

Plenary Address to the IBNA Annual Regional Conference
Montréal, Québec, Canada
9 July 2005

Looking back and looking forward: the next 30 years

Quotations from the past to the present

I want to start with a number of quotations that will set the scene for my presentation this morning.

Minutes of the eighth meeting of the Council of Foundation meeting in Sèvres, France 13-14 November 1975:

(5a) The North America office was now being established on a more permanent basis ...in New York. During his visit to the USA, Mr Peterson had met the Executive Secretary, Dr Charles Rose, and had discussed with him future policy for this office. The office would take on responsibility for contact with schools in USA, Canada and the non-Commonwealth Caribbean.

Gil Nichol (Executive Director IBNA) to Gérard Renaud (Director General, IBO): December 29 1977

IBNA cannot be characterized as an agent of IBO: it is an independent, publicly-supported organization engaged in the promotion and servicing of a product “manufactured” by IBO.

Gérard Renaud to Gil Nichol: 13 January 1978

The IB is a fact. It has been in existence now for over ten years and its essential characteristic is its universality....Your point of view is very different. I can well understand that you see things from an essentially American point of view. You see the country educationally in need of new blood and the IB system as a possible answer. Who could blame you for that?

Brad Richardson (Regional Director IBNA): IB World May 2003

That the ‘international’ was also a part of International Baccalaureate didn’t always figure in a school’s decision at that time to take up the diploma programme... In time, however, schools did come to appreciate a curriculum and an orientation that invited national students to consider their places in the world.

Howard Gardner: New York Times 21 June 2003

The curriculum is less parochial than most American efforts. It also helps students think critically, synthesize knowledge, reflect on their own thought processes and get their feet wet in interdisciplinary thinking.

Cathy Crocker quoted in Supertest Jay Mathews and Ian Hill Open Court 2005

I could say on a AP exam, find the derivative of $y=2x^2$ and I could pick one of the five answers, but the IB approach would be, tell me why you want to take the derivative of $y=2x^2$. What would you do with the derivative: The AP still does some of that, but not to the same extent.

Henry Lamb: WorldNetDaily 24 January 2004

Administrators do not tell you that the current IB programme for ages 3 through grade 12 promotes socialism, disarmament, radical environmentalism and moral relativism, while attempting to undermine Christian religious values and national sovereignty.

George Walker IB Heads Standing Conference in Accra, Ghana March 2000

...the simple logic of numbers tells you that if you want to change the world you will have to do it through state education.

The impact of the IB in IBNA

Well: the fact is that IBNA has done it through state (public) education. Today, of the nearly 800 schools authorized in this region to offer one or more of our programmes, more than 90% in the United States and 70% in Canada are state schools. The wisdom of those pioneers 30 years ago was reflected in their understanding that the situation in North America was different. North America was not the heartland of international schools and United World Colleges, though thirty years later it has both. It was a region, at least so far as the United States was concerned, where public education was held in low esteem. Eight years after the IBNA office was established, the report *A Nation at Risk* (1983) from the National Commission on Excellence in Education suggested that public education was in crisis:

If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war.

In Canada the situation was different and the quality of public education was much better regarded. Here there were different reasons to choose the IB: to maintain high standards, certainly, but also to educate an unashamedly multicultural nation that perceived an international education, with an emphasis on foreign languages, as an entirely sensible and logical way forward.

In looking back over the last 30 years, and then looking forward to the next 30 years, I therefore want to focus on a single theme, the place of the IB in public schools. A recurrent world wide criticism of the IB has been its exclusiveness, its elitism, its inaccessibility. In North America you have bucked the trend and we need to use this 30th anniversary to ask what we can learn from this very important experience.

I think we can reasonably say that, despite its relatively small presence, the IB *has* made an impact in North America: it is written about by journalists, spoken about by politicians and weighed and generally welcomed by universities. During our work with McKinsey on the corporate strategic plan, we came up with a device to measure the impact the IB has in a particular region, country or state. We proposed an ‘impact function’ which looks like this:

$$\text{Impact} = f(D, N, E)$$

which means quite simply that the impact depends on three factors:

1. D, which is the educational difference the programme makes
2. N, the number of students who will be affected by it
3. E, the ease with which the programme(s) can be introduced.

I want look at each factor in turn. I shall look in most detail at the **difference** we make and then pass quite quickly over the **number of students** we impact, but making one important proposal. Finally I shall look at the **ease** with which the programmes can be introduced which will lead me to a final, radical suggestion with the next 30 years in view. You must remember that I shall soon be leaving the IBO so there is no safer time to make radical suggestions!

D: the difference the programme makes

The received wisdom tells us that schools in the United States are not really interested in the ‘I’ in IB; what they want is an off-the-shelf, high quality plug-in to the existing system. If ‘I for international’ brings with it a global seal of approval then so much the better, but let’s venture no further than that.

I want to challenge this misleading stereotype which I frequently hear mentioned in the other regions and I will do so by quoting from the teachers and students who were interviewed for *IB World* in 2003.

Such qualities might include a willingness to undertake and the capacity to succeed in a rigorous curriculum, an engagement with a coherent approach to the world of ideas, a spirit of community that extends both to fellow IB students and to an outside community in need, and the tenacity and skills of a successful researcher.

Theodore O’Neill, dean of admissions at the University of Chicago, Illinois

IB history students have jumped at the opportunity to do internal assessment pieces about colonialism, the civil rights movement, and the African-American experience. That their own history and interests are validated in an academic programme has been essential to their success.

Adam Man, DP coordinator, Baltimore City College, Maryland

The programme has given me and my classmates a sense of community, and the IB's focus on helping a student be a well-rounded individual has given me self-confidence.

Jenna Gaylene Tichon, student at Westwood Collegiate, Winnipeg, Manitoba

In addition, our students' pride in their school has dramatically increased and they have gained a greater awareness and acceptance of cultural diversity, both within and beyond the school community.

Barbara Hilliard, DP coordinator, Jim Hill High School, Jackson, Mississippi

The focus on global issues, world understanding, and the integration of these areas into the curriculum provides IB students at Lee's Summit High School with a unique opportunity to view the world beyond the land-locked Midwestern United States.

Carleda Williams, DP coordinator Lee's Summit High School, Missouri

Of course I have not chosen those quotes at random. But what I can claim is that from them, I could construct most of the essential elements of an international education. It is concerned with:

- Understanding oneself in relationship to other people
- Understanding the importance of, and differences in, culture
- Having a balance between different areas of learning
- Encouraging critical thinking skills
- Participation in community service
- Extending national horizons.

So I do not believe that IBNA has anything to be ashamed of where international education is concerned.

However, not everyone agrees that the difference the IB is trying to make is a good thing. I need hardly remind you of Henry Lamb's opinion on this subject which I shared with you earlier and now I cannot resist addressing the strange case of 'Rousseau in Locust Valley'. No, this is not a new challenge for Sherlock Holmes but rather a chapter heading from *Supertest* (2005) by Jay Mathews and Ian Hill which describes the disquiet that a parent from Long Island has expressed about my admiration for the philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Some of you here today will remember that I quoted from Rousseau's *Social Contract* in my address in Victoria, BC in July 2002. I suggested that Rousseau was right to conclude that greater strength can come from the surrender of some individual sovereignty to a common cause: not a hugely controversial conclusion. Mrs Long Island (let us preserve her anonymity) read my address and did not like it, pointing out that Rousseau had ambiguous views on national sovereignty, on religion and on the ownership of property. She is right: Rousseau had ambiguous views on many important issues which is what makes him so utterly human and so totally fascinating but his ambiguity was never muddle and it has not excluded him from the pantheon of great philosophers nor from the Panthéon itself in Paris where he lies buried.

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury: I stand accused of admiring Jean-Jacques Rousseau. I have considered the charge and I am proud to plead guilty. Indeed, I must tell you that holding in my hands Rousseau's handwritten manuscript of the *Social Contract*, which is kept in the vaults of Geneva University, was one of the most privileged moments of my life. In a more recent return to Rousseau I concluded:

The Social Contract inspires, it infuriates; it provokes and it challenges and it will deserve to be read just as long as anyone is interested in that most fundamental of questions: how can different people come together to live acceptable lives in harmony.

My critic admits that she is neither historian nor philosopher, as though that entitles her to opt out of the intellectual struggle with which Rousseau invites us to engage; as if that entitles her to come to simple conclusions to help her and her neighbours to sleep soundly at night. Alas, I can offer no such intellectual opt-out to IB students and I can promise them no simple conclusions.

In concluding this section let me come to the heart of this matter. If the IB makes a difference – and I am assuming all of us in this hall believe it should and does – then we need to recognize that difference, to be able to describe it and to be prepared to defend it. Increasingly, there will be moments in this region when we shall all need to stand up and be counted. The clearest sign that you are making a difference is that someone has noticed and doesn't like it.

$$\text{Impact} = f(D, N, E)$$

N: the number of students affected

Let us now take a brief look at the second impact factor, the number of students engaged with an IB programme.

If we look at the growth of programmes in IBNA over the past five years, we see the following figures:

	2000	2005	2010
PYP	6	71	???
MYP	70	163	256
DP	398	582	768

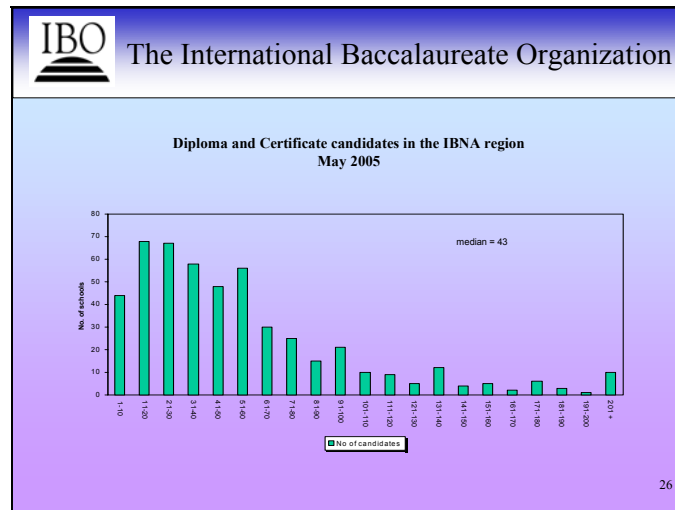
and I have made a straight extrapolation, based on the same growth, over the next five years. But, as often happens, raw figures like these conceal some important underlying detail.

For example, if we exclude the MYP schools in Québec the remaining distribution is not very impressive. Indeed, only one province in Canada and three states in the US have MYP schools in double figures. By the way, I am taking website statistics at this point which may not be completely up to date.

I well remember during all of my earliest visits to the region being told time and time again that the conventional five-year model of the MYP does not fit the organizational structure of most American state schools. Well, we listened and it is precisely for this reason that we have recently introduced alternative structures for schools to consider where the conventional

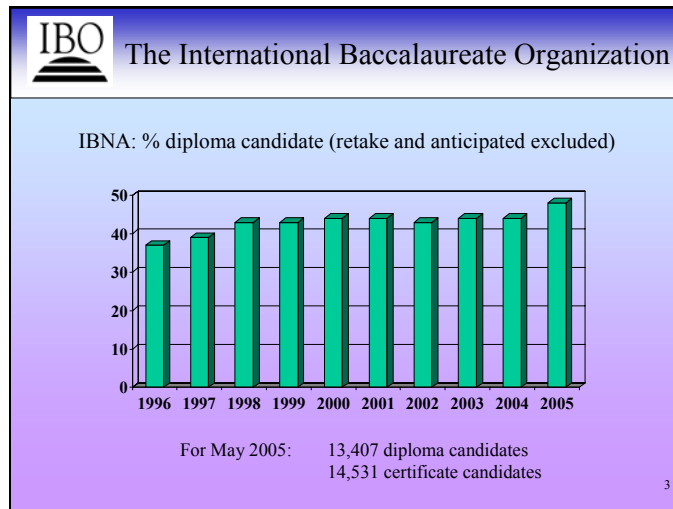
pattern cannot be implemented. We are in the early days of that initiative but I shall be very disappointed if this does not facilitate a much more rapid growth of the MYP in the region.

Next I have taken a look at the size of IB graduating classes in 2005. Here are the figures which include both diploma and certificate but not anticipated candidates:



Now, these statistics are up to date and the median figure is 43 which means that in half the schools (some 250) the group size is less than that figure, in many cases far less. I find it hard to imagine an IB group that is intellectually and financially viable at less than 40 so my proposal (do you remember I said I would make one?) is the following: perhaps we should be using more resources to seek ways to increase the size of existing cohorts even if it means authorizing fewer new diploma schools. We are talking about impact and I suggest that a median of twice that size – nearer to 80 – is needed before the programme acquires a critical mass of influence within its school.

But now let me show you some more positive figures. I have calculated the percentage of IBNA students taking certificates compared to the percentage taking the full diploma over the past 10 years. You will know that the received wisdom is that not many students in North America take the full diploma. The figures do not support this view: here is what the trend looks like and broadly speaking it is encouraging. It is also pleasing to find that not a single school that could realistically have been expected to present candidates this session has failed to do so. Again, there is a wholly inaccurate myth that certain IBNA schools lie dormant from time to time.



A few moments ago, I mentioned the wisdom of those early pioneers in realizing that the challenges of North America would never be fully grasped in Geneva. They also had the sense to understand that insistence upon the full diploma would mean the still birth of the IB in the region. Instead, the possibility of offering certificates has given schools a realistic entry point to the diploma programme which, in turn, has gradually led to an increased participation in the full programme. I shall return to this point in a moment as the starting point for another development.

$$\text{Impact} = f(\text{D}, \text{N}, \text{E})$$

E: the ease of implementation

And so to the third part of the impact formula, the ease of implementation. Let no one underestimate the challenge of penetrating any public system of education. It was not by chance that the League of Nations in the 1920s refused to have anything to do with it, delegate after delegate arguing that education was essentially a national rather than an international responsibility.

However, the United States and Canada share one very important advantage for the IB and that is the devolved nature of their public education systems. The more heavily centralized the system, the more difficult it is to penetrate (France provides a very good example of this principle) and here I want to acknowledge the importance of the different IB sub regional groups that do a huge amount of effective lobbying and explaining at a state and provincial level. There are no fewer than 6 in Canada and 15 in the US: societies, leagues, associations, organizations, coalitions and guilds. Let me pause to say a heartfelt ‘thank you’ to everyone who is contributing to their work.

But weak central direction inevitably leads to a stronger influence from other interested parties. We cannot complain about that, it just means that there is more work to do, more people to convince. I would suggest to you that in practice two key groups act as gatekeepers, either admitting or excluding the IB. The first is the universities whose attitude to the diploma programme sets a quality standard which, whether we like it or not (I do), cascades down to influence the reputation of our other programmes. I am reliably told that nearly 2,800 universities worldwide have passwords for our secure web pages, allowing access to all they need to know about the organization. I have long admired the work of CURT, the College and University Recognition Taskforce, which has taken an initiative of which IBNA can be proud and other regions jealous.

In the end, though, in a democracy it is the parents who determine education priorities and the way they vote, in the ballot boxes and with their feet in choosing a school, will determine which states, which districts and which schools consider, adopt or reject an IB programme. Communication is the key element here and we must all look forward to the day when the new IB Association brings a formal structure to our informal relationships with IB parents and prospective parents. In the meantime, I admire the IBNA electronic newsletter and hope that it is read as widely on our web site as it deserves by all the different interested parties.

If there are difficulties in gaining access to a public system of education, there are some real benefits when you get there. You have access to important public institutions like the National Research Council which carried out a comparative study of our math and science programmes a few years back. It gives us access to major grants such as that from the US Department of Education and it brings direct comment from the White House. It also puts us face to face with important competitors such as the College Board. Forty years ago, Harlan (Harpo) Hansen, the director of the College Board's Advance Placement programme, was appointed to the council of the International Schools Examination Syndicate, which was the precursor of the IBO. He played a crucial role in the launch of the IB and became a key member of the IBNA board. Rivalry does not preclude responsible collaboration and I think the time has come once again to see what experiences the two organizations might usefully share.

A new proposal

I promised I would end on a more radical note and now I am turning to look forward 30 years. The reality is, under the present model the International Baccalaureate will remain a dream for the majority of young people and their parents in this and in other regions. Fifteen hundred IB World Schools in 120 different countries is certainly beyond the dreams of those early IB pioneers, but that very success has fuelled our ambition to achieve more, indeed to achieve much more. And that, I have to conclude is going to be very difficult within the present structure which is institutionally-bound, expensive and exclusive in the very simple sense that it excludes far more than it can ever admit.

One tiny event here in IBNA has encouraged me to start to think along different lines. About a year ago, a student at Duke University sent me an e-mail explaining that his family had moved in the middle of his IB diploma course so he had never finished it. In one sense it didn't matter: he had been accepted by a world-class university without it. But he had enjoyed it so much he now wanted to complete it; could I tell him how he might obtain his IB diploma? The answer was, alas, with great difficulty because unless you live next to an IB school; unless you are aged about 16 and have a couple of free years ahead of you, studying an IB diploma is virtually impossible.

We are beginning to look just a little old-fashioned, just a little inflexible, just a little 20th rather than 21st century. So what I am currently working on is a proposal to launch an IB open international college offering IB courses on line but in close association with the growing network of IB World Schools which will be invited to provide teaching, mentoring and other forms of support to students and teachers around the world who want to become part of the open college. Slowly but surely we are gaining practical experience of distance and e-learning and every day I am reminded of the capacity of IB World Schools to create partnerships, often with schools less well endowed than they are. The latest examples, of

course, lie in Sri Lanka and Indonesia in the wake of the tsunami disaster and let me pay tribute to the immediate and generous response of so many IB schools in North America.

I therefore believe that we are in a unique position to create a virtual college that has a global outreach and a multicultural human face, combining the latest technology with the values and experience of IB schools around the world. I do not underestimate the challenge of fulfilling the IBO mission statement ‘at a distance’ but neither do I believe in there is anything quasi-mystical about it and it must therefore be analysable and capable of achievement through more than one learning medium. What about CAS, I hear you ask, what about TOK, what about practical science work, what about...well, all these questions have been asked and answered in similar contexts and somehow satisfactory answers have been found.

So let’s imagine a fictitious case. Ludmilla, in her early 20’s, is an outstanding Slovakian skier. She has been training and competing internationally in Europe and North America for 5 months of the year and she speaks good English. Her formal education has been disrupted since she was 15. Despite her obvious intelligence and huge motivation, Ludmilla’s ceiling has been set (assuming she avoids serious injury) at the level of becoming a ski instructor. But let us imagine she has been taking IB certificates through the Open International College, she has a tutor at an IB school in Bratislava (we have two schools there) who looks after her overall progress and is her TOK supervisor. During the summer term she helps to train basketball teams at a state school in Bratislava to satisfy her CAS requirements. Her extended essay has already been written on the dynamics of the carving ski. Next year Ludmilla will be studying sport and psychology at a British university with a 36 point IB diploma.

[This scenario is not wholly fanciful as we are indeed talking to an organization about an IB education for international athletes.]

Let me take you to the state of Maharashtra in India. Rahul is 15 and lives in a corrugated roofed shack in a village with his four siblings and his parents who work on the land to maintain the family’s survival. Once a week a bus arrives to take Rahul and his class up the hill to the United World College to learn English. The following year let us imagine he will be taking a number of IB certificates through the Open International College, beamed into his school by satellite, including a science course where he will be using the UWC’s laboratory facilities. One of the UWC’s Indian teachers has already agreed to be Rahul’s mentor and may also be supervising his extended essay. Once a week Rahul will join a worldwide e-forum bringing together some of the best IB teachers of TOK. It may take Rahul three years to get his diploma but since, like most Indian students, he is very highly motivated, he will get it with 44 points.

[Once again, the scenario is not wholly fanciful because the Mahindra United World College in Pune is about to launch a major learning initiative in partnership with its local community.]

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Well, none of that will take 30 years; it could be up and running within five. But what will only be clear in 30 years’ time is the kind of direction the IBO decided to take at the beginning of the 21st century. In 1975, IBNA was created and 30 years later you can say ‘we have brought the IB to the ordinary young person, to the student who has no special privileges, no special background’.

If the IBO as an organization believes this is the way forward then we are going to need new structures, not to replace what we are doing now, but to run parallel with it and regularly to intersect with it. I have given you the barest outline of how it might be done; perhaps in 30 years' time you will be telling your grandchildren 'I am sure I first heard that in Montréal'.

Let me now end by returning to the beginning and to that exchange of letters between the IBO director general, Gérard Renaud, and the IBNA regional director, Gil Nichol. It would be comforting to report that this kind of tension was left behind 30 years ago. But that would not be true. It would be comforting to imagine that it will not exist in 30 years' time. But that would not be true, either.

The management of the IBO is the management of diversity. In that sense the IBO is truly a representative part of the world. Diversity brings tension but it also brings initiative and innovation. I see the IBO's relationship with IBNA, which is now 30 years old, as a constant challenge to the IBNA board and to the IBO Council of Foundation, as well as to the director general and the regional director. They all share the responsibility to make this relationship a healthy and stimulating tension rather than a de-motivating and time-wasting frustration.

Today, Gérard Renaud (who is a regular visitor to IBHQ in Geneva) might well write:

The IBO has been in existence now for nearly 40 years and its essential characteristic remains its universality.

Thank you for inviting me to your conference, thank you for your wonderful support for the IB and let me wish you every success and happiness for the future.

George Walker
director general
IBO
Geneva

July 2005