen et al., 2011) stresses that qualitative interviews are useful because of their capability to gather facts, to access beliefs about facts, to identify feelings and motives, to comment on the standards of actions, to explore present or previous behaviour, and to elicit reasons and explanations (p. 236). Further to this, Patton (2002) describes qualitative interviewing as beginning with “the assumptions that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” and that “we interview to find out what is in and on someone else's mind, to gather their stories” (p. 341). Semi-structured interviews were designed to be “sufficiently open-ended to enable the contents to be reordered, digressions and expansions made, new avenues to be included, and further probing to be undertaken” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 236). This method of questioning allows exploration, probing, and asking questions designed to “elucidate and illuminate” (Patton, 2002, p. 343). Cohen et al. (2011) capture the usefulness of semi-structured interview questions to be how they set the agenda but do not presuppose the nature of the response (p. 382). The semi-structured interview questions have been amended

from the work of Patton (2002) and Doherty (2009), and are included in Appendix C. Questions were designed to allow comparability between research participants, while still allowing room for the conversation to be individualized.

Each interview was approximately one hour in length, and one interview was conducted per participant. The collection of data was in line with Western University's Research Ethics approval notice (see Appendix E) and the requirements of the TDSB (see approval notice Appendix F). At the beginning of each interview, with the exception of Participant 2, two copies of the letter of information (Appendix A) and consent form (Appendix B) were given to participants for their initials and signatures. Participants retained one copy while I took the other for my records. Consent forms and initialed letters of information were scanned and saved digitally to my personal USB device and the original copies were destroyed. The USB has been kept in a secure location at all times. Before commencing each interview, participants were reminded of the purpose of the study, that participation was voluntary, and that they may opt to withdraw from the study at any point. Verbal consent was received from Participant 2 after going through this information with him. In the interest of confidentiality, the names of participants, schools, and locations have been removed. Participants have been referred to by number in the order they were interviewed. Data from interviews were collected using a digital audio recorder and transcribed verbatim using the Express Scribe program. Transcriptions were saved digitally to my personal USB device and original audio files were deleted upon the completion of transcriptions.

### **3.5 Analysis of Data**

Qualitative data analysis involves the organizing, accounting for, and explanation of data, and is distinguishable by how it merges analysis with interpretation, as well as data analysis with

data collection (Cohen et al., 2011). Therefore, as described in the previous section, the data analysis phase started upon collection of policy and public domain documentation in order to enter the interview phase aware of the context of IB programs in Ontario. Cohen et al. (2011) justify early analysis of data by stating that “at a practical level, qualitative research rapidly amasses huge amounts of data, and early analysis can reduce the problem of data overload by selecting out significant features for future focus” (p. 539). Further to this, Miles and Huberman (as cited in Cohen et al., 2011) advise that one should start the process of analyzing and writing as soon as the first piece of data has been collected, “as this enables ‘progressive focusing’, and selection of key issues for further investigation to be conducted” (p. 539). An important consideration for the documentary analysis was the social production and context of each document and how this affected its interpretation, as well as how these documents were “socially organized” (Punch, 2009, p. 201).

Both document and interview data were subject to a content analysis, as this is an appropriate approach for case studies (Patton, 2002). Content analysis is “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2002, p. 453). The core meanings revealed through content analysis are often referred to as patterns or themes (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) explains that patterns are descriptive findings while themes take a more categorical or topical form. I performed an inductive analysis which uncovered patterns, themes, and categories emerging from my data (Patton, 2002). Marshall and Rossman (2010) state that two analytical procedures must occur before generating categories and themes—organization of data and immersing one’s self in the data. Therefore, I began my analysis by organizing the documents and transcripts, and reading and re-reading the texts to allow the patterns and themes to emerge.

Once the patterns and themes were identified, a coding scheme was applied to the data. Punch (2009) asserts that “coding is the starting activity in qualitative analysis, and the foundation for what comes later” (p. 176). Each code was assigned in the form of a colour and was informed by a combination of the literature review and data content. Gradually, as the analysis progressed, clusters and sub-clusters began to appear from the codes (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). The data were broken down into categories that were significant to this study’s focus, as my goal was to develop “theoretical insights into the social processes operative” in the case under study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The analytical processes all required interpretation—bring my own meaning and insights to the documents and words of the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). The final themes were organized, generalized, and compared to theory in the literature review in order to form conclusions and recommendations for policy development. Emergent themes and findings from this study will be discussed in the following two chapters.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

Empirical research in education will always carry with it ethical issues due to its nature of collecting data from people, and about people (Punch, 2009). Miles and Huberman (cited in Punch, 2009) describe the preliminary ethical concerns of research and enumerate them as follows: worthiness of the project, competence boundaries, informed consent and benefits and costs. In terms of worthiness of the project, this study on policies relating to the IBDP, and its role as an alternative curriculum in Ontario public schools, has the potential to uncover inequity in terms of access to the program across the province. It also has the ability to narrow to the gap in the literature in terms of why, from the perspective of administrators, the IBDP is being increasingly taken up by schools as an alternative to the provincial curriculum. As well, it will give insight into the benefits and difficulties of the program, which could provide insight for



schools that may be interested in choosing the program in the future. In terms of competence boundaries, I have selected a sample of four participants, which I felt was workable within the requirements and expectations of the Master's thesis. Additionally, I took all the necessary measures to ensure I had received informed consent from the participants involved in my study. All participants were provided full information about what the study involved prior to their participation, and were required to read and sign consent forms confirming their agreement to participate in the study. All research participants were assigned pseudonyms to assure confidentiality. Participants had the opportunity to review their transcriptions after their interviews. Finally, I must consider the benefits and costs to the participants themselves. It was my interpretation that participants of this project were excited about the opportunity to share their knowledge of the IBDP in Ontario. They were all generous with their time, and when given the opportunity, were keen to learn of the results of the study. Participant 3 remarked to me: "It's important to participate in things like this from time to time, and reflect on why it is we do what we do."

### **3.7 Strengths and Limitations of the Research Design**

Merriam (1988) writes that the merits of a particular research design are inherently related to the rationale for selecting it as the most appropriate plan for addressing the research problem. Case study was chosen as the methodology for this research due to the nature of the research problem, the questions being asked, and because it "offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon" (Merriam, 1988, p. 32). A case study approach is a particularly good design for education research as it has the strengths of being anchored in real-life situations, offering insights and experiences that have the power to expand the readers' experiences, and the ability

to evaluate programs and inform policy (Merriam, 1988). However, the credibility of qualitative research lies in the rigour of the methods used and the credibility of the researcher (Patton, 2002). The multiple methods chosen in this study on an array of levels were chosen to ensure rigour. Also, multiple methods of data collection were chosen to triangulate the data in order to strengthen its reliability as well as internal validity (Merriam, 1988).

A limitation of this study is the assumption that one cannot generalize from a case study (Merriam, 1988). Indeed, this study is bounded by public schools in Ontario, and I do not intend to draw conclusions which can be generalized to other Canadian provinces. The IBDP is a “globally available product that can only be animated through the particularities of local school systems” (Doherty, 2013, p. 383). Therefore, it is the locality which gives the IBDP meaning. As such, the study is also limited by the selection of only one school from one school board; namely the TDSB. This may call into question whether the study can be generalized across Ontario. I have attempted to mitigate this limitation by including participants who have understandings of the IBDP across the province. In consideration of the need to generalize, some argue that statistical notions of generalizability need not be applied to case studies, and that rather one should develop an understanding of generalizability congruent with the “basic philosophy of qualitative research” (Merriam, 1988, p. 34). In attempting to understand generalizability as it pertains to this study, I turned to Flyvbjerg (2011) who contends that the case study is ideal for generalizing using the type of test called “falsification” (p. 305). The test of falsification proposes that if one observation does not fit with the proposition of the research, then the proposition is considered invalid (Flyvberg, 2011). Flyvverg (2011) illustrates this with the proposition that “All swans are white,” and states that only one observation of a black swan (a deviant case) would falsify the proposition. Case studies are well suited to identifying ‘black

swans' due to their in-depth approach (Flyvberg, 2011). I will apply the falsification test to this study by proposing that "all students in Ontario experience equitable access to the IBDP."

Therefore, findings which suggest otherwise will render this proposition invalid. Value can then be found in the deviant cases as they "point to the development of new concepts, variables, and causal mechanisms necessary in order to account for the deviant case and other cases like it" (p. 305).

The issue of credibility was one I spent a lot of time considering, and one I acknowledge to be another limitation of the research. As I have experience teaching the IBDP, I have some concern that this research could be read as biased in favor of the program (Connell, 2010). Guba and Lincoln (1981) state that "an unethical case writer could so select from among available data that virtually anything he wished could be illustrated" (p. 381). Therefore, I have tried to the best of my ability to interpret and present the data that became apparent to me during the analysis and not to affirm any preconceived notions. However, through this research I systematically reflected on who I am in this inquiry, and have been sensitive to how my personal biography has shaped the study (Creswell, 2003). "This introspection and acknowledgement of biases, values, and interests (or reflexivity) typifies qualitative research today...It also represents honesty and openness to research, acknowledging that all inquiry is laden with values" (Creswell, 2002, p. 20). Therefore, I acknowledge that the conclusions of this study are restricted by my interpretation of the data, limited by my own personal and professional biases, and infused with my values.

### **3.8 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has outlined the research paradigm that I have used to guide the methodological considerations of this research. It has justified the use of a case study, and the

methods and instruments which have been employed during the case study. It has also outlined the methods of recruitment, data collection and analysis, and described the ethical considerations, strengths and limitations to qualitative research of this type.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Findings of the Document Analysis

This chapter presents the findings of the document analysis and chapter five will present the findings of the interview data analysis. Four broad themes emerged from my analyses:

1. Issues of access to the IBDP
2. The IBDP as a curricular choice
3. Impacts of the IBDP
4. Acknowledgement of the IBDP

The findings presented in this chapter are organized according to the organizational level from which the documents were selected, and discussed in terms of the four major themes listed above.

#### 4.1 Introduction to the Document Analysis

Documents that are published in the public domain should not be disregarded or taken lightly (Meadmore and Meadmore, 2004) for they make important claims about the values being promulgated by contemporary educational bodies (Whitehead, 2005). I felt it important to turn to documents produced by the bodies involved with the IBDP in Ontario, in order to evaluate the claims they make and the values imbued in said claims. The documentary analysis provided multiple lenses through which I could start to view the IBDP in Ontario: global, provincial, and local lenses. Analysis of documents issued by the IBO provided a description of how the IB is depicted on an international level, thus providing a global lens for understanding the image of the IBDP. Analysis of documents pertaining to how the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Quebec, and Nova Scotia assimilate the IB into their provincial education systems offered contrast to the analysis of Ontario-based documents, thereby allowing me to develop a clear

picture of the current practice of the IBDP in Ontario—the provincial lens. Finally, analysis of publications from the TDSB and Toronto High School (THS) allowed me to focus in on a specific local characterization of the IB—the local lens.

Multiple readings of the documents enabled a thorough analysis. The first readings took place prior to interviews to gain an overall sense of the content and, therefore, context of the interviewee. Documents were revisited after the interview transcriptions were completed in order to uncover the emergent themes from both document and interview data. The public domain documents from the IBO, TDSB, and THS were assessed using the following criteria: occurrence of the first three themes mentioned above, prioritization of these themes, relative positioning of IB information (on websites), and display of IB logos or other visuals (on websites). The policy documents and Ministry of Education websites for each province were approached in a similar manner as the other documents; however, assessment criteria were slightly altered. Policy documents were assessed on the basis of theme four and included the following criteria: whether there was official text to acknowledge the IBDP, whether there were financial supports for the program, and whether (and how) the IBDP was integrated into the provincial assessment system. The document analysis will start by examining the global lens, then move to the provincial, and finish with the local. I will then conclude by suggesting ways that the organizational levels could interact to encourage or hinder the propagation of the IBDP in Ontario.

#### **4.2 The Global Lens: IBO Documentation**

The document analysis started with a Google search of the terms ‘IBO’ and ‘publications’ in order to see what kinds of documents were available. This led me to a webpage on the IBO website called the ‘IB Digital Communications Toolkit’. This toolkit contained a large volume of documents organized under the following categories: brochures, flyers and

posters; presentations; logos and programme models; videos; advertising; media kit; alumni relations, research, professional development; and recognition. In my first appraisal of the webpage I was drawn to words such as ‘brochures’, ‘logos’, ‘advertising’, and ‘media kit’. My own personal experience working for GEMS, a global edu-business, came to mind, as they had used a media centre as a centralized place of marketing. I continued to look at each category in the Digital Communications Toolkit to get a sense of the kind of information provided in each, which helped me infer which would be most useful in constructing meanings of the IBDP choice in Ontario. Initially, I chose twenty-three documents to read and review. After reading these 23 documents, I noticed many of the publications were similar in content but presented in altered formats. I narrowed my sample from 23 to ten documents that represented a non-repetitive variety of information that was most pertinent to my study. I acknowledge that there are limitations to my sample in that my personal bias was inherent in the selection process.

The smaller sample of documents was reviewed in order to establish an overall image of the IBDP in terms of emergent themes. Table 4.1 summarises my analysis of the documents by reporting on the occurrences and prioritization of themes one, two, and three. Occurrence of themes has been reported based on distinct elements in the documents which I have considered to fall under the category of each major theme. In terms of the theme ‘issues of access,’ I have included information such as financing the IB, program requirements, or policy which relates to the program. Below are exemplar occurrences of issues of access.

*“IB programs are gaining broader recognition, not only in terms of academic merit and reputation, but also through state and federal legislation.” (Document 1)*

*“Schools starting the process to become a candidate school and to receive IB authorization must pay an application fee of \$14,000 USD.” (Document 9)*

**Table 4.1**

Summary of themes 1 – 3 contained in IBO document sample

Document #	IBO Document Name	Occurrence of Major Themes			Prioritization of Information		
		Access <sup>a</sup>	Choice <sup>b</sup>	Impact <sup>c</sup>	Access	Choice	Impact
1	A Look at IB Legislation in the US (IB, 2007b)	✓		✓	•		
2	Canada. A Dynamic Presence: Growth and Characteristics of IB World Schools (IB, 2010)	✓	✓	✓			•
3	Understanding the IB Diploma Programme Scores (IBO, 2010c)		✓	✓			•
4	IB Mission Statement (IBO, 2014)		✓				•
5	The IB Learner Profile: A Singular Capacity for Invigorating Campus Life (IBO, 2010b)		✓			•	
6	The IB Diploma Programme - Education for a Better World, (IBO, 2012b)	✓	✓	✓		•	
7	IB Students Bring a Passion for Learning to Your Campus: The IB Diploma Programme and Higher Education Institutions (IBO, 2010a)		✓	✓		•	
8	IB Americas Press Briefing (IBO, 2011a)		✓			•	
9	Cost of IB Programmes and Return on Investment (IB, 2008)	✓			•		
10	The IB Diploma Programme: Graduate Destinations Survey, Country Report: Canada (IBO, 2011b)		✓	✓			•

<sup>a</sup> Refers to inclusion of information which pertained to accessing the IB; i.e., finances, grades, polices, number of programs.

<sup>b</sup> Refers to inclusion of information which portrays the IB as conferring an advantage to its students; i.e., program design, skills base, university recognition.

<sup>c</sup> Refers to inclusion of information regarding the actual impact of IB, as based on empirical evidence; i.e., statistics or vignettes.



The theme of ‘The IBDP as a curricular choice’ included any information which portrayed the IB as conferring an advantage on students (or disadvantage, should there be one); for example, program design, skill development, or university recognition.

*IB students are infused with the academic integrity that is a fundamental value of universities and colleges. (Document 5)*

*The IB continuum of international education for 3 to 19 year olds is unique because of its academic and personal rigour. (Document 6)*

*“IB is well known to us as excellent preparation. Success in an IB programme correlates well with success at Harvard. We are pleased to see the credential of the IB Diploma Programme on the transcript.” Marlyn McGrath Lewis, Assistant Dean of Admissions, Harvard University. (Document7)*

*The IB provides students with an unparalleled, well-rounded international education which seeks to prepare them for the demands of an increasingly global society. (Document 8)*

Lastly, the theme ‘impacts of the program’ included any information which made reference to the measured successes of the IB program or its students. This included information set out in statistics or personal vignettes.

*IB diploma holders are entitled to receive 100% of their tuition and fees plus \$600 a year paid at any public university in Florida or a comparable amount to any private college in Florida. (Document 1)*

*“Diploma Programme students are well-rounded, multifaceted, multiskilled and have studied in depth...They score higher than students in other national systems, and the IB*

*score is worldwide the same measure.” Hrilina Lock, undergraduate admissions manager, London School of Economics, UK. (Document 7)*

*What do IB Diploma Programme scores tell us? Our research into student performance at UBC indicates that IB students with diploma scores in the 27 to 30 point range perform the same as straight-A students out of our provincial high school curriculum.” Michael Bluhm, Associate Director, Undergraduate Admissions, University of British Columbia. (Document 3)*

In some instances, documents contained evidence of multiple themes; I therefore made a judgment regarding the prioritization of these themes based on the order in which information was presented and the sheer volume of information referencing each theme. The theme which was regarded as the highest priority for each respective document is marked in Table 4.1. Four out of ten documents prioritized the themes ‘The IBDP as a curricular choice’ and ‘Impacts of the IBDP,’ whereas two out of ten prioritized ‘Issues of access.’

The conclusion I drew from the IBO document analysis is that there is a strong presentation of the IB as a valuable educational ‘product’—with the implication that products are made to be bought and consumed. The advantages touted by the IBO are backed up by facts, figures, and opinions of key educational stakeholders. However, the mere inclusion of representatives from institutions like Harvard University or the London School of Economics reflects how the IBO is portraying an image of distinction due to the elite reputation of these institutions. The IBO appears to be concerned with issues of access and—particularly in North America—has focused on how governments can support access to the program through policy and legislation. Overall, the documents have portrayed the IBDP as a rigorous and thriving program that is distinct and highly marketable.

### **4.3 The Provincial Lens: Canadian Provincial Policy Documentation**

This section will begin by describing the background to Canadian provincial policy and practice on the IB, as outlined in the literature. It will then describe the findings of the analysis of provincial policy documents.

The extent to which government policy supports IB programs in Canadian schools ranges from province to province, but all ten provinces currently have some form of official practice regarding IB programs. This support ranges from provincial funding for IB schools and IB teacher training, to policy which links the IB with provincial higher education systems (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2013). The IB North America (IBNA) has helped to clarify the link between the IB and provincial higher education institutions by producing the Canadian University Recognition Policy Summary. This list includes 66 Canadian universities that accept the IB Diploma as a credential for admission, and includes information for each university in terms of the IB and admission (including early admission and second year status for IB graduates), diploma credit and placement (on a course-by-course basis), and scholarships (IBNA, 2008).

Nova Scotia has developed policy to welcome IB into its public schools to a greater degree than any other province in Canada. The Nova Scotia government provides provincial funding for IB schools and for IB teacher training (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2013), and has created the role of Provincial Co-ordinator for the International Baccalaureate within the Nova Scotia Department of Education (Department of Education, 2007). In regards to the use of public money to fund the IB in Nova Scotia, Nova Scotia Minister of Education Ramona Jennex was quoted as saying, “This is a public school system and we wanted every child in Nova Scotia to have the same opportunities” (as cited in Baluja & Hammer, 2012, para.

18). This statement emphasizes the commitment of the Nova Scotia government to equitable access to IB programs.

The history of the IBDP in Ontario can be traced back to the early 1980s. The Ontario Ministry of Education disallowed requests for public funding of IB programs in 1982, but Victoria Park Secondary School—a publicly-funded school in Don Mills—used alternate funding to implement the IBDP in the mid-1980s (Tarc, 2009). It was not until the early 1990s that the provincial government approved the use of provincial funds for the IBDP in Ontario’s publicly-funded, secular schools (Tarc & Beatty, 2013). The IBDP was first introduced in Ontario’s publicly funded Catholic schools in 1996, and has subsequently grown at a rate of one new IBDP school per year (Tarc & Beatty, 2013).

In order to contextualize the current policy and practice of the IBDP in Ontario, I felt it was necessary to review the specific policy and practice of the IB in Ontario as well as other Canadian provinces. My search for policy documents was aided by a document obtained from the IBO website entitled, ‘A Look at Canadian Provincial Practices’ (IB, 2007b). This document provided an overview of the policy and practice of the IB in nine Canadian provinces (at the time Prince Edward Island was not included), as well as web-links to government websites where more information could be found. I followed the web-links to access up to date information on the provincial policies and practices from government websites. In my first review of the websites I attempted to assess where the information was found on each of the Ministry of Education websites, the volume of information to be found, and the nature of the links provided to further information. After searching the Ministry of Education websites in all ten provinces (there are currently no IB programs in the Canadian territories), I decided to narrow my focus to

the five provinces with the most IBDP schools: Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, and Quebec (IB, 2010).

The provinces with the most readily available and easily accessible information were Nova Scotia (Government of Nova Scotia, 2014) and British Columbia (The Province of British Columbia, 2014). Alberta, Quebec, and Ontario did not have a webpage dedicated to the IB so a search of the Ministry websites was performed to obtain other web-pages or documents containing information on the IB (Gouvernement du Quebec, 2014; Government of Alberta, 2014; Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2014). I also accessed other documents, such as education acts, guides to education, or curriculum guidelines, for each of the provinces, and did a keyword search to elucidate whether there was any reference to the IB. For example, though the Alberta Education website did not have information on the IB, its Guide to Education (Alberta Government, 2013) contained a section explaining how the IB operates within the province. Interestingly, my search of documents containing reference to the IB in Ontario resulted in only one mention in a document called, 'Fees For Learning Materials and Activities Guideline: Draft for discussion purposes' (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). Under the category 'Examples of Activities, Programs, or Materials Potentially Eligible for Fee Charges', the document included the following: "Specialized programming such as *International Baccalaureate*, Advanced Placement courses or Hockey Canada Skills Academy program" (emphasis my own, p. 4). However, this document was only for draft purposes, and the finalized guidelines, published nine months later, included the following under the same category: "Optional programming such as, Advanced Placement courses or Hockey Canada Skills Academy program" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 4). Therefore, the mention of the IB had been removed in the finalized copy and was not included anywhere else in the document. My

preliminary web searches gave me an understanding of whether or not the IB was officially classified via provincial policy documents, and if so, how it was classified. I concluded that there was little to no mention of the IB in Ontario publications.

After interviews were completed, I returned to the provincial policy documents to better evaluate how ‘support’ for the IB is expressed by each province. Table 4.2 summarizes my findings. It includes information on official classifications or descriptions of the program via policy documents or other publications, whether financial support of any kind (for program fees, exam fees, teacher training, and so on) is provided by the province, and how the IB has been integrated with the provincial curriculum and assessment system.

Through this process I discovered that terms such as ‘support’ and ‘recognition’ are often conflated, in that *recognizing* the program is often understood as showing support *for* the program. However, ‘support’ is also often used in the specific context of financial support. Table 4.2 shows that Nova Scotia, British Columbia and Alberta provide financial support for IB schools, while Quebec and Ontario do not. Inference can be made here to the relatively larger number of programs operating in Ontario and Quebec which would, therefore, require far more available funds than the three other provinces. In terms of support *for* the programs, support is highest in Nova Scotia and British Columbia where IB courses are recognized as complying with the high school core curricula, where the IB Diploma requirements are recognized as meeting the provincial graduation requirements, and where the IB scores are included in provincial reports. The *practice* of the IB in Ontario at present supports the program by considering IB courses to be equivalent to Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) credits. Documentation from the IB (IB, 2007b) references a letter from the Deputy Minister of Education, dated May 2004,

**Table 4.2**

Canadian Provincial Policy and Practice of the IB

	<b>Policy Recognition</b>	<b>Access to IB programs</b>	<b>Integration of the IB with the provincial system</b>		
<b>Canadian Province</b>	Is the program recognized by provincial policy and/or practice?	Financial supports available for schools to implement the IB	Diploma Courses recognized as equivalent to core curriculum	IBDP included in school/provincial reports	Completing the IB Diploma meets graduation requirements
<b>Alberta</b>	Yes, considered a Locally Developed Course (LDC)	•		•	
<b>British Columbia</b>	Yes, considered an External Credential	•	•	•	•
<b>Ontario</b>	Some <i>prior</i> reference to a Locally Developed Course		•		
<b>Quebec</b>	Yes, fulfills the Québec Diploma of Collegial Studies (DEC)		•		•
<b>Nova Scotia</b>	Yes, fully funded & open enrollment at all IB schools	•	•	•	•

confirming that students would be awarded Ontario secondary school credits for “the completion of work that complies with the Ontario curriculum policy guidelines” or for “the completion of work that does not comply with the Ontario curriculum policy guidelines if the work is first approved as a Locally Developed Optional Credit Course by the Ministry of Education” (p. 3).

However, there is no current policy or documentation clearly stating this to be the case. The Ontario standardized report card does not allow for reporting of IB scores as it does in Alberta, BC, and NS.

My conclusion from the analysis of provincial policy and practice towards the IB is that a ‘policy vacuum’ exists in Ontario. Although common practice shows that IBDP courses are accepted as equivalent to OSSD credits, there is nothing in print to state that this is the case. While the level of support from other provinces varies, all other reviewed provincial policies had some form of documentation recognizing the IBDP as an alternative curriculum in their province. I find this essential to understanding the IBDP in Ontario, as an absence of provincial policy ultimately means the program is governed and enacted by local level policy only. The following section looks at how the local level of the TDSB and THS characterize the IBDP through their documentation.

#### **4.4 The Local Lens: TDSB and THS Documentation**

##### *4.4.1 TDSB Policy and Practice on the IB*

The TDSB has been chosen as the local unit of analysis as it offers financial support for, and official recognition of, IB programs. The literature review provided this information in the first instance. In order to further assess the status of the IBDP in the TDSB, I started with a search of the TDSB website to see where and how the program was referenced. Similar to my approach to the IBO documents, I was trying to assess the emphasis on, and characterization of, IB programs. In my initial assessment I was looking at general content, the volume of information on the IB, where it was located within the website, and if there were any IB logos used.



Information on the TDSB policy towards IB programs was quickly found through a Google search. The information was found on the TDSB website and categorized on the left side bar under the category, 'High School Specialized Program.' This webpage provided the following information:

TDSB students have access to specialized programs that offer unique opportunities and focus on a variety of interests. Each specialized program has specific requirements as well as unique admission criteria. Application to Specialized Programs is made directly to each program based on Optional Attendance. (TDSB, 2014a).

Optional attendance refers to the fact that students have the opportunity to apply to schools other than those which serve their designated residential address; however, acceptance at these schools is subject to space availability and program suitability (TDSB, 2014b).

The main text of the document included a list of thirteen Specialized Schools and Programs (see Appendix G) and the International Baccalaureate was listed as one of the thirteen. My first impression was that the IB's position within a list of 13 Specialized Schools and Programs may allow it to go unnoticed if one was not specifically searching for it. It appeared that it was just a specialized program meriting no more emphasis than the others. However, on the left-side bar, the IB is listed as one of four sub-headings under the main 'High School Specialized Programs' heading. The other three sub-headings are Africentric Secondary Programs, Dual Credits, and Specialized High Skills Major. In this way it seemed to have more emphasis than the 12 other programs listed. It is possible this is a technical matter, as the IB sub-heading is hyperlinked to its own webpage which includes information on all three IB programs, not just the Diploma Programme.

The main webpage also provided the names of schools which offer each of the Specialized Programs. In terms of the frequency of these programs, the IBDP was the fourth most frequent (6 schools), after Math, Science, and Technology (10), Arts Focus/Programs (8), and Cyber Arts/Studies (7). A final point noted during my initial appraisal was that the TDSB does not make use of any IB logos on any of its web-pages. Therefore, I concluded that while having clear policy on inclusion and access to the IB as a specialized program, the TDSB website did not appear to market the IB, or emphasise it any more than any of its other Specialized Programs.

When I re-visited the TDSB website after the interview process, I assessed the website for the occurrence and prioritization of the major themes. The information contained on the website was descriptive but concise. The theme of access was evident on the Specialized Programs main page where it mentions the availability of specialized programs and the admission criteria governing access these programs (IB, 2014a). The theme of the IBDP as a choice curriculum comes through most often. For example, through statements like, “This exciting program gives students a real advantage in applying for post-secondary schools all over the world,” and it “gives students first year university credits and is recognized in over 125 countries” (IB, 2014c). There were no incidents or examples of specific impacts of the program included, and acknowledgement of the IBDP was implicit in its inclusion on the TDSB website.

To conclude, the TDSB presents an image of the IBDP as a prestigious and worthwhile program. However, the TDSB has chosen not to use any of the IB branding techniques that are often used by other institutions (Bayview Secondary School, 2014; Catholic Central High School, 2013; NS Department of Education, 2013). Nor has it positioned the IB in a way that would highlight its presence on the website. As such, the IBDP program appears to be no more

valued than any other of the TDSBs many programs available to meet the diverse and specialized needs of its students.

#### *4.4.2 THS Policy and Practice of the IBDP*

After the research school was secured I reviewed the school's website for references to the IBDP. In order to protect the anonymity of the school, I will refer to information on the school's website in general terms. The IBDP was listed as one of several specialized programs that THS offers. While the school included information on university recognition of the IBDP and scholarship possibilities, the school clearly laid out the rigorous requirements of the program, and seemed to place an emphasis on the IBDP student being a 'hard-worker'. The school also outlined how, like many other IBDP schools in Ontario, entrance to the program begins with an IB-prep program in grades 9 and 10. This program is meant to prepare students with the skills necessary for successful completion of the IBDP in grades 11 and 12.

The website also included an application for the program. The information portion of the application package also placed a strong emphasis on the qualities that IB students generally possess as well as the skills required for success (i.e., hard-working, strong organizational skills). The IB package contained relatively little information on the advantages of the IBDP. The requirements of the application included completing a grade 9 course selection sheet and an optional attendance form, and submitting one's most recent grade 8 report card, grade 7 report card, and a character reference. The application also explained that successful applicants would first be invited to an entrance assessment where they would be asked to complete an essay, and a Mathematics and French skills diagnostic. If successful, applicants would be invited back for an interview where they would be required to give a presentation. The interview also required the presence of at least one parent or guardian.

The overall image of the IBDP displayed by THS documentation is that it is a demanding program that is appropriate for students who want to challenge themselves and give back to the community. In terms of issues of access, the application procedure has been interpreted to be quite rigorous, and requiring parental support. In this way, access to the program at THS appears to be highly limited by academic ability. While THS frequently references the advantages that the IBDP confers, these references focus more heavily on personal characteristics and skills developed than on the actual IBDP credential. In terms of impact of the program, THS describes the IBDP as being a natural fit with the overall focus of the school; both work together to ensure that students emerge from the school as curious and caring individuals. To conclude, THS seems to be incorporating the IBDP at a local level in such a way as to strike a balance between the reputation and potential that the IB holds, and the personal values that the whole school embodies.

#### **4.5 Chapter Summary**

This extensive review of documents was carried out in order to identify the context of the IBDP in Ontario. By looking at documents published at three different levels, a more complete picture has been assembled. Taking the information provided at each level and analysing this information in pairs (global/provincial, global/local, provincial/local) enables the identification of cooperative or strained interactions. Interactions between the global and provincial levels result in the IB global product not being formally acknowledged at the provincial level in Ontario. Despite the growth of the IBDP in Ontario, support of the program by the provincial government could only stand to encourage growth. Interactions between the global and local levels work together in most instances. The IBDP has been taken up at the local level and local bodies appear to disseminate the advantages heralded at the global level. However, the local

level has the ability to regulate how much of this image is disseminated, and to enact the program in a manner that works with other local considerations such as the size of the program. The interactions between the provincial and local level are unique in Ontario in that the province has entirely decentralized the governance of these programs to the local authorities. However, the lack of acknowledgement of the program by the province also results in an administrative gap as the provincial high school requirements must also be met. In conclusion, the IBDP in Ontario public schools operates within a complex environment. It is well-known, but not formally recognised, and it is controlled while enacted with autonomy.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Findings from the Interview Data Analysis

#### 5.1 Introduction

The literature highlighted two key issues that were at the forefront of my mind as I approached the analysis of interview data. First, in the context of school choice, Ball et al. (1996) refer to Bourdieu's (1984) concept of distinction and his assertion that "the cultivated disposition and cultural competence...are revealed in the nature of the cultural goods consumed...and the way they are consumed" (p. 19). Extending this understanding of school choice to curricular choice implies that choosing a curriculum carries symbolic meanings; namely, the social standing and cultural capital associated with the choice (Doherty, 2009). Whether it is considered a rare commodity, a curriculum of choice in many localities, or possessing a reputation for internationalism and academic excellence, the IB appears to operate as a product of distinction; choice of this program affirms the cultivated taste and social distinction of its consumer (Doherty, 2009). During my analysis I gave consideration to whether the IB operates as a product of distinction in Ontario, and if there were symbolic meanings related to social standing, class, or cultural capital to be found in the choice of the IBDP. Secondly, I recognized that the globalization of education involves global processes which are strategically located in national spaces, and that it is national (or in Canada's case, provincial) institutions like ministries of education, universities, and local authorities, who unbundle the national education space to allow the global circulation of educational programs (Resnik, 2012). Therefore, the extent to which the Ontario Ministry of Education, universities, and local authorities 'unbundle' the provincial education space will determine how the IBDP circulates in Ontario. How the IBDP is recognized, regarded, and enacted may differ in other spaces. I was mindful to look below the

surface of the information presented to me, and to be alert regarding the relationship between the data and the source of the data, in order to best answer my research questions:

1. From the perspective of administrators and key stakeholders working with the IB, why is the IBDP chosen as an alternative curriculum by Ontario public schools?
2. To what extent do local policies and perceptions of IB programs affect equitable access to IB programs in Ontario?
3. In what ways has the insertion of the IBDP into public schools impacted the whole school community more broadly?

This chapter presents the findings from four qualitative, semi-structured interviews which were conducted with key stakeholders involved with the IBDP at the global, provincial and local levels. The purpose of the interviews was to garner firsthand accounts of participants in order to gain insight into their experiences with the IBDP in Ontario. The responses of participants are presented based on the four broad themes that emerged during the analysis: the IBDP as a curricular choice, issues of access, impacts of the IBDP, and acknowledgement of the IBDP. These themes have been broken down into sub-themes in order to provide rich and detailed descriptions of the case.

## **5.2 Theme 1: The IBDP as a ‘Curricular Choice’**

Analysis of interview data revealed a variety of reasons why schools have elected to adopt the IBDP. Participants also offered their perceptions on why students and parents are making the leap to the IB curriculum, as well as their understandings on what sets the IBDP apart from the OSSD. Below I will present the relevant findings. First, I will report on the vocabulary of ‘choice’ used by participants throughout the interviews.

### 5.2.1 *The Vocabulary of Choice*

The specific vocabulary used by participants emerged from the interview data almost immediately. The selection of words characteristic of market terminology revealed how participants constructed the context of the IBDP in Ontario. All of the participants made use of market terminology in some way (i.e. ‘choice’, ‘clientele’, or ‘brand’). Participant 2 specifically discussed the topic of ‘choice’ as it pertains to Ontario students and parents, and the IBDP.

Ontario has a lot to be proud of. No doubt about that. There are schools all around the world offering the Ontario curriculum and consequently everybody's satisfied that this must be a good thing. What we need to talk about are the many good things in an IB education, regardless if it's better or worse than something else, it's a good thing to do, and good for kids and good for schools, and shouldn't we encourage them to offer the choice? Which is becoming a buzz word in education. There's a lot of talk about choice for parents and choice for kids, and this ought to be one of them. We want the Ministry to do whatever they can to make those choices more available.

Participant 2 acknowledges that choice is “becoming a buzz word in education” and suggests that the Ministry should have a role in making “those choices more available”. Participant 2 is careful to point out that offering the IB as a choice does not imply flaws in the Ontario curriculum. Regardless of being “better or worse than something else,” the *choice* of the IB should be made available. Participant 3 uses market terms such as ‘clientele’ and ‘shopping’ in her somewhat comical account of the IBDP’s role as an alternative curriculum in the TDSB:

The TDSB recognizes that IB is a program that fits a certain clientele, and you may say well only 6 high schools in the TDSB, that's pretty small clientele. But for that clientele it's a really good fit...I mean, I think that, that sometimes, sometimes it's kind of like...sofa shopping. If you go sofa shopping eventually they all look the same, but really they're not all the same. Some sofas are longer, some are covered in leather, some are in tweed, some are grey, some are orange. Some are sectional, some have reclining chairs! And I think that's the thing that the TDSB recognizes, is that it's not one size fits all...

Likewise, Participant 4 clearly speaks in market terms as she refers to THS as a global school and says that, “We market ourselves and brand ourselves as that.” Therefore, language selection



was my first indication that there is a market culture surrounding education in Ontario, and that the IB is one choice in this market.

### 5.2.2 *Enrollment, Re-Invention, and Keeping Up with the Jones'*

Each location tells its own story as the global product of the IB interacts with the “contextual ecology of the local market” (Doherty, 2013, p. 395). As such, unique reasons for the selection of the IBDP in specific schools would be expected. Participant 1’s experience working with schools all across Ontario, as well as leading IB administration workshops, gave him an excellent vantage point for understanding the multitude of reasons why schools implement the IB. One of the reasons he listed was to boost school enrollment:

Some schools bring it in because they are hoping to attract kids. So by having this program they are hoping to attract ‘x’ number more kids to our school, that’s important for ‘x’, ‘y’, and ‘z’ reasons. There’s certainly, and that’s obviously money driven-reasons-. So there’s certainly monetary reasons why some schools would bring it in.

Participant 1 draws on the desire to attract students to schools by implementing the IB, and links it to the increase in funds the program would bring to the school. Similarly, Participants 3 and 4 expressed the reason for adopting the IB at their school in terms of boosting enrollment, but they do not directly relate it to funding. As Participant 3 and 4 indicated:

Participant 3: To give you a background of why they brought IB in, as with many schools, enrollment is declining and so [THS] was a school with relatively consistent declining enrollment because we have in this area—one, two, and not far down the road, three high schools, four high schools with amalgamation of TDSB. So everyone’s-. There’s less water in the watering hole, everyone’s looking.

Participant 4: [Our former Principal] said, "With our enrolment, and the competition" ...He said, "Our school could very well close." He said, "We have to do something different."

The responses of Participants 3 and 4 also highlight the air of competition that prevails in the THS area of the TDSB. With multiple high schools in the same area and enrollment declining, adding the IB constituted doing “something different” to attract the attention of the parents. This

is evidence of Ball et al.'s (1996) assertion that “choice is thoroughly social” (p. 93). This assertion also applies to the next reason cited by Participant 1. He suggests that the IB is not only taken on by schools who are struggling and in need of something different, but that it is also taken on by schools who fear that not having ‘something different’ will cause them to fall behind other schools who do.

Participant 1: I think, a little bit of it is keeping up with the Jones' from some schools. It's that school ‘x’ over there got the program, and people seem to like it, so we're going to get the program too...And that can sometimes be dangerous for a school because you're going in for the wrong reasons perhaps.

The final reason given for taking on the IB refers to the desire of some low-performing schools to use it as a means to re-invent themselves. Participant 1 explained:

Some schools see it as a way to re-invent themselves...One of the biggest differences that IB does is that it basically changes where the bar is set...And so for a low performance school, they often see that as a possibility to pull kids up in a sense to kind of hold them to a higher goal, but also to teach them a skill set that they don't normally get. So I think you see some schools take it on for that...

Participant 1 went on to acknowledge that this is more often the case in schools in the United States than in Canada. This falls in line with American-based research which reports that there is a pocket of growth of the IB in Title I<sup>2</sup> schools (Mayer, 2010). Participant 2 re-iterates that the situation in Canada is different than in the US.

I don't really think school improvement is the issue in Canada. We've got good schools and the Ontario curriculum, BC curriculum, Alberta curriculum, think what you want, that's good curriculum. So it's not, we're not trying to re-invent the wheel, but there is a recognition amongst serious educators that this is a good way of doing things.

Again, Participant 2 suggests that the curriculum in Canadian provinces is “good curriculum,” and that the IBDP is not adopted in Canada to improve upon curriculum which is provincially available. However, he references “serious educators” as ones which see the IB as “a good way of doing things,” which indirectly implies that the IB program represents something beyond that

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<sup>2</sup> Title I schools are so named if a minimum of 40 percent of students are from low-income families.

which is locally available. The following section describes the distinguishing features of the IBDP as recognized by participants.

### *5.2.3 The IBDP: A Point of Difference for Students and Parents*

The previous section listed three reasons why schools choose to offer the IBDP: to boost enrollment, to keep up with neighboring schools, and to re-invent themselves. The third reason relies more on the curriculum itself, in that its rigorous design and skill requirements are used to push students beyond their current level of performance. The first two reasons, however, imply that parents and students will be drawn to schools, or will choose to remain in schools, by virtue of having the IB as an option there. The concept ‘point of difference’ can be used to explain how schools are able to use the IB to draw students in. Doherty (2013) explains that ‘point of difference’ is taken from marketing discourse where it refers to the distinctive qualities a product or brand has that set it apart from its competitors. The concept suggests that a product’s point of difference is relational in that it is dependent upon the competitors in a specific market. Therefore, the point of difference of a product in one locality or market may be different from its point of difference elsewhere (Doherty, 2013). Doherty (2013) uses the case of the IBDP in Australia as an example. She explains how embedding the global IBDP product in the educational systems of each of the six states and two territories ultimately becomes a function of its ‘point of difference’ to each state’s particular curriculum (p. 380). Applying this concept to the case of the IBDP in Ontario, I used the participant’s experiences and perceptions of why families choose the IBDP to illustrate the ‘point of difference’ which sets it apart from the Ontario curriculum. It is important to acknowledge the limitations of these particular findings, in that interviews with IB families would be necessary to truly assess the reasons for their choices.

However, the first-hand interactions of participants with students and parents give valuable insight into the reasons for the student/parent choice.

Findings show that the preparation the IBDP gives for university, and the world beyond, is a strong incentive for students and parents to pursue the program. Participant 4 commented that “for a lot of them, it’s the university preparation. I think first, and foremost, that’s what it is.” The reason the IBDP is a point of difference in this way is that it develops a skill set in students which sets them apart from non-IB students. Participants 1 and 3 express this below:

Participant 1: I think it largely comes down to how well their child's going to do later on...One of the things that's very appealing about this program is, you know, your kid is going to be ready. If they have gone through this, they are ready for that next step...And I think that's the real appeal when you get through, at least in my mind, for a lot of parents, it's that, they're going to walk in...The most common reply I get from a student who goes off to first year university is, 'Sir, I'm doing a lot less work, I have all this free time, I'm kind of confused. My marks have gone up'...It's really that what has happened along the way is that skill set that they have done, the workload that they've dealt with, has them walk into university and this, the leap that you might expect, just is not a leap for them in many cases.

Participant 3: And that's what students say, that the tools they have in their tool kit heading off to university, whether they are doing Engineering or whether they are doing a Liberal Arts degree, it doesn't matter. University is a piece of cake to those kids.

Over the course of interviews, participants made reference to critical thinking skills, confidence, and communication skills as belonging to the skills “tool kit” which IBDP students assemble during the program.

Findings also include the ‘international’ factor of the IB as a feature which sets it apart from the local curriculum and makes it appealing to some families. For instance, Participant 1 commented:

There is a global perspective to it that I think is appealing to them. I think saying your child gets the 'international blah' diploma seems, you know skip that, but they focus on that first word, it’s appealing. It is fairly transportable.

This is evidence that there is cultural capital to be found in the word ‘international’ alone, which may be irrespective of the actual ‘international’ in the curriculum. Speaking to the specific curricular content, Participant 1 continued to say; “To be completely honest with you they have no clue what the curriculum is as a parent. Some of them, but...I don't think it's curriculum that drives it.” Participant 3 also made reference to the drawing power of the international component of the IB. However, she referenced it in the way that it appeals to globally mobile individuals:

A lot of kids come in from various nationalities; parents are new to Canada, new Canadians. Because they come from many different international countries they are aware of IB maybe in their country. They know that it's a good education. They know that it's going to be academically rigorous.

Another component of the IB which distinguishes it from the Ontario curriculum is its three core components—Theory of Knowledge (TOK), Creativity, Action, Service (CAS), and the Extended Essay. Participants spoke at length about the value of the core components. While students and parents may not initially be aware of the core components, schools often use them as part of their ‘sales pitch.’ Participant 1 explains the importance and popularity of the Theory of Knowledge course below:

I know when we speak to parents...I sell TOK as a huge advantage to their child. I basically say we live in an increasingly globalized world where your child could have a conversation half-way across the planet in five seconds if they really wanted to. It would not be difficult for them to engage in that conversation. For them, it's a huge advantage to be able to think about how somebody arrives at an answer. It's understanding how somebody might view a situation and why they might view it that way...I can tell you at the end of the day the class that those kids go home and talk about is TOK.

Participant 3 also expressed praise for the TOK course and suggested that it would be beneficial to incorporate a similar course into the provincial curriculum.

I wish they'd ditch Civics and Careers and do a course in the Theory of Knowledge. I would love to see a mandatory high school course in Theory of Knowledge. Just on

thinking. On just the joy of learning and thinking. You know? And-, because the kids, if you ask them, the course that they enjoy a lot is the Theory of Knowledge course. Because it makes them think about thinking. And it makes them just, it appeals to that curiosity, right?

The significance of the TOK course that Participant 3 expressed relates to its ability to develop critical thinking skills in students so they may experience “the joy of learning and thinking”.

Participant 3 elaborated by saying that the provincial government should look at this area of the IB, as it lends itself to what she thinks “the Ontario government would like kids to be when they graduate from schools: good citizens, good thinkers, curious, and contributing members of society.”

Another core component of the IBDP that participants described as being a point of distinction from the Ontario curriculum is the Extended Essay. Participant 3 explained how it fosters independent learning skills in a way that Ontario curriculum students are not exposed to:

I mean the Extended Essay is really an independent piece and you have an advisor but it can't be edited by the advisor. They do it all on their own. So I think that they graduate with a level of independence that probably the regular Ontario diploma students don't have.

Participant 1 explains how these independent learning skills are developed through the Extended Essay process, and re-iterates the fact that this is not something that Ontario students have the opportunity to experience:

The Extended Essay is an experience that I don't think any other diploma program has. I mean it's a maximum 4000 word research paper. They are doing a thesis essentially, a mini-thesis anyway in the 12th grade. It is meant to mimic a university research experience. They get an advisor; it's their responsibility to meet with the advisor, not the advisor's responsibility to hunt them down...It's really research driven and it's a skill that I don't think gets cultivated the same way in the Ontario part. Certainly there's no 4000 word essays to be written in Ontario.

The final core component, CAS, is the Creativity, Action, Service component that IB students must complete during grades 11 and 12. There is similarity between CAS and the

Ontario curriculum in that the OSSD requires students to complete 40 hours of community service. However, Participant 1 insists that the CAS program is very different “than the hours checkbox requirement that's currently in Ontario” in that it requires students to actively reflect on their experiences. “That reflective piece really solidifies the experience for a lot of them. They are getting more from it than just us saying, 'great, you met a graduation requirement'.”

A final part of the IBDP which participants commented on as being distinct from the Ontario curriculum, and appealing to some parents, is its external exams<sup>3</sup>. Findings showed that the external exams were a point of difference for the IB as they allowed comparability with IB students all over the world, they promoted positive student-teacher relationships, and they cultivated an “exactitude” which is not found in the Ontario curriculum.

Participant 1: In the Ontario program, the be all and end all determiner of how you're going to do is the person who sits in front of you every single day...Whereas I think from the IB perspective, it more often becomes, the teacher does have input into the grade, they have some input into it, but at the end of the day all the assignments are going away with the exception of one or two for most classes and it's being marked by somebody else. So really the relationship between teacher and student becomes let's work to get you the best darn mark we can.

This describes the student-teacher relationship as one which in which both parties work together to maximize student success, as opposed to being pitted against one another in a battle for grades. Participant 4 explained how the IB approach to assessment compares with the Ontario curriculum.

So often with the exam in Ontario curriculum, we're just going along and then the exam is the product of the stuff we did. Whereas, we're completely backward tracking with IB. Like, I know that I have to get them here, so everything I do has to prepare them for that. Whereas, I think often, it's backwards...Like you get together for a few hours and you come up with this exam, but I don't think you have the same sense of exactitude or exactness that you would have. You know, the examiners at IB are spending a heck of a lot more time and a lot more thought into what those kids are being examined on.

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<sup>3</sup> The IBDP requires written examinations at the culmination of the program. These exams are standardized by the IBO and graded by external IB examiners.

As IB assessments are external, everything the teacher does “has to prepare them for that” exam, as opposed to basing exams on work which has been completed during the semester.

To draw conclusions from this section, analysis of participant data suggests that the IBDP operates as a point of difference in an Ontario educational market. Participant responses draw on market terminology to describe the situation of the IBDP in Ontario. The reasons for the adoption of the IB by Ontario schools were to draw students in for enrollment purposes and to compete with other schools. The point of difference that the IB offers is unique to the local market, and would require a comparative study to see how locations are set apart from each other. However, in the context of Ontario as based on the findings of this study, the point of difference is related to the IB’s required skill set, its international character, its core components, and its assessment system.

### **5.3 Theme 2: Accessing the IBDP in Ontario**

In this section, I will present the findings that relate to how local policy and perceptions of the IB affect access to the program. As laid out in the first two chapters, access can be limited due to financial requirements, program requirements, and geographic and/or spatial constraints. Participant responses reflect the complex, and sometimes contradictory, nature of these restrictions.

#### *5.3.1 Financial Access*

As presented in the literature review, there are two general approaches taken by schools to meet the financial demands of operating the IBDP: implementation of student fees or absorbing the costs within the regular school budget. The TDSB represents a unique case in Ontario in that it provides funding for six of its high schools to run the program. Participant 1,



having an understanding of the operation of programs across the province, was asked if he could comment on how the program is financially accessed.

So you would have a place like, say Toronto- Toronto District School Board. In Toronto they pay every single fee affiliated with the IB program. Now the Board pays that directly. No student who takes IB there pays a single extra dollar to take it, and then you get it on the other end where there are Boards who contribute absolutely nothing...there are different places who have different prices, that's the thing it gets into a very interesting conversation, and there are pros and cons to be honest with you to both scenarios...[TDSB] is a good approach from a kid perspective because it probably increases access a little bit to it, there's no cost to the kid wanting to take it.

The complexity of funding across the province is highlighted in Participant 1's reference to "a very interesting conversation", and his belief that there are "pros and cons...to both scenarios". He suggests that the funding model of the TDSB is "a good approach from a kid perspective", but that it increases access only "a little bit". When asked to elaborate on equitable access in schools where fees are charged, Participant 1 said:

The school has traditionally picked up the slack if there is a student who financially cannot afford, and we try to help out in terms of financial assistance for those kids. So we do make sure, from an access perspective that way.

This falls in line with the research findings at Turner Fenton Secondary in the GTA, where student fees also incorporated the provision of scholarships and bursaries for students with financial need (IB, 2007).

In order to better understand the uniqueness of the TDSB funding policy from a local perspective, Participants 3 and 4 were asked to reflect on it. Given her role as IB Coordinator, and her responsibility for running the program on the TDSB's allocated budget, Participant 4 said:

It's vital, because the curriculum changes fairly frequently...so when you look at books to keep us current, the technology that we need - like the probes and things like that for the chemistry and the biology classes - um, some of the lab-work and the chemicals that are specific to their explorations. We're looking at a new math curriculum; we need all new math textbooks. Science curriculum is changing next year, so you know, Lord knows about that. Then you've got your...it costs about \$2, 000 per student for their

exams, and the [IB] World School fee is \$12, 000. So, it's completely vital. I mean, if it was a pay per kid, you're looking at a completely two-tiered system then, right? Of those that can afford it, and those who can't.

The funding of the IBDP at THS was considered by Participant 4 to be 'completely vital' to allowing equitable access to the program, and avoiding a "two-tiered system". The funding not only covers the annual school and exam fees, but fees to "keep [them] current", which is in line with Resnik's (2012) conclusion that it is costly to maintain the program to the standards of the IBO. From her position as principal of THS, Participant 3 reflected on the TDSB's policy to say:

We're the only school board in the GTA that charges nothing! Nothing for IB! So in keeping with the TDSB policy of equitable education for all right, it absolutely fits our mandate. And last year there was debate with our budget and that about starting to charge [students] fees, right? And it was, it was said, 'No, we're not doing that. We only have six secondary schools that offer IB in a big geographical area and they are spread out well.' So I think you have parents who it's accessible by virtue of, financially, they can afford it.

Participant 3 appeared to be very supportive of, and enthusiastic towards, the TDSB's philosophy on equitable education. She re-enforced Participant 4's suggestion that the IBDP is accessible to some students at THS only by virtue of the TDSB funding. These findings seem to sit slightly in contrast to the 2010 'Programs of Choice in the TDSB' report which concluded that IB programs largely serve students from the most affluent families (Sinay, 2010). There are two points to be noted here. First, the TDSB report says that IB programs 'largely' serve students from affluent families, which implies there is a proportion of students served who are not from affluent families. Second, the comments of Participant 4 above alluded to a range in SES in THS families, which implies the IB program at THS serves an unknown proportion of affluent and low-SES families. However, what is important to draw from this is that there are at least some socio-economically disadvantaged students being served by the TDSB policy that otherwise would not have access to the IB program. Participant 3's last comment, which made reference to

the six IB secondary schools in a large geographical area, makes a connection between the program funding and the geographical spread of schools in the TDSB. The following section will address geographical and spatial access to the program.

### 5.3.2 *Geographical and Spatial Access*

As revealed in the literature review, geographical and spatial access to IB programs is an area that requires further development. Whether or not a given student has the financial means to access a program is irrelevant if there is not a program in the student's geographic vicinity, or if there is an IB school but the program is not large enough to accept a new student. In terms of the geographical representation of IB programs in Ontario, Participant 1 commented that "Ontario's largest concentration of schools is easily the GTA." He went on to describe the growth of the IBDP in Ontario public schools as reflecting the desire to increase access to the program in a geographical sense:

In Ontario I think your new schools are coming in-. A lot of our new schools are Northern schools where there's not a huge amount of programs really. I'm thinking of North Bay which is one of our newer schools ... And so it's kind of introducing the program up there for kids. In some part I think it's because the word is filtering from Southern Ontario on up, that this is a desirable program and that maybe this is something they could look at and something that they could bring in, so it's-. I think most of the programs you see from a public school perspective coming in are about increasing access.

Of note here is how Participant 1 suggests that "the word is filtering from Southern Ontario on up". This reflects the idea that the IBDP has been favorably adopted as an alternative curriculum in Southern Ontario schools, and is now something which Northern Ontario schools are interested in emulating in their schools. In the South, participants attribute the TDSB's geographical distribution of IB schools to the Board's desire for equitable access. Participant 3 said:

So what the Board looks at, with anything in our board, it's around equity and fairness, so basically we did think geographically we are by volume, sheer volume of students, we're the third largest school board in North America. So then I think they look at, okay where are the other IB programs, look at them geographically, so that from a students' perspective if you're a student and your home program is Birchmount Collegiate in Scarborough, how far would you have to travel if you wanted to take this program?

Participant 4 re-iterates this sentiment and relates it to the implementation of the IB program at

THS:

The six schools are in very diverse areas, geographically in the city. And then, one of the reasons we were awarded the IB, from the TDSB, prior to the application process, was that there wasn't a school close by that has IB. So I think they are trying to be, you know, equitable.

Here, Participant 4 describes the process of becoming an IB school as being “awarded the IB,” reflecting the way the program is valued by the participant. Further to geographical considerations, spatial access to programs refers to the size of the programs available in each school. Participant 1 explains that “across the province there are various sizes of IB schools, and different ways that they can meet the needs of their community.” He says:

Probably our biggest access issue, I would say is that, and I think probably you see this in a lot of-, a lot more IB schools, is that there is great demand for the program. And so you're seeing a lot of schools who are not able to have open access because they could not meet the demand of kids who want into the program or parents who want their kids in the program...

The image of the program as a valued and sought-after option is further reinforced here. By maintaining this ‘social scarcity’ in Ontario, a school’s inability to meet program demands could be seen as a way of preserving the IB as a brand of distinction (Doherty, 2013). In business terms, a situation of increased demand could be solved by increased supply. The participants were probed as to the reasons why schools may choose to maintain the status quo of their program as opposed to growing it. Participant 1 explained his understanding of this issue in financial terms:

If you open more spots, essentially you're looking back saying that you would need-. It's a teacher training issue at that point. I can tell you from an Ontario perspective, sending somebody on training probably costs \$3000 per person.

Therefore, the cost of training alone could be a deterrent to expanding the program to more students. Contrasting this, the reason for maintaining the size of the program at THS relates more to the *perception* of the program and how the school wishes to portray itself. Participant 3 explains,

Some schools that are bigger may offer a more complex program whereas we have a small cohort and we choose to keep it that way because we don't want our school to be defined only by the IB program. It's a quarter of our school, it's not even a half. And we like it that way.

In this way, THS is choosing not to exploit the cultural or symbolic capital (Bagnall, 1994; Loh, 2012) that has been known to be associated with the full extent of the IBDP.

### 5.3.3 *Academic Access*

While some geographic contexts like Nova Scotia allow open access to the IBDP in its schools, many Ontario schools have stringent requirements for acceptance to the IBDP. Namely, in Ontario access to the IBDP is limited by the academic requirements of the program.

Participant 4 explains the policy and process of applying to the IB in the TDSB, where it is financially supported and the schools are relatively geographically distributed:

You have to sign an optional attendance form and even if you live across the street, there's no guarantee you're getting into the IB program. You have to interview just the same as everybody else. So geographically, there's no pluses or minuses of living in the [THS] area.

This reiterates the TDSB's policy to offer access to the program to the wider community.

However, it also brings forth the notion that the program has spatial limitations which are determined based on student applications. It was shown in the document analysis that THS has

quite a rigorous application procedure that is firstly based on student grades and diagnostic tests, and then on an interview. Participant 4 explains her perspective on acceptance to the program:

So, last year, I really felt like I'm not touching the wait list unless I absolutely have to, because I don't think you're doing a service to the kids. If they don't interview well, or if their marks aren't that good, no miracles happen between last year and this year.

Drawing upon her own experiences, Participant 4 details what kind of student is likely to succeed in the program. She stated that it is not "doing a service" to students to allow them into the program if they do not have the pre-requisites, even if there is space available. Participant 4 describes initial meetings held with the parents/guardians of potential IB students:

I'll say to them, "If you don't already have strong skills, you're going to be toast." Like, I tell the families that. So they have to really assess, you know, where their kids are at, you know, are they-. What kinds of changes do they have to make as a family to let that happen?

In this way, families can be seen to play a very important role in the support, and ultimately the success, of IB students. While Participant 4 is relying on her experiences to best prepare students and families for the rigours of the program, she is, in effect, rendering the program as a repellent in that certain types of students are discouraged away from it (Doherty, 2009). Participant 4 continued her discussion to describe how the program's reputation is "getting out":

The word's getting out now, like, kinda don't bother unless you've got, you know, at least a 75 percent average. You know, if you've got 'needs improvement' or even a 'satisfactory' on your learning skills, no. Um, so, but then, most of the kids...like all of the kids that really should be in the program, they're getting offers.

Access at THS can clearly be seen to be limited by academic ability and each student's skill-set, and there is an understanding that only some students "really should be in the program".

However, participants from THS as well as the provincial and global informants were all quick to dispel the notion that the IBDP is for gifted students. Participant 1 suggested that there is a "misnomer about IB that all of the kids in it are gifted or somehow the elite or best of the best

kids,” but that “it really is a program for kids who want to work hard more than anything else.”

Participant 2 explains the IBO’s perspective on the program, and the possible disconnect with local enactment:

There is still, I am sure in certain circles in Ontario and probably other provinces too, a mistaken kind of clinging to the kind of old idea of IB which certainly some schools kind of fostered, which was that you had to be born a future Einstein. You needed to have straight A’s since grade one, and be a perfect student, and do all your homework all the time, and you could be in the IB. We are fighting as hard as we can to get that view-, that we are not an elite program...I mean some schools don't help us in that regard. There are some schools who are still extremely selective about who gets into IB and who doesn't, and it's not something that we particularly support, although we can't dictate the school how to do it but we certainly encourage them to open the door and let them all in.

This statement from Participant 2 demonstrates how at the global level, or IB organizational level, there is little control over how the program is recognized and enacted at the local level.

The idea of opening the door to “let them all in” shows the IBO’s desire for open access and recognition of the program as being for students other than the academically “elite”. This view of the program is shared with the local participants from THS. Participant 3 expressed how they approach the IB program, gifted students, and the aim of cohesion of IB students with the wider school community:

And we work hard at not making the IB kids feel, or putting them on a pedestal and making them think-. Because academically in a lot of cases you know, there's a lot of gifted kids in IB because IB lends itself to a kid that needs to be challenged cognitively, right? Academically? But we work really hard at saying, 'Well you're not that special. You're just part of our community'.

Participant 4 even suggested that being gifted does not necessarily provide an advantage to a student in the IB program:

There’s no stars beside their name because they’re gifted. I’ll take a kid any day in the IB program who’s actually not gifted because they’ve had to work harder, generally speaking.

The overall emphasis of participants at all levels is that it is the work ethic of the students that determine success in the IB program, and not solely their academic abilities.

In conclusion, access to the IB program in Ontario is a complicated issue. On the surface, ‘access’ presents itself to be as simple as whether or not there is funding. Findings show that funding models like those employed in the TDSB have opened access to some students who otherwise could not afford the fees required at certain schools. In such a way, the TDSB policy has contributed to equitable access. However, other issues presented themselves in this analysis, such as the geographic location of students relative to IB schools; for example, students in rural communities in Ontario do not have the same access to the program that students in the TDSB would have. Looking even deeper than geography, students may not be able to access the program—even if there is a school within reach—if a particular school has a small program limited by academic requirements they are unable to meet. Schools may choose not to grow their IB programs based on financial constraints, or, in the case of THS, to control the amount of influence the IB has on their school. In either case, the result is that if there are more applicants than available spaces in the program, students are chosen based on their proven ability. In such a way, schools like THS employ the social scarcity strategy as they attempt to draw students to their program while simultaneously deploying strategies to suggest that spaces are limited and thus they will be selective with program offers (Whitehead, 2005).

#### **5.4 Theme 3: The Impact of the IBDP on the Whole School Community**

The findings in this section attest to the impact of the IBDP on the broader Ontario public school community. Inserting an alternative curriculum in a school is likely to have effects that reach beyond the boundaries of the IB classroom or the students in the IB cohort. It is probable



that presence of the IB contributes to the ethos and experience of a given school in positive and negative ways. In large part, participants were positive; however there were some negative consequences acknowledged.

#### *5.4.1 Caring Communities and IB/Non-IB Student Interactions*

Participants from THS viewed the IBDP as a positive force acting within their school. However, they were very quick to assert that the IBDP is just one program among many at their school that adds to an already caring school environment.

Participant 3: And it's about a caring community. In terms of being a global citizen as an IB student, that gets infused in everything. So in the morning announcements [the IB students] will say, [THS] is our home, let's keep it safe and clean, right? So that's the last thing we say every day. So are we perfect, absolutely not. But I think that there's just a genuine caring about the community that IB curriculum lends itself well to that, but also the other programs lend themselves to that too, so when you blend them all together there's a good marriage of different programs.

Participant 3 alludes to the sense of ownership and pride the IB students have taken in their school, and how this radiates out to the whole school. In addition, Participant 4 explained that IB students contribute to the community by their service work and they often look for opportunities for volunteer organizations to join them at their school: “They volunteer at hospitals, they bring...speakers that they’ve met...they make connections.” She also stated that “the IB kids have brought an energy” and “their social justice awareness about action is huge.” Participant 4 emphasized that the IB students are the “do-ers” in the school and the leaders of most school organizations. However, she also acknowledged that they can sometimes be “territorial” about their involvement:

I think they’re very sacrificial in terms of their time, and of course they get a lot out of it, but they’re the do-ers, and so you do have to...weigh, I guess... You know, there are kids that become very territorial. Like you know, ‘this is my CAS project’... ‘I’m an IB student’, and you know, ‘Reach for the Top is an IB thing!’ It’s not. But we have to make sure that it’s not. So you know, there can be an elitism that comes with it. I would risk that, because I know how much they’ve brought in.

The acknowledgement that “there can be an elitism” with the IBDP falls in line with what Doherty & Shield (2012) refer to as a dynamic of inclusion versus exclusion. To recall, Culross and Tarver (2007) cautioned that the interaction between IB and non-IB students was a major concern regarding the IBDP as an alternative curriculum. In the case of THS, Participant 3 stated that “...they do tend to be a tight cohort but not so tight that they don't intertwine and do other things.” Administrators at THS appear very cognisant of the interaction between IB and non-IB students, and are careful to minimize any potential elitism that IB students express.

The size of the program relative to the whole school community is an important factor influencing how the interactions of IB and non-IB students develop. Participant 1 explained:

...it often depends on the size of the school. So, the school I'm in...probably 55% of them are in the IB diploma program, so that's a lot. You will not find that at a lot of schools...So at our school nobody bats an eye really to being in IB or not being in IB. It's just, 'my friend is, this one isn't, we're friends.' It doesn't matter...There's a different approach when it's a much smaller program. Then it does become a bit of a weirder program to have in the school. That does carry it's own challenges.

Regarding this comment by Participant 1, and previous comments by Participants 3 and 4 which suggest THS would rather maintain the size of its program than grow it, it would appear there may be an optimal program size that works best to maintain positive relations between IB and non-IB students. However, this optimal size is relative to the individual school community. In some cases a school may require a small program with administrators who take a vigilant approach to possible negative consequences of the IBDP as an alternative curriculum. In other cases, a school may require a large program where students blend together regularly inside and outside classrooms.

#### *5.4.2 Impacts on Academics, Resources, and Learning*

Other impacts of the IB on the school community include potential improvement in standardized test scores due to the sheer influx of academic ability. Participant 3 comments that

“in terms of getting better results on literacy rates and numeracy rates, you know on EQAO,” that “if you bring in 60 kids and they're all really keen students and there's an entrance process that they have to go through,” the results are bound to increase. Standardized test scores reflect upon the whole school, and, therefore, the profile of the school is raised. Participants also reported that the injection of funding that the IB provides is beneficial to the whole school community. Participant 4 commented:

So, last year, we had about \$10, 000 left over, so I'm not going to say we're over-funded, but that actually does allow...you know, the IB brings a lot in, in terms of the school, and the kinds of programs now that we're running because of the interest, and the clubs and stuff. But we're also able to give back...I mean, we give \$10, 000 to a cross-curricular lab, you know...we're not just going to hold it for ourselves.

This is a clear demonstration of how IB funding can directly impact the wider school community by resourcing dual-accessed facilities. IB funding can also indirectly benefit the whole school community by the professional development that it provides. When asked to comment on the impacts of the IB, Participants 1 and 4 had the following to say about the benefits to teaching and learning:

Participant 1: I think that kids in our school are very well served, because you don't have a teacher teach just IB, you have a teacher teach both. And so, you will see, or at least I will see, [excerpts] of IB stuff being pulled into the Ontario class and kind of left on the table for somebody to digest.

Participant 4: It's just brought my...the wealth of knowledge that it brings...I think that's how it enriches my teaching, you know, across the board.

Participant 1 cautions that there can also be negative effects from teaching multiple programs. He relates this to the shift in expectations that is required of teachers who move from an IB course to an Academic, Applied, or Open level Ontario course.

There can also be situations where it works counter-productively. In some sense, especially if you have a very driven group of IB students, and you have a teacher who might be used to that very driven group of IB students, if they get a group in front of them who is not as driven or is not there-. Sometimes there can be-, the issue is that you

don't adjust expectations. That differentiation doesn't occur in the classroom the way you might expect it to.

Just as a teacher who teaches the IBDP can bring a new perspective into the Ontario curriculum classroom, so too can students who participate in both curricula. Participant 1 commented:

So most students are taking IB classes but they're also involved in the Ontario classes as well. So they are sometimes bringing their own experience and their own way of seeing things into the Ontario classrooms, from a student perspective.

In this instance, bringing new student perspectives into Ontario classrooms is captured in a positive light. It is important to note that this could have its own range of complications for the teacher in such a classroom—particularly depending on whether they are an IB teacher or not.

Drawing together the findings from this theme, it can be seen that there is potential for the IBDP to positively impact Ontario public school communities. However, like many of the other aspects of the IBDP that have been reported in this chapter, the degree to which impact will occur is dependent upon the local school context. Administrators who are mindful of the interactions between IB and non-IB students are essential for maximizing the potential of the program to positively impact the whole school community.

## **5.5 Theme 4: 'Unbundling' the Ontario Education Space**

At the outset of this chapter, I remarked that I began my data analysis with the recognition that circulation of a global program like the IB in Ontario relies upon the Ontario Ministry of Education, universities, and local authorities to 'unbundle' the Ontario education space (Resnik, 2012). With this in mind, a final theme emerged from the data which was interconnected with the other themes, yet significant enough to present on its own. This theme concerned the participants' understandings regarding the extent to which the Ontario Ministry of Education and Ontario universities' lack of recognition for the IBDP affects its operation and circulation as an alternative curriculum in Ontario.

### 5.5.1 *Satisfying IBDP and OSSD Requirements*

The findings showed that attempting to satisfy IBDP requirements and Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) requirements is not without complication. Participant 2 explained that the IBO has been working towards clarifying the dual program requirements with the Ministry of Education for some time.

Going back a ways, our goal in all of the Canadian provinces has been to make it a bit easier for teachers and for kids to do the IB diploma, and excuse them from doing all the other things that most of the provinces require to graduate. So the goal has been to have whoever the authority is, in this case it's the Ministry of Education, say that they-, following the IB diploma, meeting all the diploma requirements would meet the goals for graduation in that province. And for a long time that's been a particular issue in Ontario where some of the courses don't overlap as well as they do in other provinces and it is even more difficult for the kids and teachers to meet both goals. And the reporting system because of OUAC does mean that the grades have to be reported in a certain way with a certain percentage.

This shows a desire from the IBO to have the Ministry of Education recognize the IB Diploma as meeting graduation requirements in Ontario in order to minimize difficulties with course equivalencies and reporting of grades. Participant 1 supported the idea that it would be favourable for the IB requirements to satisfy OSSD graduation requirements:

A lot of people would prefer that I could say that I'm taking these six IB subjects...and that's my eleventh and twelfth grade, and if I take those six subjects...I've met the requirements of the Ontario diploma program—that the Ontario Secondary School Diploma is done at that point if I do this.

Participant 1 also re-iterated that the provincial reporting system creates an obstacle that IB schools must overcome:

We're currently in a reporting cycle for an example. So our teachers are going to write down a percentage grade. Every single IB school in Ontario is going to send out a supplemental transcript to indicate that these kids are in fact in IB. Especially if you're a large school, it's an incredibly arduous process, I mean it's time consuming, takes a lot of time to generate all of these transcripts. A lot of people would be quite happy if they could type in numbers 1 through 7 and that would go out to universities, alongside those marks even. Not even necessarily in place of those marks even, just alongside. That it would be almost that Ontario would acknowledge it say, on a transcript...

Noteworthy is Participant 1's emphasis that IB schools would be content to have IB grades included "alongside those" translated percentage marks on the provincial standardised report card. In this way, they are requesting to be acknowledged, and to have the "arduous" administrative process alleviated, but in a way that still falls in line with Ontario standardised procedures.

At THS, educators faced the obstacle of trying to cover the specific curricular content of both programs in one class. Participant 4 explained that there are sometimes choices which have to be made in terms of what content to cover:

...you know, the curriculum is so packed, that I can't meet every expectation that the Ontario curriculum demands. But I think that for the things that I value, and I know that the universities value, in terms of post-secondary, they're getting more than enough.

Participant 4 relies on her experience and understanding of university expectations to make judgements on which expectations are most important to complete. In terms of other curricular requirements, Participant 3 explained that part of the CAS Coordinator's role is to monitor the CAS hours for the Diploma students, as well as to ensure that IB students complete their 40 hours of community service required for the OSSD by the end of grade ten. "They have to get rid of those 40 hours because CAS is unique." In this instance there is conflict arising from both sides: the specific requirements of the IBDP mandate the service hours to be "unique" to CAS; however because the IBDP qualifications are not accepted as equivalent, the 40 service hours mandated by the OSSD must also be completed.

### *5.5.2 Recognition of the IB by Ontario Universities*

The reporting of percentage grades in Ontario secondary schools falls in line with the requirements of the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC). Participant 2 explains the current procedure for Canadian students applying to Ontario universities:

...the universities in Ontario in practice are quite good about the IB...But if you look at their policy, it isn't really very good compared to say UBC or U of A, or some of the Nova Scotia universities. In practice they treat IB kids pretty well...unfortunately they treat international students and domestic students differently. So they do accept international students...on the basis of their IB performance...but they don't treat domestic students in the same way because domestic students have to go through OUAC and what they require is a percentage. And there's all kinds of complications to that.

There are multiple aspects to focus on in the scenario presented by Participant 2. Firstly, it appears that the IB is “in practice” regarded positively by Ontario universities. However, there is an apparent disconnect between practice and policy in that there are separate application procedures for domestic and international IB students. This could be interpreted in two ways: equity in terms of applications across Canada, or a disadvantage to IB students who have completed additional degree components beyond their courses. Participant 3 commented that the procedure of applying through OUAC has equitable intentions, and any disadvantage to IB students can be addressed through a supplemental application:

But if you think about it right, everything gets filtered through OUAC, so they all get treated the same by going through OUAC. But then dependent upon the school, and dependent upon the program, some of those schools will take that supplemental information as well. And so you put in a separate application.

Participant 4 expressed her desire for increased recognition for the IB by Ontario universities:

...in terms of recognition, I think Ontario universities need to do a lot more about recognizing the IB diploma...I mean, if you go to the university fairs, IB university fairs, I mean, you know, in Alberta, in BC, they're like, “You're IB? Come to us!” Whereas, Ontario, it's definitely seen second. So I'll say that to kids: “if you think that getting the IB is some shoe-in, it's not. They're going to look at your marks first, and the marks are going to be transferred over.”

In this way, Ontario universities have not ‘unbundled’ the Ontario education space for IB students to the extent other provinces have. Participant 4 suggests that the IB is not a “shoe-in” for university acceptance because the marks will be looked at first and they will be “transferred over”. This procedure is equitable in that students are at least all compared using the same

metric; however, a problem arises if the transfer of grades from the IB to the OSSD is not comparable. The IBSO produced a Table of Equivalents for use in Ontario IB schools to aid in the conversion of IB grades to OSSD grades. Participant 2 suggested that problems arose when the Table of Equivalents was no longer current:

It's got more complicated because of the terrible grade inflation in Ontario. It's huge and which nobody wants to talk about. But it meant that this conversion scale that we created quite a few years ago which we intended to be a temporary patch until we could get the system to accept IB scores and work off of IB scores, it eventually got so out of date that the IB kids were being severely disadvantaged because this conversion scale from an IB score to a percentage was based on data from three, or four or five years ago which is no longer relevant because the inflation has been so much... That's not something the universities want to talk about too much, but it is a significant problem and anecdotally we hear about it all the time, and I guess eventually somebody will do a study to see how bad it is, but it's pretty bad.

Participant 2's concern regarding grade inflation was indirectly reinforced by Participant 1 when he commented, "In fact we just did a review of the table. So, the one that's there is changing. That's something we do spend quite a bit of time talking about." This underscores the fact that the table is not a fixed entity. However, reviews of the table could also be related to curriculum changes within the IBDP. As Participant 2 suggested, research into the topic of grade inflation might merit future consideration.

### 5.5.3 *Acknowledging the IBDP*

The final section of findings on this topic draws on participants' thoughts regarding acknowledgement of the IBDP by the Ontario Ministry of Education—what they would like to see happen, and why they feel it is unlikely to take place. Participant 2 articulated what he would like to see:

...so it would be useful if nothing else just to have a bolder statement...that says the Ontario government recognizes the value of the IB and its programs and that we would encourage schools to do, and students to do it, and let parents know that this is a good program. If nothing else, even if they don't have a policy, the very least they could do was say this is a good thing.



There is an indication from this comment that Participant 2 has a sense of what would be realistic to request of the Ontario Ministry of Education. That “even if they don’t have a policy” the Ministry could provide a “bolder statement” which says the IB is a “good thing.” Participant 1 explained that part of the difficulty in achieving this recognition from the Ministry of Education is not necessarily about the IB program itself, but rather about the politics involved with recognizing any other program as equivalent to its own:

...you're looking at places like Alberta and Ontario, where, especially those two I would say, where they have put forth a system of education which they feel is one of the best in the world. They are certainly good, I'm not knocking either of them. But you're then getting into a very tricky situation when you're asking them to acknowledge another one as being equivalent, and that gets into I think a huge politics game. I think the Ministry is quite happy to acknowledge we exist; I don't think that's the problem. It's just that recognition piece. The Ministry would likely argue they recognize it already. They recognize it exists. Full stop...From a complete buy-in perspective, I think that would require a lot more than just that and that's certainly the tension...You have what seems to be a case to say, 'we're big', and yet there's no acknowledgement. But it's a difficult political animal, for lack of a better way of putting it. It is a politically driven animal. It's going to be some time.

Participant 1 makes an important point regarding the concept of ‘recognition’ when he says, “They recognize it exists. Full stop.” This highlights a sort of ambiguity inherent in the term ‘recognition’, in that *allowing* a program to exist may be enough for one party to say they recognize the program, whereas another may not regard this as recognition at all. Participant 1’s conclusion that “it’s going to be some time” shows that he thinks the “political animal” is one that is not able to be conquered at the present time. A similar perspective on the topic is offered by Participant 3:

It's interesting because, I'm looking at it, and politically this probably isn't correct, but there's a certain arrogance with the provincial government and the Ministry of Education in particular. I think, you know, 'Look at us. Look at us in the McGuinty years how we've brought up the literacy rates, you know they're so much higher. Now we're focusing on Math, and look at our EQAO scores'...I don't think that, and this is just my opinion, I don't think they'd adopt it because they'd look at the Ontario Secondary School curriculum and they'd say, 'this is outstanding curriculum.'

This comment alludes to the politics involved with the situation, and the reluctance of the Ministry to more formally recognize the IB program due to how it would reflect upon its own curriculum. Participant 4 also discussed the reticence of the Ministry to acknowledge the IBDP:

I wish...I think the Ministry of Education doesn't really...they're kind of like heads in the sand, like, pretend it's not happening, almost...I don't know if it's that they don't like it, or, I don't think it's that. I just don't think...they're juggling so many balls, that, that's just a ball that never even got out of the pit, you know?

While she approaches the topic from a political standpoint, she more generally suggests that it has simply not even come up on the educational policy agenda.

This section has described the participants' accounts of how the Ontario Ministry of Education has opened up the educational space to allow the IBDP to circulate. Participants have shown that while the Ministry 'allows' the IB to exist in Ontario, there is reluctance on the part of the Ministry to formally recognize it. This has mostly been attributed to the politics involved with acknowledging an alternative curriculum, rather than how the program may be regarded by the province. As the IBDP is not formally recognized, the expectation is that the program requirements for the OSSD must be met in addition to those of the IBDP. This can create difficulties for administrators in terms of reporting IB grades, for teachers in terms of covering the content of two curricula, and for students in terms of completing additional requirements such as community service hours. University applications that are filtered through OUAC are inconsistent in their procedure for domestic and international IB students, but any possible disadvantage to domestic IB students seems to be alleviated through supplementary applications.

## **5.6 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented the findings from the analysis of interviews with four individuals considered to be key stakeholders involved with the IBDP in Ontario. The participant voices represented multiple realities of how the IB is perceived and enacted in the Ontario

context. The findings addressed my research questions by outlining the reasons for IBDP selection by Ontario public schools, explaining the extent to which local policies and perceptions affect equitable access to the program, and describing the effects the program has on the whole school community.

Findings have shown that the IBDP operates as a ‘point of difference’ in an Ontario educational market, in that the IBDP has unique features that set it apart from its competitors in a specific market—which in this case is the Ontario Secondary School Diploma. Participants used market terminology to describe the operation of the IBDP within Ontario, and attributed IBDP choice to its reputation for an advanced skill set, international character, core components and external assessment. This has resulted in schools implementing the IB to draw students in as a means to boost enrollment, compete with other schools, or re-invent themselves.

In terms of accessing the IBDP, local policies and perceptions were shown to have an impact on equitable access. Findings showed that the financial support of the IB in the TDSB opens access to students who would not otherwise have the opportunity to attend the program. Findings also showed that some schools that charge fees are aware of access issues and make provisions in their budgets for students with financial need. Geographical and spatial concerns also contribute to who can access the IB, as IB schools tend to be congregated in urban areas and are more prevalent in Southern Ontario. Even in areas of high IB program concentration, the local school context determines who can access the program based on the size of their program, and the necessary academic requirements to fill those select spots. Local perceptions of the IBDP also come into play, as schools like THS limit their program size in order to control the level of focus on the IB within their school community. Schools can be seen to employ a social scarcity

strategy which promotes access to students who are more academically capable, and discourages students who are not.

The third theme concerned findings regarding how the IBDP impacts the whole school environment. As revealed through this analysis, the IBDP has the potential to contribute in a positive way to the whole school community through IB students' sense of ownership and pride in their school, their leadership endeavours, their networking skills (which bring presenters into their school), and their awareness of global and social justice issues. Other impacts on the whole school community include the IBDP's financial investment in resources which are used by the entire student body, and the additional professional development for teachers who teach both curricula. The potential for negative impact on the school was related most strongly to the potential for elitism displayed by IB students over non-IB students. Mindfulness of administrators and program size were two factors which were deemed to influence the extent to which elitism plays out in a school.

The final theme concerned the topic of IBDP acknowledgement by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Ontario universities. This theme can be connected to the theme of the IBDP as a curricular choice in that the lack of acknowledgement from the provincial government works against circulating the IBDP as a valued alternative. This theme is also connected to issues of access in that program funding is unique to school boards and schools across the province; therefore, there are no provincial measures to ensure equitable access. Finally, in terms of impacts on the whole school community, the dual requirements cause additional strain on teachers and administrators who must try to meet the demands of two rigorous curricula. Findings showed that participants desire an official acknowledgment of the program by the Ontario Ministry of Education, but are doubtful of this happening due to the highly political

nature of the issue which provides little political advantage to the Ontario government. Chapter six will provide a discussion of these results and will conclude the thesis.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Conclusion

In this final chapter, I will conclude by describing the significance of the research in how it identifies a systemic problem of inequitable access to the IBDP in Ontario. This chapter will also outline the implications for future research and provide a summary of the thesis.

#### 6.1 Understanding the IBDP as a ‘Curricular Choice’ in Ontario

This research has been centred upon the idea of the IBDP and ‘choice’. Choosing the IBDP, or any other alternative program to that which is locally offered, represents an emerging situation where it is no longer only the school being chosen, i.e. ‘school choice,’ but the curriculum within the school, i.e. ‘curricular choice’ (Doherty, 2009). The literature on ‘school choice’ regards it as stemming from the global spread of neo-liberal educational policy and its marketization discourse (Doherty, 2009) which sees individual choices producing a stratified market that reinforces relative class position (Ball et al., 1996; Ball, 2003; Doherty, 2009). ‘Curricular choice’ has been described as originating from a similar school of thought (Doherty, 2009). In both scenarios, parents have been recast as consumers with the ‘right’ to exercise choice between schools or between alternative curricula and credentials within schools (Doherty & Shield, 2012). This study assessed whether the selection of the IBDP in Ontario was representative of this type of ‘curricular choice’—similar to that exemplified in Australian research (Doherty, 2009; Doherty, 2013, Doherty & Shield, 2012). My discussion of choice is informed by the literature and my findings from the global, provincial, and local levels as “attempts to reduce choice making to one simple formula or metaphor will only lead to dangerous over-simplification and misrepresentation” (Ball et al., 1996, p. 89).

At the global level, the IBO sits with its global dreams of creating a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect (IBO, 2013). At present, the situation is such that the success of the IB is reliant upon consumption of the global educational product by local markets. Discourses of neoliberal globalization, which facilitate educational markets, encourage the circulation of the IB and its instatement as a local ‘curricular choice.’ In promoting individual advancement over the collective good and common well-being (Lingard, as cited in Ball, 2012), these discourses also work to rival the idealist ‘global dreams’ of the IBO. Findings from this study indicated that the IBO promotes an image of the IBDP as a ‘choice’ educational product, although participants refuted the notion that the program is only for the elite. The analysis of IBO documents showed an emphasis on the programs reputation for university entrance, drawing on recommendations from universities such as Harvard or the London School of Economics, and its reputation for “academic and personal rigour” (Document 6) that will “prepare them for the demands of an increasingly global society” (Document 8). Further to this, the findings of the participant data analysis showed that the IBO promotes the role of ‘choice’ in Ontario and would value the Ministry’s support in doing “whatever they can to make those choices more available” as “there are many good things in an IB education, regardless if it’s better or worse than something else” (Participant 2). This comment is significant in that it makes the suggestion that educational ‘choices’ like the IBDP should be made available to Ontarians for selection at their discretion. It also raises the question of who is responsible for making these choices available. Some may contend whether the IBDP should be made available as a choice at all. However, the point remains that it is available, yet to varying degrees for Ontario students.

In addressing ‘choice’ at the provincial level, I was reminded that “choice means different things to different people in different settings” (Ball et al, 1996, p. 92). As such, the IBDP choice as it exists in Ontario could unfold differently from that of the Australian context, or any other. The research of Tarc and Beatty (2013) in Ontario supports the idea that the IBDP is being adopted as a ‘curricular choice’ which is characteristic of neoliberal school reform:

Generally speaking, publicly-funded secondary schools have adopted IB in a larger context of neoliberal school reform that presses secondary schools to distinguish themselves from other schools so as to maintain numbers and attract academically-able students. Many parents and students who choose the IBDP view it as a more challenging program that may provide an advantage in accessing the more competitive university programs. (p. 346)

Findings from the interview data support the claim that schools are looking to “distinguish themselves” so as to “maintain numbers” and “attract academically-able students.” Participant 1, who had an understanding of the program as it exists across the province, attributed the adoption of the program to its ability to attract students for the purposes of boosting enrollment, increasing financial resources, and competing with neighboring schools. The significance of these findings lies in their suggestion that schools are choosing the IBDP more for its ‘brand-power’ than its curricular content or idealist ambitions.

Finally, in addressing ‘choice’ at the local level, I looked for meanings constructed by and through the local enactment of the IBDP at THS and in the policies of the TDSB. The literature suggests education in Toronto operates as a local quasi-market, which combines state control and market mechanisms (Gulson & Webb, 2012, p. 168). Gulson and Webb



(2012) state that education policies which support choice have been part of the Toronto school arena for the better part of the last 25 years. What emerged from the document analysis was that the TDSB financially supports the IBDP as a specialized program, in addition to twelve other programs. The TDSB reflected the neo-liberal tenets of choice by stating that the IBDP “gives students a real advantage in applying for post-secondary schools all over the world” (TDSB, 2014c). Regardless of whether one is a proponent of choice, the TDSB can be seen to approach choice from an equitable standpoint by providing funding for all alternative programs. Participants 3 and 4 lauded the TDSB policy on funding of specialized programs as being vital to equitable education for all its students.

Overall, the IBDP was portrayed as a product of distinction in the Ontario education market—having unique ‘points of difference’ which can be seen as advantages over the OSSD. Findings also showed that the demand for the IBDP is not currently being met by Ontario schools, which preserves it as a product of distinction. To conclude, the literature and findings of this study suggest that the IBDP is representative of ‘curricular choice’ in Ontario public schools which is adopted in a larger context of neo-liberal policy and marketization strategies.

## **6.2 Understanding the IBDP Policy Vacuum in Ontario**

In this section I will draw together my findings on the IBDP ‘policy vacuum’ in Ontario in the context of educational reform. The policy vacuum was uncovered in the findings when my search for documents that recognized the IBDP as an alternative curriculum came up short. One reference to the program was found in a draft version of the Fees For Learning Materials and Activities Guideline (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010), but the example was removed in the final publication. Common practice suggests that IBDP courses

are 'allowed' to be substituted for OSSD credits. Relative to other provinces who offer the IBDP, Ontario was found to provide the least amount of recognition and support despite it having the highest volume of programs in the country. The document analysis showed that the IBO is placing an emphasis on increasing access to the IB through governmental policy and legislation. This was reiterated in the analysis of interview data as Participant 2 spoke of the IBO goal to make it "a bit easier" for schools to offer the IB in all the Canadian provinces, and how it has been a particular issue in Ontario for some time.

In terms of considering the role of the IBDP in a national (or provincial) setting, Doherty (2009) writes:

The IB is a uniquely transnational educational construction, a curriculum without borders, governed and operationalised beyond the nation, where so much of the institution of schooling is governed and operationalised within the nation. This curricular innovation has demonstrated a resilience over time, and a capacity to productively embed itself within a variety of national settings. (p. 2)

In this way, the IBDP can be seen to have demonstrated considerable resilience in Ontario due to its capacity to "productively embed itself" in the province despite a lack of provincial policy to recognize the program. This is not to imply that the province is a victim of the IB infiltrating its educational space (Doherty, 2013), but rather acts as a reminder that neo-liberalism works on and in the state (Ball, 2012) in numerous ways. I situate this work in the field of critical policy studies, and include in my definition of policy, an authoritative allocation of values (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), and courses of action and *inaction* relating to the selection of goals or the allocation of resources (Codd, 2007). I raise the questions: What values are inherent in the government's *inaction* towards policy on the IB? If the IBDP

primarily serves the middle-class in Ontario, and no measures are taken to open access to the wider population, whose ‘right to choose’ is the government valuing?

The interview data offered opinions on why the Ministry is not willing to more formally acknowledge the program. Participants referred to the situation as a “political animal” (Participant 1), stating that “there’s a certain arrogance with the provincial government and the Ministry of Education” (Participant 3) in regards to the provincial curriculum, and that it is “just a ball that never even got out of the pit” (Participant 4). These comments, as well as the ‘policy vacuum,’ can be understood in terms of the educational reform strategies that occurred in Ontario in recent decades. Chapter one outlined the educational reforms introduced in Ontario from the early 90s until the present, and how they echoed a national shift toward a market-based neoliberal paradigm (Satler, 2012). What has endured throughout the decades is the tendency to develop reforms that are characteristic of neoliberal globalisation and marketization discourse—setting policy in line with international trends and OECD recommendations (Carpenter et al., 2012). This can be seen through the importance placed on international and provincial assessments (i.e. PISA and EQAO) in Ontario. By acknowledging the IB as an equal, the Ministry may stand to lose some of the foothold that it has worked so hard to achieve for its own education system in recent decades. As such, recognition of the IB would not be politically advantageous to the Ontario Ministry of Education, as the Ministry does not stand to gain anything from the recognition. Therefore, there is a status quo of allowing the program to exist while being governed by local authorities.

### **6.3 Significance of the Research**

The significance of this research can be seen in its contribution to the study of IB programs in Ontario public schools. In this section I will outline the five main ways that this study contributes to the literature.

#### *1. Identifying the policy vacuum.*

This thesis has contributed to the literature by identifying the ‘policy vacuum’ regarding the IBDP in Ontario. Allowing the IBDP to operate at the local level with no parameters to guide fees or access produces a wide array of local interpretations across the province. Ball asserts that policies “create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do is narrowed or changed or particular goals or outcomes are set” (Ball, 1997, p. 270). As such, I suggest that this issue should be placed on the Ontario Ministry of Education policy agenda, in the interest of increasing equitable access to the program by Ontario students.

#### *2. Raising awareness of inequitable access.*

This thesis serves to question the current practice of the IBDP in Ontario, and start a conversation on the social justice implications of the ‘policy vacuum’ that has been shown to exist. Dei (1999) asserts that the harmful consequences of the marketisation of education in Ontario are most severely felt in relation to issues of equity and access. In order to encapsulate my discussion of access, I will return to the ‘black swan’ proposition discussed in chapter three. I applied the falsification test to this study by proposing that “all students in Ontario experience equitable access to the IBDP,” and illustrated this proposition to be false through my findings. Value can be seen in the deviant case, or the specific ways that access to the IBDP has been shown to be inequitable, as they “point to the development of new

concepts, variables, and causal mechanisms necessary in order to account for” inequity (Flyvberg, 2011). This study has attempted to identify some of the causal mechanisms for this inequity, and I will summarize these in point three below.

### *3. Identifying inequitable access as systemic.*

The literature showed that most schools in the province choosing to offer the IBDP will have to charge fees—immediately dictating that most IBDP students will be middle-class. Local support structures such as scholarships or bursaries in fee-charging schools, and the provision of the program by the TDSB, widen access to some financially burdened students. However, the findings showed that the issue of equitable access reaches far beyond financial provisions—it is systemic. Access is complicated by the geographic spread of programs and the local restrictions of programs based on program size and entrance requirements. In this way, Ontario students in rural communities—particularly in Northern Ontario—have little chance to access the program. Even students who are in the geographic vicinity of a program may not be able to obtain transportation to the school if they do not have adequate resources. In the case where programs are geographically available but limited in size, students must possess pre-determined characteristics to access the program. Students accepted into the IBDP at THS were required to have proven academic ability, advanced skills, and family support. Participant 1 affirmed that these were common entrance criteria across the province. Family support could be difficult to attain for students of single-parent homes or low SES backgrounds.

### *4. Questioning the consistency of local interpretations.*

The literature explained that the nature of adopting a global product like the IBDP into local contexts is likely to produce a variety of local interpretations (Doherty, 2013). For

instance, the emphasis on international-mindedness tends to vary from school to school, as suggested by the literature and confirmed in this study. These local interpretations become increasingly important when they dictate who may enter the program. I will draw upon one finding to illustrate my point that local perceptions of the program should be called into question when considering access to the program. All of the participants placed an emphasis on characterizing the IB student as ‘hard-working.’ Hard-work is a valid requirement for success. Nonetheless, emphasis on the ‘hard-worker’ plays on what Apple (2000) refers to as the legitimizing of markets as natural and neutral by the suggestion that they are governed by effort and merit. Who would question success determined by hard-work and merit? However, how is ‘hard-work’ defined and who gets to define it? How hard might a student work who is living in a single-parent home and achieving a 72 percent average? I question whether a chain of equivalencies (Tarc, 2009) exists that sees:

Academic ability = hard-work = worthy of success

This linear way of thinking about hard-work and success serves to perpetuate the image of the IBDP as an elite product that is only suited to a certain kind of student. While THS worked hard to minimize the elitist image of the IBDP by keeping the program small and re-enforcing the idea that the IBDP is just one of many programs they offer, it is uncertain how this plays out in other schools across the province. The effect of the dynamic of inclusion/exclusion (Doherty & Shield, 2012) as it relates to IB and non-IB students is also worthy of further examination.

##### 5. *Questioning whether ‘the rich get richer’.*

All levels of stakeholders who participated in this study opposed the image of the IBDP as elitist or only for gifted and talented students. However, the findings of this study

suggested that the primary reason for the adoption of the IBDP by schools is to draw students to the school. It is important to consider the type of student that these schools are drawing in given the program requirements. It is understandable that the elitist image would be propagated if it is predominantly well-resourced, high-performing students who are accepted into the program. In this way, low-SES or under-resourced students could be intimidated by the program; thus, schools are perhaps unintentionally carrying out a social scarcity strategy (Whitehead, 2006). Some may argue that students in Ontario all have access to a world-class education, and that this scenario is no different than a private school versus public school debate. However, I argue that it is different, as the IBDP is proven to offer advantages beyond that of the OSSD (even if only by perception), and if only the well-resourced students have the opportunity to access it, they have the opportunity to get *further* ahead than those that do not. Thus, the rich get richer, and the poor stay poorer.

#### **6.4 Implications for Future Research**

This thesis poses as many questions as it has attempted answers. The findings of this study provide four implications for researchers or educators who are interested in conducting research on the IBDP in Ontario or other Canadian provinces. Firstly, this study reported on administrator *perceptions* of why students and parents choose the IBDP as an alternative program. Bagnall's (1994) dissertation work included participant data from students on why they had chosen the IBDP; however, it would be interesting to have more recent qualitative data on student and parent choices which could be compared to the existing literature and to the perceptions of administrators discussed in this study. Secondly, this study was a single-case study of the phenomenon of the IBDP as it exists in Ontario. The 'point of difference', or advantage, that the IB offers is unique to the local market, and would require a comparative

study to see how locations are set apart from each other. It would be insightful and revelatory to conduct a comparative case-study with another Canadian province which differs in its policy and practice of the IBDP. For example, the policy towards the IBDP in Nova Scotia allows open access to the program and equates completion of the IB Diploma to the Nova Scotia High School Graduation Diploma. It would be of interest to conduct a study that investigated who takes the program when finances *and* program requirements are not a barrier. Thirdly, the selection of a qualitative case-study implies a method which can give rich insight into a particular location or phenomenon, but is not intended to be generalizable to the wider population. A study which posed a questionnaire to all IBDP Coordinators and principals in the province would help to confirm or redress the reasons for schools choosing the IBDP, as reported in this study. Finally, the core components of the IBDP (TOK, CAS, and the Extended Essay) were shown to be valuable aspects of the IBDP program by participants. A qualitative study which looks at these specific components as they operate within Ontario public schools could illuminate their benefits in order to make further recommendations to the Ontario curriculum.

## **6.5 Summary**

I arrived at this research topic due to my experience working with the IBDP in an international school setting. When I returned to Canada, I developed a curiosity as to why an international curriculum like the IBDP would be selected for implementation alongside a Canadian provincial curriculum. A review of IBDP statistics in Canada illustrated that the program is most prevalent in the province of Ontario (IB, 2010). This intrigued me, as I had an understanding that the Ontario curriculum was itself used by International schools around



the world.<sup>4</sup> This drove my desire to uncover what, if anything, the IBDP had to offer over and above the Ontario curriculum, and how this program was made available within public schools. Hence, I set out to explore the IBDP as an alternative curriculum offering in Ontario public schools, with the primary goal being to interrogate how policy and practice propagates or hinders equitable access to the program across the province. I subscribe to a transformative paradigm as I feel power differentials should be subject to a critical analysis in order to assess the implications for social justice. In order to inform my question of equitable access, I required a better understanding of how the IBDP operates as a global product in Ontario, how it is chosen as an alternative to Ontario curriculum, and how it impacts IB students and the wider school community. I deployed a single-case study methodology with the focus of the case being the phenomenon of the IBDP in Ontario public schools. The case-study design consisted of multiple units of analysis at the global, provincial, and local levels. My findings depicted the IBDP as the epicenter of a complex and tangled educational web of global, provincial, and local interactions—each with its own ambitions and effects due to neoliberal globalization. Based on the analysis of my results, I conclude that the IBDP is representative of ‘curricular choice’ in Ontario public schools, and a provincial ‘policy vacuum’ exists regarding the IBDP in Ontario. These findings are significant as they indicate that the IBDP in Ontario operates as a global product of distinction which predominantly serves middle class students—in effect creating a private school atmosphere in public education. Findings of this research suggest a ‘policy vacuum’ regarding the IBDP in Ontario, in that the IBDP operates without any official policy to govern it at the provincial level. This is significant as it leads to

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<sup>4</sup> Working in the International school ‘circuit’, I was aware that many International schools used Canadian provincial curriculum. The Canadian Information Centre (2014) reports that 20 International schools are accredited to offer the Ontario curriculum, while 37 offer the B.C. curriculum, 18 offer N.S. curriculum, and 6 offer Alberta curriculum.

an array of local interpretations on program enactment and resourcing, which contributes to a systemic problem of inequitable access. This study calls upon the attention of policy-makers to address this issue at the provincial level.

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## APPENDIX A

### Letter of Information

#### *Curricular Choice' in Ontario Public Secondary Schools: Exploring the Policy and Practice of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme*

#### **Introduction and Invitation to Participate**

My name is Wendy Baker and I am a Master of Education student at the Faculty of Education at Western University. Goli Rezai-Rashti and I wish to invite you to participate in our research study on the implementation of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) in Ontario public secondary schools because, as an administrator or professional working with the IBDP in Ontario, you have the potential to provide rich insight into how these programmes are implemented.

#### **Purpose of this Study**

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the implementation of the IBDP in Ontario public secondary schools, so as to inform educational policy development on alternative curriculum options, such as the IB. This research aims to understand the IB in this local context by exploring the intended outcomes of the IBDP in public schools, and the challenges and benefits associated with implementing multiple curricula in one school.

#### **Study Procedures**

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in an interview which will be audio recorded. If participants do not wish to be audio recorded, they should not participate. It is anticipated that the entire task will take approximately 1 hour, and will only consist of one session. The interview will be conducted in the Greater Toronto Area at a location which is convenient to you as a participant.

#### **Confidentiality**

The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and no information which could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. Results may include quotations from your interviews in order to provide an accurate representation of your perspectives. Personal information (i.e. your name and your school) will be removed from transcribed material and the final report; pseudonyms will be used. If you choose to withdraw from this study, your data will be removed and destroyed from the database. All information will be secured on a memory stick and password protected audio recording device which are kept in a locked cabinet,

and accessible only by investigators of this study. Information will be kept in accordance with Western University's policy for five years and then destroyed through file deletion.

**Possible Risks and Harms**

There are no known risks to participating in this study.

**Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your future employment.

**Contacts for Further Information**

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Research Ethics (519) 661-3036, email: [ethics@uwo.ca](mailto:ethics@uwo.ca). If you require any further information regarding this research project or your participation in the study you may contact Wendy Baker at xxxxxxxxxxx or xxxxxxxx@xxx.xx.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Sincerely,

Wendy Baker

**APPENDIX B**

**Letter of Consent**

*Curricular Choice' in Ontario Public Secondary Schools: Exploring the Policy and Practice of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme*

*Wendy Baker, Master's of Education Student*

*Faculty of Education, Western University*

**Consent Form**

- O I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
- O I consent to having anonymous direct quotations from my interviews used in any future published work of the final research study.

Participant's Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Person Obtaining Informed Consent (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Guide

1. How long have you been working at with the IBDP?
2. When was the IBDP implemented in your school?
3. How many students at your school are currently enrolled in the IBDP? (Has this grown from when it was originally implemented?)
4. Have you participated in official training from the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO)?
5. Did you have a hand in establishing the IBDP at your school? If so, what was your role? If not, how did you come to work with the program here?
6. Can you describe what you understand the philosophy of the IB to be, and how your school addresses this inside and outside of the classroom?
7. Can you describe the role of the IBDP as an alternative curriculum at your school – its purpose, goals, intended outcomes, etc.?
8. Can you discuss how the topics of international-mindedness and intercultural awareness are addressed in the IBDP at your school? Are there ways in which these carry over to the whole school environment? (If not, do you think there is any possibility for this to occur?)
9. Can you describe the demographics of students who are enrolled at your school, and specifically in the IBDP here (if possible, in terms of Socio-economic status, class, race, gender, ethnicity, etc.)?
10. Can you comment on the extent to which the current school board policy supports your students?
11. Can you describe the application process and timeline for entering the IBDP? What support mechanisms are in place for students wishing to apply?
12. How is the implementation of the IBDP negotiated to fit into the timetable, staffing, industrial conditions and school systems devised around local curricula?
13. How would you characterize the benefits and drawbacks to implementing the IBDP in your school?
14. Do you have any opinions or recommendations regarding the current policy towards funding and implementation of IB programs in Ontario? Please explain why or why not.
15. Do you think there is a need for curriculum to address issues of international-mindedness and intercultural-awareness to a greater extent? Please explain why or why not.

## APPENDIX D

### Email Script for Recruitment

Subject Line: Invitation to participate in research

You are being invited to participate in a study that we, Wendy Baker and Dr. Goli Rezai Rashti, are conducting. Briefly, the study involves discussing the implementation of the IB Diploma Programme in Ontario public schools, will require approximately one hour of your time, and will be conducted in at a location convenient to you.

If you would like more information on this study, or would like to receive a letter of information about this study, please contact the researcher at the contact information given below.

Thank you,

Wendy Baker  
Researcher  
Master of Education Student  
xxxxxxx@uwo.ca  
(xxx) xxx xxxx

Goli Rezai-Rashti  
Principal Investigator  
Professor  
Faculty of Education  
Western University  
xxxxxxxxx@uwo.ca  
(xxx) xxx xxxx

# APPENDIX E



Research Ethics

Use of Human Participants - Initial Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Prof. Goli Rezai-Rashti  
 File Number: 104680  
 Review Level: Delegated  
 Protocol Title: Aligning the International with the Local: An Exploratory Study of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme in Ontario Public Schools  
 Department & Institution: Education/Faculty of Education, Western University  
 Sponsor:  
 Ethics Approval Date: December 13, 2013 Expiry Date: April 13, 2014

**Documents Reviewed & Approved & Documents Received for Information:**

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Recruitment Items	Recruitment Email	2013/09/24
Recruitment Items	Telephone Script	2013/09/24
Other	References	2013/09/24
Instruments	Interview Questions	2013/10/03
Western University Protocol		
Revised Letter of Information & Consent	Letter of information revised to include PI's name and contact information.	2013/11/29

This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREB.

The Chair of the NMREB is Dr. Riley Hinson. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.



Officer to Contact for Further Information

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Grace Kelly grace.kelly@uwo.ca	<input type="checkbox"/> Vicki Tran vicki.tran@uwo.ca	<input type="checkbox"/> Mira Moldavi mirmold@uwo.ca	<input type="checkbox"/> Erik Basile ebasile@uwo.ca
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This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.



## APPENDIX F



### Organizational Development

1 Civic Centre Court, Ground Floor, Toronto ON M9C 2B3 • Tel: (416) 394-4929 • Fax: (416) 394-4946

January 31, 2014

Dear Wendy Baker and Goli Rezai-Rashti,

*Curricular Choice' in Ontario Public Secondary Schools: Exploring the Policy and Practice of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme*

The External Research Review Committee (ERRC) of the Toronto District School Board considered your research proposal at the January 2014 meeting and approved your application to interview up to five key staff informants about the IB program in one secondary school. While we understand that you may have tentative agreement from Weston CI, for our records could you please advise us of the participating school once that is finally confirmed.

Please note that this ERRC approval does not obligate any staff members to participate, and the invited individuals may make the final decision about their own participation.

As a condition of this approval, we will also expect to receive a final report of your study with an estimated completion date of April 2014.

Sincerely,



Sally Erling, Chair  
External Research Review Committee, TDSB  
E-mail: [ERRC@tdsb.on.ca](mailto:ERRC@tdsb.on.ca)

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## APPENDIX G

### Toronto District School Board High School Specialized Programs

Type of Program	Number of TDSB Schools	Description
<b>Africentric Secondary Program</b>	2	Offers students the opportunity to learn through an Africentric lens
<b>Arts Focus/Programs</b>	4 Arts Focus schools, 4 Arts programs	For those interested in pursuing visual and performing arts at a professional level
<b>Entrepreneurship</b>	1	For developing the innovation, flexibility and self-reliance required to be successful in a business driven environment
<b>Integrated Technology</b>	1	Uses math, science and tech skills in all subject areas, to allow students to combine the knowledge of traditional academic disciplines with a problem solving approach to change
<b>Cyber Arts/Studies</b>	4 Cyber Arts; 3 Cyber Studies	Cyber Arts programs integrate artistic expression and knowledge of design with technical experience combining the Fine Arts with Computer Technology and Communication Media.
<b>Dental Assistant</b>	1	Beginning in Grade 11; prepares students interested in become a dental assistant.
<b>Elite Athletes/Arts</b>	4	For provincial or national athlete; Allows special timetables and unusual arrangements to coexist with coaching and travel schedules
<b>International Baccalaureate</b>	6 IBDP	The International Baccalaureate Program is a world renowned graduation diploma, recognized for admission to universities throughout the world. All external examinations, certificates and diplomas are prepared, graded and awarded by the Geneva-based International Baccalaureate Office
<b>International Studies/Languages</b>	1	Gives students a global perspective; Study of a variety of disciplines from business and commerce to languages
<b>Leadership Pathway</b>	1	Helps students assume ownership for their leadership development
<b>Math, Science &amp; Technology</b>	10	Fosters a deep understanding and interest in math, science or technology
<b>Media Arts</b>	2	Television and media arts technologies or graphic design are integrated with a focus on production, live production or print media
<b>Pre-Advanced Placement (AP)</b>	2	Specialized enrichment program that focusses on mathematics, computers, sciences, arts and humanities

## Curriculum Vitae

**Name:** Wendy Baker

**Post-secondary Education and Degrees:** University of Prince Edward Island  
Charlottetown, PE  
2000 – 2002

Dalhousie University  
Halifax, NS  
2002 – 2004 B.Sc

Deakin University  
Melbourne, Australia  
2008 PGDE

Western University  
London, ON  
2012 – 2014 M. Ed

**Honours and Awards:** Governor General’s Bronze Medal  
2000

Percy and Helen Murphy Full-Tuition Scholarship  
2000

Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS)  
2013 – 2014

**Related Work Experience:** Secondary Science and Mathematics Teacher  
Jewish Free School, London, UK  
2009 – 2010

Head of Secondary Mathematics  
GEMS Wellington International School, Dubai, UAE  
2010 – 2012

Teaching Assistant  
Western University  
2012 – 2013

Research Assistant  
Western University  
2013 – 2014