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# A Critical Analysis of OECD's 'Global Competence' Framework

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## Abstract

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) proposes that improving students' "multidimensional capacities" through 'global competence' education can result in a more 'inclusive and sustainable' world. The purpose of this study is to critically analyze OECD's 'global competence' policy (2018) as incorporated in its Programme for International Student Assessment. This document analysis employs Bacchi and Goodwin's (2016) poststructural policy analysis, "What's the Problem Represented to be?" approach, which unearths the assumptions, presuppositions, and potential effects of policy through a solution-problem articulation. This study finds that OECD's solution of 'globally competent' learners constructs a problem that suggests national education systems are failing to produce graduates who are equipped for the needs and issues associated with the evolving global economy. Ultimately, the problem constructed in OECD's 'global competence' policy comes with potential opportunities; however, it also associated with blind spots that may impede OECD's mission of nurturing an 'inclusive and sustainable' world.

## Lay Summary

The purpose of this study is to critically analyze the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) 'global competence' education policy. Why study policy? Policy is a significant artifact to analyze because when it is taken up, it can change the way people understand an issue and therefore how they think and act about that issue. My analysis focuses on a problem-solution articulation produced within OECD's 'global competence' policy and the effects that this representation may have on people, education systems, and the economy. I discover that OECD's solution is to change students' thinking and decision-making processes by using comparative data to determine which nation state's education systems are producing more 'globally competent' learners than others, and use this information to improve education in each nation state. Consequently, the represented problem constructed suggests that education systems are failing to produce students who are equipped for today's agile global economy. Overall, OECD is trying to advance an education

intervention that equips students with the transferable competencies that the organization considers necessary for better preparing students for the neoliberal economy. OECD uses humanist rhetoric to gain support for a neoliberal education framework, which intends to drive social and economic development as a means for improving its member nation state's economies. The utopic global community imagined in this policy offers opportunities that would indeed make the world a better place; however, this study cautions that the problem representation constructed through OECD's notion of 'global competence' fails to draw attention to a couple of significant blind spots. These blind spots are problematic because the discursive and subjectification effects construct divided, un-inclusive, and unsustainable realities. As a result of this analysis, I encourage political leaders, educators, and researchers using OECD's 'global competence' framework to be critical of the long-term effects that this policy constructs, as these effects do not necessarily align with the vision that OECD is promoting.

## Keywords

OECD, global competence, PISA policy analysis, WPR approach, human capital development

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# Chapter 1

## 1 Introduction

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) proposes that developing students' 'global competence' through education can result in a more 'inclusive and sustainable' world. OECD (2018) frames 'global competence,' as a "multidimensional capacity," as follows:

Globally competent individuals can examine local, global and intercultural issues, understand and appreciate different perspectives and world views, interact successfully and respectfully with others, and take responsible action toward sustainability and collective well-being. (p. 4)

The organization argues that 'global competence' is vital because "around the world, in the face of widening income gaps, there is a need to dissolve tensions and re-build social capital" (OECD, 2016, p. 1). As OECD's policy will be influential in shaping the discourse for global competence, this makes it likely that its version of 'global competence' will be a primary conceptualization used and put into practice transnationally. Thus, there is a need to unpack OECD's notion of 'global competence.'

OECD envisions an 'inclusive and sustainable' world where citizens will have a capacity for: (1) living harmoniously in multicultural communities, (2) thriving in a changing labour market, (3) using media platforms effectively and responsibly, and (4) supporting the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (OECD, 2018). Collectively, these four objectives contribute to OECD's notion of why students from its member nation states need 'global competence.' OECD describes 'inclusivity' and 'sustainability' with humanist and neoliberal vocabulary. OECD describes 'inclusive' behaviour through students' willingness to work together in an intercultural community and workplace. 'Sustainability' is described as a capacity for nurturing sound social, ecological, and economic decisions in order to improve the conditions of the global society. Ultimately, the organization offers its policy as a solution for improving the world through education.

I argue that this proposal intends to unify learning by taking a global approach to maintain a standard of education that will deliver ‘globally competent’ graduates.

This study uses Bacchi and Goodwin’s (2016) poststructural analysis called “What’s the Problem Represented to be?” (WPR). This approach provides me with the analytical means necessary for answering two research questions guiding this study: *What representation of a problem is constructed through OECD’s ‘global competence’ policy? What are assumptions, presuppositions, and potential effects of this representation?* In turn, this analysis creates new ‘realities’ by highlighting how OECD’s policy may reshape the behaviour, attitude, and actions of students and nation states, demonstrating OECD’s power to steer from a distance. The organization governs international education for the purpose of achieving its wider goals by using education intervention to implement social and economic growth for its member nation states.

This thesis commences with an overview of the significance and rationale supporting my study of OECD’s ‘global competence’ framework. In the second section of this paper, I summarize the method used for conducting the document analysis by describing the purpose and intended outcomes associated with Bacchi and Goodwin’s WPR approach. The third section follows up with a literature review of the neoliberal conditions of the global economy and education systems today. Furthermore, it explores some of the key concepts referenced throughout the Analysis and Findings section with the intentions of providing background knowledge in which to situate and appreciate the complexity of the ideological perspective in which OECD’s policy constructs. In the next chapter I discuss my findings using Bacchi and Goodwin’s WPR approach. In the Discussion and Conclusion chapter, I consider possible opportunities and blind spots of OECD’s policy in light of my findings.

My study suggests that OECD constructs a problematic solution-problem articulation given its stated objectives and its underlying assumptions. Specifically, OECD’s problem representation calls into question education systems for failing to produce ‘globally competent’ students. For example, on one hand I discover that OECD’s proposal may better prepare students for a globalized world, while also nurturing global citizens who

are life-long learners. However, on the other hand, there is a possibility that OECD's policy may categorize students and nation states into a series of 'winners' and 'losers' who have divided interests about global relations. The context surrounding the solution-problem articulation aims to improve education in order to create a more 'inclusive and sustainable' world through the production of 'globally competent' learners. As a result of the conflicting outcomes from this thesis, I recommend that researchers, political leaders, and educational stakeholders be critical of the long-term effects of OECD's 'global competence' proposal.

## 1.1 Why does OECD's 'global competence' initiative matter?

OECD's ability to collect multi-nation state data makes the organization's educational initiatives important to fully comprehend. As an independent entity, OECD's legitimacy resides outside of any single nation state because it is established through multilateral support. Thus, the organization is in a unique position to govern from a distance if it can compel participation from nation states. OECD's rapport with nation states stems from its ability to produce evidenced-based educational proposals, findings, and policies. The organization's evidence is produced from empirical data, which are derived from its independent studies such as OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). In collecting large sets of qualitative and quantitative data from students and teachers in multiple nation states, the organization positions itself as a powerful stakeholder in global education reform. OECD informs nation states about the performance of their education systems by comparing them to one another. Multilateral comparative testing becomes a system of ranking, which is why many nation states and their citizens have given OECD significant attention. Ranking results are then used to make claims about an individual national government's successes and failures based on where their students land amongst OECD's comparison metrics.

OECD's perspectives are embedded in its educational policies, which are then taken up as proposals for enhancing national education systems (Gorur, 2016). The organization uses its tests as assessment tools to measure the extent to which nation states are achieving OECD's proposed objectives. The concept of 'global competence' is an



example of this process in action. During 2018 PISA test, OECD collected transnational data to measure 'global competence' for the first time. Over the next few years, from 2019 through to 2021, OECD will release results and construct recommendations for curricular changes within nation states using PISA data as evidence for its recommendations.

OECD governs by influencing educational change through testing and policy recommendations (Gorur, 2016). OECD serves the interests of its 36-member nation states by helping them improve economic development within their local economies through educational policy development (OECD, 1996). The significance of the OECD stems from its ability to motivate normative change. Normative change can go unnoticed and unquestioned, as the change can set new priorities and agendas within education systems, and often in the way administrators, educators and students conform to these changes without fully appreciating their purpose or long-term effects. For example, nation states have been known to construct policies and allocate funding to align with OECD recommendations (Gorur, 2016). Norms, as established by OECD policies, can pressure individual education systems to change to align more closely with other education systems. For example, linking the efforts of multiple education systems can make it difficult for others to resist adopting similar practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 2010). With nation states actively listening and adopting many of OECD's ideas, policies, and tests, it demonstrates OECD's power through policy changes made in nation states' education systems all over the world (Gorur, 2016). Gorur (2016) predicts that the buy-in by member states is likely a result of individual nations wanting to experience the improved education and economic standards that OECD promises.

This study acknowledges OECD's ability to govern sovereign states and students. Thus, how the organization conceptualizes 'global competence' will have a normative impact on nation states. The organization will use its dataset collected through the 2018 PISA test to construct new recommendations for educational policy amendments. This process is problematic because it reinforces and legitimizes OECD's notion of 'global competence' through regimes of test-taking and comparative education, whilst minimizing examination of the assumptions undergirding 'global competence,'

‘inclusivity,’ and ‘sustainability,’ for the purposes of schooling. Therefore, how OECD operationalizes its ‘global competence’ policy has lived effects by changing people’s thinking processes and behaviours.

For example, Gorur’s study (2016) warns researchers that the PISA process brings “about deep-rooted changes, and it is likely that the effects will be very long-term” (p. 600).

According to the National Centre for Education Statistics, an average of 59 nation states participated in OECD’s PISA tests between the years of 2000 and 2015 (<https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pisa/countries.asp>, July 16, 2019). Therefore, since 2000, nation states have been participating in PISA tests and actively following up with OECD’s recommendations in hopes that it will bring about the changes that the organization promises. However, Gorur notes that there is little evidence to suggest that OECD’s policies are resulting in the improvements that the organization proposes because PISA tests have not been around long enough to see the long-term effects taking place. For example, PISA has not been studied long enough to determine if OECD’s ability to foster behavioural changes in people impacts the ‘sustainability’ of the global economy. Instead, the author claims that political and educational stakeholders continue to make decisions about education through a reductionist view, meaning that fiscal assessments and measurable outcomes determine the “efficacy and quality of a school system” (Gorur, 2016, p. 602). This reductionist view describes “performative change” by outlining how testing produces a particular ‘reality.’ One of the problems with this is that performative changes do not provide substantial evidence to predict long-term results and the lack of longitudinal data hinders the merit of OECD’s ‘global competence’ solution. Thus, it is a serious concern that these nation states may be being blindsided by OECD’s neoliberal-inflected economic solutions and overlooking the possibility that its humanist outcomes may not come to fruition.

Another possible long-term effect of OECD’s ‘global competence’ initiative may be its ability to produce isomorphic change. DiMaggio and Powell (2010) explore isomorphic change theory to describe how less successful companies start to adopt similar organizational practices of more profitable companies for the purposes of producing similar results. The authors argue that less profitable companies adopting what they

consider to be the ‘successful’ practices of a more profitable company in the same industry results in companies becoming “more similar without necessarily making them more efficient” (DiMaggio & Powell, 2010, p. 147). I worry that OECD is causing similar isomorphic change through standardized education by suggesting that individual nation state’s education systems should adopt similar practices.

A concern is that OECD’s ‘global competence’ framework might add to this isomorphic effect. For example, following PISA, the dataset will illustrate which nation states and students are more ‘globally competent’ than others. This ranking system will likely influence less ‘globally competent’ nation states to look towards the more successful nation states’ educational practices. Rather than celebrating the diversity and differences that OECD proposes via its ‘global competence’ framework, the policy and testing regime may be causing nation states and students to become more alike through its standardization process. Thus, it seems possible that the long-term isomorphic effects of ‘global competence’ may be working against OECD’s own initiative that seeks to celebrate diversity.

Overall, through the publications of OECD’s policies and its PISA results, the organization is in a unique position to be able to conduct change through the dissemination of ideas (Mausethagen, 2013). OECD’s ability to produce comparable data once every three years is an intentional strategy for sparking longitudinal evidence-informed decisions, which are allegedly used to improve both the quality of education and the wealth of the economy. The PISA data constructs an international story about the performance and potential of each participating nation state. In doing so, OECD produces normative change through policy reform, while at the same time prescribing behavioural change in students and individual nation states. By adding ‘global competence’ to its testing regime, OECD is in a position to both celebrate and shame education systems all over the world. Consequently, OECD’s ‘global competence’ proposal encourages isomorphic change by intending to standardized educational practices. The possibilities that OECD offers with education for ‘global competence’ is exciting, yet there seems to be foreseeable blind spots that educators and political stakeholders need to take into consideration.

## Chapter 2

### 2 Method

The purpose of this study is to critically analyze OECD's 'global competence' education policy. Why study policy? Policy is a significant artifact to analyze because when it is taken up, it can change the way people understand an issue and therefore how they think and act about that issue. Bacchi and Goodwin (2016) describe policy as "performative" because it can affect people's behaviours as a result of how someone understands the context of the policy. Taking a critical approach to policy is necessary because it enables researchers to unpack a particular problem that a policy intends to solve. By digging deep into the assumptions and presuppositions that went into the construction of a policy, researchers can appreciate how policy also produces a problem to which it represents a solution for. This solution-problem articulation process brings awareness to ideological influences that are embedded within policy.

With the notion of performativity in mind, this study sets out to address the questions: *What representation of a problem is constructed through OECD's 'global competence' policy? What are assumptions, presuppositions, and potential effects of this representation?* According to Ball (1993), describing policy as discourse directs attention to "the way in which policy ensembles, or collections of related policies, exercise power through a production of 'truth' and 'knowledge'" (as cited in Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 8). By analyzing a set of 'truths' either produced or reinforced through this policy, I uncover a constructed 'reality' that OECD creates through a solution-problem articulation. The second question pushes the first research question further by unearthing driving factors contributing to the problem representation and by analyzing the effects linked to the discourse constructed.

To be able to answer these research questions, a document analysis of OECD's policies (2018; 2016) are necessary because they are the foundation of OECD's 'global competence' framework. Gabriela Ramos, OECD Chief of Staff to the G20 and Andreas Schleicher, Director of OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, and Special, co-wrote

the first OECD ‘global competence’ policy in 2016. Two years later, the authors published an updated version, replacing the original one on the organization’s website. Although both policies are very similar, there is a noticeable effort in adding more language towards “sustainability” in the latest publication. While the latter one is the primary source for this study, collectively these policies are significant to the study because both versions have been widely distributed around the world. Both policies begin by formally introducing its readers to the rationale for ‘global competence,’ followed by the need for testing this standard, while the appendix provides sample questions to exemplify how ‘global competence’ intends to be assessed in the 2018 PISA test.

These policies are the primary resources for exploring OECD’s ‘global competence’ proposal because they offer the most concrete data to date. Having working with “Global competence for an inclusive world” (OECD, 2016) in the workplace, I was quite familiar with this resource because of the number of times I read it. To become just as familiar with “Preparing Our Youth for an Inclusive and Sustainable World: The OECD global competence framework” (OECD, 2018), I decided to read it multiple times prior to beginning my formal analysis. Being knowledgeable about both texts is necessary for a document analysis because it helps the researcher appreciate the context of the policies. Due to the size and diversity of the information within each text, I was seeing multiple problem representations. I relied on deliberation and dialogue with my advisors to identify which solution-problem articulation was ideal to analyze.

Confident in the problem representation that my study aimed to investigate, I proceeded to reach both OECD policies (2018; 2016) through the lens of each WPR question. I combed through the texts only looking for evidence of where the solution was being produced, then followed suited for each of the following questions in order. To organize my findings, I used a data management system called Nivio. This tool allowed me to highlight text and take screenshots of artifacts within the policy that aligned to each WPR question. I used the feature nodes to file my evidence into appropriate buckets so I could continuously return to the information in an organized manner. Nivio proved to be useful for managing large amount of information because the tool enabled me to focus on the

node file necessary for unpacking, making sense of, and looking for evidence to address each WPR question.

This study investigates a solution offered in OECD's 'global competence' policy which proposes that the organization's current testing regime is an ideal vehicle to disseminate and reinforce the value of 'global competencies,' which are deemed to be necessary for 'success' in today's evolving global economy. Due to the size of OECD's policies (2018; 2016), and the timeframe of this study, I chose to focus on one primary solution-problem articulation produced through OECD's 'global competence' initiative. OECD's solution constructs a problem representation that suggests education systems are failing to produce globally-minded learners. OECD's representation describes the ideal student by focusing on the soft skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values that the organization prioritizes. Through its testing regime, OECD is able to hold students and nation states accountable for their learning. This model reinforces the importance and desire to think and behave in ways that adhere to the acceptable standard of OECD's notion of 'global competence.'

My analysis focuses on a problem-solution articulation produced within OECD's 'global competence' policy and the effects that this representation may have on people, education systems, and the economy. Bacchi and Goodwin (2016) recognize that the purpose of policy is to present a solution to a problem, yet the authors appreciate that a policy is more complex than the literal meanings written on the page. The performative nature of policy is what makes the 'global competence' policy exciting and dangerous. The poststructural lens of the WPR welcomes skepticism of systemic practices and therefore is a form of critical theory (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). According to Bacchi and Goodwin (2016), this critical approach reflects Foucauldian concepts by calling into question policy assumptions and subjectification effects that would have otherwise likely have been taken for granted. A critical lens is useful for this study because it encourages richer conversations by engaging with presuppositions that went into the making of the policy. The WPR approach is useful for conducting a critical policy analysis of 'global competence' because this process materializes insightful information that is not typically acknowledged by policy makers or the stakeholders who put the policy into practice.

There are seven questions in Bacchi and Goodwin's WPR approach. These questions are organized in a way to help researchers critically unpack a policy and reflect on the impact of the analysis. For the purpose of this study, I have chosen to ask the first five questions in the WPR approach because they capture the critical thinking that this analysis intends to achieve. In order, the modified questions from the WPR approach that I use for this study are: (1) *What is the problem represented to be?* (2) *What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?* (3) *How has this representation of the problem come about?* (4) *What is left unproblematic in this problem representation?* (5) *What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?*

To hone only one of several problem representations produced in this policy, I decided to begin this analysis with a precursor question: *What is the solution?* It is beneficial to begin with a precursor question because it "promotes a novel way of thinking that opens up many kinds of material to original and inventive interrogation" (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 17). The solution produced in OECD's 'global competence' policy that this analysis focuses on is OECD's proposal to use PISA to advance the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values of what the organization considers an inclusive and sustainably-minded global citizen. I have chosen to work with this particular solution because it reflects the general context of OECD's proposal. In my study, it was valuable to start with the solution because it helped me focus on only one problem representation rather than trying to analyze each argument, example, and sample test question offered throughout the entire policy.

By beginning with the solution, I was able to establish a clear problem representation. Thus, the next question asked in this study is the first question in WPR: *What is the problem represented to be?* The represented problem constructed suggests that education systems are failing to produce students who are equipped for today's agile global economy. The solution-problem articulation is an efficient way of visualizing how the problem representation works in conjunction with the policy. The policy is written in a proactive vocabulary because it is a proposal, or rather a solution, which ultimately makes the problem representation less clear. Being able to identify and articulate a

particular solution within the ‘global competence’ proposal enabled me to see the problem representation constructed. This study is concerned with OECD’s constructed problem representation because it produces lived effects that have significant consequences for students and nation states. Moreover, OECD’s ability to disseminate this particular ‘reality’ constructed, on a global scale, makes it an influential discourse.

The next question asked in the WPR approach is: *What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?* Assumptions and presuppositions are important to this study because they guide a way of knowing or understanding the world. According to Bacchi and Goodwin (2016), “assumptions” are embedded norms that offer a sense of truth, where “presuppositions” are conclusions that are derivatives of previous experiences, knowledge, or theories. Together, both assumptions and presuppositions can influence a person’s rationale behaviour regarding an issue, which in return often constructs binaries that reflect what someone accepts and what they do not accept. The purpose of this section is to uncover binaries produced as a result of how the problem representation is understood. This question offers a way to make sense of OECD’s positionality, which helps to appreciate the context of its solution within the proposal.

*How has this representation of the problem come about?* This next question aims to map out the conditions that surround the development of the solution-problem articulation, including power relations that are established within (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). By looking at what this policy sets out to do, I unpack how neoliberal practices encourage nation states to want to monitor human capital potential as a marker for predicting how prepared graduates will be for the global economy (Lingard & Sellar, 2013). This form of analysis matters because it highlights embedded norms and expectations that are often considered normalized best practices.

The fourth question in WPR is: *What is left unproblematic in this problem representation?* The purpose of this question is to critically assess information that is unchallenged and underpins the problem representation in OECD’s framework. Relying on analysis from the second and third questions in WPR, this question intends “to



destabilize the problem representation by drawing attention to silences, or unproblematized elements, within it” (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 22). To problematize is to call into question, which is necessary for challenging context that can shape certain behaviours. By analyzing the ideal learner produced by this problem representation, this study draws attention to the type of student that OECD constructed through its policy. Through this question the research demonstrates how behavioural practices manifest as a result of policy.

The last question that I use from the WPR approach is: *What are the effects of this problem representation?* This question sparks an analysis about the subjectification, discursive, and lived effects caused by the problem representation taken up in this research study. The purpose of this question is to appreciate the effects of the ‘globally competent’ learner idealized through OECD’s represented problem-solution.

By the end of this policy analysis, I have analyzed the underlying basis of OECD’s problem representation. Critically unpacking the solution-problem articulation, and assumptions and presuppositions that give reason to support this articulation by reviewing why this policy was created by shedding light on the type of students idealized. This is achieved by describing the ‘reality’ that may be constructed as a result of OECD’s ‘global competence’ education.

To continue critical discussion surrounding the implications of this discourses leads me into the Discussion and Conclusion section of this paper. This chapter fosters thoughtful conversation surrounding opportunities and blind spots discovered as result of how the problem representation is produced. This question teases out different, yet very real, possibilities that may come to fruition as a result of how OECD’s notion of ‘global competence’ is taken up through the problem representation.

It should be noted that the WPR approach and how it is used in this study is not without limitations. As a result of this study, I have described OECD’s notion of ‘global competence’ through the lens of a single problem representation. This particular representation shapes how I understand and problematize OECD’s larger proposal. It is important to note that focusing on the responsibilities of students as the site for change is

likely influenced by my work experience. Having used OECD's (2016) policy in the development of primary and secondary educational products and services, and currently working as a career development coordinator in a post-secondary institution, have enabled me to see the performative power that policies construct. I have personally witnessed how policy shapes the behaviours of students, even when they do not realize it is happening. Thus, my personal career experiences and interests reflect my interpretation and representation of the impact of OECD's policies. In this way, researcher biases can influence how policy is approached in the first place, and different researchers may have different and alternative representations of the problem. A priori knowledge encourages our analysis to see loose ends while even missing others. Yet, I do not want researcher bias to concern others who intend to use the WPR approach because it is this bias and interest that drew me to the study in the first place. I would argue that different researchers studying one policy through different lens even enhances the quality and richness of the critique. With many possible problem representations available in this policy, there are multiple ways that researchers can problematize 'global competence,' opening up critical conversation.

I do recommend for researchers wishing to use Bacchi and Goodwin's WPR policy analysis to consider adding the precursor solution question as I have found the problem representation more approachable when looking at it in relation to what the organization was intending to offer. It is important to remember that policy intends to change behaviours, therefore, the solution is often easier to articulate than the problem representation. My last recommendation is to set an achievable scope for the study by regularly drawing on and reframing one solution-problem articulation. In a policy as large as OECD's 'global competence' study, there are many different directions that the text can lead a researcher. Trying not to be distracted by other rich statements or examples given in the policy can be difficult. Therefore, by organizing the research analysis using the WPR questions continuously refreshes the researcher's thought-process in the direction of the problem representation rather than just returning to the policy over and over again. The questions guide researchers in the direction of studying only one problem representation, which ultimately keeps the study manageable.

## Chapter 3

### 3 Literature Review

The conditions of the global economy and local education systems are shifting in a way that welcomes, and even encourages, humanist and neoliberal ideologies that are ungrained within OECD's 'global competence' framework. The purpose of this literature review is to elaborate on the conditions that make international education possible today. This analysis is grounded through the broader study of international education because 'global competence' is one of the latest ways in which national education systems have come together for a transnational approach towards standardized education. Globalization is one of the primary reasons that international education is able to thrive because the process of globalization removes barriers to allow multilateral collaboration, the sharing of ideas, principles, and practices, while also allowing for instantaneous feedback on a global stage (Power, 2007). Through innovative research, including the development of new technology, globalization has started to blur the lines of state borders by functioning through a transnational system underpinned by the assumption that all humans coexist in an interconnected global society regardless of their geographic location. Globalization has made international education appealing because it serves the interests of a multinational community.

With globalization there has been a spread of western ideology. Open borders and active listening have enabled dominant perspectives to reach more corners of the world. Sörlin and Vessuri (2007) recognize that there are normative and democratic dimensions linked to market-driven knowledge-based economies. The authors argue that the gap between developed and developing nation states may only increase as a result of globalization because the developed nation states' economic practices have more influence over developing nation states. As a result of globalization, western knowledge has been the dominant voice, persuading developing states to adopt similar knowledge and practices. Sörlin and Vessuri posit that this hierarchy of knowledge is a consequence of neoliberal policies.

### 3.1 Neoliberalism

The twenty-first century is underpinned by neoliberalism, “a politically imposed discourse, which is to say that it constitutes the hegemonic discourse of western nation states” (Olssen & Peters, 2005, p. 314). According to Olssen and Peters (2005), the neoliberal discourse prioritizes economic practices through globalization, particularly via the principles of free trade. Mishra (1999) and Stiglitz (2002) claim that globalization emerged “in the US in the 1970s as a forced response to stagflation and the collapse of the Bretton Woods system of international trade and exchange, leading to the abolition of capital controls in 1974 in America and 1979 in Britain” (as cited in Olssen & Peters, 2005, p. 314). In turn, this opened doors to more economies, new industries, and development opportunities.

Neoliberalism brought forward a new idea that linked education and industry together. As a result of this idea, “the term ‘knowledge capitalism’ emerged only recently to describe the transition to the so-called ‘knowledge economy’, which we characterize in terms of the economics of abundance, the annihilation of distance, the de-territorialization of the state, and, investment in human capital” (Olssen & Petters, 2005, p. 331). Neoliberalism is important to consider because it serves the idea that the more open the market is, the greater the opportunities there are for citizens to convert their knowledge and skills into economic wealth. A neoliberal assumption claims that if the market is easier to access, then more people will be able to take advantage of the opportunities that it presents.

With an increase in stakeholders accessing the free market, competitive practices have become more prevalent. Neoliberalism, and its competitive essence, brought forward this need to justify spending, including that of public goods and services such as education. The competitive nature of neoliberal marketization sought to improve standards by holding stakeholders accountable for where they invest their resources (Sörlin & Vessuri, 2007). As a result, the demand for accountability was established. The audit culture became a system of spending transparency. According to Rizvi and Lingard (2010), global competitive funding models drove the need for “outcome accountabilities, often framed through sets of key performance indicators” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 47). Key performance indicators are a way to justify spending by linking costs to tangible

deliverables. This desire to use performance indicators aligns with OECD's mission to use empirical data to construct recommendations for its member nation states as a tangible way for governments to see improvements in education that ideally link to the growth of their economies.

Neoliberal ideology is present in OECD's policies (2018; 2016) through its language and assumptions. OECD functions through neoliberal ideology by assuming that students should and can use their competencies for economic advantages, such as enhancing their capacities to acquire better jobs. Beyond this, OECD's neoliberal ideology is present in the notion that the human becomes the primary site responsible for fostering an 'inclusive and sustainable' world. Rather than producing a policy that advocates for political representatives to be held accountable for allocating resources to resolve systemic issues identified within the policy, it is a neoliberal principle to assume that humans, in this case students, can produce the change it sets out to achieve through its 'global competence' framework.

## 3.2 Governance

Neoliberalism brought forward more than competitive and transparent spending; ultimately, it shifted decision-making power in politics. Junemann, Ball, and Santori (2016) use 'network governance theory' as a concept to explain how neoliberal practices "have brought new players, voices, values, and discourses in policy conversations" (p. 357). Using a map to web together relationships between actors such as state governments, non-governmental organizations, multilateral organizations, for-profit companies, foundations, and philanthropists, the authors explore how different perspectives, rationales, norms, and values all become intertwined with the development of policy. The shift from 'government' to 'governance' is significant because it demonstrates how both the market and outside interests gain a decision-making voice within public spaces.

OECD is a prime example of how a multilateral organization has become a partner of the neoliberalizing state, aiming to help governments improve public education through performance indicators. The organization's neoliberal mindset maintains that it, alongside

state governments, are accountable for measuring and improving the quality of education. Arguably, the organization's positionality outside of the state makes it a less nationalistic stakeholder to collect and compare educational data. It is not to say that nation state's governments are no longer important, as "governments are increasingly significant as market-makers, partners, target setters, and monitors and funders of neo-liberal innovations" (Junemann, Ball, & Santori, 2016, p. 544). However, OECD has a niche focus to improve economic problems via education intervention and the organization has become a trusted expert that some governments rely on for counselling. This partnership is an example of collaborative governance existing within a connected network.

Blackmore (2011) is concerned that globalization is enabling the justification of neoliberalism through "new managerial" practices. New managerial practices seek to enhance efficiency and effectiveness by setting targets, measuring progress, and using measurements of growth, or depletion, as a rationale for justifying such practices. New managerial practices go hand-in-hand with the audit culture because it is a leadership model that aims to find quantitative data to support targets, decisions, and policies that were constructed to conduct change. OECD practises new managerialism by governing from a distance through the dissemination and monitoring of its targets. Orr (2004) argues that 'governance' is different than 'government' because key actors are "depicted as steering from a distance" (as cited in Blackmore, 2011, p. 446). Governance networks can be deceptive unless critically examined by policy researchers. Social, capital, and economic gains driving policy development tend to have different narratives depending on what actors are involved in the construction of the policy proposals. For example, OECD is clear that they aim to use education policy and testing as a tool for economic and social advancement. Thus, a network that includes OECD in the conversation can anticipate this to be a perspective brought to the table.

The argument that OECD is governing from a distance can be described as 'hidden power' (Gaventa, 2006). According to Gaventa's study (2006), hidden power is where stakeholders at any level of government—local, national, or global—have the ability to set agendas, identify problems worthy of discussion, and help determine best plans for moving forward. OECD maintains hidden power at all three levels of government

because it has the ability to influence national governments to set targets for their local education systems, while also maintaining the ability to influence multilateral collaboration to improve education and the global economy. I argue that OECD's power is typically hidden because citizens of the state are rarely familiar, if at all, that the multilateral actor has influence in local teaching and learning practices. Notably, hidden power taken up through an ability to influence, which is not necessarily a bad thing. OECD's specialized knowledge and unique position to mediate across state borders make it a valuable stakeholder. However, the organization's hidden power can be dangerous because often educators, students, parents, and other key stakeholders in the community are not aware of where local educational directives are stemming from. Moreover, nor do local stakeholders have the opportunity to set terms of educational debate with OECD.

A concern regarding neoliberal marketization of education and tying performative measures to its success is associated with the data collected because it may lead governments down a misrepresentative path (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2013). While Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2013) advocate for a critical approach to assess OECD's PISA results, there may be value in the organization collecting transnational data. For example, one of the authors of OECD's 'global competence' policies (2018; 2016) defends the notion that international education partnerships offer an outlet for nations to learn from one another (Schleicher & Zoido, 2016). Since the majority of nation states, if not all, aim to use education to provide youth with greater opportunities to develop their potential, then governments would be amiss to not take advantage of knowledge mobilization. Hanushek and Woessman (2015) argue that international comparative research focused on skill development has already started to improve amongst vulnerable populations (as cited in Schleicher & Zoido, 2016). It seems evident that the supporters of OECD's research anticipate that this data collection will allow nation states to make more strategic decisions about their education policies and curriculum.

Improving education is a collective responsibility amongst stakeholders such as governments, educators, parents, researchers, and professional advisors. OECD can be considered one of the more influential stakeholders in this network governance approach for education. OECD has influence because national governments are looking to the

organization for support. Thus, it is not surprising that OECD's recommendations are being taken up by its member nation states. For example, one of the primary practices that this research study focuses on is OECD's philosophy regarding converting skill development into socioeconomic potential. Competency development is the foundation of OECD's 'global competence' framework. Since OECD is a primary voice within the international education network, and claims that it is important, its theory is likely to be supported by the other stakeholders. OECD's ability to use its position as a trusted ally within international education allows the organization to guide the conversation and enable other stakeholders within its network to appreciate OECD's perspective and suggestions.

### 3.3 Human Capital

It is evident that key stakeholders in western education systems want to see education used as a driver for human capital development. This is likely a result of such nation states being members of OECD. This neoliberal perspective demonstrates that education is moving away from the liberal idea that education is a public good and towards this notion that education is a private good that can be used for economic development (Power, 2007). Apple, Ball, and Gandin (2010) recognize that neoliberal ideas bind education and development by connecting competencies to economic output. OECD's neoliberal understanding of education reinforces the idea that the development of human capital will translate into economic wealth. The relationship between neoliberalism and human capital theory is reflected in OECD's desire to encourage competency development through education as a means for fostering economic growth.

'Global competence' is a form of human capital theory that is aiming to solve some of today's most complex problems for the broader purpose of nurturing an 'inclusive and sustainable' world. Gibson and Waldman (2004) use task-specific human capital theory to describe desirable working conditions where people are granted increasingly difficult tasks as a means for improving their value and sense of accomplishment. The authors suggest that when people are working in challenging task-specific conditions, they see themselves as more successful in their career. In Gibson and Waldman's study, success is defined in relation to salary wage. Task-specific human capital theory is relatable to



OECD's 'global competence' since they both seek to use competency development as a means for improving the economy through employment attainment.

Furthermore, the commitment to life-long learning and problem-solving processes associated with 'global competence' adheres to task-specific human capital theory. In the case of 'global competence,' there is a multilateral commitment brewing which seeks to prepare students for the complex realities of a globalized world. For example, OECD may be using a form of task-specific human capital theory to scaffold students' readiness in a way that enables them to eventually solve some of the world's most complex issues, "such as climate change and global warming, global health and population growth" (OECD, 2016, p. 12). The use of human capital theory is relevant because it affects how students and governments grapple with the strategies necessary for overcoming such problems.

Olssen (2006) claims that "lifelong learning represents a model of governing individuals in their relation to the collective" (p. 217). The multilateral commitment demonstrates a collective willingness to adopt OECD's 'global competence' policy through the participation in the 2018 PISA test. This collectiveness is a united approach for improving human capital development. For instance, Olssen (2006) uses the European Commission and Lisbon Memorandum to exemplify how standardized education policies were converted into initiatives which sought to develop regional development goals through human capital and employment opportunities.

To date, standardized testing has been used to measure human capital. Grek (2013) recognizes that the value of comparative testing is that it provides nation states and researchers with a space to measure societal and economic goals, ultimately helping them monitor and improve labour market outcomes. The author favours transnational comparative models because "it has become part of consistent efforts to restore legitimacy and trust between populations and their governments" (Grek, 2013, p. 697). By focusing on measuring competency development, which is simply another way to phrase human capital development, attempts to hone the production of new knowledge.

Through the collaborative and comparative efforts of education there is a demonstrated commitment to innovation, progress, and moving forward.

### 3.4 WPR Approach

Bacchi and Goodwin's WPR approach (2016) is an ideal research tool for this study because it marries critical questions surrounding policy work and governance, unearthing silences such as the idea of 'global competence' education being a form of human capital development. The authors recognize that policy is a useful vehicle to steer from a distance through prescriptive language. This approach "is an analytic strategy that puts in question the common view that the role of governments is to solve problems" (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 14). Instead, the authors challenge the notion that governments, or in this case a multilateral organization, use policy to construct a particular problem. In this sense, policy is prescriptive because it seeks stakeholders to act in a particular way that aligns with a set of defined characteristics and behaviours presented in the policy. WPR grapples with the effects produced within the discourse constructed as a result of how the policy is understood, to bring awareness to new problems that may not have been an issue prior to the policy constructing it.

It is important to note that WPR is significantly influenced by Foucauldian research. Bacchi and Goodwin's framework looks at power through a reciprocal lens. Rather than having tangible power over something or someone, power stems from relationships. According to Foucault (1984a) power is not considered restrictive, rather it is the process of production (as cited in Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). Power relations can be seen through an ability to produce or influence change. Power relations are important to understand for this study because it helps to appreciate the power dynamics between subjects and the subjectification process of the 'globally competent' learner.

Through WPR analysis, power relations will be a factor considered when unpacking the expectations established through OECD's 'global competence' policy. By asking the questions in the WPR approach, new insights regarding the state of education systems, the expectation of the learner, and the 'sustainability' of the global economy are brought forward. This critical approach to policy analysis offers a deductive interpretation of

OECD's proposal as a means to help future researchers appreciate the opportunities and blind spots associated with 'global competence' education in a way that may otherwise have been overlooked.

Ultimately, OECD's neoliberal approach for education intervention may be hidden to most educators using the 'global competence' framework because they are likely approaching it from a curricular perspective. Rather than critically examining 'global competence,' many educators may begin by thinking about how it can be integrating into their teaching and learning plans. This literature review illustrates that the conditions for international education are ripe because there is a global approach and appreciation for multilateral cooperation. However, it is still unclear whether OECD's proposal for an 'inclusive and sustainable' world, particularly through its 'global competence' initiative, will produce positive or negative effects in educational, social, and economic spaces long-term. In the next section of this of this paper, using Bacchi and Goodwin's WPR approach, I will extend the theories and concepts highlighted throughout the literature review to take a deeper dive and more critical assessment of OECD's 'global competence' proposal.

## Chapter 4

### 4 Analysis and Findings

This analysis uses with a close reading of OECD's 'global competence' framework. The purpose of the Analysis and Findings section is to unearth a problem representation produced as a result of OECD's 'global competence' education and analyze the assumptions, theories, silences, and potential effects of the representation. In this section, I rely on one precursor question and the first five questions in Bacchi and Goodwin's (2016) WPR approach to engage in a critical assessment of OECD's 'global competence' policy. The solution-problem articulation hones how students become the site of intervention for OECD's standardized approach for disseminating and testing 'global competence' throughout multiple national education systems. Recognizing that there many different avenues that a documentary analysis of this policy could take, I am mindful to focus the scope by narrowing in on how OECD repurposes its testing regime to encourage nation states to produce 'globally competent' learners.

#### 4.1 What is the solution?

For this particular analysis of 'global competence,' it is beneficial to begin with a precursor question: *What is the solution?* Working backwards offers a new deductive lens. This initial question is an ideal starting point for this study because honing a solution produced in the policy makes the problem to the solution clearer by seeing the deductive relationship between the two. This study investigates OECD's general offer to use its preexisting PISA regime to introduce and measure the organization's interpretation of 'global competence' education on a comparative scale as a means for nurturing OECD's envisioned 'inclusive and sustainable' world through schooling. OECD's solution is designed to enable the organization to regulate soft skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values that make up its notion of 'global competence.' The organization aims to use its testing regime to advance globally-minded behaviours. This solution offers to create normative change by amending the way people think, respond to, and

internalized its proposal. This will result in a more interculturally respectful society where like-minded individuals are striving to achieve common goals.

It is necessary to recall OECD's definition of 'global competence.' OECD (2018) describes 'global competence' as a "multidimensional capacity" where:

Globally competent individuals can examine local, global and intercultural issues, understand and appreciate different perspectives and world views, interact successfully and respectfully with others, and take responsible action toward sustainability and collective well-being. (p. 4)

OECD's definition of 'global competence' is dynamic, suggesting an ability to be aware of your individual interactions at various levels of social order, which may include relationships with other people, institutions, knowledge, or even resources.

An important aspect of OECD's definition is that it puts the responsibility and ownership of 'global competence' into the hands of the individual. OECD's understanding of 'global competence' is more than a capacity, it is a revitalized philosophy on life with regards to how one sees, understands, and appreciates the world around them. By accessing students through its education policies and assessments, the organization asks students to see themselves as part of the solution for nurturing an 'inclusive and sustainable' world. Ultimately, 'global competence' becomes an educational intervention where new normative practices are to be established. OECD's solution relies on its testing regime to disseminate its 'global competence' framework. PISA tests become the medium in which the organization introduces its concept into education systems as a means for tapping into the individual level, all for its broader benefit of holding students and nation states accountable for global civic engagement.

OECD (2018) addresses that "the global competence assessment in PISA 2018 is composed of two parts: a cognitive assessment and a background questionnaire" (p. 6). The cognitive assessment aims to explore students' perspectives and knowledge of world issues by asking them to reflect on scenarios that are underpinned by transnational and intercultural challenges. For example, possible topics that may come up in the scenario-

based cognitive test asks students about “human capital, development, and inequality” (OECD, 2018, p. 46), “natural resources and environmental risks” (OECD, 2018, p. 47), and “universal human rights and local traditions” (OECD, 2018, p. 48). These scenario-based questions assess students on an array of interdisciplinary knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that OECD considers necessary for being globally-minded. Scenario-based questions demonstrate how OECD is shifting the type of competencies prioritized in both the test and in the classroom, and therefore their potential to be valued by individual students. OECD introduces complex topics centered around global ‘inclusivity and sustainability,’ such as intercultural tensions, environmental and economic crises, and universal rights. The scenario-based questions assess students’ cognitive thinking process about these issues, whereas the student questionnaire that follows intends to gather metacognitive data about such topics.

The second part of the ‘global competence’ assessment is the background questionnaire. The questionnaire intends to put metacognitive responses on a scale to determine students’ self-perception of their familiarity with cultural, political, environmental, and international issues that OECD considers are within the realm of global relations. This approach relies on students to honestly answer their knowledge of specific topics. For example, on four-option Likert scales students are asked questions such as:

How easy do you think it would be for you to perform the following tasks on your own?

- i. Explain how carbon-dioxide emissions affect global climate change
  - ii. Establish a connection between prices of textiles and working conditions in countries of production
  - iii. Discuss the difference reasons why people become refugees
  - iv. Explain why some countries suffer more from global climate change than others
  - v. Explain how economic crises in single countries affect the global economy
  - vi. Discuss the consequences of economic development
- (from OECD, 2018, p. 50)

Integrating ‘global competence’ into the questionnaire is an attempt to repurpose OECD’s preexisting testing regime model to measure soft skills and topics pertaining to social studies and humanities. This standardization technique intends to quantify data collected from individual students. Not only does OECD’s framework introduce a list of topics that students will read and potentially internalize as a priority of what type of competencies and knowledge are important, but it also enables the organization to use this data to generalize where education systems are failing students. The attempt to measure soft skills enables OECD to rank students from particular nation states. Its research will rank and compare nation states to one another, identifying nation states that are more successful, when they rank higher. Consequently, OECD’s solution allows the organization to also identify the nation states who rank lower, and arguably, these nation states are failing their students by not providing them with an education system that will set them up for success in the global economy.

‘Global competence’ education becomes a vehicle for disseminating and holding stakeholders accountable for their level of ‘global competence.’ The PISA regime steers both students and nation states from a distance. OECD marks the student as the site to implement the intervention through testing. Additionally, the organization uses its partnership with nation states to implement curricular changes via policy, while also encouraging governments to regulate students’ progress through PISA findings. Rather than governing over, by forcing national governments to regulate the conditions creating these global social, economic, and environmental problems through legal action, OECD uses a soft governance strategy through education systems to motivate changes within their communities. OECD conducts normative change by influencing the adoption of new norms, practices, and expectations of learning.

Ultimately, OECD’s solution advances the development of ‘global competence’ education through its PISA regime. This solution affords the capacity to identify the degree to which a student, and collectively a nation state, can be coined ‘globally competent.’ The ability to scale ‘global competence’ readiness is important because it allows OECD to assess how prepared students are for a globalized life. Yet, this solution does not sit in isolation. In the organization’s definition of ‘global competence,’ there is a

desire to “take responsible action toward sustainability and collective well-being” (OECD, 2018, p. 4). OECD’s ‘global competence’ framework sets out to assess and promote an ability to act ‘inclusively’ and ‘sustainably.’ This evidence is made clear via OECD’s definition and reinforced in the title of its policy, “Preparing Our Youth for an Inclusive and Sustainable World: OECD PISA global competence framework” (OECD, 2018).

OECD’s understanding of ‘inclusivity’ stems from an interdependent lens that exists within today’s globalized world. For example, in the second dimension of ‘global competence,’ OECD expresses the need for “individuals with this competence also account for and appreciate the connections (e.g. basic human rights and needs, common experiences) that enable them to bridge differences and create common ground” (OECD, 2018, p. 8). Dimension three asks students to “engage in open, appropriate, and effective interaction” (OECD, 2019, p. 10), while the fourth dimension asks students to have the confidence to act and stand up for the collective good. Three of the four dimensions significantly rely on students using tact communication skills as a means for fostering an inclusive community and achieving common goals. OECD’s notion of ‘inclusivity’ exists in the current global relations through multilateral collaboration and trade. However, there seems to be a fear that the inability to approach social and economic efforts from an ‘inclusive’ perspective is a barrier to efforts that require intercultural collaboration.

‘Sustainability’ is the other goal that OECD sets out to achieve through its ‘global competence’ framework. In a paragraph titled, “To support the Sustainable Development Goals,” the organization claims that this policy will motivate students to overcome the United Nation’s 17 identified “social, political, economic and environmental challenges” (OECD, 2018, p. 5). The 17 listed goals are: (1) no poverty, (2) zero hunger, (3) good health and well-being, (4) quality education, (5) gender equality, (6) clean water and sanitation, (7) affordable and clean energy, (8) decent work and economic growth, (9) industry, innovation, and infrastructure, (10) reduced inequalities, (11) sustainable cities and communities, (12) responsible consumption and production, (13) climate action, (14) life before water, (15) life on land, (16) peace, justice, and strong institutions, and (17) partnerships for the goals (United Nations, 2015). OECD suggests that students will be



equipped to create a sustainable world by focusing on some of the United Nation's goals. The need for 'sustainability' comes from the first dimension of 'global competence,' where students are asked to acquire higher-order skills necessary for solving such local, global, and cultural challenges. It is then extended into dimension number four by asking students to act on their problem-solving skills.

OECD's notion of 'sustainability' is broad because it encompasses survival of the environment, economies, and the global society as a whole. It is evident from its policy and the United Nation's listed goals that youth are set out to solve a variety of challenges with sometimes competing interests. For example, the neoliberal practices infused in decent work and economic growth may hinder the likelihood of reducing inequalities. Moreover, the United Nation's diverse agenda is likely why 'global competence' describes 'sustainability' from both a social justice and economic lens.

Through a close reading of the policy, I have discovered that OECD's solution is to change students' thinking and decision-making processes by using comparative data to determine which nation state's education systems are producing more 'globally competent' learners than others, and using this information to improve education in each nation state. The organization is relying on its expertise and reputation with summative testing to measure soft skills and topics of social studies as a means for governing from a distance. In the following section, the solution-problem articulation comes together to investigate the problem representation constructed through OECD's 'global competence' education as a way of nurturing what the organization describes as an 'inclusive and sustainable' world.

## 4.2 What is the problem represented to be?

OECD's proposal uses PISA as a tool to disseminate and reinforce 'global competence' education through its partnering nation states. This soft governance strategy aims to foster normative change to advance students' globally-minded behaviours. This solution has the potential to create systemic change at local, national, and international levels by infusing norms at the local level, to encourage an 'inclusive and sustainable' world. As this is the solution that this study is working from, then the 'problem' is that education

systems are failing to produce globally-minded citizens who can make an ‘inclusive and sustainable’ world. According to this representation of the problem, the failure to produce the idealized learner necessary for nurturing an ‘inclusive and sustainable’ world holds nation states and their education systems accountable for overcoming the intercultural, economic, and environmental issues illustrated in OECD’s policy.

Since the solution is an education intervention, then the problem representation demands that educational systems around the world need to change in order to produce the ideal student. The problem representation constructs the ideal learner who will be converted into globally-minded citizens and equipped to work better together in an intercultural environment to sustain peace and growth. According to OECD’s solution, the ‘globally competent’ student is able to achieve four outcomes. These outcomes are illustrated in the four reasons why OECD claims there is a need for ‘global competence.’

The organization’s first rationale argues that “contemporary societies call for complex forms of belonging and citizenship where individuals must interact with distant regions, people and ideas while also deepening their understanding of their local environment and the diversity within their own communities” (OECD, 2018, p. 5). This quote exemplifies how the individual is responsible for managing cultural tensions. It is evident that OECD is concerned that schools are currently not producing students capable of intercultural collaboration. This section describes how the individual is both an influencer and receiver of racism and discrimination. OECD leaves it up to the individual to learn how to grapple with intercultural discrepancies, which the organization argues can be achieved through its ‘global competence’ intervention.

The second reason why ‘global competence’ education is necessary stems from OECD’s findings that “employers increasingly seek to attract learners who easily adapt and are able to apply and transfer their skills and knowledge to new contexts” (OECD, 2018, p. 5). Adaptability and transferability are two competencies that OECD argues students are missing, and need to acquire in order to be successful in an evolving labour market. This position makes it clear that the student needs to take ownership over their own future.

The organization values the relationship between students and employers as a way for changing the state of the economy.

The third reason justifying the need for OECD's 'global competence' framework is to ensure students have a strong digital literacy since they have "access to an unlimited amount of information [which] is often paired with insufficient media literacy, meaning that young people are easily fooled by partisan, biased or fake news" (OECD, 2018, p. 5). 'Global competence' education becomes a solution for students' lack of digital literacy by teaching students to approach the volume of information presented to them online with a critical lens. According to OECD, keen digital literacy is necessary for an 'inclusive and sustainable' society because "young people's digital lives can cause them to disconnect from themselves and the world, and ignore the impact that their actions may have on others" (OECD, 2018, p. 5). It becomes the responsibility of the student to take accountability for their digital literacy through 'global competence' education and schools to offer learning opportunities that enhance their capabilities. OECD uses the PISA model as a ranking system to foster a competitive environment amongst students and nation states, motivating them to achieve higher scores. Ultimately, what this example demonstrates is how 'global competence' education can persuade students to be critical about the information they are reading, which is ultimately influencing new behaviours that reflect globally-minded thinkers.

OECD's policy introduces the fourth justification for its 'global competence' education by integrating the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals into its rationale for why students need 'global competence' education. For example, "educating for global competence can help form new generations who care about global issues and engage in tackling social, political, economic and environmental challenges" (OECD, 2018, p. 5). By offering 'global competence' education as an outlet to help teach students about the Sustainable Development Goals, and offering its framework as a means to measure the goals, OECD is problematizing that there is a need to put these testing strategies in place in order to help make these goals achievable. It is not surprising that OECD believes that using standardized testing to assess students' knowledge about topics that relate to the Sustainable Development Goals will increase knowledge mobilization through policy

development, as well as hold students accountable via the testing results. It is evident that OECD supports the United Nation's goals, which makes sense since its member nation states are generally the same; yet, the organization questions that without policy development and standardized assessment of these goals at the individual level, the collective nation states are less likely to achieve them by 2030.

Collectively, the problem representation suggests that national education systems are failing to produce 'globally competent' students. OECD's four reasons for needing its 'global competence' framework describes the idealized learner, and in doing so, critiques education systems today for not producing this type of student. OECD's solution constructs this problem by arguing that the ideal student is able to produce its prescribed globally-minded characteristics, which have yet to be proven through empirical evidence. Nation states are critical stakeholders in this problem representation because they are responsible for overseeing the change necessary for developing the ideal learner. OECD's problem representation holds nation states accountable for the types of learners produced within their education systems. This puts more pressure and likelihood for using the 'global competence' education as a mechanism for change at the individual level.

Therefore, both nation states and students are responsible for ensuring 'inclusive and sustainable' changes. Nation states are responsible for governing education in a way that aligns to OECD's 'global competence' proposal. At the same time, students are held accountable by internalizing and practicing the characteristics associated with 'global competence.' OECD's ability to steer from a distance requires self-governance from both groups of people, which is achieved by making them feel responsible for the creating the 'inclusive and sustainable' world that OECD describes.

### **4.3 What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?**

Assumptions and presuppositions guide a person's way of knowing and understanding the world around them. According to Bacchi and Goodwin (2016), "assumptions" are embedded norms that offer a sense of 'truth,' whereas "presuppositions" are conclusions

that are derivatives of previous experiences, knowledge, or theories. Together, both assumptions and presuppositions influence a person's rationality or positionality on an issue because they inform a person's thinking process. The purpose of this section is to shed light on major assumptions and presuppositions, and the binaries they create, through OECD's solution-problem representation.

A presupposition serving the solution-problem articulation stems from the concept of "governmentality." Bacchi and Goodwin rely on Foucault's term "governmentality" to describe the process of governing the ways in which people think and act. In OECD's solution-problem articulation, the organization presupposes that through governmentality it can foster the change necessary for developing an 'inclusive and sustainable' world. OECD's presupposition relies on the notion that there is a strong correlation between knowledge and power. If students accept that 'global competence' education is the best way for solving issues, then collectively, they will be a generation that is able to effect change. The organization assumes that individual behaviour can be unified through education, particularly in this case through 'global competence' education. OECD's unified approach is powerful in this problem representation because the cohesiveness of students' globally-minded capacity (knowledge) is critical for fostering behavioural change on a global scale.

It is evident that OECD sees value and power in students' social capital, which seems to stem from the philosophy that today's learners make up future generations of globally-minded leaders. How students think and make decisions is vital for nation states because it forecasts national potential. Using the PISA regime, OECD has the ability to persuade students to internalize its understanding of 'global competence,' and holds students, schools, and nation states accountable for where they rank. The testing mechanism ensures that stakeholders are self-governing the development of 'global competence' on an individual level.

A problem with OECD's policy relying on the concept of governmentality for stimulating globally-minded thinkers is that the organization's framework only reaches a small sampling of its larger target audience. OECD's policy refers to "students," "youth," and

“future generations,” implying that its policy looks to govern all students. However, the ‘global competence’ framework tests a sample population of 15-year-olds only.

Consequently, this education framework tests a small set of students, assuming it will have a larger reach as a result of the study. Additionally, since the test is only conducted once every three years, the timeline makes it less likely to reach each generation since it misses students year-over-year. Although OECD’s policy is a multilateral solution that intends to persuade people to think and act in a different way, its controlled testing environment hinders its ability to reach a larger population of students.

For this reason, I argue that OECD puts just as much pressure on nation states in its problem representation as it does on students. OECD’s solution-problem articulation may focus on education as the site for change, yet it is important to recognize that it achieves this through its partnership with national governments. The relationship between the nation state and PISA is critical because a sense of commitment is developed. By participating in the ‘global competence’ portion of the 2018 PISA test, nation states demonstrate their willingness to engage with the accountability required for nurturing ‘globally competent’ students. The pressure OECD puts on students and nation states exemplifies that it relies on its ability to conduct change through self-governance.

Gorur (2016) points out that OECD’s PISA regime sets out to achieve a longitudinal study to illustrate its effectiveness and to steer from a distance, yet the organization has not been around long enough to appreciate its long-term effects. Shifting norms are typically a drawn-out process, particularly in this solution-problem articulation, because it requires students to internalize a new set of principles that the organization anticipates will deliver a refined set of decision-making strategies. Normative change takes time as new knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values have to be developed and spread. This long-term, soft governance approach may be problematic because PISA tests are isolated. The test alone impacts a fraction of students within any given nation state, which may not have the normative effects that the organization is intending for. If ‘global competence’ education is going to conduct normative change, OECD will need to ensure that wider initiatives of international or global education in the classroom also changed as a result of its policy.

OECD's soft governance approach stems from its neoliberal foundation. The organization is confident that the best method for constructing normative change is to make change happen at the student level, while the national level then becomes a mechanism for serving and supporting the self-governance framework. Reflecting on the four reasons OECD provided for introducing its 'global competence' education, it is clear that the organization's neoliberal ideology is at play with the way it packages both business-oriented and socially-oriented goals into one solution. I argue that OECD's problem representation, which calls into question the types of learners being produced in education systems today, is underpinned by the organization's desire to produce business-oriented and socially-oriented outcomes through its notion of an 'inclusive and sustainable' world.

First, through OECD's neoliberal perspective, business-oriented success is earmarked in relation to economic wealth and income gaps. Lingard and Sellar (2013) recognize that neoliberalism is present when measurement is linked to new development and success. The authors describe this reality as the "audit culture" (Lingard & Sellar, 2013, p. 25). This business model relies on the neoliberal human capital theory, which assumes that skills can be converted into economic capital. The audit culture seems to come into fruition via OECD's 'global competence' framework since the purpose of this proposal is to collect data for the purpose of auditing the conditions of nation states in relation to their ability to be financially successful in today's global economy.

Through the business-oriented perspective on international relations, OECD's neoliberal assumptions trigger human capital presuppositions. 'Global competence' becomes an opportunity to foster growth through innovation. This is an opportunity to engrain a neoliberal solution to social and economic problems by advancing the idea that students who are taught how to be adaptable young professionals will have greater success in the workforce. It is evident that OECD believes that through 'inclusive' practices, people will be able to co-construct more robust processes and innovations to solve economic problems. The organization relies on this presupposition to predict that collaboration in the workforce will result in the development of new resources and ideas that are likely to resolve complex challenges, ultimately creating a more 'sustainable' world.

OECD's solution presupposes that students will have equal opportunity to convert their personal capital gains into social and economic capital for the community. Weis (2010) asks education and political stakeholders to pay attention to social class and how education reinforces it. The author argues that education impacts class in two different ways. First, the quality of education available to students impacts their ability to be successful in the workforce. Second, a student's access to social supports, such as their network of support from guardians and their community, are very different depending upon the social class that the student comes from. It is clear that social class will have an impact on students' 'global competence,' just like it does in current curriculum. To this point, there should be concern for nation states who have chosen to opt out of OECD's 'global competence' policy proposal. Students in these nation states are left out of the intervention completely, which puts a wedge in OECD's global initiative. Not only will students from richer social class benefit from 'global competence' more than those from less privileged backgrounds, however there are still millions of students who will not have the opportunity at all. Therefore, not all students have equal opportunity to develop their 'global competencies,' nor to convert them into social and economic wealth.

The PISA results will demonstrate that there is a gap amongst students within nation states by comparing them to one another on one scale. The hierarchical nature of the ranking system illustrates that students from some nation states are more prepared for the global economy than others. However, 'global competence' is a collective approach intended to improve education for all that engage with OECD's framework. The inclusiveness is lost when it fails to nurture 'sustainability' for all communities, which is what OECD's mission sets out to do by aligning to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals.

Secondly, OECD's notion of 'global competence' is also underpinned by socially-oriented presuppositions. OECD states that "young people who develop Global Competence are better equipped to build more just, peaceful, inclusive and sustainable societies through what they decide and what they do" (OECD, 2016 p. 4). The organization's rhetorical commitment to building a more just, peaceful, inclusive, and sustainable society by enabling people to appreciate their relationships with others



demonstrates that OECD intends to use ‘global competence’ education to change students’ appreciation for and interactions with their peers. The organization presupposes that students who are globally-minded will be more motivated to work with one another regardless of cultural tensions that may exist and will therefore be better citizens because of their willingness to collaborate in a globalized world.

OECD assumes that its ‘global competence’ proposal can motivate people to come together, regardless of their national priorities and cultural differences. The organization presupposes that globally-minded students will reprioritize their efforts in order to solve some of the world’s most complex problems together. OECD’s solution-problem articulation offers the perspective that ‘global competence’ will provide an opportunity to remove nation state-centered and cultural barriers to enable future globally-minded citizens who can co-construct transnational or international plans for progressing the global society together as a whole.

I question whether the organization’s socially-oriented philosophies serving its solution-problem articulation is grounded in OECD’s belief that globally-minded students will be more receptive to working constructively together, or if this is simply rhetoric. OECD’s neoliberal principles prioritize the idea that self-governing, human capital driven students will be better prepared for the global economy because of their capacity to continuously evolve alongside market trends. The social gains that OECD presupposes comes alongside the development of ‘global competencies,’ such as inclusive and respectful behaviours, with a drive to sustain the well-being of the larger society, which could simply be the expected language used to persuade a larger audience to buy-in to its solution.

However, Griggs’ research (2013) illustrates that there is indeed a desire for taking up a transnational commitment to overcome environmental challenges, such as climate change. The author recognizes that positive environmental change cannot be achieved without global commitment. Furthermore, the author argues that “none of this is possible without changes to the economic playing field” (Griggs, 2013, p. 307). Griggs research supports OECD’s ‘global competence’ proposal because it suggests that the education

systems can and should produce globally-minded citizens who are held accountable for their actions. The organization's solution depends on both business and socially-oriented assumptions in order to sustain a growing economy while having like-minded citizens compassionate about prioritizing transnational issues.

Overall, OECD highlights the failure to hold students and nation states accountable for their lack of intercultural capacities as one of the reasons why the global society is divided and headed down an unsustainable path. Through a neoliberal soft-governance model, OECD predicts that its solution will improve the world through its 'global competence' education intervention by shifting the norms that regulate peoples' behaviours. This type of normative change will take time and has yet to be determined whether it is likely to succeed or not.

#### 4.4 How has this representation of the problem come about?

When wondering how this problem representation has come about, it is important to appreciate what OECD's solution is intended for. Thus, I begin this question with: '*Global competence* for what? To answer this question, I analyze how has this solution comes about by first looking at what it intends to do. It is clear that I am focusing on one solution-problem articulation surrounding OECD's notion of 'global competence' by directing the conversation towards how OECD aims to use its PISA testing regime to produce idealized learners whom are globally-minded, meaning that they are prepared to tackle the complex realities of the evolving global economy, which include society as a whole.

It has already been established that this solution-problem articulation resides within a neoliberal logic. The neoliberal discourse is important to how this representation of the problem has come about because it justifies the use of education for human capital development. OECD's critique of widening "inequality in education, trends in income inequalities between and within countries" (OECD, 2018, p. 47), aims to resolve

educational disparities by equipping students with the same set of competencies that the organization argues are the most desirable for an evolving economy. Neoliberal philosophies of education intend to put the ownership of education and job attainment into the hands of the individual by preparing them with the toolkit necessary to succeed.

Apple, Ball, and Gandin (2010) recognize that neoliberal ideas bind education and economics, meaning that skill development achieved through learning within education systems can impact economic output. This neoliberal theory is embedded in OECD's solution as the organization strives to reinforce the idea that the development of human capital will translate into employability, economic wealth, inclusiveness, and sustainability. The organization's aim is to pursue human capital development as a strategy for using human capital theory through 'global competence' education by offering students the opportunity to leverage competencies learned in the classroom for financial success.

OECD's history of striving to use human capital theory to drive social and economic equality is a predominate story surfacing throughout its policies. For example, OECD's white paper (1996) demonstrates its philosophy on education and how it is linked to the economic theory through the organization's recommendation to:

Upgrading human capital – Policies will be needed to promote broad access to skills and competencies and especially the capability to learn. This includes providing broad-based formal education, establishing incentives for firms and individuals to engage in continuous training and lifelong learning, and improving the matching of labour supply and demand in terms of skill requirements. (p. 19)

OECD's white paper suggests that education policies should be used as a vehicle to promote the development of human capital. This theory undergirds OECD's 'global competence' solution simply through its rationale for competence development. Enhancing a student's 'global competence' is all about laying out a series of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values, all for the broader purpose of attributing to human capital development. Thus, it is not surprising that there is evidence in OECD's previous policies

to support the theory and that ‘global competence’ came about as a result of the organization’s support for human capital development.

Holden and Biddle’s (2017) analysis of human capital theory offers a compelling study to situate ‘global competence’ within because it recognizes that there are two measurements for which one needs to assess the rate of return on the investment in education. The authors suggest that there are both economic and social benefits tied to investment in public education. In their research study, it is clear that Americans first and foremost recognized the economic value linked to education; however, they also appreciated that an effect of this investment is also the social benefits associated with a wealthy economy. For example, President Kennedy relied on OECD’s proposal for human capital theory as a means to end poverty and sustain a better life for more people (Holden & Biddle, 2017). Human capital theory is relevant to the purpose of ‘global competence’ because it recognizes that collective social goals are correlated with collective economic goals. Holden and Biddle’s perspective on human capital theory offers a framework to be able to justify the investment in employability because OECD’s longstanding position has been to invest in education to improve human capital, and as a result, more people will be able to contribute to the global economy.

In contrast, Reay’s (2004) research on Bourdieu’s notion of “habitus” hinders OECD’s theory of human capital development. Habitus refers to an individual’s capital value in relation to their social surroundings, such as who they know, how they were raised, and the quality of education they obtained (Reay, 2004). According to the author, Bourdieu recognizes a person’s potential by mapping out their ability to convert their social and cultural capital into opportunities. Bourdieu’s theory weakens the argument surrounding human capital theory because it suggests that if two people have the same cognitive capacities then their habitus are still different. Thus, two students educated using the ‘global competence’ framework will start out on different levels. The person with a richer habitus reach will be in a more privileged position than the individual with a weaker habitus. For example, in a world of universal ‘globally competent’ graduates, ‘globally competent’ students in developed countries will continue to have an advantage over the

‘globally competent’ students in a developing country because their social networks make them more likely to secure better paying occupations.

As mentioned in the previous WPR question, OECD’s ‘global competence’ proposal presupposes that students will have equal advantages to convert their human capital into financial capital, however this presupposition ignores a significant problem. Even if nation states introduce the concept of ‘global competence’ into their education system in hopes of achieving common goals, such as closing income gaps (OECD, 2016, p. 1), the pre-existing income gaps already put students from various nation states off on different starting platforms. Thus, there is admirable aspirations for using human capital theory to close income gaps, yet it is very realistic that our current social and economic inequalities may prevent OECD’s educational solution from achieving its goals.

Furthermore, OECD’s solution relies on its preexisting testing regime, the tri-annual PISA test, to measure students’ human capital. OECD has been functioning for almost 60 years and has been conducting its PISA test for nearly the latter 20 years. According to OECD’s website:

Together with governments, policy makers and citizens, we work on establishing international norms and finding evidence-based solutions to a range of social, economic and environmental challenges. From improving economic performance and creating jobs to fostering strong education and fighting international tax evasion, we provide a unique forum and knowledge hub for data and analysis, exchange of experiences, best-practice sharing, and advice on public policies and global standard-setting. (<https://www.oecd.org/about/>, June 6, 2019)

It is clear that the organization has been established to create solutions through the development of policy and hold stakeholders accountable using the evidence drawn from its testing regime.

This “About” page of OECD’s website is necessary to appreciate why the organization relies on standardized tests as a means for measuring indicators that allow for a human

capital model. OECD is founded on the mission that it is its responsibility to set global standards, collect a unique set of data to measure students and nation states against these standards, and all for the broader benefit of achieving its social and economic development goals. This mission is why OECD has chosen to repurpose its PISA test for its ‘global competence’ solution. The organization aims to demonstrate that the soft skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values that comprise its notion of ‘global competence’ can be measured and therefore can be used as evidence in a neoliberal society to make change. This is simply because it is general neoliberal practice to believe that what is measured will then be prioritized and therefore achieved.

Rutkowski (2007) notes that “it is difficult to separate OECD’s technical expertise from its normative assumptions about the role education must play in the development of the global economy” (as cited in Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 132). As a result, OECD’s problem representation encompasses competing priorities by trying to nurture long-term normative change by forcing the soft and subjective learning into the standardized testing model. Even though ‘global competence’ claims to nurture a more ‘inclusive and sustainable’ world through its education intervention, OECD’s human capital priorities may hinder the organization’s effectiveness and outcomes of its ‘global competence’ initiative (Leuze, Martens & Rusconi, 2007). This is problematic because it may cause its testing regime priorities to supersede, preventing the social development and educational goals from taking fruition.

Additionally, OECD’s neoliberal approach for taking up human capital theory through its ‘global competence’ PISA education solution causes power relations between OECD and its stakeholders. For example, OECD uses its policy and testing regime to influence change at the student and national level. Being in the position to be the influencer is what yields the organization’s power through governance. OECD’s ‘global competence’ solution constructs what Gaventa (2006) would call a “visible power relation” between OECD and nation states since nation states have to opt in and agree to participate in the ‘global competence’ section of the PISA test. Nation state’s free choice to engage with this solution is what makes this power relationship visible. Regardless whether the power relation between OECD and nation states is considered a good or bad relationship, the

power dynamic is established as soon as OECD has the ability to collect data on the nation state and guide them in a 'better' educational direction using the empirical evidence collected from the PISA test.

OECD has defined power through its ability to uniquely inform the nation state on how well their students ranked in comparison to other students from other participating nation states. By participating, the organization will offer a series of recommendations for improving education systems to increase national levels of 'global competence.' This ability to persuade change in education systems can impact what and how students learn, and illustrates OECD's power, which is yielded through its ability to conduct change on a global scale. However, this is not the only power relation established when nation states choose to opt in on the PISA test.

Nation states that chose to participate in the first round of 'global competence' testing that took place during the 2018 PISA test created a hidden power relation between OECD and students. Students within nation states were selected anonymously to participate in the testing regime because it is a requirement for OECD's research methodology. Although students had the option to opt out of the testing, the likelihood of them doing so is difficult because of the power relation between students and teachers. Students are vulnerable populations in power relations because they are typically less informed about their rights in the learning environment as well as recognize that the conditions set for education. Furthermore, students tend to trust their teachers as authorities over their learning. As a result, the sample population of students who took the PISA test were an authentic intervention site. Having participated in 'global competence' portion of the test meant that they were the primary population who came into contact with the educational intervention. An unknown consequence of OECD's policy in action is whether this test will have a significant impact on their daily lives. For example, I question what thoughts were sparked as a result of the test. Were students familiar with the questions and scenarios asked? Were they proud or embarrassed of their responses? Was there an opportunity for them to ask and challenge the questions presented? Many questions about the lived effects remain outside of what this study can determine, however, what is

significant is OECD's ability to get students thinking and feel the need to know about the issues prescribed to them on the PISA test.

The reason the power relation between OECD and the students is hidden is because students are likely unaware of the greater goals that OECD is trying to achieve through its 'global competence' intervention. OECD's ability to highlight specific topics, scenarios, and problems in the test converts them into priority knowledge and competencies that students internalize as important. This ability to transfer and prioritize what knowledge matters is what makes OECD a powerful influencer. Students have little, if any, voice in their learning through the standardized testing model, which makes them the vulnerable population in the relationship.

Overall, the problem representation suggests that education systems are failing to produce the ideal learner necessary for nurturing globally-minded citizens. This has come about because of the neoliberal policy model that aims to use human capital development as a driver for change. OECD has supported this framework for over 10 years via its policy, which is why it is not surprising that human capital theory is embedded within its 'global competence' education framework. The organization's rapport for establishing evidence through the collection of data from standardized testing accounts for why it is trying to fit the soft skills in 'global competence' to its preexisting framework. However, I do warn that its neoliberal efforts construct both visible and invisible power relationships with nation states and students. The power dynamic reinforces the authority that OECD has on education at a localized level by reinforcing its expertise through the participation in PISA's 'global competence' test.

#### **4.5 What is left unproblematic in this problem representation?**

The purpose of looking at what is left unproblematic is to destabilize the problem representation at hand. Destabilizing the problem requires taking a critical approach by bringing attention to elements that are typically taken for granted or simply missing from the representation altogether (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). This question is important to this study because it surfaces information that would otherwise be forgotten about or left



unsaid. OECD's 'global competence' education constructs a problem representation that calls into question current education systems by problematizing students for their lack of global mindfulness and inability to work well within intercultural environments. This representation of the problem engages in a conversation that challenges the state of the global economy by drawing attention towards the need for improving inequality, cultural conflict, ecological sustainability, and economic sustainability.

Regarding what is left unproblematic, I would like to first draw attention to the idealized learner constructed in this problem representation. OECD questions national education systems because of the type of graduates they are producing, and the failure to produce a specific type of learner, is a critical component of this problem representation. In this particular representation, the organization critiques the characteristics of people today for their behaviours of "racism and discrimination" (OECD, 2018, p. 20). OECD's problem representation highlights the individual as the primary source for the injustices and cultural tensions occurring within communities. Through the proposed solution, OECD extends their intervention beyond the student by holding education systems responsible for producing 'better' students.

OECD's problem representation is constructed on the idea that categories, or rather types, of students can be created through teaching and learning. The organization's solution proposes to introduce a new global-oriented and accountable learning environment in order to produce students who are global-minded and who are able to demonstrate their contributions to the global economy through competency development. Arguably, students who are able to provide evidence for their 'global competence' prove their ability to be sound global citizens.

An issue with OECD's idealized learner is that it stems from a western notion of social and economic relations. OECD is advancing the idea that neoliberal education practices are the best path for socio-economic development. The organization's solution pushes away other philosophies of education by asking nation states to implement this particular educational intervention. The problem representation demonstrates OECD's commitment for producing one particular type of learner, the 'globally competent' student. As a result,

the organization's solution becomes a unilateral approach for developing one particular type of graduate, which ultimately contradicts the organization's call for students to "appreciate different perspectives and world views" (OECD, 2018, p. 4). Instead of approaching nation states through an active listening lens by working with their current curriculum, OECD's solution-problem articulation looks to improve students through a standardized approach by implementing its one preferred set of competencies.

OECD's solution suggests that education systems can attempt to produce a particular type of learner. This quest encourages education systems to control how and what students learn so the system can manipulate the type of graduate produced. Weis' (2010) previously cited research calls into question the idea that education systems can produce isomorphic change. Although students may be standardized in the sense of qualifications and characteristics during the PISA test, it is important to note that education systems alone do not have the capacity to control conditions outside of the institution's influence and how these external elements affect the student and their ability to perform.

Thus, missing from this problem representation's discourse is a realistic scope of who produces the ideal student. Education systems can significantly influence a learner; however, the education sector is not solely responsible for what type of student is produced. OECD's 'global competence' policy grapples with transnational and cultural problems that are deeply entrenched in politics, history, human nature, business principles, and the diverse needs of national economies. Sparking an interest in global issues and attempting to equip students with the cognitive capacity to work well within diverse and evolving spaces only impacts the student and not the systemic disparities contributing to these complex problems. Therefore, a broader solution and action plan that incorporates partners outside of the education sector is required if OECD and educators genuinely want to help students to enhance their intercultural capacities to nurture a more 'inclusive and sustainable' world.

Overall, this problem representation ignores systemic issues that are contributing to racist and discriminatory behaviours, such as poverty and lack of sufficient public services. The examples in OECD's policy, such as rising inequality, environmental issues, and

intercultural issues are complex. They extend far beyond the education sector and arguably are inherent in the growth of the economy. Changes in legal, corporate, and public sector practices need to amend, perhaps in addition to this renewed focus on students' 'global competencies.' The reality is that this solution-problem articulation silences a larger issue regarding global politics. Indeed, no mention is given to the limits of capitalism itself in the document. Rather than doing something today about the state of the global communities, it seems that OECD's solution is to leave the responsibility of creating a more 'inclusive and sustainable' world in the hands of our youth, tomorrow's leaders. A significant problem with this articulation is that it might already be too late to resolve some of the problems identified throughout this policy.

#### 4.6 What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?

When looking at the effects produced by this representation of the problem, Bacchi and Goodwin encourage researchers to unpack three types of effects: subjectification, discursive, and lived. According to the authors, subjectification effects dissect the type of people constructed in the policy by analyzing categories of characteristics and behaviours; discursive implications set limits to the representation of the problem by outlining what makes being the subject possible; and lived effects discuss how the previous two implications are taken up on a day-to-day basis. This question will analyze the 'globally competent' learner by bringing awareness to how this subject is produced.

A subjectification effect of OECD's representation of the problem is the construction of the 'globally competent' learner. By calling into question the types of learners being produced, OECD (2018) offers its ideal learner through this policy:

'Competence' is not merely a specific skill but is a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values successfully applied to face-to-face, virtual or mediated encounters with people who are perceived to be from a different cultural background, and to individuals' experiences of global issues (i.e. situations that require an individual to reflect upon and engage

with global problems that have deep implications for current and future generations). (p. 7)

Therefore, the ‘globally competent’ learner prioritizes cultural awareness and global-mindedness. The ideal learner focuses on the global rather than the national, likely because civic engagement in this case stems from OECD’s multilateral orientation.

The subjectification process of the ‘globally competent’ learner that OECD sets out to achieve through regional, national, and local education systems is significant because the problem representation implies that a multilateral approach is better for students than a localized approach. In this representation, “better” refers to students’ ability to be successful in the global economy. The ‘globally competent’ learner produced by OECD’s problem representation goes beyond the identified list of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. It extends into the idea that students are able to measure up to the needs of an evolving workforce. Thus, the list of competencies will likely shift as the economy grows and expands. The focus is then on the student being able to continuously measure up to the organization’s evolving standard.

A discursive effect of the ‘globally competent’ learner is the student’s ability to test their level of ‘global competence.’ Students and nation states can only be considered ‘globally competent’ should OECD deem them to be. Therefore, the subjectification process can only be made possible by the organization, reinforcing them as a critical stakeholder in education and the future of the global economy. The testing regime sets limits on the ‘globally competent’ learner by using its empirical data to guide nation states’ education systems in a direction that more closely aligns with the testing of ‘global competence.’ Through this practice, OECD suggests new curriculum for students to learn and is able to help produce the ideal learner.

OECD’s policy asks educators to prioritize the development of its prescribed knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values through topics such as the Sustainable Development Goals. Using its humanist objectives to guide curriculum in a direction that leads to a ‘sustainable’ mindset, the organization also intends for students to develop a sense of cultural awareness and growth of the global economy through such examples. In return,

teaching the Sustainable Development Goals in the classroom, which encompass a broad range of global social, ecological, and economic issues, is a lived effect of the process of developing a 'globally competent' learner. Since these goals are current problems challenging the global society today, I anticipate that problem-based learning might become a feature in which 'global competence' education is produced. For example, the cognitive portion of the PISA test asks students to demonstrate "the combination of background knowledge and cognitive skills required to solve problems related to global and intercultural issues" (OECD, 2018, p. 21). Through problem-based learning students would become more familiar with some of the complex transnational issues listed. Students may be asked to work together in groups to construct solutions to these problems and presumably will be required to practice digital literacy skills by relying on sound evidence to support their proposals to these problems.

A significant effect of this represented problem produced through OECD's 'global competence' policy is an idealized learner. Seemingly, this learner can only be produced if nation states buy-in to OECD's proposal because the testing regime assesses the state of their education systems so that the organization can offer a series of recommendations to improve curriculum in a way that aligns with the education reform. This multilateral approach requires collaboration and joint effort in making OECD's larger mission possible.

Not surprisingly, OECD's 'global competence' proposal aims to affect behavioural and normative changes in social, educational, political, and economic spheres. The organization uses power relations to guide practices in a way that advances the OECD's own ideological position on the relations between education, human capital development, and 'sustainability' and 'inclusion.' OECD's power stems from this ability to operationalize comparable data regarding the 'globally competent' learner to advance a discourse that influences others to act accordingly. However, its power goes beyond changing students, educators, and government's behaviours. The organization is potentially fostering normative change by producing globally-minded thinkers.

OECD's power, which comes from its ability to influence, gives reason for key stakeholders to probe into this idea of a 'global learner.' By drawing attention to the subjectification, discursive, and lived effects make it easier for politicians, researchers, and educators to draw their own conclusions about whether, and how, 'global competence' education produces, or might produce, the ideal learner for their individual national agendas. If these effects are attractive to governments then OECD's proposal seems like a great starting point for improving local education. Additionally, governments should look at the supports in place to help the 'globally competent' professional be resourceful. However, nurturing behavioural changes is not enough. 'Globally competent' graduates require normative changes in other public sectors outside of education in order for OECD's mission to sustain an 'inclusive and sustainable' world to be successful.

#### **4.7 Research Questions: What representation of a problem is constructed through OECD's 'global competence' policy? What are assumptions, presuppositions, and potential effects of this representation?**

In summary, OECD's 'global competence' policy produces a reality that suggests education systems need to change their practises in order to teach students the competencies necessary for becoming 'globally competent' citizens. OECD uses its preexisting PISA regime to introduce, reinforce, and measure students' developmental progress. The organization constructs a problem surrounding the learner by making the case that students do not currently have the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary for collaborating effectively in an intercultural environment, which is also deemed necessary to resolve significant problems facing the global community today. Ultimately, OECD's ideological perspective that constructed this solution-problem articulation is advanced through its 'global competence' education.

OECD's perspective is undergirded by a neoliberal ideology that assumes students can convert their competencies into social and economic success. Success is defined from an economic lens by inferring that when national economies are thriving, this means that (all) citizens are thriving. The neoliberal lens undergirding OECD's notion of 'global

competence' is critical because it measures success in social and financial capital gains. OECD's 'global competence' education serves the theory that both social and economic goals can be achieved if people are willing and able to use their human capital to solve global problems.

Overall, OECD is trying to advance an education intervention that equips students with the transferable competencies that the organization considers necessary for better preparing students for the neoliberal economy. OECD uses humanist rhetoric to gain support for a neoliberal education framework, which intends to drive social and economic development as a means for improving its member nation state's economies. In the following Discussion and Conclusion section, I push these findings further by analyzing the implications of the possible realities constructed through this solution-problem articulation produce in OECD's 'global competence' education policy.

## Chapter 5

### 5 Discussion and Conclusion

I am actively seeking to understand how the implementation and operationalization of ‘global competence’ may improve learning because of my personal interest in discovering how ‘global competence’ impacts individuals and educational services. Approaching my thesis analysis from this perspective enables me to see, and fixate on, both the opportunities and challenges associated with integrating curriculum and pedagogies serving OECD’s ‘global competence’ education. Although I am hopeful that OECD’s proposal can improve learning and help prepare students to grapple with the dynamics of an evolving economy, I am mindful that policy is engrained with perils that have repercussions when the policy is taken up.

My findings from using Bacchi and Goodwin’s (2016) WPR approach to analyze ‘global competence’ has helped to shed light on potential effects caused by the problem representation produced in OECD’s framework. A new dilemma is constructed as a result of this analysis, which is derived from weighing the possibilities stemming from OECD’s integrated humanist and neoliberal approach toward international education reform. In this concluding chapter, I draw out some opportunities and blind spots that I have discovered while conducting my analysis as a way to advance the critical dialogue surrounding ‘global competence’ by analyzing different ‘realities’ that may be constructed long-term.

#### 5.1 Opportunities

The first opportunity associated with the problem representation suggests that students are ill-prepared for a globalized world because they lack the skills, knowledge, attitude, and values required for working ‘inclusively’ through a ‘sustainable’ lens. This opportunity is a discursive effect because it composes the ideal student who is considered ‘prepared’ for the neoliberal economy. Furthermore, this problem representation sets limits for a ‘global competence’ education. For example, ‘globally competent’ students are restricted to the assumption that the world is indeed global and this representation



assumes that decisions and behaviours also have a global impact. In a way, the ‘globally competent’ student only exists in a world where education and the workplace occur within an international arena. The process of globalization is considered an opportunity from this perspective because it fuses together national education systems through learning.

The collaborative nature of globalization allows citizens from multiple nation states to work together on mutual interests. The accessibility made possible through globalization welcomes and encourages OECD’s ‘inclusive’ solution. For example, the British Council (2013) recognizes that “work readiness in an interconnected world requires young people to understand the complex dynamics of globalisation, be open to people from different cultural backgrounds, build trust in diverse teams and demonstrate respect for others” (as cited in OECD, 2018, p. 5). The opportunities associated with globalization should be celebrated and discussed within the classroom because it encompasses the globalized world that students are engrained within.

Globalization has fostered a need for ‘global competence’ education, and if OECD achieves what it set out to do, the next generation of young professionals will have a more ‘inclusive’ philosophy on life. Through ‘global competence’ education, globalization will be used as a tool to disseminate change. Nation states will be pushed to increase their students’ ranking on the PISA test by implementing new policies and curriculum that serve the ‘global competence’ framework. By integrating practices surrounding the openness required for globalization, teachers will expose new global opportunities to their students. Students may have the privilege to engage with new technologies, knowledge, and skills acquired through practices made possible via globalization, all of which intends to prepare them for the global workforce.

The practice of ‘global competence’ education will not only benefit from globalization, but also foreseeably increase its reach. OECD’s solution suggests that a generation of ‘globally competent’ graduates will not shy away from workplace tensions and transnational problems. The ‘global competence’ framework intends to nurture global citizens who are compassionate and prepared for intercultural collaboration. The

‘globally competent’ student will have a desire to engage in a global workforce and pursue international opportunities which may increase the amount of travel, the dissemination of ideas, the richness of innovation, and the spread of economic development. Discovered through the analysis of the problem representation, it is evident that globalization fosters new ways of thinking about the potential found within OECD’s ‘global competence’ solution because it may hone innovative products and services while increasing the development of human capital on a global scale.

I am optimistic that a generation who is more open to intercultural collaboration, on the grounds of mutual respect and human dignity, is bound to produce a better world. The opportunities made possible through globalization intend to nurture a willingness to tackle transnational challenges, together. This drive increases the likelihood of a generation determined to generate solutions for problems that arise rather than leave it to the next generation to take care of. If education systems buy-in to the notion of ‘global competence,’ it could welcome the development of human capital for community development rather than individual gains.

Overall, the discursive effect of the problem representation presses people to think about education through an interconnected lens. This educational intervention would reinforce international education through PISA because the multilateral approach is deemed necessary for ensuring that students are prepared for the globalized world. OECD offers a compelling case to situate the opportunities and challenges associated with globalization because ‘global competence’ education aims to help students be prepared for and willing to overcome current and new challenges that arise within this context. Complex issues will never go away, yet ‘global competence’ imagines a world where global citizens are both willing and able to work together to solve problems using their co-constructive learning philosophy.

A second opportunity associated with this problem representation produced in OECD’s ‘global competence’ education is the idea that students can become global citizens who are committed to life-long learning. According to OECD, the need for upgrading competencies is necessary in order to keep pace with the evolving conditions of today

and tomorrow's global workforce. Through this solution-problem articulation, the organization is suggesting that a person simply cannot learn everything they need to for their careers by the time they earn their degree(s) because knowledge and technology are continuously evolving. A fear of OECD is that when people and organizations stop investing into human capital development, some of their competencies become outdated. The life-long learning model found within the 'global competence' framework fills this gap.

Through a life-long learning mindset, education attainment is not sufficient for an evolving workforce. Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007), alongside Kumar (2007), recognize that current practices of "graduate employability requires developing a wealth of attributes, skills and knowledge which will assist graduates in applying their disciplinary knowledge in the workplace; as well as technology expertise, career development skills and engaging in extracurricular activities and work experience" (as cited in Jackson, 2014, p. 137). This model presupposes that degrees are predictors of career attainment. However, this scaffolded education model does not meet the needs of today's workforce because jobs and careers are dynamic. The reality is that new competencies are necessary in order to be successful in a workforce that is continuously changing. Thus, a problem with today's education systems is that they are preparing students for jobs that will look different, or perhaps not even exist, by the time students graduate.

OECD integrated life-long learning into the 'global competence' proposal is a solution to this problem. The organization's integrative approach suggests that learning should not stop after people graduate from their education institutions. OECD's 'global competence' framework includes life-long learning because it infuses self-reflection and the desire to continuously improve human capital into the education attainable model (Jackson, 2014). The 'global competence' proposal is an opportunity to rethink how and why people learn. If young professionals believe that their learning is never finished, then they will be inspired to continue to learn and stay abreast of the changing needs of the workforce. Through PISA, students will learn to be held accountable for their learning. This is a benefit to young professionals because their human capital value will increase as well as their ability to earn a higher living standard (Gibbson & Waldman, 2004).

The opportunity to improve how people learn is important because it is associated with why people learn. The reality is that people learn for all kinds of reasons. For example, people learn for pleasure, to improve employability, and to establish new innovative practices. If OECD wants students to learn ‘global competence’ so they can be equipped for the global workforce, then *why* people learn needs to change. For example, OECD imagines students wanting to learn for the purposes of self-development because human capital investment will improve their capacities for navigating a globalized world. OECD’s problem representation implies that why students learn needs to change because it is evident that current practices are not nurturing ‘inclusive’ young professionals who are committed to a ‘sustainable’ future.

The life-long learning approach associated with ‘global competence’ education offers a new realm of possibilities. People that are aiming to improve their ‘global competence’ demonstrate their commitment towards securing a more ‘inclusive and sustainable’ world. OECD’s life-long learning initiative undergirding the ‘global competence’ framework aligns with Boni and Calabuig’s (2017) third possible imaginary associated with international education. The authors argue that education institutions, particularly higher education institutions, offer a networked approach for global inclusivity. Boni and Calabuig’s third imaginary envisions life-long learning is honed through education attainment, which is also a producer of global citizenship. The author’s research describes global citizenship as a life-long learning process because it is someone’s cognitive capacities for reflecting on their local and global footprints. Therefore, life-long learning in conjunction with ‘global competence’ development nurtures the possibility of global citizenship. Through the development of this new identify, people will be driven to overcome transnational issues that are not achievable in national isolation.

The neoliberal conditions of today’s economy attract the practices of life-long learning as a means for enhancing ‘global competence.’ The ideas of global education and global citizenship in relation to competency development have been put into practice for many years through a cosmopolitan lens. The idea of global citizenship enables individuals to consider intercultural and transnational contexts when dissecting a problem. Rizvi (2014) states that “in the eighteenth century, the terms ‘cosmopolitanism’ and ‘world

citizenship' were often not used as labels for determinate philosophical theories, but rather to indicate an attitude of open-mindedness and impartiality" (p. 354). The neoliberal appetite for human capital development makes the attitude for open-mindedness, global connectivity, and adaptability more attractive than ever.

Neoliberalism favours young professionals who are able to convert their knowledge and skills into economic wealth. By embedding life-long competency development into the notion of global citizenship enables these individuals to be better equipped for the interconnected global economy.

This second opportunity has a subjectification effect. OECD's solution aims to develop students into 'global citizens' by helping them acquire a capacity for 'global competence.' The term 'global citizenship' is referenced six times in OECD's policy (2018), which indicates that it is an important concept. This is also evident in the introductory sentence outlining the dimensions of 'global competence' when OECD's cites UNESCO (2014) and the Council of Europe (2016); "education for global competence builds on the ideas of different models of global education, such as intercultural education, global citizenship education and education for democratic citizenship" (OECD, 2018, p. 7). Thus, a desired outcome of 'globally competent' students is that they will become 'global citizens' through this international education framework. 'Global citizens,' who are committed to life-long human capital development is ideal because it enables people to value working together as one, interdependent community.

OECD's 'global competence' solution-problem articulation generates optimistic possibilities by drawing connections between people, education attainment, and professional opportunities. This network approaches illustrates a connection amongst nation states and their economies, making it difficult for nation states to see themselves outside of it. OECD aims for governments, students, employers, and researchers to all see themselves as part of the larger global society. The 'global' part of 'global competence' requires people to appreciate the inclusiveness of 'global citizenship' because it helps them value the idea that the global society is a web of relationships where people are dependent upon one another. Converting 'globally competent' students into 'global

citizens' redefines the borders of citizenship. It is clear that there is innovative and lived potential that may stem from OECD's 'global competence' proposal.

## 5.2 Blind Spots

Through OECD's call for 'global competence,' the organization constructs two categories of students and nation states. First, there are those who adhere to OECD's characteristics of 'global competence.' These students and nation states are the ones that rank higher on the 'global competence' spectrum and therefore are coined more likely to become 'global citizens.' Consequently, there is a second group of students and nation states who are simply not as 'globally competent' as the former subjects because their PISA results scored lower on the 'global competence' scale. As a result, OECD's assumptions suggest that these less 'globally competent' subjects are less likely to be successful and resourceful in the global economy.

'Globally competent' students and nation states are considered to have the intercultural capacity to take collaborative action on issues that concern both local and global communities with the intention of nurturing a 'sustainable' world. These subjects are distinguished by their appreciation for global connectiveness and their desire to work together on the grounds of human dignity and well-being. OECD's subjectification of 'globally competent' subjects is compelling because the characteristics associated with these stakeholders are united through their motivation to make the world a better place. OECD's policy persuades political and educational communities to advocate for the adoption of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values that make up 'global competence' through the organization's idealization of its improved global society.

However, students and nation states that do not meet the qualifications associated with 'global competence' are also part of the subjectification process. Through OECD's constructed definition of 'global competence,' the organization establishes an ideal set of competencies that shifts normative change in education systems. Subjects that fall within the definition would be considered normal practice, whereas subjects that do not reflect OECD's characteristics reside outside of this expected practice. Students and a nation states who choose not to act on transnational issues, such as the United Nations 17

identified Sustainable Development Goals, and who first and foremost see their priority residing with the wealth of a nation rather than that of the entire global society, may be alienated for failing to align with OECD's 'global competence' solution. By constructing a 'global competence' standard to measure subjects against, the first blind spot undergirding OECD's problem representation is that it creates two categories of subjects who come into conflict with one another.

OECD's comparative method used to drive students and nation states to adopt 'global competence' is problematic because it is achieved by shaming those who do not meet its standard. Auld and Morris (2014) posits that PISA's comparative testing model generates a series of 'winners' and 'losers.' The relationship between those considered more 'globally competent' with those that are considered less end up in a hierarchical power relation. Golder (2010) recognizes the subjectification process is a product of "power-knowledge relations" (as cited in Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 49). The comparative framework, which is achieved through PISA testing results when OECD positions students and nation states on its spectrum, generating a group of stakeholders that are considered more likely to succeed in today's global economy and those considered less.

By framing the 'global competence' conversation through a hierarchal lens, OECD is both celebrating and shaming groups of subjects. Furthermore, its ranking system suggests that 'global competence' is measurable. The celebration of 'globally competent' students and nation states exemplify their potential to secure employment and socio-economic success by illustrating that these stakeholders have the competencies necessary to be successful in an agile economy. Moreover, OECD is identifying these stakeholders as the leaders of tomorrow. The organization assumes that students and nation states that significantly reflect 'global competence' qualities have the capacity to solve some of the world's most complex transnational issues. Therefore, the 'winners' of the 'global competence' PISA assessment are the subjects the global society should be looking to as they have the power to conduct 'inclusive and sustainable' change.

Students and nation states that fall beneath the 'winners' are (intentionally or unintentionally) shamed for their lack of competencies. The 'losers' are problematized

for not having the characteristics and capacities for working collaboratively together. Their failure to adhere to the same standards as the ‘winners’ suggests that they will have a more difficult time finding employment because of their inability to work within an intercultural environment and use their knowledge to generate innovative solutions. As a result, it stigmatizes these subjects, hindering their influence and opportunity to participate.

A consequence of this comparative model is that OECD’s findings welcomes criticism from outside stakeholders and OECD’s research may be exposed to people drawing false conclusions. For example, companies may elect not to recruit from lower ranking nation states because their less ‘globally competent’ students are perceived followers rather than leaders. This may also result in where companies choose to locate their businesses. There is a potential for broad judgments to be made from PISA’s sampling of students tested. The peer review model welcomes public assessment of the value of human capital found within each nation state and there will be consequences to these assessments.

Thus, a potential blind spot of OECD’s comparative framework for reporting on ‘global competence’ is that the results may reinforce social class. Weis (2010) argues that social class impacts achievement in education and that education reinforces social class attainment. The author asks researchers to remember that not all students are starting off on an equal foot. The author’s research demonstrates that a student’s capacity to learn correlates with their “class habitus” (Weis, 2010, p. 417). Nation states who invest significantly into their education systems, who offer opportunities to engage with local and global communities, who ensure that students are well nourished, and who have parents that are more involved in their children’s learning, are more likely to produce ‘globally competent’ students. Social class can be an advantage, yet it is important to remember that it can also be a disadvantage. Nation states with less resources are likely to scale lower on OECD’s ‘global competence’ assessment.

Weis’ (2010) research is necessary to include in the study of ‘global competence’ because it recognizes that social class and nation state gross domestic product measurements offers a strong prediction of who the ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ in OECD’s



comparative testing will be. Where students start off prior to the ‘global competence’ reform matters because it sets some students and nation states up for an advantage, while others are at a disadvantage. If social class is a root cause for education attainment, and education attainment is an influencer in who secures better jobs, then it is easy to see how social class reinforces social class. In the context of ‘global competence,’ nation states that are already well advanced are likely to produce higher results from OECD’s 2018 PISA test. These results may have a significant impact of where companies recruit and invest their resources, which reinforces who will have more success entering in and benefiting from the global workforce.

Unfortunately, the nature of comparative testing is that it constructs a hierarchy of ‘winners’ and ‘losers.’ Although there are many opportunities associated with ‘global competence,’ there is reason to be concerned with how it is taken up. OECD’s comparative model creates the conditions for a divided global society rather than a united one. OECD’s premise for changing the behaviours of people—turning them into ‘globally competent’ citizens—might be well-intentioned, however there is reason to speculate that there will be a typology of students and nation states constructed.

A significant blind spot of OECD’s ‘global competence’ proposal is that the ‘winners,’ ‘losers,’ and those who opted out are divided into categories that come into conflict with one another. The subjectification of students and nation states may nurture a competitive environment where groups of people are trying to showcase that they are more ‘globally competent’ than the others. The ‘winners’ would demonstrate that they are leaders amongst the global community through their global-mindedness and commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals. In return, their positionality would make their students more likely to acquire employment by being identified as more ‘competent’ to employers.

The competitiveness works against OECD’s mission of nurturing a more ‘inclusive and sustainable’ world if students and nation states are in competition with one another. The proposal encourages collaboration rather than competition, yet the capitalist conditions invite competition and reward potential over ‘inclusivity’ and ‘sustainability.’ Indeed, the

nature of competition will be difficult to overcome and the ranking system may only reinforce this behaviour rather than encouraging nation states to work together. Thus, one significant blind spot of OECD's 'global competence' proposal is that the effects of subjectification may be reinforcing inequality rather than 'inclusivity,' and social and economic 'sustainability' will be questionable until these practices change.

'Global competence' aims to nurture an interdependent, collaborative, respectful global community, however there is reason to believe that it may result in a divided global society instead. Divided interests is a second blind spot associated with this analysis of 'global competence.' As discovered through the subjectification of students and nation states, there is a possibility that a hierarchy of 'global competence' will rank subjects. This ranking system will create categories of subjects, which reflect hierarchies of power. Ultimately, this process generates a competitive nature and drives "productivity, accountability, and control" (Olssen & Peters, 2005, p. 326).

In the case of 'global competence,' OECD is able to steer the learning environment to test students and nation state's human capital capacities for the broader purpose of predicting their social and economic potential. Through PISA, OECD identifies potential and distributes power accordingly. Those deemed to have greater potential will have great power because these students and nation states will be coined as global leaders, whereas, the less 'globally competent' stakeholders will maintain less power since they are coined not as capable of engaging in the future that OECD imagines. This division of potential yields different power and as a result divides students and nation states rather than unifying them.

The potential for nurturing a divided community rather than a collaborative one is a discursive effect. The neoliberal ideology serving OECD's 'global competence' solution hinders the opportunity for equitable collaboration. Furthermore, this division of power demonstrates that PISA's standardized/comparative testing model can have long-term effects that are work against OECD's vision. Gorur (2016) posits that OECD is creating performative changes through PISA and these changes will result in long-term effects that likely do not align with the organization's stated philosophies. In the author's

research, performativity is used to describe the simplification of existing conditions into quantifiable and comparable frameworks, which uses data to construct a revised reality. For example, Gorur (2016) states that:

‘Seeing like PISA’, is characterised by a reliance on numbers; enhanced mechanisms of accountability; a heightened focus on education as an economic commodity; a proliferation of testing; and the viewing of education as a global race with winners and losers. (p. 608)

OECD’s standardized/comparative testing regime produces such ‘winners’ and ‘losers.’ Over time, this may have an effect on how the global community sees their peers. The lack of respect from the ‘winners,’ or the admiration or dislike from the ‘losers,’ will potentially deteriorate the relationship between students and between nation states. A concern with taking up ‘global competence’ in a comparative framework is that it influences how the global society sees one another and influences their likelihood of working together to create a better future.

While the long-term effects are still hypotheses, I suggest that what is clear is that there is an impact on how stakeholders see themselves in relation to others. Comparative testing is quantifying characteristics to make them measurable and comparable, however in doing this they are losing sight of who students and nation states truly are by removing context. Students’ characteristics are stripped down into comparative data, removing elements that make them unique and diverse. As Gorur’s research mentions, “the individual students, in all his or her complexity, is lost” (Gorur, 2016, p. 603). Lewis and Hardy (2016) take this position further by recognizing that topological practices extend to spaces by removing culture, teachers, students, and historical conditions so that education systems can be organized, ranked, and compared. By converting students and nation states into quantifiable datasets, it exposes students and nation states to be the subjects of unwelcomed criticism.

In OECD’s solution, the negative stigmas associated with comparative testing may surface dehumanizing effects because the data sorts the ‘winners’ from the ‘losers,’ while

removing diversity and personality from the scales. Instead, the PISA test produces a story of who is within scope of achieving their imagined future and who is likely to not achieve it. The test allows for people to be pinned against one another and to judge from a distance. The distance between them and the data is significant because the results remove most association of the students who wrote the test. An uncertainty yet to be discovered is the consequences of nation states who opted out of the ‘global competence’ assessment on the 2018 PISA test.

What does it mean if you are an OECD nation states who opted out? Ledger, Thier, Bailey, and Pitts (2019) capture the first group of OECD nation states that have opted out of the ‘global competence’ section of the 2018 PISA test. The authors are concerned that nation states such as Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States have elected to not participate in the test because they are key players in the global economy. As leaders in education and in global politics, many other nation states look to them for guidance and best practices. By opting out of the ‘global competence’ portion of the 2018 PISA test, it makes it more likely that other nation states will follow suit. Therefore, there is need to take these findings further by pondering what optics and effects may be associated with OECD members making a strategic decision to not engage with this proposal. These nation states are no longer in the arena and therefore cannot be compared to the other nation states who have opted to participate in the testing.

There is reason to speculate that their lack of participation will leave them outside of the conversation and forgotten about. Typically, nation states want to participate in OECD’s tests as a way of showcasing that they are serious about investing in their national education systems and want to be held to the ‘exemplary’ standard set by OECD. However, since the United Kingdom and the United States have significant influence within the global market and are considered leaders of the neoliberal economy, their decision to opt out of the ‘global competence’ test challenges OECD’s proposal as a whole. Without clarity as to why they elected to not participate, speculation arises and other nation states may assume that it is because they do not agree with the mission that OECD is aiming to achieve. This not only calls ‘global competence’ education into

question, but also the organization's direction of introducing soft skills into its testing regime.

What these blind spots demonstrate is that there is already a disconnection starting to occur amongst nation states who chose to either participate and not participate in the 'global competence' assessment, and there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the standardization and ranking method may increase the polarization between stakeholders. Previous PISA results have demonstrated that there will be 'winners,' 'losers,' and those who did not participate. When identifying and categorizing these stakeholders, it is easier to see how 'global competence' might construct a divided global community rather than a united one. OECD's comparative method is problematic because the effects of its method may work against the organization's stated humanist goals.

### 5.3 Conclusion

This study examines how OECD problematizes national education systems for failing to produce 'globally competent' students by offering a testing regime to introduce, disseminate, and reinforce its 'global competence' education. OECD's power is yielded through its ability to persuade particular kinds of behaviours and produce normative change. The organization's ability to steer from a distance is dangerous because it is often hidden. Hidden influence can be problematic as there is less opportunity to engage in critical conversation and prevent the intended changes from occurring.

By analyzing how OECD takes up 'global competence' using Bacchi and Goodwin's WPR policy analysis process, the study surfaces a problem representation that is being disseminated on a transnational scale. This study hosts a critical conversation by drawing attention to subjectification, discursive, and lived effects that are likely to have tangible consequences. The Analysis and Findings section demonstrate that policies, particularly 'global competence' policies (OECD, 2018; 2016), have more implications than what is typically presented in the rhetoric text of the policy. Thankfully, Bacchi and Goodwin's WPR questions offer a way for more thoughtful analysis surrounding OECD's 'global competence' policy. The Discussion and Conclusion section of this study testifies opportunities and blind spots offered through this policy. As a result of this study, it has

demonstrated that policy can cause the development of an unintentional discourse that extends beyond the original scope or purpose of the policy. These effects illustrate how policy can produce performative changes in people and practices.

Overall, OECD's 'global competence' proposal claims to make the world more 'inclusive and sustainable' by nurturing 'globally competent' students using a neoliberal education model grounded using humanist rhetoric. The utopic global community imagined in this policy offers opportunities that would indeed make the world a better place; however, this study cautions that the problem representation constructed through OECD's notion of 'global competence' fails to draw attention to a couple of significant blind spots. These blind spots are problematic because the discursive and subjectification effects construct divided, un-inclusive, and unsustainable realities. In conclusion, the WPR policy analysis has offered a critical platform to engage with the problem representation honed in this study and has enabled me as a researcher to establish the discourse that OECD produces through this representation while also analyzing the effects it may have on the larger community. As a result of this analysis, I encourage political leaders, educators, and researchers using OECD's 'global competence' framework to be critical of the long-term effects that this policy constructs, as these effects do not necessarily align with the vision that OECD is promoting.

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