**Cambridge English B for the IB Diploma: Teacher resource**

**Audio scripts**

**Audio track 19**

[Paper 2 Higher level - Text A]

[NB: pronounce PISA as for the name of the city]

**Text A**

You are about to listen to a conversation between two teachers about the latest report from the Programme for International Student Assessment, also known as PISA.

**Jack:** Hi Martin. Did you see the latest PISA report?

**Martin:** PISA?

**Jack:** Yeah – Programme for International Student Assessment. It’s a report that ranks countries on education. They publish test scores on Maths, Reading and Science every three years. It’s a bit controversial.

**Martin:** Oh yeah I’ve heard of that. So who came out on top this year?

**Jack:** Well you know, the usual: Singapore, Shanghai, Hong Kong. Didn’t you used to teach in Singapore before coming here?

**Martin:** Sure did, six years – loved every moment of it.

**Jack:** So what’s their recipe for success?

**Martin:** Oh, it’s a combination of factors, I guess. But teachers definitely have a higher status in society. Parents respect you more. Schools pay more. They send you on all kinds of courses too. You know, staff training and such.

**Jack:** But it’s also the students, right? I mean, I’m sure they only hire the best of the best teachers. But I’ve been told that the kids work hard.

**Martin:** Well, yeah, generally speaking they work very hard, but you have to understand their context. The country’s young. And they have to prove their place in the world. You see it with other young countries, like Vietnam and Poland. It’s like they’re in a race against their big neighbours, like China and Russia.

**Jack:** Yeah, Vietnam and Poland were high on the PISA list too. You’re right they’re ambitious. You know, I went to Poland for a teacher exchange project a couple of years ago.

**Martin:** Really?

**Jack:** Yeah. The students work really hard there too. But there was something else I noticed. Most of them were just doing what the teachers told them to do. It was kind of conformist. Do you know what I mean? No artsy, holistic learning business. There was a lot of rote learning and testing. That kind of stuff.

**Martin:** Yeah, I saw a lot of that in Singapore too. But you know, psychologists have said it for ages: people who can memorise dates and crunch numbers are often better at creative thinking and problem solving. The one is usually a prerequisite for the other.

**Jack:** Yeah, that doesn’t surprise me. Sometimes I feel like we’re so focused on critical thinking in Western Europe that we forget to teach the facts. You know what I mean?

**Martin:** Yeah, it’s kind of paradoxical. But I’ve never been happier than teaching here in Holland at an international school. You kind of get the best of all worlds. And we have a big say in what we teach and how we teach it.

**Jack:** I know what you mean. When I came here, I was surprised how much autonomy they gave teachers.

**Martin:** That’s important for those PISA rankings too. You know, all schools have to do is hire competent people and give them autonomy over small classes. The rest falls into place. Students will score well on those tests. I bet Finland scored high on the PISA rankings too, didn’t they?

**Jack:** Um yeah, I think so... Finland was up there too.

**Martin:** See? Finland is known for small class sizes. And teachers write their own curriculum and create their own tests. Who else did well on these tests?

**Jack:** Oh, the Baltic States were up there. And New Zealand. And Germany.

**Martin:** So basically anywhere where teachers earn a good living. And the difference between rich and poor isn’t too great. Who was low in the rankings?

**Jack:** Indonesia... Russia.... Now that you mention it, countries with high income inequality were rather low on the list. I hadn’t thought of a correlation before.

**Martin:** Were any South American countries ranked highly on the PISA list?

**Jack:** No. I don’t think so.

**Martin:** Yeah, see?! There’s high income inequality there too.

**Jack:** So what are you saying? Countries have to be fair before they can be smart?

**Martin:** Oh, I don’t know. I’m sure you have very bright students everywhere in the world. We’re talking about averages and generalisations. But yeah, income equality certainly helps education results.

**Jack:** I’ve got to run and teach a class. But it was good talking to you. You Geography teachers are full of interesting insights.

**Martin**: Cheers, mate. See ya around.