

## **Challenging the neoliberal narratives- IB practices within Singapore, Hongkong & Taiwan**

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This paper is part of a recent qualitative research study, a comparative analysis of IB practices within Southeast Asian contexts, Singapore, Hong, Kong and Taiwan. In Asian societies, such as Singapore, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, the number of IB school has experienced a quick rise since the turn of the millennium. There has also been advances made by the state governments to incorporate international curricula to national education systems (Kim and Mobernd, 2019). This development in IB schools in the three contexts have been uneven with some countries more advanced in its practices and others still at its infancy stage of development. Despite the varying conditions, IB's links to the future of global capital, the internationality of education in this sense continues to grow in influence.

Since its inception in 1968, the IB Diploma has set “the gold standard against other international programmes...and has achieved this position through recognition by the world’s most prestigious universities, through its global support from governments and from its position of a virtual monopoly as an international pre-university qualification” (Walker, p. 49). The IB has been marketed as a form of qualification that is recognised by universities worldwide, thus establishing a strong global brand. This growth has also led to claims that IB is adopted by elite schools in Asian Pacific regions for increasing their international competitiveness and to make themselves stand out from other local competitors. It is thus tagged to the neoliberal market agenda.

However, the empirical illustration from the study within the three varying contexts, showed a shift of the neo-liberal market agenda in the practices of the three schools. The schools whilst navigating through a competitive globalised market had shown a more measured approach in navigating through its practices. The interviews showed how leaders and teachers were shifting away from a neoliberal mandate to rethink their aims of the curricula approach and the individual's place within any education system. While staying unique to their distinct values and practices, the schools were collaborative in their approach towards the development of curricula. Schools benefitted from a networked community, more predominantly in the Singapore's context. There was a common platform created by IB for shared training and schools leveraged on each for support.

The pandemic has appeared to challenge the neoliberal hegemony. There has been a new appreciation of teachers' work and their contributions. ‘We are all in this together!’ has been a common political refrain in the context of the pandemic in all contexts (Lingard, 2021). Human development is at the forefront of learning and this has ushered in a kinder, more collective, socially just politics within schooling and education across the IB schools.

