

International Mindedness to Survive & Thrive: Challenges & Possibilities

Shubha Koshy, West Island School - ESF, Hong Kong
Carol Inugai-Dixon, University of Tsukuba, Japan

The Asian Conference on Education 2018
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

International schools, particularly under the auspices of the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO), are unique hot houses of K-12 Education. These 4937 schools are situated in various contexts across the world and are required to deliver a challenging curriculum that is concept based and inquiry driven. At the middle years and diploma level, this includes compulsory components of critical thinking, action service and academic research. As teacher trainers who are exploring global citizenship and international mindedness, we hope to share the possibilities and challenges that face all institutions grappling with the delivery of authentic, transferable skills for the 21st century. This presentation explores the challenges and the possibilities of using the loose guidelines provided by the IBO, to build an honest, robust and resilient program of exploration. Students need to be challenged to use their critical thinking as a framework for intercultural understanding and global engagement. The possibilities of building a multicultural society must be explored through the use of multiple languages as the repositories of culture and knowledge across diverse peoples. The challenges include using technology as a tool to foster the possibilities of diversity rather than as a tool of standardisation and limitation. The challenges of creating personal identity in a globalised world through language, the arts and history need to be addressed. Students need to be actively taught to foster resilience and security through connecting mind, body and the spiritual self at a time when mental health among young adults, is particularly precarious.

Keywords: multilingualism, intercultural understanding, global engagement

iafor

The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

The aims of this paper are threefold:

1. To introduce the imperative for international mindedness. Why it is important now, more than ever before: 18 years into a new century. It was only 100 short years ago when World War 1 took place and there are as yet cautionary lessons that have not fully been learnt. Humanity has always faced the great crossroads of self-destruction versus self-fulfillment, the choice between merely **surviving** instead of **thriving**. Yet never more urgently have we had to address it than now. Except it is no longer a choice, it is an imperative based on the fact that other roads are closing themselves off for us. It is therefore essential to change and preserve what we hold most valuable on the planet and none of these possibilities can afford to be easy or superficial.
2. What information is already available - what would work? What signposts, gateways and clues are already out there? What are the messages learnt by organisations like the IBO which have been attempting to maximise the possibilities of Int Mindedness and global citizenship for the past 50 years?
3. Each signpost, each clue points to both possibilities and challenges. We can choose! International mindedness if taught through inquiry into the self and critical thinking that takes into account other perspectives, could lead to greater identity for all as well as resilience. Perhaps the paradigm shift required in education is genuinely to create a generation of stronger, highly aware,, service-minded and compassionate young people who are prepared to engage with the world, committed to systemic change.

Making the case for International Mindedness: Why is the imperative NOW?

- **Carl Sagan: The Pale Blue Dot:** Carl Sagan, Nasa Scientist, space explorer and writer of *Cosmos* made this profound case on what it means to be human on earth, a mere 2 years before he died in 1996. As Voyager 1 in 1990, left our planetary neighbourhood on a mission of unmanned discovery for the fringes of the solar system, Sagan wrote these words about the final photograph it sent of Earth, a faint smudge of blue, caught in a sunbeam:
“That’s here. That’s home. That’s us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, has lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering. Thousands of confident religions, ideologies and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every ‘superstar,’ every ‘supreme leader,’ every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there - on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.” -Carl Sagan from a lecture delivered at Cornell University, 13th October 1994.

It is possible here to begin to make the case for what a number of famous scientists, astronomers, evolutionary biologists, philosophers and writers have been saying for many decades. The possibilities and challenges arise from the fact that our biological, chemical and evolutionary realities are scientifically documented and now proven to us in the 21st Century in unprecedented ways. This is here, this is us, this is now!

Carl Sagan also said, *‘...that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we’ve ever known.’*

- **Bill Bryson: A Short History of Nearly Everything:**

Bryson addresses our molecular structure and some facts that Science has now proven to us about the basic chemical and atomic building blocks of human composition. *'The bad news is that atoms are fickle and their time of devotion is fleeting- fleeting indeed. Even a long human life adds up to only about 650,000 hours. And when that modest milestone flashes past, or at some other point thereabouts, for reasons unknown your atoms will shut you down, silently disassemble, and go off to be other things. And that's it for you. Still, you may rejoice that it happens at all. Generally speaking in the universe it doesn't, so far as we can tell.'* Bryson, B. (2013).

There is a humbling atomic imperative that Bill Bryson gives us. An hourly deadline to create a sense of some urgency if we are to impact and influence the world we live in and the wonder of the human condition. In Zen, Buddhist and Hindu philosophy, being born human in this life comes with a set of unique privileges and responsibilities. These are our possibilities and while they are not without challenges, we must use our talents to achieve our full potential: essentially to improve our own life that of others. The terrifying challenge is that we have but finite hours in which to achieve everything that our generation - even as teachers or educators aspire to achieve.

- **Robert Sapolsky- Humans are a standard off the rack mammal:** Primatologist and neuroscientist Robert Sapolsky says we are just *'a basic off the rack mammal...we've got the same basic building blocks and plumbing...but we use it in ways that are unprecedented.'*(Sapolsky, TED Sept 2009). What are these unprecedented ways? We can practise acts of senseless, illogical and unprovoked violence or cruelty but equally illogical and awe inspiring acts of **altruism** and **human empathy**. We have indeed the unique theory of mind: the ability to think about thinking and through this to be **able to change our own circumstances** and that of others by simply rethinking it differently.

- Evolutionary biologist, Mark Pagel tells us that it is **not necessarily just tool use but Language** that might have transformed humanity (Pagel, TED Global, 2011). The possibilities of language to transform humanity still exist and when used for positive effects, still astound us. For 3.5 million years we have survived as humans in a food web and a biosphere where we were certainly not the fastest or the fittest of species. This miraculous evolution to be the sentient species we are today has been through social evolution and visual theft or indeed social cooperation (Pagel 2011). The thread of language connects us to our primeval ancestors as they struggled to survive and provides us with both clues and possibilities today. How might we use our languages and our collective experience of being human to collaborate and improve ourselves?

Can we challenge ourselves to use social media and technology to thrive and explore our myriad languages and their ways of knowing and being? Multilingualism is a fact, a right and our greatest resource, (IBO, *Language and Learning in IB Programmes*, 2011). Could it be that what we really need is to use technology to translate, for languages to thrive rather than disappear? Could technology increase multilingualism and intercultural understanding rather than shrink into a monolingual, English based code that expresses artificial intelligence rather than the rich variety of the organic human impulse?

Pagel reminds us that somewhere in our evolutionary past, human beings made a decision towards, *'cumulative cultural adaptation,'* to move away from caves and small family groups towards larger village settlements in order to survive and thrive through this process of sharing and learning. Surely our greatest feats from the

invention of the decimal system, laptop computers to mobile phones and space travel have come through communication and collaboration? Equally, have not our most dangerous acts of mutual destruction taken place when the sheer human potential to survive and thrive has been deliberately curtailed aborted? When communication, languages, cooperation and collaboration have been threatened by self-started human phenomenon like war, slavery, colonisation and genocide?

The unfulfilled possibilities of Star Trek:

In 1966, Gene Roddenberry thought it would be a good idea for there to be a science fiction television series that was about open ended space exploration. The fabled *USS Enterprise* was composed of a multicultural, gender balanced, multi-species crew whose mission was simply to explore, '*Space. The final frontier....to seek out new lands, new civilizations, to boldly go where (no one as opposed to no man! Corrected 1987) has gone before!*' The United Federation of Planets was in fact Roddenberry's idealised version of a successful United Nations which actually prevented war and promoted exploration and inter-planetary or indeed even intercultural understanding on a platform of mutual benefit, in fact to survive and thrive.

These are the possibilities of the *Star Trek*, a journey of discovery, not the *Star Wars*. The *Star Wars* narrative is simply a mirroring of what we have always had on earth - exploitation, good versus evil empires and renegade rebel forces, colonisation, monstrous struggle, cold wars, revolution, dog-fights in space and constant strife. *Star Trek* on the other hand was full of possibilities: of intercultural and even inter-species understanding, mutual appreciation and a search for mutual co-existence.

For those of us born in the last decades of the 20th century, in the delirious excitement of modernisation and the possibilities of a brand new century, there is now a profound sense of disappointment. Yet eighteen years into the exciting 21st century, it is not a debate about interplanetary exploration that divides us but the polarising issues are gender, race and environmental destruction. Issues that the science has been saying for a long time are 'no-brainers,' issues that are as old as time itself. These are *still* the most burning issues in a world that seems very far indeed from achieving forays into space. Not only have we not had any more manned or indeed 'woman-ned' missions to the moon, we are still in profound disagreement on what it means to be human!

Our Ecological Disaster: Repair or despair?

Despite our great advances in technology and industrialisation, the finite, ecological Earth is sending us some strong messages and according to climate change scientists and activists, this warning has been available through various big data predictions, for over 70 years. We now have to sit up and pay attention to the weather forecast as there is every possibility that the earth is doing something unprecedented through weather and climate. Not only has every human being experienced what we like to call 'natural disasters,' like famine, drought, typhoons, hurricanes, storms, tsunamis and forest fires, these phenomenon are now here to stay. They show no signs of being the freak occurrences they once were. Additionally there is evidence to show that their menace has been amplified and exacerbated by some avoidable and strictly man-made phenomenon.

The word Anthropocene was first used in the year 2000 by Nobel Laureate Paul Crutzen, an atmospheric chemist came up with the term 'Anthropocene' to describe this weird geological phenomenon we are both creating and experiencing. It was defined as, '*relating to or denoting the current geological age, viewed as the period during which, human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the*

environment.' (Crutzen, 2000).

Since then, the word 'anthropocene,' has rapidly been incorporated in the vocabulary of those concerned by climatological change and global warming. Yet it is used with pride and a sense of smug self-congratulation when in fact, the reasons to be satisfied are far from evident. This is definitely an age where human beings are the dominant effect on both climate and the environment but to what effect? Do we survive and thrive or do we err and merely contrive?

Our collective challenge, the moral and physical imperative to act has never been stronger, yet are we repairing or despairing? There is evidence to show that the next generation will have no choice but to act and act decisively to contain, repair and address the damage on a scale so far unprecedented. Therefore is our education preparing them for the skills required by this century? What are we in fact doing to create the knowledge, skills, values attitudes and belief systems required to tackle the problems of the present and the future? How in fact can students be trained or alerted to developing what PISA, calls 'Global Competence?' The IBO mission states, *'The International Baccalaureate® aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.'*

Signposts, Possibilities & Challenges:

The IBO model of International Mindedness: The IBO has close to 4937 schools who follow one or all of their curriculum programs. All of these schools must therefore adhere to IBO's stringent *'From Principles to Practice,'* for the various programs they subscribe to. The foundations of these are the mission and vision that exhorts learners towards, *'the recognition of a common humanity, shared guardianship of the planet and contribution to world peace & development.'* In addition, the IBO offers a Learner Profile, a set of ten, key virtues that most befit an internationally minded person. These offer signposts and possibilities that educators around the world could use to guide and govern both the mundane and the procedural parts of an IB Education, in fact the principles that guide the practice.

The most important part of the IBO's mission and vision is of course the fostering of international mindedness. They highlight the three key dimensions of international mindedness in all their documentation. These are:

- Multilingualism
- Intercultural Understanding
- Global Engagement

It is worth investigating these ideas not only as dimensions but also as conceptual lenses through which to both frame and focus on international mindedness. They form the basis upon which to build the knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and beliefs that are necessary to develop a *'common humanity and shared guardianship'* of the planet. These ideas are in fact a useful foundation for all curriculum to grow from.

Multilingualism:

Multilingualism is now recognized as a fact, a right and a resource. A fact that best describes (as opposed to prescribes) the reality of *'a new linguistic dispensation'* (Aronin and Singleton 2008). This is a right as (supported by, for example, declarations from UNESCO on mother-tongue entitlement and government legislations for global language/lingua franca education). The IBO further cites multilingualism as a RESOURCE and an opportunity for engendering the ideals of international-mindedness and intercultural awareness. (*Language & Learning in IB Programs*, IBO, 2011).

There has been much debate and discussion about the challenges as well as the

possibilities of multilingualism in the 21st century. School administrators are often quick to cite budgetary constraints and timetable impossibilities with accommodating on average twenty to forty mother tongue or first languages represented by the language profiles of most IB schools, especially in the Asia Pacific region. Yet these are the very schools who are equally quick to advertise the flags of these forty countries in their foyers and on their websites as a much more colourful and obvious nod towards advertising international mindedness. Many IBO educators warn against the far too easy wins of the 6 Fs - food, flags, fashion, faces, festivals and fundraising that consume new international schools intent upon consolidating their international competitiveness. True multilingualism allows students to explore their education in multiple languages, investigating through language the diverse perspectives offered by language as a way of knowing and being.

The challenges around implementing mother tongue and school supported self-taught languages abound but they offer students sound intercultural perspectives that cannot otherwise be accessed. Wittgenstein famously said, *'the limits of my language are the limits of my world.'* It is therefore imperative for the IB spirit of international mindedness to explore the world through more than one language.

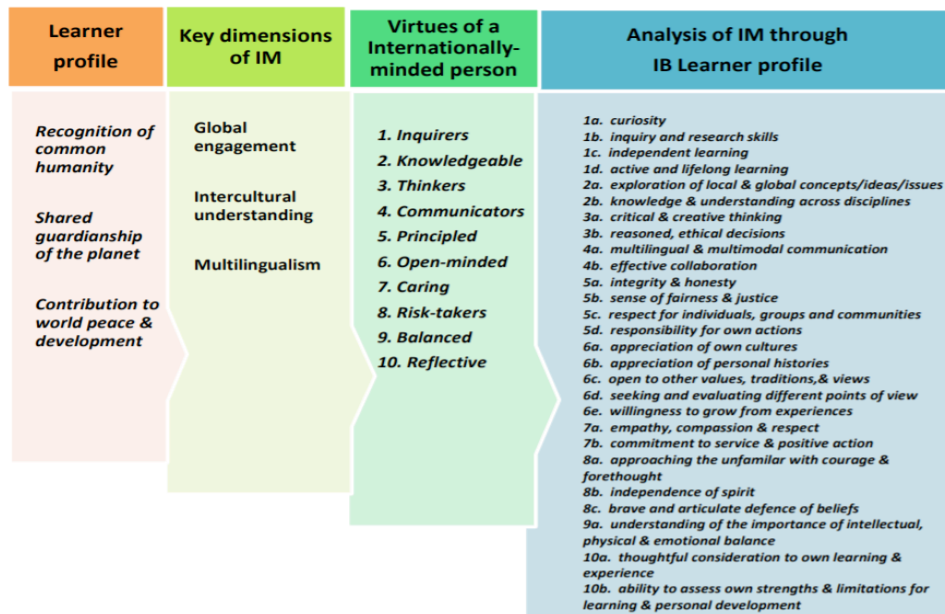


Figure 7 (Model 4) Pedagogies for forming the virtues of internationally minded learners

Figure 1: Source: *21st century international mindedness: An exploratory study of its conceptualisation and assessment*. Michael Singh & Jing Qi, 2013. Centre for Educational Research, University of Western Sydney.

Intercultural Understanding:

In the context of challenges presented by the teaching of multilingualism and intercultural understanding, it might be useful to reference an earlier more ancient era of possibilities. At a time when neither language or cultural understanding were a barrier to the spread of a whole set of beliefs and a way of life. Founded in the 5th century BCE, Buddhism spread widely from India across Asia, traversing Sri Lanka, Burma, Tibet, Nepal, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, Korea and China before finally coming to rest in Japan. Translation of the Buddhist texts was not only prolific, it necessitated a spate of exploratory journeys between and across these lands. Intercultural and interlinguistic exchanges were rife. There seemed no barriers, to either translation nor indeed the eloquent discussions, debate, question and

consensus of Buddhist concepts that were the hallmarks of Buddhist Sangha teachings.

Equally architecture travelled with Buddhism. Beginning with the Indian *Toran* gates which marked the outer threshold of temples. These ubiquitous gateways that symbolised the human ascent from the mundane to the sacred, also travelled across vast distances. In China they were called *Pailou* gates and in Japan, they continue to be called the *Torii* and mark the entrances to most shrines. Both the *Toran* or *Torii* spread across Asia with the spread of Buddhist texts and doctrines. From Buddhist texts & architecture to the modern languages of technology, language can indeed become a tool for intercultural understanding and sharing the common goals of humanity.

As stated earlier, international schools can be superficial in their very attempt to be visibly international. They display multiple national flags with pride, have signage occasionally in other languages, faces of all racial groups - the United Colours of Benetton! Food is prominent at school fairs and dress up days are elaborate. Yet Qi and Singh were in their 2013 study of 21st century internationalism, asked if this was in fact a truly transformative education? Is this truly an international education that provides students with the tools through which to interrogate their own beliefs and values? (Qi & Singh 2013). Are we teaching students to be good 'tourists' of the world or good 'residents, citizens of the planet?' How do these global citizens at international schools, investigate who they are - under the surface of skin colour, food, fashion and festivals? These are the true challenges of an international education.

Global Engagement:

The OECD (2018) provides a useful definition of Global Competence that subtexts engagement: '*Global competence is the capacity to examine local, global and intercultural issues, to understand and appreciate the perspectives and worldviews of others, to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with people from different cultures, and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development.*' Only by examining local, global and intercultural issues and understanding and appreciating the perspectives and worldviews of others can global citizens genuinely engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions across cultures. The final outcome of this, one hopes, is an ability based on sound skills, knowledge and values to take action for collective well being and sustainable development.



Figure 2: PISA Global Competence, PISA 2017.

The IBO insist within their core that students are involved in ‘Creativity Activity & Service’ a program of extra-curricular learning that must investigate local actions that might be connected to larger community, national or global goals of development or sustainability. These CAS Programs provide endless possibilities to indeed engage with transformative learning of skills or knowledge and service learning that could indeed interrogate values and belief systems, whether it is engaging with the problem of homelessness in seemingly affluent Hong Kong or working with youngsters afflicted by landmine injuries in Vietnam or AIDS orphans in Cambodia. Yet without a strong grounding in curricular rigour and the skills with which to process the experience, students might indeed experience these as one of ‘snapshot’ events that do not necessarily evolve into the ‘mindsets’ (Singh & Qi, 2013) that we hope might drive systemic global change in the future.

Critical Thinking & Critical Literacy:

Young people today need to realise that they are lucrative pawns in the games played by information tech giants and Big Data. They are documented and profiled and hugely manipulated by the social media platforms that they inhabit in various ways. Although they are digital natives, it is perhaps precisely because of this that their critical thinking and critical literacy filters need to be alert and well developed. This needs to be achieved by schools and colleges in explicit and implicit ways.

Information communication technology is a *tool*, a means to a greater end, not an end in itself. It has myriad possibilities and multiple challenges. How can we use it for the greater good, to take us *towards* our agreed goals rather than to create distance, disillusionment and chaos?

The challenge before educators is encouraging young people to investigate their identity as essentially human, organic creatures. We are neither plastic nor digital in our fundamental cognitive, sociocultural, biological vibrations, as the most intelligent mammal on the planet. Yet as we frame ourselves as agents to act locally and think globally, we need to consider the role of technology in creating this 21st century identity. We need to reconsider our current paradigm of indiscriminate growth and competition which we are told is ‘natural.’ But is it indeed natural? Could we perhaps equally consider another natural paradigm which might serve us better? A paradigm with allows us to survive of course but to genuinely flourish and thrive?

This is the paradigm of sustainable identity through symbiosis and acknowledged, compassionate, interdependence.

The Crisis of Youth Identity:

An increasing issue that is facing the globalised world is that of personal Identity. Teenagers talk about the parts of themselves that are Japanese or Indian or Chinese and the parts of them that are 'different.' In a world where they live away from their original home culture, what is their identity? Passports are just tools and are changeable identities. Multicultural marriages merge into a neutral globalised culture that harkens only superficially (food, fashion, festivals, faces & flags) towards the roots of either parent, which may be quickly forgotten in the urban, still industrial metropolis that they both inhabit. For children of these 'world cities' and these wonderful marriages, confusion and disorientation or indeed a sort of cultural schizophrenia abounds unless issues of identity are explicitly tackled by both parents. Who am I? How do I relate to my parents, my multiple cultures, my acquired nationality and the world? Which languages do I use to make myself understood? Where am I a citizen, where a denizen and how do I create identity online as a netizen?

Struggling with these questions, it becomes easier for today's youth to immerse themselves in an easy online world that provides candy cane sustenance through celebrity worship, brand loyalty and instant gratification as well as sporadic endorsement through likes, retweets and emoticons. Being a 'netizen' becomes by far the easiest and least demanding identity. It allows assumed personas, pseudonyms and photoshopped profile pictures, creating an ideal but un-lived fantasy world. Despite the constant almost intrusive contact offered through online relationships, youth are increasingly dissatisfied with the quality of their friendships and their emotional bonds, with each other as well as with the adults who oversee rather than guide or mentor them.

Some psychologists attribute the spate of mental health issues amongst the youth to the lack of meaningful, real, human physical contact. After all we are organic creatures inhabiting a mechanised world. Mammals operating within a virtual machine? Technology mutes our immediate instincts for who to trust, who to communicate our innermost thoughts with, who to support and who to reject. In the online jungle there are no markers that pick out friend from foe. Online tribes may not have real tribal affinities. Political, ideological likes and dislikes shift on a daily, even hourly basis following the constantly breaking, news cycle. Judgements and verdicts are passed through thumbs up and thumbs down, creating a culture of public shame and humiliation in an arena where you are not really known or acknowledged for your 'common humanity.'

Thus the challenges of international education and international mindedness may seem to outweigh its possibilities. Yet, those very challenges offer opportunities to genuinely engage with the immediate task of raising a generation of learners to become resilient, self-sufficient and knowledgeable enough to take their rightful place on the planet as its future denizens. If indeed humanity is to make the choice to veer away from self-destruction towards emancipation and self-fulfillment, every opportunity needs to be fully explored.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank Professor Carol Inugai Dixon for her profound and thoughtful reflections that pepper this paper. I am grateful for the endless wisdom stream she has shared over skype, long distance and then over coffee and bento boxes in Tokyo. My husband Raghvendra Singh has provided the critical, supportive sounding board for my early morning flurries of jumbled thoughts. His insightful questions and practical connections have been invaluable to clarifying my thinking. Finally I would like to thank my Principal, Christopher Sammons for the opportunity to explore the role of global citizenship and international mindedness in the wellbeing of our students.

References

- Aronin, Larissa|Singleton, & David. (2007, December 31). Multilingualism as a New Linguistic Dispensation. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ837885>
- Bryson, B. (2013). *At home: A short history of private life: Illustrated edition*. New York: Doubleday.
- Crinion, E. (2015, April 03). Pale Blue Dot [no music]. Retrieved October 10, 2018, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pvxKdvuwIw&t=88s>
- Earlyguard. (2011, September 11). Globaia: Anthropocene Mapping (feat. music by Earlyguard). Retrieved October 01, 2018, from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-TDZCStBiJw>.
- IBOrganization. (n.d.). Mission. Retrieved from <https://www.ibo.org/about-the-ib/mission/PISA-2018-Global-Competence>. (2017, Dec 12). Retrieved June 2, 2018, from <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-2018-global-competence.htm>
- Sapolsky, R. (2009, September). The uniqueness of humans. Retrieved October 5, 2018, from https://www.ted.com/talks/robert_sapolsky_the_uniqueness_of_humans
- Singh, M., & Qi, J. (2013). *21st century international mindedness: An exploratory study of its conceptualisation and assessment*. Retrieved August 14, 2018, from <http://www.ibo.org/globalassets/publications/ibresearch/singhqiibreport27julyfinalversion.pdf>

Contact email: shubhakoshy@gmail.com