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Critical reflections on modern elite formation and social differentiation in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme in England

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Abstract

This paper investigates the changes in educational policy in England regarding the implementing of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (henceforth IBDP) into post-16 (sixth form) education. The aim is to illustrate the unique trajectory of the IBDP in England: from its adoption in schools and colleges across the country, to its removal, due largely to a combination of specific changes, such as government funding criteria inside state education, and the tariff system for university entry that is deployed for qualifications at 18. This paper explores this combination of changes using interview data with 28 senior leaders from eight schools and colleges that have introduced the IBDP, including state centres that have subsequently had to remove it from their curriculum. Employing the idea of a neo-liberal social imaginary, this paper

analyses the resulting level of social exclusion inside the English post-16 curriculum created by the educational policies adopted by successive governments since the 2008 economic recession. The paper argues that the rise and decline of the IBDP in England has resulted in a significant level of socially differentiated take up, largely in independent schools, and in state schools in London and the South-East of the country. This paper concludes that access to the IBDP is restricted with regard to both geographical and social mobility and that current access to the IBDP in England is helping to sustain a 'globally mobile transnational elite group', thus reinforcing the connection established between the IBDP's wider curriculum and global capitalism.

Keywords:

Cultural capital education leadership elites globalisation International Baccalaureate social mobility

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