Chapter 5

Australian Education joins the OECD:

Federalism, Regionalization, and the Role of Education in a Time of Transition

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Introduction

As Australia—following a decade of reluctance—finally joined the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1971, expectations were generally low among officials in the Commonwealth government's Department of Education as to what benefits to expect (Carroll and Kellow 2012; Kellow and Carroll 2017). In the briefing material provided for the final accession talks, the department tentatively suggested that they amounted to little more than readier access to results of OECD projects—even if it also encouraged the negotiators to inquire into the prospects of getting "our own problems looked at" in the OECD and its sub-organization, the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) (NAA 1969: 4).

A seemingly greater concern during the run up to the membership negotiations, however, was the autonomy of the Australian federal states in educational matters. The Australian constitution left almost no room for federal involvement in educational policy; nonetheless, by the early 1970s the Commonwealth's influence on state education had expanded markedly (White 1987). The 1970s, in turn, would see a significant increase in federal control over Australian education by the manoeuvring of successive governments from both sides of the political aisle (Lingard and Lewis 2017). Yet, no formal power was transferred from the states to the Commonwealth administration (White 1987), and officials in the Education Department did indeed regard the concern for state rights as the largest potential hindrance to Australian commitment to the OECD's educational efforts. The risk of the OECD conducting and publishing country reviews critical of Australian education was one headache in this regard. In the briefing material, the department's officials worried that if "a review of Australian education produced criticism of State policies or support for Commonwealth intervention in areas of present State responsibility, this could cause us difficulties in our relations with State Education Departments" (NAA 1969: 2). Other seeming reservations revolved around commitments—such as collecting educational statistics and information—that would demand state department support (NAA 1969: 4).

The accession negotiations, however, also clearly presented the Commonwealth Department of Education with an opportunity to get more involved in matters under state jurisdiction. "For Australian membership to be really effective in the education aspects of O.E.C.D. work," the briefing memorandum maintains, "we will need to have the co-operation of State Education Departments and to establish and maintain continuing liaison with them on these matters" (NAA 1969: 2). Did OECD membership, then, reinforce an already present trend of centralization in

Australian educational federalism? It is the ambition of this chapter to engage that question while also, on a more general level, offer insights into the knowledge dynamics underpinning the impact of the OECD on Australian education policies—and the dynamics conditioning the limits of that impact. It seeks to do so through a study of archival sources such as meeting minutes, discussion papers, and correspondences related to the Australian Commonwealth Department of Education's OECD Advisory Committee (OAC) as well as a number of OECD-programs with Australian participation in the mid-to-late 1970s. Furthermore, the mid-to-late 1970s was a time of transition in Australian educational policy-making. In the words of Lingard and Lewis (2017: 268), the Whitlam Labor Party Government (1972-75) had marked a "peak moment of post-war Keynesianism." However, as the decade wore on, the Keynesian consensus gave way for one rooted in neo-classical economics, also in education matters (Marginson 1997; Henry et. al. 2001).

How the OECD, itself in a transition period and, as we shall see, yet far from unambiguous in its economistic approach to education, played into this process has not been studied in depth. The same goes for the development of the relationship between the federal states and the national government in the context of Australia's early OECD-membership. In what follows, I argue that Australian interactions with the OECD in the field of education in the mid-to-late 1970s pointed in two separate but not yet incompatible directions—one equity-oriented and the other more in line with the standardization and accountability regime typically identified with OECD's current policies—both of which favored a somewhat cautious shift of authority towards the national level in educational policy making. In the process, the chapter highlights the importance of looking at movements between different spatial levels of analysis (Christensen and Ydesen 2015) when tracing the ability of international organizations to get their ideas and visions "out of the house" (Duedahl 2016).

Doing so, I argue, it is important to see the impact of international organizations as multidirectional interactive processes. That, in turn, makes it possible to see the rise of the economistic approach to education on a global scale as a multifaceted process in which the OECD has played a key role—but neither as a neutral facilitator nor as an unopposed hegemon. On the one hand, Julia Resnik (2006: 178) is certainly right in stressing the need to "analyze international organizations as agents, as institutions with structures and resources that have an intrinsic tendency […] to increase their power and resources." Similarly, recent scholarship has shown the large and far from value-free transnational influence of the OECD in contemporary education policies worldwide (e.g. Sellar & Lingard 2013 & 2014; Rinne 2008). While having by no means been a

lone actor, the OECD is central to recent research narratives on what has been described, among other designations, as "the formation of a global governing complex" (this volume; Sellar & Lingard 2013); the emergence of a "world education culture" (Resnik 2006); and the "harmonization of the educational globe" (Tröhler 2010).

On the other hand, transfer processes—whether of policies, institutions, norms, ideologies, or knowledge—are tightly linked to choices made by the actors involved, also on national, regional, and local levels (e.g. Stone 2012). Simon Marginson (1997: 84) takes this perspective further in a book outlining the development of the Australian education system since 1960, stating that while globalization diminished national steering of policy agendas to some degree, in the final analysis "[t]he two systems of control, national and global, reinforced each other." The local, regional, national, and global levels are thus interconnected—via the transfers, translation, transformation, and trading of ideas, knowledge, and practices (Christensen & Ydesen 2015; Cowen 2009; Dolowitz and Marsh 1996)—through new types of interaction but not in ways that are necessarily weakening the nation state (Caruso 2014). In a federal state like Australia, as will be argued below, internationalization in some ways served to strengthen the nation state vis-a-vis the federal states although not always straightforwardly so.

In what follows, the international and domestic context for Australia's early involvement in the OECD is first outlined. Then follows a discussion of the Australian Commonwealth Department of Education's most important advisory committee on OECD matters and some ways in which the interests of state and federal actors were negotiated here. This discussion frames the last three analytical sections of the chapter, which deals with interactions between the OECD and Australian education authorities at different levels on initiatives negotiating both the location of power between these levels and the role of education at a time when the relationship between its social and economic potential was up for revision.

Australia, the OECD, and the Early Years of the Economic Paradigm in Education

To a large degree, the roots of the OECD's economistic approach to education are to be found in the US Cold War context, where accountability measures with an economistic *raison d'être* paved the way for increased government agency vis-à-vis the federal states (Tröhler 2014; Tröhler 2010). In turn, the US became a central player in shaping the OECD's efforts in education (Elfert, this volume). However, the integration of the OECD's agenda on national levels proved unsuccessful

throughout the 1960s (e.g. Bürgi 2016), and rising graduate unemployment, the oil crisis, and falling rates of economic growth in the 1970s added to a sense of failure in educational planning. Moreover, the international context on which the OECD's authority and influence depended changed drastically with the 1971 collapse of the international monetary system, the 1972/73 enlargement of the European Community and the 1973 reform of the International Monetary Fund seemingly threatening the OECD's international position (Wolfe 2008). Alltogether, these factors shaped the context for a markedly diminished support for continuous educational expansion and instead fuelled the rise of neo-classical economic policies, a development that the OECD readily adjusted to during the 1970s (Carroll and Kellow 2011) after a "round of soul searching" had taken place within the organization (Wolfe 2008: 40). Here, the emphasis changed from input to output governance, as the OECD began looking for ways to measure the efficiency of educational systems (Bürgi 2016).

It was during this time of transition that Australia hesitantly became involved in OECD's educational efforts. The Canberra government's reluctance manifested itself in the fact that the country did not join CERI for more than a year upon accession. While retaining a degree of caution about wide involvement in OECD's education activities, the lack of sincerity in the Australian commitment gradually disappeared. Indeed, the Commonwealth government, Australian officials, and various Australian organizations became major players in the development of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and other education initiatives in the OECD from the late 1970s onwards and continue to be so in the present (Kellow and Carroll 2017; Henry et al. 2001; Centeno 2017).

Yet, according to Vickers' (1994, 36) pioneering study on the influence of the OECD on Australian education, the Commonwealth's involvement in the OECD was of a rather particular character, participating—from the 1980s onwards, at least— "most actively in those projects that connect education to the economy [….]" It should perhaps come as no surprise that the Commonwealth authorities used its gatekeeper's privilege in this way. According to Pusey (1991) the influence of market liberalism was remarkably strong in Australia from the mid-1970s onwards. This had a profound effect on educational policies as well. Marginson (1997: 144) has argued that, as the crises of the mid-70s seemingly crippled Keynesian legitimacy in public policy and as fears of falling standards of literacy and numeracy among students came to dominate public discourse, "educational decline was joined to the narrative of national decline, undermining the egalitarian and

progressivist strands which had grown out of the late Keynesian period." These were, in turn, replaced by educational policies grounded in market reform.

The selective approach to participation in OECD education programs in the 1980s noted by Vickers had its roots in the early years of Australian engagement with the organization. This was at least in part a matter of necessity. Both finances and geography provided constraints to Australian activity in the OECD at the time, necessitating limited participation in meetings and programs as well as inter-departmental arrangements at the country's representation in Paris (Kellow & Carroll 2017). Such considerations were clearly present as the Department of Education sought the best ways to engage with the OECD's Education Committee and CERI in the wake of the recently achieved Australian membership in both arenas. In a 1975 letter to Harold Hughes, the Chairman of the OECD Advisory Committee, outlining ways to improve briefings for OECD Education Committee meetings, the Australian Counsellor of Education and Social Affairs at the OECD, P. B. Kearns, advised a two-pronged strategy:

a. adopting a selective approach and identifying a few priority areas for intensive study; and
b. devising a mechanism to enable key OECD documents in these selected priority areas to be put to in-depth analysis so as to produce considered Australian responses (NAA 12. February 1975).

As for which areas to prioritize, Kearns maintained that involvement "would clearly be of most value where areas selected for study corresponded with current policy interests of the department or commissions" (ibid.: 2). Kearns, for his part, had a number of forthcoming Education Committee projects in mind. These included programs with titles such as "Student aspirations and private demand for education," "Education and life-chances," "Education and employment," and "New options beyond compulsory schooling," where the latter two were seen as particularly closely related to the subject for the OECD review of Australian education policies—dealing, as we shall see, with the links between education and employment—which was simultaneously under way.

The suggestions were not more ambitious in scope than what Kellow and Carroll (2017: 277) have described as the "quite strategic selection" of six CERI-projects that the Commonwealth Department of Education chose to participate in upon joining CERI and after consultation with the states, "reflecting Australia's early caution on involvement in education matters." However, they do reflect a somewhat different and more economistic focus, in line with the selection noted by Vickers, and do indeed indicate Australian interests in education-related work in the OECD in the

following years. Yet, this focus did not stand alone. That is, the policy interests of the Commonwealth as well as state departments and school-related committees were still rather equivocal at a time when the Australian Department of Education was searching for a *modus operandi* in its relations with the OECD. For this reason, the constitution of the committees dealing with matters seen as relevant to these relations mattered when OECD reports and research projects were selected and subsequently engaged within the Australian context. The make-up of the OECD Advisory Committee is particularly interesting in this regard. The following section briefly discusses this body.

The OECD Advisory Committee – Balancing State and Federal Interests

As suggested by the name, the OAC functioned as a committee of advisors to the Commonwealth Department of Education on matters relating to the OECD, particularly the OECD's Education Committee and CERI. Its members were all appointed in individual capacity by the Minister for Education, thus not formally representing any institutions, and numbered eleven in the committee's 1976 set-up. Of these, the Commonwealth Department of Education provided the chairman as well as secretary for the committee, while personnel from various sectors of the department also occasionally attended the committee meetings. Moreover, three committee members held positions in academia and four were employed in the education departments of different federal states (New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia) or, in one case, a state-based educational body. Finally, one member came from the Commonwealth Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, while another member was a commissioner in the Australian Schools Commission—a Commonwealth institution charged with implementing equity-oriented, nation-centered programs.

In its make-up, then, the advisory committee spanned a rather wide range of interests and perspectives. Even if the members were formally on the committee in individual capacities, the interests represented on the committee were a concern. At one meeting, for example, it was discussed whether to invite Malcolm Skilbeck—later to become Deputy Director of Education in the OECD's Directorate for Education, Employment, Labour and Social Affairs (DEELSA) in the 1990s but already a prolific consultant with CERI by the mid-1970s (e.g. Kellow and Carroll 2017: 273 ff.)—onto the committee permanently. The idea was dropped, however, as—according to the minutes from the meeting—"the addition of a further Commonwealth officer to the Committee was

considered to be undesirable at this stage" (NAA 18. February 1976: 2). Some sort of balance, if not formally acknowledged, was carefully kept between state and federal interests.

Likewise, some states certainly took interest in the work of the committee and of the OECD more generally. In 1976, one member took up a position as Under-Secretary in the Ministry of Education of New South Wales, having formerly been at the Victorian Institute of Colleges. Inquiring about his potential continuous presence in the OAC, he was told by his soon-to-be Minister that "far from having any objection, he thought that the maintenance of close liaison between the New South Wales education system and the activities of O.E.C.D. was most important" (NAA 26. March 1976). This aligns well with a dynamic revently discussed by Savage and Lewis (2018) in regards to debates about teaching standards from the 1980s and onwards, in which the NSW has fashioned itself as a subnational frontrunner, looking for inspiration abroad in the process. Hence, state actors seem to have regarded the international level as a suitable arena for knowledge exchange as well as a means for asserting their own position in ways circumventing the federal level yet informing ideas about the national education system.

The Social and Economic Underpinnings of Decentralized Planning

This desire for liaison on part of the states was also evident in some of the work of the OAC, as exemplified in the committee's discussions ahead of Australian participation in the OECD Education Committee's project on "Education in Regional Development Policies" (ERDP). The project in many ways reflected contemporary interest in "regionalization" and local autonomy as witnessed not only within the OECD but in much of the Western world. Having been rather uninterested in participating in the project with an Australian case study when the project was first discussed at a June 1975 meeting, the OAC's disinterest was more or less dispelled when an explicit additional emphasis was put in the OECD's framing of the project on issues related to countries with a federal system of governance (e.g. NAA May 1976). Moreover, it doubtlessly helped that the the Australian Counsellor of Education and Social Affairs at the OECD, the above-mentioned P. B. Kearns, was able to point out a number of intersections between the program and committee reports recently finished in the domestic Australian context (NAA 29. March 1976).

Still, the subject of the Australian contribution—i.e. the region to be studied—gave rise to debate among committee members. In the original proposal from the OECD, the Pilbarra region in Western Australia was suggested as a case study showcasing "the place of education in the

development of new economic regions in isolated and sparsely populated areas" (NAA 12. April 1976). Upon correspondences with members of the OAC, however, a number of alternative proposals entered the mix. Strikingly, if perhaps unsurprisingly, these proposals reflected the OAC members' state affiliations: the four regions eventually considered at an OAC-meeting in July 1976 were all located in South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales (NAA 28. July 1976: 8), likely suggested by the committee members working in the education ministries of those three states.[1]

From early on Kearns, in a note accompanying the OECD proposal, had remarked that "the selection of a region […] would seem to necessitate the involvement of the relevant state education department" (NAA 15. April 1976: 2). This proved unproblematic. The OAC-member from the state education department in South Australia reported on officials from various branches of the department being "enthusiastic" about a case study being carried out there, making their involvement in the production of a report likely (NAA 12. May 1976a). The committee members from the other two states also offered their help, naming personnel from the respective departments—and, in the case of Victoria, praising the expertise of the Assistant Director in question (NAA 20. May 1976).

In the end, a sort of compromise ensued. Thhe OAC selected the only suggested region spanning two states, namely the Albury/Wodonga region located on both sides of the Victoria-New South Wales state border. Moreover, the committee nominated the Assistant Director from the Victorian Education Department as the expert in charge of writing the report but he was to "work closely with the research officer nominated from New South Wales" (NAA 28. July 1976, pp. 8-9). Beyond the acquiescence of the state ministries, the Commonwealth Department for Education was to be informed throughout the work process. Only as a seeming afterthought did an OAC-member suggest the involvement of an officer from the chosen region.

While the Western Australian Pilbarra region lacked supporters in the OAC—on which no representative from Western Australia was present—as a potential case study for the Education Committee's ERDP-program, the state was indeed the main Australian representative at a thematically somewhat related, parallel-running program under CERI-auspices. This program, the "Basic Education in Sparsely Populated Areas"-project (SPA) concluded in 1978, took among its starting points that

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[1] In New South Wales, at least, the OAC-member who had been with the NSW Education Ministry all along proposed a study of the Newcastle region (NAA 28. July 1976).

in recent years, teacher qualifications, the use of standardised tests, and school finance mechanisms have all become points of contention in the continuing debates about centralisation v. decentralisation and standardisation v. local relevance (OECD 1978: 4).

This contention, the report held, was linked among other things to an increased appreciation of the qualities of rural schools and the differentiated needs they served, as well as "the recent preoccupation with equity, generally, and the aid to disadvantaged populations, in particular" (Ibid., pp. 4-7). Moreover, among the project's conclusions was an emphasis on the importance of schools for rural communities and a resistance towards "urbanizing" rural schools, as well as a statement on the inadequate state of secondary level education in sparsely populated areas. Finally, one conclusion argued that the higher costs of education per student should be accepted "as one of the economic facts of rural life" and another asserted that "little lasting and significant improvement in rural education will occur in the absence of explicit and appropriate governmental policies and assistance" (Ibid. pp. 44-50). While federal dimensions were not touched upon in the report, it is understandable that Western Australia—a large and sparsely populated state—found the project interesting.

As Rasmussen & Ydesen (2020) have argued, the SPA project along with some of OECD's similarly more socially oriented programs of the 1980s represented a widening of the notion of the talented child, so that hitherto unharnessed human resources could be put to use for the sake of the economy. Yet, at the same time the program's report was in many ways in line with the equity-oriented approach to especially so-called disadvantaged areas that had become increasingly predominant in Australian educational politics up until the early 1970s. This had particularly been the case in the work of the Schools Commission, which in its original shape was a main representative of the "peak Keynesian" equity-based approach to education noted by Lingard and Lewis (2017). A key element to this approach had been the provision of grants by the federal government directly to school systems and sectors (Campbell 2019).

This same duality—of increased national control and decentralization on state level with respect to the local—was clearly present in both of the projects discussed in this section. Thus, just as the SPA-project held that "the primacy of local circumstances and the value of local initiative must, of course, be remembered" when prefacing the conclusion that centralized

government initiatives and funding was continuously needed (OECD 1978, pp. 49-50), one of the aims stated in the outline for the ERDP was

> to propose a comprehensive analysis of the contribution of education and training to regional development policies and practices (including employment) in the different groups of Member countries, in the context of local populations and overall national objectives (OECD-A 25. June 1976).

. Yet, the programs differed as well. As we have seen, federal/state dynamics were prominently on the agenda for the ERDP-project. Perhaps this goes some way to explain the federal states' interest in the project. Thus, while professing being "lukewarm" about what he feared would be "a fairly academic exercise with little that would be of practical use [… for] determining policy on regionalisation in Australia," in a May-1976 reaction to the proposal, one of the OAC-members from the New South Wales Ministry of Education still admitted to finding it "difficult to argue against the importance of regional development in education and […] the peculiar problems of Australia in terms of Federal/State relationships and uneven distribution of population" (NAA 12. May 1976b). Moreover, state involvement should presumably be seen in the context of pressures from below to decentralize—or regionalize—at least some functions of the education system which had "a tradition of strong centralized control, with policies formulated by Departments of Education in each of the capital cities, implemented uniformly throughout each state […]" as put by the OAC-member from the Victorian Education Department in a 1974 report to the OECD (OECD-A 14. May 1974: 3).

Differentiation of education services within the federal states and at a regional level was clearly on the agenda. Indeed, the background note for the ERDP-project referenced "an anti-centralist, pro-regional-initiative backlash" as "part of a general movement towards increased individual or group participation in educational decision-making," where "the region is often seen to be a highly appropriate mechanism for devolving power from the central and allegedly distant authorities" (OECD-A 25. March 1976: 1). As such, the OECD-focus on regionalization could be embraced on part of the states as a source for policy-making legitimacy vis-à-vis the federal government. This, at least, was certainly part of the OECD Secretariat's framing.

Yet, the focus on regional disparities also opened up for an impulse to even out such disparity through efforts of homogenization arising from the center. Here it is important to note that the overall framework for the project was one of educational planning. In an early outline for the

project, to cite but one example, one line of inquiry asked how "planning mechanisms involving education work in relation to regions" (OECD-A 1976: 2). Likewise, the approaches to education and regional development put forth by the Education Committee in the ERDP-project were "based upon two assumptions, one social and the other economic." The economic aspect explicitly echoed the human capital approach to education: "education determines the composition of intellectual capital and the qualifications of available manpower [… and can therefore] help to reduce regional inequalities in unemployment levels;" while the social emphasized "regional cultural and economic development" although primarily as a context for education's contribution "to the development and self-realisation of the individual" (OECD-A 25. March 1976, pp. 4-5). What is evident here is the recession context as well as pressures to decentralize, the result being a rather curious construction of educational planning tempered by an emphasis on regional autonomy and the individual; or, as stated elsewhere in the same document, the OECD had "in recent years" come to see a "need to combine a high level of efficiency in the formulation and execution of public policy with acceptance of the value of devolution of authority and maximum involvement of affected groups and individuals in the decision-making process" (ibid., 7). Hence, while the "soul searching" OECD of the 1970s strove to incorporate social concerns as well as a focus on regional authority in its educational programs, these elements were always entangled with an economistic and human capital-inspired planning approach even in the organization's most socially oriented programs. While at least rhetorically emphasizing decentralization and prodiving legitimacy for state policy-makers, this in fact also entailed a shift of authority away from the state level towards both the local and the federal level and simultaneously towards the individual in ways pointing towards a more marketized educational ideal.

Coming up with a National Approach – An OECD Country Review

The recession context also clearly informed the OECD-review of Australian education policies, concluded late 1976 with a confrontation session in Paris and published early 1977, which was entitled "Transition from school to work or further study" (OECD 1977).

It was the Australian Education Council, an entity consisting of the state and Commonwealth ministers of education, which chose the main theme of the review: the transition from education to employment, a subject seen as relevant to OECD member states in general due to the massively increased attendance in secondary schooling (NAA s.d.: 1). During the review process, youth

unemployment became an increasingly pressing issue in the Australian context—it would remain so for the following decade, also constituting the subject for the next OECD-review of Australian education policies in the mid-1980s (OECD 1986).

While an in-depth study of the dynamics surrounding the creation, circulation, and reception of the review is beyond the scope of this chapter, it should be noted that the exercise—from what can be gleaned from the archival material—gave little occasion for obvious tensions between state departments and the Commonwealth Department of Education. Throughout the process, moreover, the Commonwealth Department of Education invited stakeholders to be involved at various stages of the review process. Here, the Commonwealth's education officials held a role as a gatekeeper, filtering who were to engage with the reviewers as well as comment upon their conclusions. Generally, the federal authorities had a privileged position for controlling which of the initiatives and findings commissioned at the OECD's headquarters in Paris made their way to domestic policy-makers and interest groups—even if the presence at the OECD of experts coming out of local or regional contexts could potentially undermine this control.

As a matter of fact, the Commonwealth Department of Education circulated a draft version of the country review to a range of interest groups as well as various departments of Commonwealth and state departments as the Australian delegation for the confrontation session—led by K. N. Jones, Head of the department—prepared for the occasion. The OAC dealt with the review as well, its members meeting with the reviewers during their visit to Australia as well as commenting on their draft report at a meeting held in November 1976 closely preceding the concluding confrontation session in Paris. Interestingly, one of the academic members of the OAC was the most skeptical voice This professorial fellow did not attend the meeting but sent a memorandum in which he expressed having found the report "disappointing," lacking "penetration and incisiveness" and furthermore with "value judgements implicit throughout the report but with no attempt to justify them." The greatest issue, however, was that the "OECD clearly underestimated the problem of getting evidence from a country so large and diverse" (NAA 14. November 1976).

Such critical voices were rare, however. At the OAC-meeting, the consensus seemed to be that the review "accurately reflected much of what is happening in Australia," as the member from the Victorian department of education expressed it (NAA 16. November 1976: 3). This was certainly also the overall attitude expressed at the confrontation session. Here, Jones was

accompanied by an official from the Commonwealth Department of Employment and Industrial Relations and a representative of the state departments, thus formally recognizing the responsibilities of the states in educational matters. Preparing for the session, the delegation was asked to give state and national perspectives on the social role of education. At the OAC-meeting, Jones expressed hopes that it would be possible "to come up with a national approach" through discussions with and comments from various interest groups (ibid.: 2). Yet, the member from the Victorian Education Department found that this "would be very difficult," and held that "the views of the States would need to be incorporated" (ibid.: 4). These were minor tensions, however, although Jones did indeed stress, when answering that same question at the confrontation session, that "our task is to share with the State administrators in developing national attitudes and approaches and to have a special concern for balanced development" (NAA s.d., unpaginated part). The state representative at the confrontation session, the Director-General of Education in Western Australia, described the role of the Commonwealth in education in positive terms, noting that the increased funding through the special programs of the Schools Commission "have added valuable dimensions to the social contributions of the Australian school system" (ibid.).

Indeed, as K. N. Jones reported on the review session afterwards, relations between federal and state levels were not among the issues that had been problematized, even though they were subject to inquiries from other countries with federal systems. However, he did note that attending the problems identified by the reviewers "will need to include employment and education authorities at both Commonwealth and State level" (ibid.: 4). The country review exercise as a whole, then, functioned as an exercise of and argument for closer coordination between the two levels of government. The authorities on the federal level acknowledged the authority of the states in regards to education, while the state representatives in turn paid tribute to and legitimized the federal state's interventions, all in the name of a stronger link between education and employment. For the federal government, however, the OECD report, by pointing to problems needing to be solved, also clearly presented an opportunity for streamlining approaches across the different state education departments in communication with the central government. Simultaneously, however, assessment programs seem to have offered an additional path towards standardization.

Assessment and Standardization – From Above and from Below

The 1976-OECD country review directly engaged debates about the role of education in Australian society. Already during the November meeting with the OAC, Jones relayed that "important matters arising from the Report were the extent to which education should be seen as a servant of the work force and the employability of young people" (NAA 16. November 1976: 2). Similar concerns were central in the discussions of the Williams Committee of Inquiry into Education and Training, reporting directly to the Prime Minister and following immediately in the wake of and explicitly referencing the OECD review (Committee of Inquiry into Education and Training 1979). According to a contemporary newspaper report,

> the main split [among committee members] has been over the question of what the education system should be doing. The industrialists on the Committee have argued that it should be producing more people with technical skills needed by industry, and fewer people with amorphous university degrees that have no bearing on the labour market . . . the educationists have argued that the system's role is to equip people with more general qualifications to give them greater flexibility (cited from Clarke & Edwards 1980: 497).

Judging from the main recommendations of the Williams Committee's final report, the "industrialists" seemingly won that battle. As Lingard (1998) has noted, a notable shift in focus from input to outcomes occurred in Australian education between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s. This greater focus on outputs was already visible in the Williams committee:

> Our main recommendations relate to greater emphasis in teacher education on ways of teaching reading and number work, further research by ACER [Australian Council of Educational Research] to specify the range of performance levels to be expected of pupils of varying abilities at particular ages, and the accountability of schools for achieving specific objectives (Committee of Inquiry into Education and Training 1979, foreword: III).

As discussed in a recent article by Ydesen and Bomholt (2019), ACER had by then already hosted a prominent study group on the possible introduction in Australia of a National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)-scheme inspired by an American model. Initiated on the behest of the liberal Minister of Education of the coalition government that came into office in 1975, the study group ran from 1976-78. ACER, in turn, would become a main player in the development of the PISA. In the late 1970s, however, that was still a thing of the future. For now, the study group

eventually rejected the desirability of a national assessment scheme on the American model as "not appropriate for the Australian situation" (quoted from ibid.). It is worth noting, however, that in Ydesen and Bomholt's interpretation the proceedings of the study group only came to regard the NAEP program as unsatisfactorily capable of assessing educational improvement in a broader sense when Malcolm Skilbeck—a dominant figure, generally in favor of the program—had to abstain from study group meetings due to ill health. As already noted, Skilbeck too would eventually become central to the OECD's efforts in education.

Moreover, at the same time as the study group more or less rejected standardized national testing—at least in the American-inspired version—Jones took a radically different approach at a meeting of the OECD Education Committee at ministerial level. Here he argued that while schools should primarily work to turn students into citizens, an "adaption of educational processes" was required given the "relatively dismal picture" caused by social and economic trends. "In this situation," he told his ministerial colleagues, "I see a role for international co-operation in efforts to identify the skills which might be regarded as the basic competences which young people ought to acquire." The proposal Jones drew from this clearly foreshadows subsequent Australian involvement in the push for and development of standardized output assessment under the auspices of the OECD, yet with a peculiar focus on national and local agency:

> I would hope that the conference would agree to invite the Secretariat to undertake some work towards the definition of the range of basic competences, not the one precise list, but something from which people within one country, and indeed within one community, could extract something of importance to them.

Clearly, this was a call for standardization—yet, at least on a rhetorical level, it was a call for a standardization implemented by local—and, as Jones related elsewhere in the speech, state—actors through selective adaptation(OECD-A 19. October 1978, pp. 1-4). The concern for state rights in education was still present if not explicitly articulated in relation to the standardization of basic competences; however, the consequences of such standardization were—whether sincerely or not—believed adaptable to local circumstances at the agency of local actors, at state level and below.

Conclusion

Coming off the back of the oil shock and economic recession that hit the Western world in the early 1970s, the period covered in this chapter was one of transition, also in political attitudes towards

education as the Keynesian consensus was challenged by a more economistic approach. It was moreover a period of increasing globalization and transnational governance, a process in which the OECD was an important actor. In the above, I have outlined how the convergence of those two related developments influenced the direction that Australian education policy took at a time when a more economistic approach to education was still in ascendancy. It has been shown that Australian involvement in OECD programs on educational matters was rather heterogeneous, as equity-oriented as well as economistic (that is, standardization and accountability-based) programs were engaged with. Certainly, the OECD's more equity-oriented programs also held economic underpinnings and largely regarded education in terms of human capital development, yet they were at the very least economistic in a qualitatively different way.

On a general level, however, the above analysis does hint at an increased focus on the links between education and economy as well as an emerging interest in assessment and standardization, especially in the context of substantial Australian youth unemployment at the end of the 1970s. This focus would come to dominate Australian involvement in the OECD's educational endeavors over the next decades. Yet, still in 1980, as the Australian government was offering its priorities for future OECD educational activities, it held that "the social/economic context within which educational issues are examined is OECD's distinctive strength and is becoming even more relevant." Likewise, out of the three program areas prioritized, one was summed up as "Equal Opportunities," another as "Quality in Education" (which included key words such as "Assessment," "Standards," "Selection," "Core Curriculum," and "Accountability" among others) (OECD-A 7. May 1980: 8). This persistant duality complicates the role of the OECD—although it does by no means imply that it should be downplayed. Rather, it serves as a reminder that the impact mechanisms bringing the economistic approach to education about have been complex, far from unilateral, and tied to historical contingency.

This is particularly the case when it comes to the ways in which the OECD has reconstituted policy-making authority at different spatial levels. Hence, the analysis of this chapter is in line with Henry et. al.'s (2001: 4) statement that while "the OECD has been a key articulator of a pre-dominantly neo-liberal reading of globalization [...] it is [also] a complex organisation, and its work and influence in the field of education reflect more ambiguous stances which may contribute to both strengthening and to undermining national policy making." Through a close reading of the Commonwealth Education Department's OECD Advisory Committee's work in general and in

relation to the OECD review of Australian educational policies as well as Australian attitudes towards assessment as put forth at the OECD, this chapter has shown how federal, state, and—to a certain degree—regional and local interests were constantly negotiated as part of their multidirectional interactions with each other and the OECD.

In this process, the OECD seemingly provided an arena conducive for a transfer of policy-making authority from the state level towards the federal level, although the development was far from unilateral; neither was it a top-down process only. That is, the federal states rather willingly engaged with OECD projects, for example through their representatives in the OAC. Concomitantly, at least some of the states saw liaision with the OECD and participation in its programs as beneficial for the development of their own education systems while also showing appreciation for a legacy of the Keynesian education paradigm, namely the federal state's increased financial support for state education. However, in the final analysis this support as well as the initiatives that constituted Australian engagement with the OECD during the first decade of its membership in the organization, both the more social, human capital oriented programs and the increasing focus on standardization and assessment, pointed towards increased federal control with Australian education. In the process of asserting its own influence in the field of education, then, the OECD also became a major actor in reinforcing of the nation state.

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