



*Citation for published version:*

Bunnell, T, Fertig, M & James, C 2016, 'Bringing institutionalisation to the fore in educational organisational theory: Analysing International Schools as institutions', Paper presented at Aamerican Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Washington, USA United States, 8/04/16 - 12/04/16.

*Publication date:*  
2016

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

**University of Bath**

**Alternative formats**

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact:  
[openaccess@bath.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@bath.ac.uk)

**General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

**Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

**Bringing institutionalisation to the fore in educational organisational theory:  
Analysing International Schools as institutions**

**Tristan Bunnell (University of Bath)**

**Michael Fertig (University of Bath)**

**Chris James (University of Bath)**

**Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association**

**Annual Conference, Washington, April 2016**

**(Please do not cite without the authors' permission)**

Address for correspondence:

Professor Chris James  
Department of Education  
University of Bath  
Claverton Down  
Bath, UK  
BA2 7AY

Phone +44(0)1225 383280

Fax +44(0)1225 386113

E-mail [C.James@bath.ac.uk](mailto:C.James@bath.ac.uk)

# **Bringing institutionalisation to the fore in educational organisational theory: Analysing International Schools as institutions**

## **Abstract**

In this paper, we use institutionalisation theory to analyse the legitimacy of schools identifying themselves or being identified by others as ‘international’; identify aspects of institutionalisation theory that could be developed; and argue that an institutionalisation perspective should be more central in educational organisation theory. International schools are an appropriate form of educational organisation to analyse from an institutional perspective. The rapid growth of different types of International Schools with new rationales raises concerns about their legitimacy relative to traditional norms. In applying institutionalisation theory to International Schools, a number of relevant issues arise: the significance of the institution’s primary task and institutional work on it; the centrality of affect in schools as institutions; and the very different ontological bases for the three pillars of institutionalisation; the significance of the ‘student dimension’ in institutionalisation, the nature of the members of the institution, their dominant mode of interpretation, their motivations and their personality; and the role of teachers’ professionalism in legitimising schools. We argue that those responsible for establishing the legitimacy of their schools, will be least challenged by ensuring compliance with the regulative pillar, and most challenged by ensuring conformance to the cultural-cognitive pillar.

## **Key words**

Institutions

Institutionalisation

Institutional theory

Institutional work

Institutional legitimacy

## **Introduction**

In the last 10 years or so, the number of schools around the world classifying themselves or being classified by others as ‘International Schools’ has increased rapidly, substantially and unexpectedly (Brummitt and Keeling, 2013; Keeling, 2015; Hallgarten et al., 2015). In addition, the diversity of International Schools has increased considerably. With such in growth in numbers and diversity, the legitimacy of International Schools as (international) educational institutions becomes a matter of interest.

Legitimacy is the sense that the actions of an object in our social world are what is required, right and suitable in a way that is consistent with a system of socially created customs, norms, ideals, meanings and definitions (Suchman, 1995). Scott (2014) argues that institutional legitimacy is established by institutionalisation, a position we ourselves have adopted (Bunnell, Fertig and James, Forthcoming). Having institutional legitimacy is crucial for all schools, but International Schools also need to establish their legitimacy as ‘international’ educational institutions. The legitimacy of International Schools as international is important for all those who have an interest in them including researchers in the field. Further, defining an ‘International School’ has been an enduring challenge, see for example Hayden and Thompson (1995) and has a number of problematic aspects (Bunnell, Fertig and James,

Forthcoming). International Schools therefore are a very appropriate case for the study of institutionalisation and legitimacy.

Applying institutionalisation theory to International Schools provides an opportunity to extend and develop it. From our analysis, the provision of an international curriculum emerges as central and crucial to the legitimacy of any school's claim to be international. This idea resonates with the assertions of other authors, for example, Geller (2002) and Thompson (1998). We argue that the provision of an international curriculum is an International School's primary task, which, in a normative sense, is the formal or official task (Lawrence 1977). We bring the idea of the primary task into institutionalisation theory where it assumes a significant place and a key consideration in institutional legitimacy. Also, from our analysis of the institutionalisation of international schools, the significance of affect, arguably an under-developed aspect of Scott's (2014) framework emerges as does the difference between the cultural-cognitive pillar differs from the regulative and normative pillars in an ontological sense. A number of other issues also come to the fore.

For this article, we draw on our own analyses (Bunnell, Fertig and James, 2015; Forthcoming; Fertig, 2015), and on Scott's work theorising organisational institutionalisation processes (Scott, 2014). Suchman's (1995) analysis of institutional legitimacy is also important as is the work of theoreticians such as March and Olsen (1989) and Jepperson (1991). We also draw on the substantive body of literature on International Schools and international curriculum and our own research-based analyses of international curricular provision, for example, Fertig (2007) and Bunnell (2016).

Following this introduction, we discuss the nature of International Schools and the International School terrain and the way it is changing. We then describe the theoretical framework bringing in the notions of the primary task and institutional work. We then analyse the provision of an international curriculum in an International School using the theoretical framework. In the final substantive section, we explore the issues that emerge from our application of the theory, and the article ends with some brief concluding comments.

## **International Schools and the International School landscape**

The central argument we make in this section is that the increase in the number of schools labelling themselves as International Schools and new ways of defining International Schools have radically changed the nature of International School landscape. These new features of the landscape are various but have been defined as Type C Non-Traditional International Schools to distinguish them from the long-standing Type A Traditional and Type B Ideological kinds. The descriptive norms of these Type C International Schools clearly contrast with those of the Type A and Type B forms.

In our analysis of the landscape, we argue that many aspects of norm-based definitions, such as the diversity of the student population, do not legitimate a school's claim to be international. However, of all the norms, the provision of international curriculum would seem to a necessary requirement. In arguing that the provision of an international curriculum must be the central task of an International School we recognize that the notion of an international curriculum may be problematic. The concept of an 'international curriculum' is complex one (Cambridge, 2011) and defining the international aspects of curriculum provision is not straightforward (Hayden, 2013). Nonetheless, the provision of an international curriculum is central.

## ***International Schools***

On a normative basis, a model of an International School can be developed and advocated and indeed a number of authors have done so, see for example, Leach (1969), Jonietz (1991), and more recently, Hallgarten et al. (2015). The characteristics set out in such models usually include: educating students with diverse nationalities, who are the children of an internationally mobile parents; providing an international curriculum; being run on a not-for-profit basis although parents pay fees; and promoting international peace and understanding. In addition many International Schools are staffed by an intentionally internationally mobile work-force.

Hayden and Thompson (2008; 2013) using the various normative descriptions identified three types: (1) Type A Traditional International Schools; (2) Type B Ideological International Schools and (3) Type C Non-Traditional International Schools, which have emerged substantively only recently and do not fit the traditional (Type A and Type B) models.

Type A Traditional International Schools (Hayden and Thompson, 2008; Hayden and Thompson, 2013) are those “*established to offer education to the children of globally mobile parents usually working for the United Nations or its agencies, embassies and multinational companies*” (Hill, 2014 p.177), a view echoed by (Hallgarten et al, 2015). Such schools typically: have a history of considerable parental involvement (Benson, 2011); have a student body with a wide range of nationalities (Mayer, 1968) typically western nationalities and not including the host nation; have relatively high levels of student mobility; typically use English as the medium of communication (Hayden and Thompson, 2013); are fee-paying and thus privately funded; are run on a not-for-profit basis; and have formed membership associations, such as the European Council of International Schools (ECIS). The curriculum of such schools is ‘international’, potentially for various reasons. However, pragmatically, an international curriculum enables some form of curriculum continuity for the children of a highly mobile global workforce who may move between schools rapidly and frequently.

The origins, history, traditions and typical characteristics of ‘Type A’ schools are significant and of interest. However, we argue that the provision of an international curriculum is central in a Type A school’s claim to be international. Of course, ‘Type A Traditional’ Schools typically do provide such a curriculum. However, it is not difficult to envisage an International School with all the other characteristics listed above providing a distinctly non-international curriculum, in which case we argue that its claim to be international would not be legitimate.

Schools in the Type B Ideological International Schools category are those committed to the philosophy of Kurt Hahn (Röhrs, 1970; van Oord, 2010) and/or education for global peace (Hayden and Thompson 2013). In the late 1960’s, Leach (1969) characterize their ideological form as ‘international internationalism’. Such International Schools are ‘pioneer’ schools (Bunnell, 2013). Hill (2014) argues that their central feature is ‘international mindedness’ and that these Type B schools ensure an international perspective through the provision of an international curriculum, for example those of the International Baccalaureate. Here we see the centrality of the provision of an international curriculum in underpinning – arguably legitimately – these schools’ claim to be international. Exemplars of Type B Ideological International Schools include the United World Colleges, for example, Atlantic College, Wales, UK and the International School of Geneva, which arguably had a leading role in the development of what Mayer (1968) refers to as “*the International School movement (our emphasis)*” (p.74).

The ‘traditional’ International School terrain, of Type A Traditional and ‘Type B Ideological’ schools is being reconfigured by the rapid growth of a ‘Type C Non-traditional’ type (Hayden and Thompson, 2013), which have been variously characterized. One characteristic is that they are typically privately owned and are operated to make a profit for the owners. (MacDonald 2009, Brummitt and Keeling, 2013). This for-profit rationale differs from the not-for-profit basis of the traditional Type A and B forms. The for-profit issue is of course complex (James and Sheppard 2014). Individuals may profit financially from an enterprise (including a school) in various ways, calculating a school’s financial profit is a complicated matter (James and Sheppard 2014); and the use any profit is put to is also relevant. Interestingly, the not-for-profit descriptor of schools in the Type A and B categories appears to be changing which, given the potential profitability of such schools (Edureach, 2016), may be unsurprising. For example, in 2014, the long-established not-for-profit International School of Europe (ISE) group, which was founded by the Formiga family and has schools in four Italian cities, joined forces with HIG Europe, which is part of the global private equity firm HIG Capital, that has 14 regional offices around the world managing over 200 companies across 15 different business sectors. In 2013, HIG Capital had acquired St. Gilgen International School in Austria. Regardless of developments of this kind, the case for arguing that being for-profit undermines the legitimacy of a school’s claim to be an International School is not strong. Although it may not be ‘ideal’ (Leach (1969), whether a school is for-profit or not does not of itself affect its claim to be ‘International’.

A second characteristic of Type C Non-Traditional International Schools is that many have been established to serve the needs of the local (indigenous) population. Thus local/indigenous students often dominate in these schools and the student body may be relatively homogenous (Bunnell, 2014; Hill, 2014). The international nature of the student body features in definitions of international schools (Findlay 1999, Allen 2000) with other authors, for example, Hayden and Thompson (2000), arguing that it is crucial. Thus a diverse student population appears to be a normative descriptive characteristic of International Schools. Having an internationally diverse student body may facilitate the provision of an international curriculum but whether such a characteristic gives a school’s claim to be an International School legitimacy is open to debate. It is surely quite possible for a school to provide an international curriculum to a homogenous student body and for those students to learn and succeed in their studies.

Machin (2014, p.21) argues that many of the newer International Schools, which are largely of the Type C Non-Traditional kind may “*have less altruistic aims than those of the original pilgrims of international education*” indicating how such new entrants into the field are viewed. Similarly, Hallgarten et al. (2015 p.3) argue that such schools “*may be diluting the distinctiveness of the (International School) model*”. Perhaps more forcefully, Tarc and Mishra Tarc, 2015 p.36) assert that: “*Some of these schools are international in name alone, offering little more than English-language instruction by home nationals and a token expatriate as consultant*”. Clearly, the legitimacy of the claim of these new Type C International Schools to be international is impacting on the legitimacy of Type A and B International Schools that typically provide an international curriculum.

Bunnell, Fertig and James (Forthcoming) argue that four factors have affected the increase in the number of schools defined as International Schools. The first is the demand from local (indigenous) parents willing and able to pay fees. In 2013, Brummitt and Keeling (2013) reported that 80% of places international school places were occupied by local (indigenous) children. They argued that the main factor in International School growth was probably local

wealthy non-English speaking parents seeking places in International Schools for their children.

The second factor Bunnell, Fertig and James (Forthcoming) identified was the emergence of chains of International Schools, typically operated by companies on a commercial basis, such as the Dubai-based GEMS Education Ltd. (Woodward, 2005; Paton, 2009). Related to this new form, are branded English private schools, ‘satellite colleges’ as Bunnell (2008) calls them. Typically, the schools work with local entrepreneurs and investors to establish these satellite colleges (Machin 2014).

The third factor identified by Bunnell, Fertig and James (Forthcoming) is the demand for an ‘English’ education (Tarc and Mishra Tarc 2015). The associated driver of demand is that the Type C International Schools are considered able to provide students with the necessary qualification and capabilities to access to US and UK higher education (ISC 2015).

The way an International School is defined is the fourth factor identified by Bunnell, Fertig and James (Forthcoming). The International Schools Consultancy (ISC) Group, which provides data on the changing nature and growth of International Schools (Haywood 2015) defines an International School as an English-medium school, located outside an English-speaking country that delivers the curriculum wholly or partly in English (ISC 2015). Although that definition both clear and simple (Ellwood, 2007), it is problematic. First, it only defines the language of curriculum provision not its nature. A curriculum may be provided by a school in English outside an English speaking country but have no international dimensions/aspects, which would arguably undermine the legitimacy of its claim to be ‘International’. Significantly, in 2015, the ISC reported (ISC 2015) that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) had 511 International Schools with Dubai alone having 253. However, at that time the National Curriculum of England and Wales was the most popular curriculum option in International Schools in the UAE, with half the International Schools offering it. Second, Bunnell, Fertig and James (Forthcoming) argue that the Anglo-centric definition could be reconstituted by replacing English with any other language. So, for example, 31 schools in Dubai provide an Indian curriculum, for example, the Central Board of Secondary Education curriculum, to children of Indian diaspora in the medium of Indian (DubaiFAQs guide to Dubai 2016). Arguably, they should be considered to be International Schools. Further, over 480 primary and secondary schools in 130 countries outside France provide a French education to 310,000 students, 115,000 of whom are French, in accordance with the standards of the French Ministry of Education (France Diplomatie 2016) are not International Schools according to the ISC (2015) definition, when logically they could be by replacing ‘English/England’ with ‘French/France’. However, these schools “*prepare students for the French state examinations of the brevet and baccalauréat*” (France Diplomatie 2016, p.1) by providing a French/non-international curriculum. Further, seven ‘IB World Schools’ in Morocco, which would be Type B Ideological International Schools, provide IB programmes through the medium of French. The complexity of these illustrations points to the need for clarity, which we are suggesting lies with the nature of curriculum provided not the language of communication or the school’s location.

In summary, of all the descriptive norms of International Schools, we would argue that the provision of international curriculum would seem to be a necessary requirement. Thus the provision of an international curriculum must be the central task of an International School if it is to legitimately claim to be international. The institutional characteristics and processes that relate to that task, the so called pillars of institutionalisation (Scott 2014) will serve to confirm that institution’s legitimacy as an International School. In the next section we turn to

the analytical framework, and consider, institutional legitimacy, institutionalisation theory and the notion of the primary task.

## ***Theoretical framework***

### **Institutional legitimacy**

*“Legitimacy is a generalised perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions”* (Suchman 1995, p.574). Establishing legitimacy requires an acceptance that the mores and practices of the institution and those of its environment must be aligned (Barley and Tolbert, 1997; Dacin, 1997). Organisations achieving this alignment enhance both their legitimacy and survival prospects (Meyer and Rowan, 1977).

Legitimation may be an active process *“whereby an organization justifies to a peer or superordinate system its right to exist”* (Maurer, 1971, p.361). It involves understanding notions of what is proper and taking actions to gain societal approval (Drori and Honig, 2013). For schools, legitimation necessitates gaining an understanding of the exigencies of the external environment, which can be problematic (Battilana, 2006). It also requires a within-organisation effort to align institutional processes with these external demands (Wiley and Zald, 1968).

### **The institutionalisation of organisations**

Institutions are social structures that *“provide stability and meaning to social life”* (Scott, 2014, p.56). They are significant aspects of society and can both enable and constrain action (Giddens, 1979; Sewell, 1992). Although they are relatively stable and durable (Giddens, 1984; Jepperson, 1991), they can and do change over time (Scott, 2014). Organisations can gain legitimacy through institutionalisation (Scott, 2014).

### ***Institutionalisation: The pillars***

Scott (2014) argues that institutionalisation is underpinned by three elements: regulative; normative; and cultural-cognitive, which he refers to as pillars.

**The regulative pillar** comprises those influences associated with rule-setting, monitoring and sanctioning activities (Scott 2014) and is ‘visible’ in institutions as rules, laws and sanctions. Compliance is based on expediency; it is more advantageous to comply regardless of whether the rule is fair/just. Regulatory rules are thus coercive; individuals are forced to comply regardless of their wishes. They have an instrumental rationale and are legally sanctioned, which is the basis for their legitimacy.

**The normative pillar** is the prescriptive, evaluative and obligatory aspects of institutional life. It comprises values and norms. Values are notions of the preferred/desirable and standards against which enable existing structures and behaviours can be compared (Scott 2014). Norms specify practices deemed to be legitimate ways of pursuing valued outcomes. Normative systems define goals and how they should be achieved (Blake and Davis 1964). Norms are significant in institutionalisation (March and Olsen 1989) in part because of the moral foundation of many institutions (Stinchcombe 1997) and the importance of the moral agency of social actors (Hecllo 2008). Conformance to norms is based on social/moral obligation – a duty, commitment and responsibility to others.

**The cultural-cognitive pillar** is concerned with shared understandings of reality and sense-making schema which enable meaning-making and interpretation. It is grounded in cultural theory (Douglas 1982), which argues that individuals and their agency are assigned a role in social environments and emphasises the social reasons for behaviour (Douglas 1986).



Institutions cultivate a particular thought-style (Douglas 1982) - a collective consciousness - that includes rules that have a particular justification. Disobeying these rules incurs a penalty.

Compliance with the cultural–cognitive pillar is based on a shared understanding of assumptions, and it achieves its institutionalisation work by mimetic means, through copying or imitation. The expectation is that individuals will behave in an orthodox manner according to conventions. The validity of this pillar is based on it being understandable, customary and familiar.

Scott (2014) makes reference to feelings in his analysis of the pillars, in essence to show the extremes of the affective experience associated with the three pillars. Thus compliance with the regulative pillar is driven by the prospect of experiencing fear or guilt, and compliance is experienced by feelings of innocence. Failure to comply with institutional norms will result in feelings of shame, while compliance brings feelings of honour. The feelings associated with the appropriate conformance to the institutional requirements of the cultural-cognitive pillar are those of certainty, which arise from the institution member interpreting events with confidence and certitude and acting with confidence and conviction. Not knowing how to make sense of institutional matters and to act appropriately results in feelings of confusion. Arguably, the relatively limited inclusion of affect into institutionalisation processes underplays the role of feelings in institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006), especially in the institutionalisation of schools.

***The carriers of institutionalisation***

The three pillars of institutionalisation are communicated by means of carriers (Jepperson, 1991). Scott (2014) identifies four types: symbolic systems; relational systems, activities, and artefacts as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. The institutional pillars and carriers of institutionalisation (adapted from Scott 2014).

<b>Carriers of Institutionalisation</b>	<b>The Regulative Pillar</b>	<b>The Normative Pillar</b>	<b>The Cultural-Cognitive Pillar</b>
<b>Symbolic Systems</b>	Rules Laws	Values Expectations Standards	Categories Typifications Schema Frames
<b>Relational Systems</b>	Governance systems Power Systems	Regimes Authority systems	Structural isomorphism Identities
<b>Activities</b>	Monitoring Sanctioning Disrupting	Roles Jobs Routines Habits Repertoires of collective action	Predispositions Scripts
<b>Artefacts</b>	Objects complying with mandated specifications	Objects meeting conventions and standards	Objects possessing symbolic value

***Institutionalisation: The primary task***

Lawrence and Suddaby, (2006, p. 215) define institutional work as *"the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions"*. Arguably, such a definition requires a sharper focus for purposeful action, which we consider is provided by the notion of the primary task. For Rice (1963), the primary task is the task an

organisation must work on to survive. That description is not saying that organisations must have an explicit or an agreed primary task or that an organisation should be working on the task they may have been assigned. Rather it is saying that it is the task that the organisation feels – consciously or unconsciously – it needs to undertake if it is to continue, to carry on. Here, we see a connection between legitimacy and institutional survival (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Organisations will only survive if the task which is the focus of the purposeful actions of institutional work is legitimate. We therefore argue that defining an institution's primary task is crucial in establishing institutional legitimacy.

The relationship between organisational goals and the organisational primary task is of interest. Organisational goals and their significance for legitimacy feature in the institutionalisation literature (Scott, 2014). Parsons (1960, p. 21) referring to goals argued that: "*they legitimise the main functional patterns of operation, which are necessary to implement the values*". For Scott (2014), schools receive legitimacy in a society to the extent that "*their goals are connected to wider cultural values . . . and to the degree that they conform in their structures and procedures to established 'patterns of operation' specified for educational organisations*" (p. 28). We acknowledge that the nature of organisational goals is important in institutionalisation but that the organisational (primary) task has a more central place. The organisational task is what the members of organisation must work on if their institutional work is to be legitimate; the organisational goal is what an organisation's institutional work intends to achieve. The task defines what the institution is there to do; the goal is the outcome of that doing. The task is therefore pre-eminent in a consideration of institutionalisation and institutional legitimacy.

The concept of the primary task may seem to be an over-simplification, especially given the complexities faced by many institutions including schools. However, the primary task is a valuable heuristic device and is useful organisational analysis (Miller and Rice 1967, James et al., 2006). In that regard, Lawrence (1977) described three different kinds: the normative primary task, which is the defined, formal or official task; the existential primary task, which is the task the work group members believe they are undertaking, and the phenomenal primary task, which is the task that can be inferred from work group members' behaviour of which they may or may not be consciously aware. Although these forms of primary task may be different, arguably they should be the same if an institution is to be fully legitimate.

Defining an institution's primary task can be difficult (Roberts 1994; James. et al., 2006). Too narrow a definition may threaten the institution's survival; too broad in terms of the institution members' resources, and prioritising work on it will be difficult. Defining the primary task in a work organisation can be taxing and may cause conflict and the temptation is to avoid doing so. Organisations often concentrate on outcomes rather than the task as a way of avoiding conflicts. They may define the task in a way that fails to give priority to one set of activities over another, which is another way of avoiding conflict. Regardless of these difficulties, clarifying an institution's primary task can be valuable in securing institutional legitimacy.

Working on the primary task is challenging (Obholzer and Roberts 1994; James et al., 2006): it carries a risk of failure; the task will have been assigned in some way and those working on it may be called to account for their work on it; working on the primary task obliges individuals and groups to act, they are required to marshal their resources and to commit themselves to work on it. The 'moral purpose' of many institutions including and especially schools will exacerbate the challenging nature of institutional work on the institution's legitimate primary task. Inadequate task definition can also make work on it more

challenging. It can encourage task avoidance strategies, which may be attractive because they ease the challenging nature of the legitimate primary task.

### ***Using institutionalisation theory to illustrate the institutionalisation of International Schools***

Thus far, we have argued that the provision of an international curriculum is essential in legitimising a school's claim to be international. We have also worked with Scott's (2014) theory of institutionalisation and have sought to extend that theory by developing the central role of the primary task in institutionalisation and securing institutional legitimacy. In this section, we apply the concept of the primary task and the pillars and carriers of institutionalisation (Scott, 2014) to explore how the provision of an international curriculum would legitimately underpin a school's claim to be international. We first describe our methods, sources and evidence then we present an illustration of the institutionalisation of the curriculum in tabular form. We discuss the notion of the primary task, set out the potential pillars and focus in particular on the carriers of those pillars and their role in institutionalisation.

#### **Methods, data sources and evidence**

Our method entailed gathering a range of data sources including: IB accreditation information, our professional/research-based knowledge of International Schools, for example, Bunnell (2005; 2008; 2013; 2014), Fertig (2007; 2015), and James and Sheppard (2014), and other published works, for example, Hayden and Thompson (2011).

We then identified significant themes that illustrate how a pillar that institutionalises curriculum provision may be 'carried'. For example, the regulative pillar necessitates teachers attending regular IB professional development workshops. This requirement is expensive and disrupting, but it authorises the school as an 'IB World School' and enables it to benefit from the status. This training enables teachers to offer a repertoire of collective actions in their teaching. This collectively legitimated repertoire creates a predisposition for teachers to actively engage in contact with each other, sharing ideas and materials.

#### **Results**

We would argue that the primary task for schools claiming to be international is the provision of an international curriculum. Importantly, the normative primary task, which is the legitimate task of the institution, the existential primary task, which is the task the institutional members consider they are undertaking, and the phenomenal primary task, which is the task that can be inferred from institutional members' behaviour must be aligned. Only then will the institutional pillars legitimately underpin institutional work and any carriers of those pillars will themselves be legitimate.

As regards the pillars and the way they are carried, the results of our analysis are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The institutional pillars and carriers of the institutionalisation of the curriculum of International Schools.

	<b>The Regulative Pillar</b>	<b>The Normative Pillar</b>	<b>The Cultural-Cognitive Pillar</b>
<b>Characteristics of the pillar</b>	Requirement to be successfully recognized as a globally-branded 'IB World School'. Much of this requirement is coercive and disruptive but shows commitment to the 'cause'.	The prescribed and obligatory aspects of an 'IB World School' which underpins and facilitates the formation of a distinct philosophy and mode of operation.	Instinctive/natural practices of those in schools committed to 'internationalism'/world peace and promoting international-mindedness.
<b>Symbolic Carriers</b>	Every school must undergo an authorization process preceded by an authorisation visit before it can be granted IB World School status. Subsequent visits every five years.	An expectation that international-mindedness and a commitment to global peace through intercultural understanding will be embedded into the school's mission and ethos.	Classroom teaching focuses on facilitating international mindedness through inquiry-based learning, an emphasis on critical-thinking, or other aspects of the IB Learner Profile (e.g. open-mindedness).
<b>Relational carriers</b>	As part of the authorization process, all teachers must undertake professional development and training at IB-authorized workshops using IB-authorized workshop leaders.	Teachers, once trained at workshops, are expected to use the vocabulary/code of the IB Learner Profile in their everyday teaching.	Teachers actively engage with other teachers in other schools via the IB's Online Curriculum Centre. This engagement allows teachers to share ideas and materials.
<b>Activities as carriers</b>	An IB World School must have an action and service programme, involving activities inside and outside the school, which is supervised and recorded.	As part of the action and service programme, schools are expected to offer clubs/activities such as Model UN conferences which reflect international-mindedness.	The school celebrates annual festivals and events, such as UN Day, with other schools in other countries. This collaborative celebration creates a sense of global community and commitment.
<b>Artefacts as carriers</b>	The IB World School logo would be shown on the school letterhead and student reports, the school sign, and the school website.	The school is expected to exhibit the IB Mission Statement in classrooms and corridors. Posters showing the IB Learner Profile displayed. Commitment to the IB mission and philosophy displayed in prominent locations.	The school displays examples of high-standard examination work in the corridors and entrance, which reinforces the commitment of the school as an IB examination centre.

## Discussion

A number of substantive issues arise from the analysis as follows.

**The central issue.** Although securing institutionalisation is important for all schools, arguably International Schools have an additional task of establishing themselves as

‘International’. To refer to themselves as ‘International’ without underpinning that claim would undermine their legitimacy. There is a very strong case for arguing that the legitimacy of all schools as institutions has been neglected and underplayed in the organisational analysis of schools and organisation theory in education. Institutional legitimacy is crucial for schools and achieving it configures so much of their nature as organisations.

**The centrality of the primary task in establishing institutional legitimacy.** Arguably, a central aspect institutionalisation should be the institution’s primary task. It is the given task it must perform to survive (Rice 1963; Lawrence 1977), thus (institutional) work the primary task is central to legitimisation. Importantly, the institutionalising pillars – the regulative, normative and the cultural-cognitive – will shape and be shaped by the primary task. Further, the primary task is typically associated with anxiety (James et al. 2006), and consequently there is potential for institution members not to work on it (James 2010), thereby undermining institutional legitimacy. Importantly, the task is pre-eminent in relation to goals in terms of legitimacy. A legitimate task is a legitimate precursor of legitimate outcomes.

**The importance of affect in the institutionalisation of schools.** Given the significance of affect in conditioning organisational practices (James 2010), there is a strong case for broadening the scope of the cultural-cognitive pillar and the associated carriers to embrace feelings, moods and emotions. Arguably, the relatively limited inclusion of affect into institutionalisation processes underplays the role of feelings in institutional work, especially in the institutionalisation of schools. James et al. (2006) argue that schools are places of affective intensity where feelings run high, and where powerful feelings underpin strong motivations and actions. The moral purpose of schools as institutions is relevant and significant here. In addition, institutional work (see below) entails both institutional emotional work (Hochschild, 1983) – members of the institution must bring their full range of emotions to the institutional primary task (see above), and institutional emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) – institution members are required to manipulate and change their affective state in the service of the institution. In that regard, feeling rules, what an institutional member is supposed to feel (James, 2010) are as important as thinking rules. There is a strong case for re-configuring the cultural-cognitive pillar as the cultural-cognitive/affective pillar for application in educational settings.

**The difference in essence between the pillars.** The cultural-cognitive pillar differs from the regulative and normative pillars in an ontological sense. Arguably, many of the aspects of the regulatory and normative pillars are (real) objects in the institutional world and differ in essence from the nature the cultural-cognitive pillar, which are the outcome of subjective interpretation.

**The effect of the student body on institutionalisation.** The nature of the student body is a substantive issue in normative definitions of International Schools. Many argue, for example, Hayden and Thompson (2000), that International Schools in a normative sense should have a diverse student body; it legitimises the school as ‘International’. This issue is significant for the legitimacy of the new Type C Non-Traditional International Schools which may not have a student body with diverse nationalities. As regards the institutionalisation of (all) schools, including International Schools, the student body, whether diverse or not brings various requirements and perspectives in relation to the pillars. This diversity may complexify all the carriers but particularly the carriers of cultural-cognitive pillar. The ‘student dimension’ in all the carriers is significant in the institutionalisation of schools. Many carriers will be manifested through the students, which will affect the way the institutionalising pillars legitimise the institution.

**The nature of those who undertake institutional work in schools.** Many International Schools are staffed by an intentionally internationally mobile work-force, which may be significant in carrying the cultural-cognitive pillar. The local regulatory and normative context may be different for new staff members and sustaining the cultural-cognitive pillar may be challenging for those responsible for securing the school's legitimacy. However, this mobility may bring institutionalising benefits for International Schools because such teachers will understand the nature of International Schools.

Individual interaction with the regulatory and normative pillars and their carriers and how they are interpreted will vary according to the nature of the members of the institution, their dominant mode of interpretation (James, James and Potter, 2014), their motivations and their personality (Paunonen and Ashton, 2001; Cattell, 1996).

The notion of the teachers' professionalism and the normative pillar in any school is of interest. The professionalism of teachers has a significant legitimising role in all schools, including International Schools. Arguably the nature of the 'school workforce' as 'professional' should be brought to the fore in considering the institutionalisation of schools. Arguably, this change would require a new/reconfigured perspective on the work of teachers, from 'teachers as leaders' to teachers as moral agents influencing the legitimacy of the institution through their institutional work.

**Institutionalisation and the management task.** Arguably, for those responsible for the conduct of the school and establishing the school's legitimacy, ensuring conformity is least challenging for the regulative pillar, more challenging for the normative pillar and most challenging for the cultural-cognitive pillar. The basis for that assertion is in the authority – the legitimacy of the power - of the person responsible. For the regulative pillar, their power is legitimised by compliance to the law/regulations; and for the normative pillar, their authority is grounded in a sense of 'that is the way schools work/the way things are done round here'. But for the cultural-cognitive pillar, they are requiring people to make sense of the world in a particular way and in an ongoing and on an unsupervised basis, and when the people concerned may not have the capacity to do so.

**Giving institutionalisation theory a 'finer grain'.** We were aware as we analysed the evidence for the illustration in Table 2 that a more fine-grained analysis of the institutionalisation of International Schools – and indeed all schools - could be achieved by applying open systems theory (von Bertalanffy 1950; Scott and Davis 2007; James et al. 2006) to the framework. The carriers are amenable to further development to understand the institutionalisation of the inputs, processes and outcomes/outputs of International Schools, and indeed all schools.

## **Concluding comments**

In this paper, we have applied institutionalisation theory to analyse the legitimacy of those schools identifying themselves as being identified by others 'international'; identified aspects of institutionalisation theory that could be developed to enhance the theoretical framework; and argued for a more central place for an institutionalisation perspective in educational organisation theory. We have drawn on Scott's (2014) institutionalisation theory, where institutionalisation is underpinned by three pillars: the legal/regulative; the normative and the cultural cognitive, which are then evidenced and communicated by various organisational features and organising processes, referred to as carriers. Scott's (2014) model has been our starting point.

International schools are an appropriate form of educational institution to analyse. Such schools have traditionally been not-for-profit and catered for the children of an expatriate

work-force and/or pursued a commitment to education for global peace. The growth of new forms of International School with new rationales raises concerns about their legitimacy relative to traditional forms of International School.

In applying institutionalisation theory to International Schools, a number of significant matters arise which we argue should be included in an institutionalisation framework, thereby enhancing it. They are: the significance of the institution's primary task; the centrality of affect in schools as institutions; and the very different ontological bases for the three pillars of institutionalisation. Also from our analysis the significance of the 'student dimension' in institutionalisation; and the nature of the members of the institution, their dominant mode of interpretation, their motivations and their personality and the role of teachers' professionalism in legitimising schools emerge as significant. We argue that those responsible for establishing the legitimacy of their schools, will be least challenged by ensuring compliance with the regulative pillar, and most challenged by ensuring conformance to the cultural-cognitive pillar. We also make the case for giving institutionalisation model we have developed a 'finer grain' by applying open systems theory to the model.

This article raises issues for consideration in analysing the legitimacy of schools in a range of settings, particularly those established as new initiatives e.g., Charter Schools in the US and Free Schools in England, and it points to ways that institutionalisation theory can be further developed. Arguably, the case for asserting that the legitimacy of schools as institutions has been overlooked in the organisational analysis of schools and organisation theory in education is strong. Achieving and securing institutional legitimacy is vital for schools and doing so considerably configures their organisational nature.

## References

- Barley S.R. and Tolbert P.S. (1997) 'Institutionalization and Structuration: Studying the Links between Action and Institution'. *Organization Studies*. Vol 18 No 1 pp 93-117.
- Battilana J. (2006) 'Agency and Institutions: the Enabling Role of Individuals' Social Position'. *Organization*. Vol 13 No 5 pp 653-676.
- Blake J. and Davis K. (1964) 'Norms, values and sanctions', in Faris R.E.L. (ed) *Handbook of Modern Sociology*, Rand McNally, Chicago, pp 456-484.
- Brummitt N. (2007) 'International Schools: Exponential growth and future implications'. *International Schools Journal*. Vol 27 No 2 pp 35-40.
- Brummitt N. and Keeling A. (2013) 'Charting the growth of International Schools', in Pearce, R. (ed.) *International Education and Schools: Moving Beyond the First 40 Years*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, pp.25-36.
- Bunnell T. (2005) 'Perspectives on international schools and the nature and extent of local community contact'. *Journal of Research in International Education*, Vol 4 No 1 pp 43-63.
- Bunnell, T. (2008) 'The exporting and franchising of elite English private schools: the emerging 'second wave''. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* Vol 28 No 4 pp 383-393.
- Bunnell T. (2013) 'The role of the pioneer International Schools and the growth of the International Baccalaureate', in Pearce, R. (ed.) *International Education and Schools: Taking the First Forty Years Forward*. Bloomsbury, London, pp.167-189.
- Bunnell T. (2014) *The Changing Landscape of International Schooling: Implications for Theory and Practice*. Routledge, London.

- Bunnell, T., Fertig, M. and James, C. R. (In press) What is international about International Schools? An institutional legitimacy perspective. *Oxford Review of Education*.
- Cattell, H.E. (1996). The original big five: A historical perspective. *European Review of Applied Psychology* 46: 5–14.
- Dacin M.T. (1997) ‘Isomorphism in Context: the Power and Prescription of Institutional Norms’. *Academy of Management Journal*. Vol 40 No 1 pp 46-81.
- Dixon S. (2012, March 23) International Schools: now more than three million children get a global education, *Daily Telegraph*.
- Douglas M. (1986) *How Institutions Think*. Syracuse University Press, Syracuse NY.
- Douglas M. (1982) ‘The effects of modernization on religious change’. *Daedalus*. Winter pp 1-18.
- Drori I. and Honig B. (2013) ‘A Process Model of Internal and External Legitimacy’. *Organization Studies*. Vol 34 No 3 pp 345-376.
- Ellwood, C. (2007) Comment, *International Schools Journal* 27 (1), 5-7.
- Fertig M. (2015) ‘Quality Assurance in National and International Schools: Accreditation, Authorization and Inspection’, in Hayden M., Levy J. & Thompson J. (eds) (forthcoming) *The SAGE Handbook of Research in International Education*. SAGE, Los Angeles.
- Fertig M. (2007) ‘International School accreditation: Between a rock and a hard place?’ *Journal of Research in International Education*. Vol 6 No 3 pp 333-348.
- Giddens A. (1984) *The Constitution of Society*. University of California Press, Berkeley CA.
- Giddens A. (1979) *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis*. University of California Press, Berkeley CA.
- Hayden M. (2011) ‘Transnational spaces of education: the growth of the international school sector’. *Globalisation, Societies and Education* Vol 9 No 2 pp 211-224.
- Hayden, M., Rancic, B. and Thompson, J. J., 2000. Being International: student and teacher perceptions from international schools. *Oxford Review of Education*, 26 (1), pp. 107-123.
- Hayden, M. C. and Thompson, J. J., eds., 2011. *Taking the MYP Forward*. Woodbridge: John Catt Educational Ltd.
- Hayden M. and Thompson J. (2013) ‘International Schools: Antecedents, current issues and metaphors for the future’, in Pearce R. (ed.) *International Education and Schools: Moving Beyond the First 40 Years*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, pp.3-24.
- Haywood, T. (2015) International mindedness and its enemies, in: M. Hayden; J. Levy; and J. Thompson (Eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of International Education (Second Edition)* pp.45-58. SAGE Publications Ltd: London.
- Heclo H. (2008) *On thinking institutionally*. Paradigm, Boulder CO.
- Hill I. (2014) ‘Internationally minded schools as cultural artefacts: Implications for school leadership’. *Journal of Research in International Education*. Vol 13 No 3 pp 175-189.
- Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The managed heart: Commercialisation of human feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.



- ISC (2015) The International School Consultancy.  
<http://www.iscresearch.com/Portals/0/ISC%20Corporate%20Brochure%202015%20single%20pages.pdf>. Accessed April 2015.
- James, C. R. (2010) The Psychodynamics of Educational Change. In A Hargreaves and D. Hopkins (Eds) *The International Handbook of Educational Change*, London: SAGE.
- James, C. R., Connolly, M., Dunning, G. & Elliott, T. (2006) *How Very Effective Primary Schools Work*. London: SAGE.
- James, C. R., James, J. E. and Potter I. (2015) Theorising Organising in Educational Settings from an Adult Ego Development Perspective. *Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Chicago, April 2015*.
- James C. R. and Sheppard P. (2014) The governing of international schools: The implications of ownership and profit motive. *School Leadership and Management*, Vol 34 No 1 pp 2–20.
- Jepperson R.L. (1991) ‘Institutions, institutional effects, and institutionalization’, in Powell W.W. and DiMaggio P.J. (eds), *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago ILL, pp 143-163.
- Jonietz P. (1992) International Schools: Developing a consensus of opinion. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Brunel University, London.
- Jonietz P. (1991) Part 2: The International School Experience: Introduction, in: P. Jonietz and D. Harris (Eds.) *World Yearbook of Education 1991: International Schools and International Education* pp.53-54. Kogan Page: London.
- Lawrence W. G. (1977) Management development ... some ideals: images and realities. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 1: 21-25.
- Leach R. (1969) *International Schools and Their Role in the Field of Education*. Pergamon Press, Oxford.
- Martin J. (2002) *Organizational Culture: Mapping the Terrain*. Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Maurer J.G. (1971) *Readings in organisational theory: open systems approaches*. Random House, New York.
- Meyer J. and Rowan B. (1977) ‘Institutionalized organizations: formal structure as myth and ceremony’. *American Journal of Sociology*. Vol 83 pp 340-363.
- Mayer M. (1968) *Diploma: International Schools and University Entrance*. The Twentieth Century Fund: New York.
- Obholzer, A. and Roberts, V. Z. (1994). *The unconscious at work*. London: Routledge.
- Paunonen, S.V. and Ashton, M.S. (2001) Big Five factors and facets and the prediction of behavior. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology* 81 (3): 524–539.
- Phillips, J. (2002) The third way: Lessons from international education. *Journal Research in International Education* 1 (2), 159-182.
- Rhodes R.A. W. (1997) *Understanding Governance*. Open University Press, Buckingham.
- Rice, A.K. (1963) *The enterprise and its environment*. London: Tavistock.
- Röhrs H. (1970). *Kurt Hahn*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Rowan B. (1982) ‘Organizational Structure and the Institutional Environment: the Case of Public Schools’. *Administrative Science Quarterly*. Vol 27 pp 259-279.

- Scott W. R. (2014) *Institutions and organisations: Ideas, Interests and Identities*. Sage, London.
- Scott W. R. and Davis G. F. (2007) *Organisations and Organisations: Rational Natural and Open Systems Perspectives*. Pearson Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River NJ.
- Sewell W.H. (1992) 'A theory of structure: duality, agency, and transformation'. *American Journal of Sociology*. Vol 98 pp 1-29.
- Suchman M.C. (1995) 'Managing Legitimacy: Strategic and Institutional Approaches'. *Academy of Management Review*. Vol 20 No 3 pp 571-610.
- von Bertalanffy L. (1950) 'An Outline of General System Theory'. *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* Vol 1 pp 114-129.
- Woodward W. (2005, December 13) Business Class, *The Guardian*.
- Wiley M.G. & Zald M.N. (1968) 'The Growth and Transformation of Educational Accrediting Agencies: an Exploratory Study in Social Control of Institutions'. *Sociology of Education*. Vol 41 No 1 pp 36-56.