The Hidden Internationalism of Elite English Schools

Rachel Brooks (University of Surrey) and

Johanna Waters (University of Oxford)

Contact details for corresponding author:

Rachel Brooks

Department of Sociology

University of Surrey

Guildford

Surrey

GU2 7XH

Email: r.brooks@surrey.ac.uk

Abstract

Analyses of UK higher education have provided compelling evidence of the way in which this sector has been affected by globalisation. There is now a large literature documenting the internationalisation of British universities, and the strategic and economic importance attached to attracting students from abroad. Within the schools sector, it has been argued that parents are increasingly concerned about the acquisition of valuable multicultural ‘global capital’. Nevertheless, we know little about whether ‘internationalism’ and/or the inculcation of ‘global capital’ is an explicit focus of UK schools. To start to redress this gap, this article draws on an analysis of websites, prospectuses and other publicly-available documents to explore the extent to which internationalism is addressed within the public face that schools present to prospective pupils, and the nature of any such messages that are conveyed.

Keywords: education, international, schools

Background

Over recent decades internationalism has become increasingly important to education systems worldwide: more students than ever before are crossing national borders in pursuit of an education; many national systems of education are becoming more internationally-focussed; and some scholars have argued that we have witnessed the rise of a ‘global’ education market. Such shifts have been driven by a number of factors. Firstly, many parents have sought an international education for their children in the belief that this will help them to be competitive within a global labour market – and/or a domestic labour market that puts high value on international qualifications and experiences. Indeed, socially powerful groups

now see international mobility ‘as way of strategising to enhance the educational capital of their young people beyond the national to the global’ (King et al., 2011: 177) and of inculcating the competences and dispositions ‘that will allow effortless circulation amongst the international community, its codes and its subjects’ (Aguair and Nogueira, 2012: 353). Secondly, in many parts of the world, schools have actively pursued this growing market: national schools are developing sophisticated international strategies (Aguair and Nogueira, 2012); international schools that have historically catered for expatriate communities are now reorienting themselves towards lucrative local markets (Hayden, 2011); and globalism has become one of a small number of ‘canonical discourses’ adopted by schools (Wilkins, 2012). Thirdly, national governments have, in some parts of the world, stimulated this growth. In South Korea, for example, in 2009 a policy change allowed South Korean nationals to establish and operate international schools for the first time, and such schools to recruit up to half their population from South Korean nationals (Song, 2013).

This paper seeks to contribute to this body of work by providing a case study of England, documenting the ways in which globalising agendas are being played out in English schools. Analyses of UK *higher education* (HE) have provided compelling evidence of the way in which this sector has been affected by globalisation. Indeed, there is now a large literature documenting the internationalisation of British universities, and the strategic and economic importance attached to attracting students from abroad (e.g. Brooks and Waters, 2011). Moreover, recent research has also highlighted a small but significant minority of UK students who are choosing to move overseas for higher education – often to access an elite education and/or pursue a more broad-based degree programme (Brooks and Waters, 2009; Findlay et al., 2012). Within the schools sector, it has been argued that parents are increasingly concerned about the acquisition of valuable multicultural ‘global capital’

(Gibbons, 2002). Nevertheless, we know little about whether ‘internationalism’ and/or the inculcation of ‘global capital’ is an explicit focus of UK schools. To start to redress this gap, in this article we draw on an analysis of websites, prospectuses and other publicly-available documents to explore the extent to which internationalism is addressed within the public face that schools present to prospective pupils, their families and other interested parties, and the nature of any such messages that are conveyed.

Methods

This article is based on a detailed analysis of the websites and prospectuses of 30 ‘elite’ schools (with sixth-forms) in England. Our choice to focus on elite schools was informed by previous research in this area. While aspects of multiculturalism (and thus some forms of internationalism) have been discussed in relation to state schools, particularly those in urban areas (e.g. Reay et al., 2007), much less attention has been given to private and high-performing schools. Such schools are, nevertheless, sociologically significant as they hold considerable power within society and provide an important means through which the middle classes are able to achieve social reproduction (Allan, 2010). Furthermore, extant studies have suggested that young people attending well-known private schools are much more likely than their peers at other types of school to consider moving overseas for their HE and to be supported in such decision-making by their institutions (Brooks and Waters, 2009; King et al., 2011). Research within the private sector has also indicated that international mobility for education is a source of some discussion amongst pupils (Maxwell and Aggleton, 2013). We were also keen to include high-performing state schools, as there is some evidence that they are now also encouraging young people to consider overseas HE, and are being targeted by American universities (Danby, 2013). Across all three types of school, we were interested to

explore the extent to which discourses of internationalism were evident in the ways such schools chose to present themselves to prospective pupils and the public more generally.

To ensure that we captured some of the diversity among elite schools, our sample was stratified to include three groups:

- ‘influential’ private schools – schools identified by the Sutton Trust (2012) as having educated around 12 per cent of the ‘leading high flyers’ in the UK;
- ‘high-performing’ private schools – identified using the Department for Education’s league table of A/AS Level point scores per pupil for 2012; and
- ‘high-performing’ state schools – also identified using the Department for Education’s A/AS Level league tableⁱ.

In each category, we chose ten schoolsⁱⁱ and, in the discussion that follows, we identify them by type (e.g. Influential Private 1, High-Performing State 2). Further details about the schools are given in Table 1ⁱⁱⁱ. Sampling in this way enabled us to explore a more diverse range of schools than has typically been the case in research on the private sector, which has often focussed on one school only, and to tease out possible differences between private schools, which have been highlighted in large-scale surveys but rarely explored in any qualitative depth. The schools were also widely geographically dispersed across England, with no particular concentration in any one area.

[Insert Table 1 here]

For each of the 30 schools, we conducted a detailed analysis of their website, prospectus and any additional documents that were publicly available on the website. We chose to focus on these publicly-available materials as they represent an important means of communication for all schools. As Marginson (1993) argued over two decades ago, schools now have a ‘consciousness of appearance’ and often employ staff with marketing and media expertise and/or engage marketing consultants. Such approaches have become increasingly important as education markets have become more competitive. As parents have become constructed as consumers, so schools have been expected to ‘appeal to and educate parents as bearers of consumer rights and responsibilities’ (Wilkins, 2012: 71). Indeed, an entrepreneurial culture now prevails, in which websites and prospectuses have become important parts of the ‘symbolic architecture’ of educational institutions (Wardman et al., 2010), and contribute to the ‘visual saturation of schools as objects of consumption’ (Wilkins, 2012: 83). They have become a significant means through which schools aim to build a unified and positive image – akin to corporate branding (McDonald et al., 2007). Moreover, prospectuses and websites offer insights not only about how schools see themselves, but the assumptions they make about their prospective pupils; they also have an important relationship with wider dominant discourses. As McDonald et al. (2010) have argued, ‘schools draw on hegemonic discourses in broader cultural politics [and]...in turn, reproduce and reinforce the platforms and emphases of these discourses’ (p.14). Websites and prospectuses are perhaps particularly important for private schools as they often rely on visual and ritual display as a base for their prestige and exclusivity (e.g., emphasising school architecture and landscapes) (Allan, 2010; Gottschall et al., 2010).

Our analysis of the websites, prospectuses and other materials comprised both content analysis and discourse analysis (of words and images). We were interested to explore the

extent to which certain themes were mentioned and/or represented (e.g. HE destinations outside the UK, international pupils, trips and expeditions abroad), and used a detailed grid to record this information. We also explored, in a more discursive manner, the way in which these various themes were constructed in the websites and elsewhere – thus our analysis was primarily qualitative rather than quantitative in nature. The theoretical position that we adopted in this analysis drew on the notion of ‘visual grammars’ outlined by Leathwood and Read (2009). This assumes that, although it is possible for texts to be read in different ways by different readers, particular discourses are socially and culturally dominant at any one point in time and have a strong bearing on the way in which texts are both produced and read.

International activities

Our analysis of the websites and other materials from the 30 schools in the sample revealed some differences between the state and private schools^{iv}. The level of international activity – across a number of different domains – appeared higher in the two types of private school than the high-performing state schools. Nevertheless, across the vast majority of schools, whether state or private, ‘the international’ was rarely celebrated explicitly in the schools’ homepages, headteachers’ welcome messages or other prominent pages and/or materials. For the private schools, in particular, it was notable that despite a seemingly important role in promoting students’ international mobility (for HE) and providing education for a considerable number of international pupils, the majority of institutions maintained a largely insular and geographically circumscribed ‘public face’. In the sections below, we explore in more detail four types of this ‘hidden internationalism’, drawing on illustrative evidence from the schools, before offering some explanations of these patterns in the final part of the paper.

Overseas HE destinations

Many of the private schools in the sample provide HE destinations data somewhere on their website – typically as part of a page devoted to ‘higher education’ or ‘pupil destinations’.

These data indicate that a considerable number of pupils from the private sector progress to overseas universities each year. For example: at Influential Private 3, 29 pupils were accepted by overseas institutions in 2011 (the most recent data available on the website); at High-Performing Private 4, ten pupils secured places at overseas universities in 2012; at High-Performing Private 5, about four progress to overseas destinations each year; and High-Performing Private 10 claims that between 10 and 15 of its pupils apply to universities outside the UK each year. A number of the private schools also provide dedicated support for international mobility. For example, High-Performing Private 10 employs a special adviser for US university entry, Ivy League admissions tutors regularly visit Influential Private 10, and High-Performing Private 4 runs a HE fair specifically for North American institutions. Nevertheless, this activity was rarely mentioned in the main pages of the schools’ websites and, in some places, it appeared that it was consciously being concealed from the schools’ ‘public face’. High-Performing Private 4 provides a striking example of this. The school evidently has strong links with US universities, as it runs the North American universities fair, mentioned above, which is open to pupils from other UK schools. Moreover, the headteacher’s blog includes an article on studying in the US, which claims ‘US applications have become big business for schools like mine’ and goes on to argue that they can be more sympathetic to the middle class child than Oxbridge:

US universities are famed for wanting to know all about pupils' other interests, their role in the community, their leadership – whether as captains of a team, or leaders of

an orchestra - and all the things that make them tick. That is a big appeal when our pupils regularly hear Oxbridge admissions tutors tell them that they can't possibly take such middle class accomplishments into account.

Nevertheless, the blog is accessed through a marginal part of the website as a whole, and the article is only one of many blogposts. The links with US institutions are not mentioned on any of the main webpages and, in relation to HE in general, it is leading UK universities that are emphasised, as the quotation below illustrates:

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

Similarly, at Influential Private 3 and High-Performing Private 5, although there is evidence, cited above, that the schools regularly send pupils to US universities, this is not given any prominence in the main webpages and, again, it is Oxbridge places that are celebrated.

Alongside the positioning of Oxbridge as the most desirable HE destination and the relatively 'hidden' nature of information about overseas destinations, is a clear emphasis on the *local*. This is evident even in the small minority of schools that *do* celebrate pupils moving overseas for university (such as Influential Private 10). For example, despite an international reputation and a history of pupils moving abroad for HE, Influential Private 3's website has a

strong orientation towards the local community, claiming on a prominent webpage that ‘The College’s governing body... attaches great importance to good relations with the people and organisations in the local area’.

In the high-performing state schools, the number of students progressing to overseas HE institutions appeared significantly lower. Indeed, it seemed that only three schools of the ten had sent any students abroad for HE in the recent past, and the numbers involved were small (three in the last year from High-Performing 1 and 9, and one from 4). There was no evidence of any specific support being offered in any of the ten schools to facilitate entry to overseas universities. Moreover, on the vast majority of websites (including those of schools that had sent students abroad), there was no mention of overseas destinations. For example, one student from High-Performing State 4 who secured a place at a HE institution abroad (Princeton) was mentioned only in the downloadable newsletter, not on any of the webpages. Thus, while the level of overseas activity (in relation to HE) was significantly lower in the state schools when compared to their private sector counterparts, an emphasis on *national* HE destinations was common across all three of the groups in our sample.

International pupils

A second area in which there appeared to be a significant dissonance between the actual level of international activity and its representation on school websites relates to international pupils. Here, we focus primarily on the private schools in the sample as, in most cases, we were able to ascertain the number of international pupils at each school, from the reports of the Independent Schools Inspectorate that were available to download from the school websites. It is also the case that, as we will discuss later in the paper, international pupils are

an important source of revenue for private schools, particularly, although not exclusively, for those that have boarding facilities.

A considerable number of the private schools – both ‘influential’ and ‘high-performing’ – appeared to have a significant proportion of international pupils: e.g. 17 per cent of the overall pupil body at High-Performing Private 10 (boarding), and 20 per cent at both High-Performing Private 7 (day) and Influential Private 10 (boarding). Nevertheless, it was striking that only in a relatively small number of the schools were such students mentioned (let alone celebrated) in any detail in the publicly-available texts we analysed. Only two of the private schools had dedicated webpages for international pupils. In five others (all with boarding facilities, and in the ‘influential private’ category), a specific section of the admissions pages was dedicated to international pupils, but in most cases the text provided was quite short. Furthermore, where internationalism was discussed explicitly in the schools’ websites and other marketing material, the international composition of the schools themselves was not mentioned. For example, the ‘international’ webpage of High-Performing Private 7 focuses only on language exchanges and the sister school that is currently being established in South Korea, while at Influential Private 10, despite a fifth of pupils coming from overseas, its internationalism was constructed only in terms of its links with schools abroad. Indeed, the *British* nature of its everyday practices is emphasised:

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

In these schools, like many others in the sample, the significant international composition of the student body remained largely hidden.

An international curriculum

Over a quarter of the schools in the sample (seven of the private schools and one state school) offered the International Baccalaureate (IB) in the sixth form – either instead of, or alongside, A Levels. The academic literature on the IB typically discusses it as part of a broader trend towards internationalising the curriculum and inculcating a greater global awareness amongst pupils. Indeed, Rizvi and Lingard (2010: 174) argue that such trends place emphasis on:

developing in students a ‘global competence’ that enables them to become globally mobile and work in a range of different cultural contexts....the need to develop qualifications less geared towards the demands of the national labour market and more towards international requirements, suggesting curricular frameworks that are globally networked...

In our sample, however, the IB was constructed, not as a qualification that would develop this ‘global competence’, but as a more academically-rigorous and broad-based alternative to A Levels, that would facilitate entry to ‘top’ universities. High-Performing Private 4 is typical of many of the schools in our sample in framing the IB in this way:

The IB ensures that pupils further develop their core skills in English, mathematics, languages, and science, whilst allowing them also to pursue options in areas of strong

personal interest. Its combination of depth and breadth makes it an ideal preparation both for university and working life. (Website)

Again, we see ostensibly international activity constructed in largely national terms.

Sister schools overseas

Finally, five of the private schools indicated that they had one or more ‘sister schools’ abroad:

- Influential Private 2: five schools (in China, Singapore and South Korea);
- Influential Private 4: three schools (China, Hong Kong and Thailand);
- Influential Private 5: one school (Malaysia);
- Influential Private 8: one school already running, a second is being established (both in China)
- High-Performing Private 7: one school in the process of being established (South Korea).

Typically, these schools have opened relatively recently, and promote themselves as offering an English-language, British education to local populations and expatriate communities, informed by the values and philosophy of the original UK school. They are often seen as a means of providing financial support to the UK school, helping to fund bursaries and keep fees down. Again, however, these schools were given little prominence in the websites and other publicly-available materials that we analysed. In most cases, the information was restricted to the ‘international’ pages of the website and, in common with the other types of

international activity discussed above, was not referred to on any of the schools' most prominent webpages or in the headteachers' welcome messages. Such sister schools were presented, not as a venture that was central to the schools' missions, but as a discrete activity that was largely separate from its British school. Indeed, as noted previously, for most of the schools in the sample, including those in the 'influential private' category that had worldwide reputations, much of the web text, and associated images, was grounded in a discussion of *local* projects, not international commitments. For example, although Influential Private 2 has five international sister schools, the general feel of the website is one of overwhelming Britishness and tradition. Significantly, the webpage headed '[Influential Private 2] and the Community' defines its community in exclusively *local* terms, and it emphasises the importance of welcoming members of the local community to the school, through 'the weekly lunchtime concerts which enable boys and girls to give free public performances'. Nowhere on the webpage is any reference made to the school's significant global links (or indeed to any *national* communities either).

We have argued in this section that the websites of the private schools provide solid evidence of a high level of international activity. The international links of the state schools were noticeably weaker. Nevertheless, across the sample as a whole, information about most types of international activity was often hard to find, and was certainly not emphasised in the most prominent parts of the websites. Indeed, for many of the schools, there was a clear disjuncture between, on the one hand, their international links and, on the other hand, their foregrounding of the *local* in their 'public face'. The notable exception to this was the considerable space on the websites and in Twitter feeds, newsletters and other materials, devoted to overseas trips, exchanges and expeditions. Although most of the state schools highlighted this kind of overseas activity more than any other international link (such as students studying overseas,

for those three schools that had sent pupils abroad for HE), this specific type of ‘internationalism’ was particularly dominant amongst the private schools. The reasons for this anomaly are explored below, as part of our broader attempt to theorise the ‘hidden internationalism’ of English elite schools.

Theorising hidden internationalism

Variation in national fields

The ‘hidden’ nature of the internationalism discussed above stands in stark contrast to schools in other countries of the world, which seemingly have a more ‘celebratory’ approach to international activities and incorporate them much more explicitly into their public face. For example, within Brazil, Aguiar and Nogueira (2012) have shown how, in response to perceived demand from the middle and upper classes, private schools are developing international strategies and advertising these clearly in their promotional material. Such strategies typically include international travel, the promotion of bilingualism, and additional foreign language learning. Indeed, they argue that private schools have been caught up in a highly competitive race to see which institutions can do most to inculcate ‘internationalisation’ amongst their student body. Similarly, in South Korea, internationalism is explicitly promoted by many private schools as a means of appealing to parents within a competitive market. Song (2012) provides compelling evidence of how English medium schools, which were initially established to educate foreign residents, have recently transformed themselves into private providers of global education for South Koreans. He contends that these schools have become so popular that they are now able to charge extremely high fees and impose very restrictive admissions criteria. In this way, they have

presented themselves to South Korea's privileged classes as 'an optional solution to the latter's need to ensure social reproduction, closure and exclusion in the age of globalisation' (p.153). For these schools, internationalism is central to their mission and highly visible in their public face.

While we would argue that similar global processes are driving many of the activities in schools in England, Brazil and South Korea, the differences in the way in which they are presented (or not) to prospective students and their families can be explained, we suggest, in relation to the field (Bourdieu, 1996) in which they are positioned. Scholars have provided strong evidence of the way in which global HE is structured into various sub-fields, primarily in accordance with the relative status of universities. For example, Marginson (2008) has differentiated between 'the elite sub-field of restricted production' (such as American Ivy League universities, and Oxford and Cambridge in the UK), the 'sub-field of large scale mass production' (universities that focus primarily on revenues and market share) and a third sub-field of institutions that occupy an intermediate position. In extending this analysis to the schools sector, we contend that the constitution of fields is also influenced by particular *national* assumptions, and the relative value of the 'international' differs markedly between national fields. While similar global pressures are experienced across the globe, they are played out in rather different ways. In countries such as Brazil and South Korea, within the field of education, the 'international' is typically of higher status than the 'local'. This then leads to a more explicit referencing of international activities and global orientations in school marketing material. In contrast, in England, while engaging with international agendas is deemed to be important, an 'English education' is positioned as of higher status than its international equivalent. This is likely to be explained, at least partially, by: the reputation of some English private schools for educating many of the world's past and current leaders; the

dominance of the English language worldwide; and, perhaps, assumptions – on the part of schools themselves and parents of prospective pupils – about the high intrinsic worth of an English education. For the schools in our sample, the same kinds of assumptions also seem to operate with respect to the messages they conveyed about HE: overseas universities were presented primarily as a second choice (an ‘honourable substitute’ (Bourdieu, 1996: 217)) if Oxbridge entry was not possible (see also Brooks and Waters, 2009).

In many ways, this resonates with recent research on spatial disparities within the HE sector. Indeed, Brooks et al. (2012) have shown how the value of a degree awarded from an ‘overseas’ institution differs markedly in England from many other countries. Asian employers, for example often value a degree obtained from a Western, Anglophone nation because of its content (favouring Western bodies of knowledge), its association with Western forms of ‘comportment’, and the status of Western universities, generally (Waters, 2008). In contrast, many of the British students in Brooks et al.’s study, in possession of a degree from outside the UK (even when from a prestigious overseas university), reported having had difficulty entering the graduate labour market because of assumptions by graduate employers that a British degree would have been preferable. In explaining these patterns, Brooks et al. suggest that the hierarchical positioning of universities internationally (Marginson, 2008) and the privileging of western, Anglophone forms of knowledge (Kenway and Fahey, 2007) may encourage assumptions amongst graduate recruiters about the ‘superior’ quality of a UK qualification. These spatial disparities are underpinned, we would suggest, by a persistent neo-colonialism, in which ‘the flow of students across national borders indicates a hierarchy in the various national educational systems in terms of zones of prestige’ (Munk, 2009: 19). Such hierarchies typically position the US, UK and other Western Anglophone nations at the apex. In this way, they represent an enduring legacy of British and American colonialism

which secured English as the key language of global commerce, and constructed British and American standards and influences as best (Matthews and Sidhu, 2005; Sin, 2013). Indeed, in many countries where a colonial legacy is apparent and forces of neo-colonialism run strong, English is an important and much desired form of embodied cultural capital (Leung and Waters, 2013). Although these arguments have commonly been made with respect to higher education, our analysis of school websites and prospectuses suggests that they are relevant to lower levels of the educational system too.

The negated (international) other

International pupils have become increasingly important for the financial viability of private schools in the UK over recent years, as the number of British students in the private sector has fallen as a result of the recession (MacErlean, 2012). Moreover, a letter leaked to the press in July 2013 suggested that the current UK Coalition government is exploring the possibility of places being opened up in state schools for international pupils who wish to board (BBC News, 2013). In the letter, written by the Prime Minister's private secretary, the 'export potential' of such a policy change was highlighted. This emphasis on the economic benefits of international pupils is similar to that documented within the literature on international student mobility more generally. Rizvi and Lingard (2010: 169), for example, have argued that, whereas in the past international education was often considered as part of overseas aid, it is now seen as an important component of global trade; 'the discourse of internationalism has thus shifted, with the introduction of a set of market principles to guide its practices'.

Given this policy emphasis, and the importance of international pupils to the future of many schools, it would, perhaps, be expected that such pupils would have a more conspicuous place on the websites and prospectuses of the institutions in our sample. Nevertheless, as will be discussed in more detail below, when pupils from outside the UK figured prominently, they were typically portrayed as residents of overseas countries, for the mobile students to visit – through expeditions, exchanges and other types of trip. It is likely that the notable absence of international pupils from marketing texts is closely linked to the arguments developed above about the foregrounding of the ‘English’ nature of the schools. In her analysis of university websites and prospectuses, Graham (2013) argues that the way in which the ideal student is constructed through such materials can lead to some prospective students self-selecting themselves out, because they do not identify with the particular construction. It is possible that if greater prominence was given to international pupils, this may deter British families seeking an elite English education for their children. However, as a consequence of the hierarchical positioning of types of schooling, schools that are apparently more ‘international’ in their pupil body may also be less attractive to parents from overseas who wish to purchase an English education – with access to English social networks, English forms of deportment and English spoken primarily by native speakers.

In many ways the ‘hiding’ of this particular form of internationalism and the promotion of only stereotypically ‘English’ students within the schools’ marketing materials has much in common with the construction of ‘ideal pupil’ subjectivities, discussed in previous research on elite schooling. For example, in their analysis of the school prospectuses of all-boys’ elite private schools in Australia, Gottschall et al. (2010: 28) argue that the images used accord with dominant discourses of masculinity. They write:

The image of the hyper-masculine senior boy body is common to all the prospectuses analysed...with strenuous physical activity and demonstrations of male strength depicted against the background of 'hard' surfaces and architectural elements.

Similarly, Allan (2010: 45) contends that the ideal pupil portrayed through the public texts of the private girls' school in which she conducted research was an all-rounded one, who was able to draw on the support of the whole school in 'creating the perfectly groomed, governed, balanced and successful self'. As a consequence of constructing these 'ideal pupils', other possible subjectivities are closed down. Allan argues that, within the site of her research, it was white, working class subjectivities that were silenced (Allan and Charles, 2013).

Research within the HE sector has also highlighted 'hidden' populations. Leathwood and Read (2009) argue that these 'negated others' include students from ethnic minority backgrounds, and those who are visibly gay, disabled, mature, not conventionally attractive, and larger than average. They suggest that this lack of diversity is due to the frequent use, by HE institutions, of apolitical website designers, who tend to deploy only dominant cultural discourses.

The absence of representations of those from different countries, when such pupils represent a considerable minority of the schools' pupils, may also be explained by the increasingly peripheral position of multicultural discourses within English schools. Mitchell (2003) has argued that we have seen a significant shift – away from national narratives that emphasise the importance of multiculturalism as a means of working with and through difference to find democratic solutions to social problems and towards a much greater sense of individual endeavour and strategic entrepreneurialism. Such strategic manoeuvring has been documented well by various detailed empirical studies of UK schools. Indeed, Reay et al.

(2007: 1046) have argued that in many urban comprehensive schools, the ‘multi-ethnic other’ is valued by white, middle class families, and multicultural schools are seen by such families as good preparation for the global economy that ‘requires individuals who can deal with people of other races and nationalities openly and respectfully’. Nevertheless, they suggest that such attitudes are predicated on a strategising and capital-accruing approach, in which multiculturalism is valued primarily as a source of cultural and social capital, and that only those multi-ethnic others who share normative white middle class values are accepted. Thus, they conclude that even within ostensibly multicultural schools, it is *sameness* that is routinely valued, not difference and diversity. Similarly, Byrne (2006) contends that, for the white mothers in her study, their response to ethnically mixed schools was complex: on the one hand, they were attracted by the presence of the excitingly different ‘cultural other’; on the other hand, they believed that the sense of moral order and control that they sought was threatened by too great a presence of cultural and racial others. Diversity, in this analysis, is thus associated primarily with perpetuating advantage, rather than challenging disadvantage. Similarly (although focussing on HE rather than schools) Sidhu and Dall’Alba (2012: 422) have noted the discursive absence of multicultural imagery in British Council marketing material – material whose primary purpose is to advertise British universities to prospective international students. They suggest that this silencing is intimately linked to wider political imperatives and ‘resonates with broader moves to discipline the ideal of a multicultural democracy and to introduce a more assimilationist model of social cohesion’.

Thus, while the ‘hidden-ness’ of international pupils within the websites of our sample of schools may be primarily explained by the desire, on the part of the schools, to present an ‘English’ image – with the aim of attracting more international pupils as well as their British

counterparts – it has the effect of silencing them in the official representations of the school, and reinforcing a very limited form of multiculturalism and internationalism.

Circumscribed nature of cosmopolitanism

A third explanation for the ‘hidden’ nature of internationalism in the schools’ websites and other publicly-available texts relates to the nature of the international activities that they are promoting or concealing which, in large part, maps on to wider debates about cosmopolitanism. In the ensuing discussion, we consider firstly the one form of international activity that was routinely celebrated in the websites – the overseas trip, exchange or expedition – before going on to explore why other types of ‘engagement with the other’ were not similarly acclaimed.

In contrast to the other forms of internationalism we have discussed, the overseas school trip or expedition was accorded considerable importance on most of the schools’ websites – evidenced through the number of separate webpages devoted to such activities and the prominence of stories about overseas trips and expeditions on homepages and in school newsletters, Twitter updates and/or the general news pages of the websites. As Allan and Charles (2013: 11) have suggested, mobility is deemed to be an important attribute of the middle class subject, and often constitutes a key component of how elite schools present themselves to others; movements outside national boundaries are constructed as ‘unremarkable and even expected’ (p.11).

The internationalism represented by trips and expeditions plays into wider discourses about the importance of ‘well-roundedness’ – developed through extra-curricular activities such as

travel – that are evident in the vast majority of the websites in our sample. McDonald et al. (2012) suggest that such emphases are linked to the messages elite schools wish to convey about self-esteem. They argue that school marketing materials indicate that ‘for successful academic students, scholastic identity and self-esteem are unproblematic, while self-esteem for the not-so-academic can be recuperated by out-of-classroom skills such as sports and extra-curricular activities’ (p.5). Others have suggested that an emphasis on ‘well-roundedness’ serves to highlight to the parents of prospective pupils the multiple opportunities available to succeed and gain status within the school, beyond the narrowly academic (Allan, 2010), and the attention that is given to developing a broad range of individual talents (Maxwell and Aggleton, 2013) – thus articulating with wider sociological arguments about the importance of ‘concerted cultivation’ to middle class parents (Vincent and Ball, 2007). Maxwell and Aggleton (2013) contend that while schools may not offer such activities for purely instrumental reasons, travel abroad – alongside other activities such as art, music, drama and debating - helps to develop what they call ‘surety of self’ which, in turn, has the effect of reproducing privilege. They maintain that such activities ‘further embedded an assuredness of identity that could be articulated, and which was distinguishable from others as having experiences which were of note’ (ibid.: 88).

We argue that such international activities were promoted, while other forms were hidden, because they presented no threat to the schools’ dominant ‘English’ identity. Overseas trips and expeditions can be conceptualised as part of the ‘cosmopolitan tourism’ discussed by Vertovec and Cohen (2003: 7) which, they suggest, is built upon ‘exoticism, commodification and consumer culture’, and does not require any profound ‘engagement with the Other’ or loss of national identity. In this way, overseas ‘others’ become framed

primarily as means of ‘resourcing the self’, as Allan and Charles (2013) have noted with respect to overseas trips to ‘help others’. They write:

Whilst there may be a genuine commitment to social service in these schools, there is also a discernible instrumentalist discourse about how global social service for non-white or needy ‘others’ can help resource the mobile, cosmopolitan ‘can-do’ girl subject of neo-liberalism. (ibid: 14)

They go on to argue that silently inferred in this construction of international mobility is ‘the (sometimes ethnic) other who is “stuck in place”, and less able to be financially and socially self-sufficient’ (p.12). For the schools in our research, such overseas trips are arguably less threatening to their English identity than the other types of international activity discussed in this paper as: mobility is for a short period of time only; it is unlikely to affect everyday practices at school (and thus not compromise the British education emphasised by Influential Private 10 and others); and any encounters with overseas ‘others’ are fleeting and unlikely to prompt new forms of global subjectivity.

Conclusion

A detailed reading of the websites of the 30 elite schools in our sample has revealed the importance, to many of them, of a wide variety of international activities. Such activities include strong links to prestigious US universities, the presence of a relatively large number of international pupils, an international curriculum, and the growth of ‘sister’ schools in South East Asia. However, we have also shown how, in many cases, these activities were significantly downplayed in the websites, prospectuses and other publicly-available materials.

Instead, emphasis was placed on the maintenance of an English identity – firmly located within a *local* community. In explaining this dissonance we have suggested that the articulation of an English (rather than global or cosmopolitan) identity is likely to be closely linked to the markets from which the schools recruit. ‘Englishness’ is likely to be strongly desired by those international pupils who cross national borders for their education, by virtue of its association with prestigious and traditional forms of education, access to elite social networks, the value of British educational credentials in the global marketplace, and the opportunity to become fluent in a dominant world language. We have also argued that, given the spatial disparities in the global field of education and the persistence of neo-colonial influences, ‘Englishness’ is likely to be valued equally highly by British families seeking an elite schooling for their children – and deemed more desirable than ‘international’ alternatives. There are thus strong motives for schools to continue to expand their international activities (e.g. to increase their income through sister schools, and to ensure their pupil numbers stay buoyant, through recruiting those from abroad) but also to downplay their internationalism in their public face.

While it is possible that the everyday experiences in the schools in our sample are at variance with those foregrounded within marketing materials, and internationalism is celebrated rather than hidden in day-to-day interactions, the evidence presented in this article tends to support Rizvi and Lingard’s (2010) contention that economic motives are deeply implicated in schools’ engagement with global agendas. Indeed, they argue that:

Cultural meanings are...reduced to the benefits that students are able to accrue within the global marketplace. In the process, it converts students into economic units, with

the implication that only those aspects of other cultures that are commercially productive are worthy of attention. (p.175-6).

In line with this thesis, our data indicate that aspects of other cultures were given public prominence only when considered commercially productive.

Our research is significant in bringing into sharp relief differences, across space, in the way in which global agendas are played out – explained principally, we would suggest, by variation within national ‘fields’ of education. For English schools, despite assumptions about the ‘canonical’ nature of global discourses (Wilkins, 2012), global connections are downplayed and much international activity remains largely hidden. We have suggested that this can be explained by the relative positioning of domestic and international forms of education, which differs in the UK from elsewhere. Although no other study, to our knowledge, has identified the ‘hidden’ character of this activity, our findings do articulate with broader concerns about the nature and impact of internationalism. Indeed, Matthews and Sidhu (2005: 50) have argued that Australian schools with a significant proportion of international students tend to give rise to ‘profoundly conservative ethno-cultural affiliations’, while Tamatea et al. (2008: 168) contend that even international schools ‘place by far the greatest emphasis on the construction of an individual self, as opposed to a community or global self’. While our research offers no evidence about actual practices within schools, it does suggest that international diversity is only valued publicly in so far as it helps to further advantage – of pupils, their families and the schools themselves – rather than contributing to the development of ‘globally oriented citizens’ (Parekh, 2003).

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Biographies

Rachel Brooks is Professor of Sociology and Head of the Department of Sociology at the University of Surrey. She is also co-editor of *Sociological Research Online*. Rachel's research focuses largely on the sociology of post-compulsory education, and her recent books include *Contemporary Debates in the Sociology of Education* (co-edited with Kalwant Bhopal and Mark McCormack) and *Negotiating Ethical Challenges in Youth Research* (co-edited with Kitty te Riele).

Johanna Waters is Associate Professor of Human Geography at the University of Oxford. Her research interests include the inter-relationship between transnational migration and education, and mobilities and educational inequalities. She has published widely in the areas of social geography and the sociology of education. She is co-author (with R. Brooks) of *Student Mobilities, Migration and the Internationalisation of Higher Education*, Palgrave Macmillan (paperback edition, 2013), and author of 2008 monograph, *Education, Migration and Cultural Capital in the Chinese Diaspora: Transnational Students between Hong Kong and Canada*, Cambria Press.

Table 1. Characteristics of the schools in the sample

	Private High- Performing	Private Influential	State High- Performing
Total number of schools sampled	10	10	10
Boarding	3	10	1
Fees of over £10K per term	1	9	0
Co-educational in sixth-form	2	5	6
Boys only in sixth- form	1	5	1
Girls only in sixth- form	7	0	3
Academically selective	10	10	10

ⁱ These were all academically-selective grammar schools.

ⁱⁱ The ten ‘private influential’ schools were those identified in the Sutton Trust (2012) report. In the two other categories, we chose the ten highest performing schools, using the Department for Education’s league tables.

ⁱⁱⁱ These characteristics were not used to sample the schools, and are reported *post-hoc*.

^{iv} There were also some important differences between the two types of private school. These are discussed further in Waters and Brooks (under review).