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In the name of the nation: PISA and federalism in Australia and Canada

This chapter examines how the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has contributed to the reworking of relations between globalization and different nationalisms. PISA is an international large-scale assessment (ILSA) of the reading, mathematical and scientific literacies of students who are approximately 15 years of age. The OECD first conducted PISA in the year 2000 and has expanded the programme across subsequent triennial assessments (2003 – 2018) to include young people in nearly 80 countries. PISA is arguably the most prominent and influential ILSA today and has had significant policy impact, driven in large part by media representations of rankings that emphasise nation-to-nation comparison between participating countries (Martens & Niemann 2013; Baroutsis & Lingard, 2017). In this chapter, we analyse two national cases—Canada and Australia—that each have federal systems in which states or provinces have primary responsibility for schooling. We address the following research question: How has PISA contributed to the emergence of national imaginaries of schooling in Australia and Canada?

A brief historical reflection on the development of PISA is necessary to understand how the programme has shaped both national imaginaries and the global education policy field. In 1983, amidst growing concerns about educational standards in US schooling, the *A Nation at Risk* report announced that the US's "once unchallenged pre-eminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world" (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p.5). The anxieties evident in *A Nation at Risk* echoed those of the US's earlier 'Sputnik moment', which had previously drawn attention to the need for greater investment in education, with a renewed focus on mathematics and science. The report lamented the "rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people" (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 6). Seeking better information for benchmarking educational performance internationally, the US later advocated for the development of PISA and the OECD's Indicators of Education Systems (INES) initiative, which inform the OECD's annual publication of comparative international educational statistics in its *Education at a Glance* reports (Henry et al., 2001). While the OECD is the most visible proponent of PISA today, the US played a central role in driving the development of the programme and it thus reflects a

national agenda that was globalised through the subsequent work of the OECD and participation by other countries.

Important shifts occurred in global education policy during the 1990s, and the OECD's education work played an important role in these developments. This was a period of renewed globalization in which the numbers and comparisons generated by the OECD's work contributed to the emergence of a global education policy field (Lingard & Rawolle, 2011; Rutkowski, 2007), and the OECD and other international organizations began to play a significant role in articulating education and economic policy. Much of the literature examining PISA over the past two decades has emphasised the OECD's role in the global governance of education (e.g. Sellar & Lingard, 2014; Kallio, 2009; Martens & Jakobi, 2010), complemented by a focus on top-down global effects on national policy making in education (Beech & Larsen, 2014; Larsen and Beech, 2014; Lingard, 2021b; Sellar & Lingard, 2013).

Perspectives on PISA from both policy and academic standpoints have begun to shift. The results of the 2016 UK 'Brexit' referendum and the election of Donald Trump to the US Presidency in 2016 manifest the resurgence of nationalisms and ethnonationalisms in the Anglosphere, while other parts of the world, such as Latin America, had already experienced a re-nationalisation trend during the previous decade (Sant & Gonzalez, 2018). The prevailing consensus regarding the triumph of economic globalization was challenged by new foreign policy approaches, an emergent anti-multilateralism and changes to trade relations prompted by Brexit and Trump. The fracturing of this consensus continued with the disruption to global flows caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Appadurai, 2020). At the same time, PISA appears to have passed its zenith and has confronted growing critique from participating nations, including from the US (Schneider, 2019; Lingard, 2021a). Some of these critiques have focused on the rapid expansion of PISA to create new programmes and assessment domains, which potentially undermine its rigour and value for participants, particularly developed nations. PISA 2021 has also been postponed until 2022 due to the pandemic, and a new set of education policy problems has emerged with the closure of schools globally and the move to online teaching. Clearly, the attention given to the global policy field over the past three decades requires rebalancing with national perspectives, which is a key objective of this volume.

Our aim in this chapter is to examine the influence of PISA in Australia and Canada from 2000 to the present, in order to analyse its contribution to the emergence of national

imaginaries of schooling. In the next section, we introduce the theoretical framework for our analysis, drawing on theories of the nation-state, globalization, and federalism. We then analyse our two case studies of the impact of PISA within federal education systems to demonstrate how PISA has reworked state/province/federal relations and its uses to advance the distinct yet complementary projects of states and nations. We draw on interviews with policymakers and analysis of documents, including PISA reports produced by the OECD and the national agencies that manage the assessment.

1. Theoretical framework

Nations and the nation-state

In line with the broader framing of this volume, we assume the nation to be a discursive practice. Theory and research, within and beyond the field of education, often employ different paradigms for the study of nationhood (e.g. Smith, 2000; Özkırıklı, 2017; Sant & Hanley, 2018), but the mere existence of paradigms suggests that nationhood operates as a contested social construct (Özkırıklı, 2017). As a discursive practice, the nation functions as an “empty signifier” (Laclau, 2007a, p. 69), which is both limited and open. The nation requires the presence of an excluded Other; yet, the nation is also open to the pressure of distinctive competing discourses, each of them with a different image of this Other (Sant, 2019). By recognising the contested meanings of the ‘nation’, and that struggle over meaning takes place in policies, we aim to avoid assumptions that could otherwise condition our analysis of the idea of nationhood.

In the context of nation-states, the nation functions as a mutual ally of the state. Prior to the emergence of nation-states, kings often claimed legitimacy as a divine right (Kelly, 2005). In his classic, *The King's Two Bodies*, the historian Ernest H. Kantorowicz (1967/1999) described medieval kings as entities with two bodies: a transcendent or political body and a natural/mortal body, with the power (or sovereignty) of the later derived from the ahistorical nature of the former. In a context in which states attempted to react against and appropriate religious authority (Brown, 2014), nation-states ‘inherited’ the King’s two bodies. The nation became the ‘soul’ or ‘enduring’ body from which state sovereignty emerged, and the state became the container for the nation. Indeed, today the relationship between nation and state operates at the level of what, following Derrida (2006), we could describe as spectrality (Cheah, 1999). The nation constitutes the spirit providing transcendence and legitimacy to the

state. State sovereignty arises precisely from its appeal to the nation. Yet, the nation, as previously stated, is 'empty'. Derrida (1996) explains:

For there is no ghost, there is never any becoming-specter of the spirit without at least an appearance of flesh, in a space of invisible visibility, like the disappearing of an apparition. For there to be ghost, there must be a return to the body, but to a body that is more abstract than ever. (p. 126)

The ghostly nature of the nation requires "flesh" to manifest; it "can exist only through its parasitic attachment to some particular body" (Laclau, 2007b, p. 72). This ghostly nation takes the shape of state structures - the technical and institutional bodies that administer the impossible fullness of the 'spiritual' nation. Anderson (1996) uses the simile of the haunted house (the nation) that can only manifest through old switchboards (the state) (see also Cheah, 2003). This spectral relation is, therefore, symbiotic. The nation requires a state to manifest its presence; the state requires a nation to legitimise its power. Through nation-building, the empty shell of the state structure attempts to give itself a soul (Fanon, 1963).

The increasing complexity of national-global relations

Rather than a globalism-nationalism binary, what we see today are much more complex interactions between processes of nationalisation and globalisation. According to Brown (2014), the accelerating processes of globalization have generated a situation in which political sovereignty is increasingly migrating from states to international economic and governance institutions and to entrepreneurial decision makers. Simultaneously, processes of deterritorialization have led to disjunctive relationships between the 'the state' and 'the nation', with some 'nations' searching for 'states' and others spreading through existing state boundaries with migration and the emergence of new diasporas (Appadurai, 2006). Moreover, states seek to manage the deterritorializing desires produced by global flows of technology, media and money, and the loss of some economic sovereignty, by reterritorializing desire onto new ideas of nationhood as an expression of cultural sovereignty (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Appadurai argues that today, given demographic diversity, the state and the nation have become the project of each other, with the hyphen in 'nation-state' indicating the somewhat attenuated relationship between the two.

The recent erosion of nation-state sovereignty has had a strong impact on citizens' perceptions of their ability to influence increasingly important phenomena such as global

capital, climate change, transitional terrorist networks and, more recently, the global COVID-19 pandemic (Brown, 2014). Paradoxically, the 2008 financial crisis, the rise of cultural diversity, and the commodification of democratic politics have contributed to a resurgence of nationalist and ethnonationalist political discourses (Mouffe, 2018). As Sassen (2013) points out “[t]he issue here is not one of nationalism versus globalism, but one of complexity” (p. 26).

Federalism and its manifestations in Canada and Australia

Federalism refers to a structure of government with two layers, for example, a federal or national government and state or provincial governments. This structure allows for unity and diversity within a given nation. A formal Constitution outlines the division of powers and defines powers for each layer of government. So, for example, the Australian Constitution in Section 51 outlines the powers of the federal government with those not listed remaining residual powers of the states and territories. A federal government structure differs from a unitary form of government such as in New Zealand where there is one layer of government covering the entire nation. As Wallner (2018, p. 81) observes, “Federal systems are centred on the principle of ‘shared-rule’ and ‘self-rule’, where political and societal actors attempt to find a balance between the value and benefit of independent decision-making and central oversight, contrasted with the value and benefit of independent decision-making and sub-national autonomy”.

Australia and Canada are both federations, but federalism works very differently in each case. In both, though, education is the responsibility of the lower tiers of government; in Canada, the provinces and territories, and in Australia, the states and territories. These differences reflect varying histories and demographics. Politics and changing circumstances, for example globalisation and emergent new nationalisms, affect the workings of federalism and particularly the changing roles of the national government. The balance between centralisation and decentralisation, and the relations between the national tier of government and the states, provinces and territories, fluctuates and changes. As a generalisation, over time the national government in federal states has tended to wield more influence. This is absolutely the case in relation to Australia but not so in relation to Canada, where a multinational nation with recognised First Nations and a Francophone province, Quebec, has resulted in a form of federalism that limits centralisation and the increased influence of the national government. Wallner (2018) refers to the centralising trend in federalisms as a trend

towards the shared rule of education, an observation that applies to Australia and to a much lesser extent Canada. The two federalisms thus work in different ways and this is particularly the case in respect of education policy and centripetal forces in these federalisms.

2. The Australian case

Australian federalism in education

While education is a Constitutional responsibility of the states and territories in Australia, there has been increasing federal government involvement, particularly since the 1970s. During the second World War, the federal government took over income tax raising powers from the states. This has resulted in Australian federalism manifesting the highest degree of vertical fiscal imbalance of any federalism, with the federal government having the resources and the states having responsibility for expensive services such as schooling, health and policing. Furthermore, under Section 96 of the Constitution the federal government has the capacity to make specific purpose grants to the states. This situation and changing geo-political framing since the 1970s have seen an ever-increasing involvement of the federal government in schooling in Australia, functioning at times through funding-compliance trade-offs and at other times through explicit policy developments. In the mid-1970s enhanced federal involvement was focused on achieving equity. Subsequently, in the context of neoliberal globalisation and an economic, human capital reframing of the purposes of schooling, there was further centralisation in Australian schooling. This occurred under federal Labor governments from 1983-1996 and again from 2007-2013.

It was during this second period of Labor governments that the momentum towards centralisation and more national involvement reached its peak. Labor's so-called 'education revolution' saw *inter alia* the creation of a national curriculum, national testing, and national standards for teachers. This centralisation was achieved through agreements between the federal government and the states and territories made at the Intergovernmental Council in Education, consisting of all the Ministers of Education. The national agenda in Australia might be best described as a "federally driven yet collaborative intergovernmental reform" (Wallner et al., 2020, p. 254). The national agenda has been managed by a new body, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), established in 2008 and co-owned by the federal, state and territory governments.

These national policies were both a response to and articulation of globalisation, as well as being an expression and constitution of the nation in changing geo-political circumstances. Gerrard and Farrell (2013, p. 5) have eloquently grasped this situation in their observation that, “the development of a national curriculum has been framed both as an instantiation of nationhood and a devoted gesture to the global network of educational practices (e.g. PISA, OECD...) within which local schooling practices are increasingly interpellated”. One can see the close interweaving of the global and the national in this set of national policies. With globalisation of the economy, nations lost to varying degrees sovereignty over their economies. In this context, Appadurai (2006, p. 23) noted that “[t]he nation-state has been steadily reduced to the fiction of its ethnos as the last cultural resource over which it may exercise full dominion”. That reality also formed a backdrop to the Labor governments’ national agenda, particularly the national curriculum, as did a human capital framing of education as one central economic policy still controlled by the nation (Savage, 2016; Lingard, 2018). At the same time, these national policies were a response to what was perceived to be Australia’s declining performance on international large-scale assessments, including PISA.

These changes in the functioning of Australian federalism in education have to be seen against the varying impacts of globalisation, including new spatialities (Amin, 2002). Regarding the latter, we have seen some rescaling of politics to regions and international organisations, and centripetal forces and rescaling pressures within most federal political structure, evidenced in a strengthening of federal presence in schooling policies.

Australian participation in PISA

Substantial involvement in and with the OECD has been important to Australia as a mid-range international nation. Australia joined the OECD in 1971, ten years after its creation in 1961, and has played an important role in the work of the OECD and that work has had a substantial impact on policy making. In Australia, the significance of the OECD in general, and specifically in education, is demonstrated by a number of facts and has been expressed in our interviews with Australian policy makers (particularly federal) since the turn of the century. Many of these interviewees have noted ‘Australia punching above its weight at the OECD’ with the corollary that the OECD’s work has had more impact in Australia than in many other nations.

Two Australians have headed Education at the OECD. Professor Barry McGaw was the first Director of the stand-alone Directorate for Education created in 2002. The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) has played a significant role in designing and developing PISA. It is significant that Professor McGaw was a major player in the federal Labor government's national agenda (2007-2013) and he was the first Chair of ACARA. The current Chair of the PISA Governing Board is a Senior Australian public servant, Michelle Bruniges, who is now Head of the federal Department of Education, Skills and Employment. It is significant that Bruniges has defended the expansion of main PISA against criticisms coming from the federal department of education in the USA (see Lingard, 2021a). A former Australian politician has been appointed the Secretary-General of the OECD from June, 2021.

In research conducted on the OECD since the late 1990s, we have found that, particularly up until 2009, PISA had much more policy salience in Australia than in the UK and the USA (Sellar & Lingard, 2013). This Australian positioning *vis-a-vis* the OECD must be kept in mind when considering its role in the constitution of a putatively national system of schooling in Australia. We see in this relationship an interesting interweaving of policy actors and institutions; the global in the nation and the nation in the global.

In the first two PISA assessments conducted in 2000 and 2003, Australia performed strongly. The media coverage was very positive, so that, for example, the headline in the *Canberra Times* regarding Australia's performance on the 2003 PISA, proclaimed that "Australia's education systems gets full marks" (13 December 2004). What is significant to observe here is the use of "Australia's education system", when at that time there was no national curriculum nor national testing. Rather, each state and territory constructed their own curricula and assessment regimes, yet the reporting on PISA performance was as if there was an Australian system of schooling. We argue that PISA reporting helped discursively to constitute the imaginary of an Australian schooling system.

From PISA 2006 onwards, Australia's performance declined. The federal Labor government elected in 2007 used this decline as one rationale for its 'education revolution' (Savage, 2021), which included the creation of the national curriculum and national testing. These developments helped constitute the notion of a national schooling system, as did reporting on PISA results. It should be noted, though, that all of the states and territories from the first PISA in 2000 have over-sampled so that comparisons can be made between these jurisdictions. This is unusual amongst federations. However, media reporting still talks of

Australia's performance on PISA. This neglects the reality of different levels of performance by the states on PISA; so, for example, the Australian Capital Territory performs very well, while the Northern Territory performs poorly. The aggregation of scores at the national level underpins the description of decline in Australia's overall performance.

Shanghai's stellar performance on PISA 2009, outperforming Finland, caused a PISA shock in Australia (Sellar and Lingard, 2013). This shock was amplified by the publication in 2012 by the think tank, the Grattan Institute, of a report, *Catching Up: Learning from the best school systems in East Asia* (Jensen et al., 2012). The report basically reflected on the PISA 2009 results and the outstanding performance of many Asian schooling systems. The headline concerning the report in the national newspaper, *The Australian*, stated, "Lessons from Asia show the way forward for our schools" (17 February 2012). The other national newspaper, *The Financial Review*, ran with the headline "Asian education goes to the top of the class" (18 February 2012).

The then Australian Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, formerly federal Minister for Education, noted in relation to *The Australian's* story on the Grattan Institute report:

Four of the top performing school systems in the world are in our region [based on PISA results] On average, kids at 15 in those nations are six months ahead of Australian kids at 15 and they are a year in front of the OECD mean.... If we are talking about today's children - tomorrow's workers – I want them to be workers in a high-wage economy where we are still leading the world. I don't want them to be workers in an economy where we are kind of the runt of the litter in our region and we've slipped behind the standards and the high-skill, high-wage jobs are elsewhere in the region. (Franklin, 2012, p. 1)

This is a significant set of observations. It expresses a human capital version of the purposes of schooling, which was also a significant rationale for the Labor government's (2007-2013) national schooling agenda. It also reflects Australia's pivot towards Asia in the so-called Asian century and it shows as well the significance of the OECD's PISA in constituting a national view of schooling. In this case, despite the Constitutional reality, involvement in PISA and the OECD's education work, and the move to a national curriculum and national testing in schooling, together helped discursively constitute a national imaginary of schooling.

3. The Canadian case

Canadian federalism in education

The Canadian writer, Mavis Gallant, once suggested that “a Canadian is someone who has a logical reason to think he [sic] is one” (Gallant, 1981, p. xiii). Gallant grounds her vision of Canadian national belonging in rationality—in this case, a discussion of Canada’s conferral of citizenship by birth—rather than shared ancestry, language, culture or beliefs. A similar view was expressed by Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, in an interview with the *New York Times* magazine, where he suggested that

There is no core identity, no mainstream in Canada. There are shared values — openness, respect, compassion, willingness to work hard, to be there for each other, to search for equality and justice. Those qualities are what make us the first postnational state. (Lawson, 2015, para. 46)

Both Gallant and Trudeau point to the basis of Canadian national identity in shared rights and responsibilities, in contrast to the European model based on “territorialized notions of cultural belonging” (Soysal & Soyland, 1994, p.3). Soysal and Soyland define postnational citizenship as conferring “upon every person the right and duty of participation in the authority structures and public life of a polity, regardless of their historical or cultural ties to that community” (p. 3). While cultural and ethnic nationalisms clearly play important roles in Canadian history, modern Canadian nationalism is predominantly an inclusive, civic nationalism.

Canadian federalism is also an exception to the centripetal forces evident in many federal schooling systems in the context of globalisation. This reflects the idiosyncratic nature of Canadian federalism, with schooling policy jealously guarded by the provinces as their domain of governance, which reflects the Constitutional reality. Additional factors in Canadian federalism have been the recognition of First Nations and the existence of a single Francophone province, Quebec. The provinces have considerable autonomy in respect of taxation, along with “a robust system of unconditional equalisation to redistribute funds throughout the federation” (Wallner, 2018, p. 83). Unlike Australia, in Canada there is real fiscal federalism. While there is no federal presence in schooling and no federal department of education, there have been moves toward horizontal alignment across the education policies of the provinces in relation to testing and curriculum, which has been driven by the provinces themselves. The Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC) facilitates some cross-nation

developments, including the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP), but there is no national curriculum. Schooling is quite centralised within each province under the oversight of provincial Ministries of Education, such that Wallner (2018, p. 83) describes the Canadian federal system of schooling “as deconcentrated rather than decentralised”. Globalisation has not affected the federal functioning of schooling in Canada as it has done in Australia with the growth of national policies. Cross-nation developments in Canadian schooling have resulted from horizontal alignments across provinces and not through vertical integration.

Canadian participation in PISA

Canada is the only OECD member country that does not have a national ministry of education and thus constitutes an interesting case study of ‘national’ participation in PISA. Provincial participation is coordinated at a federal level by CMEC. This case study draws on CMEC reports and an interview conducted in 2016 with a key informant from CMEC. We also draw on previous analyses of the media and policy impacts of Canadian PISA 2012 performance (Sellar & Lingard, 2018).

CMEC is an intergovernmental body that was established by the provinces and territories in 1967 to provide national leadership in education in Canadian federalism. The aims of CMEC include supporting national policy debate, support for initiatives that are of mutual interest to provinces and territories and coordination between national education organizations and the federal government, as well as serving as “an instrument to represent the education interests of the provinces and territories internationally”.¹ Provinces have pursued a collaborative approach to assessment for some time and CMEC has been central in developing this agenda, as our informant explained:

[Provinces] had a very strong interest in assessments since the beginning of the organisation. We instituted a national assessment. At the time it was called the Student Achievement Indicators Programme. It’s morphed into the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program, and we manage this on their behalf from beginning to end. Development, administration, reporting, and so on.

The School Achievement Indicators Programme (SAIP) was established in 1993 and was replaced by the Pan-Canadian Assessment Programme (PCAP) in 2007. PCAP is a sample-

¹ https://www.cmec.ca/11/About_Us.html

based assessment of reading, mathematics and science aligned to curricula. Curricula vary in each province and territory, although common approaches are fostered by mechanisms such as the Western and Northern Canadian Protocol (WNCP). PCAP has been conducted with Grade 8 students (~13 years) every three years since 2007, but it has not had a significant impact on provincial and national policy debate.

With the emergence in the 1990s of new international large-scale assessments, the provinces approached CMEC to coordinate their participation in PISA.

[With] the increased interest in international assessments, the provinces asked us to co-ordinate multi-provincial efforts and participation. PISA is a pretty good example, where technically each province could possibly participate in PISA, and they do that in [the IEA's] TIMSS or in PIRLS, ... but when there's a critical mass of provinces interested, then they ask the secretariat to co-ordinate their participation. That's what we do in the case of PISA.

Canada oversamples for PISA in order to disaggregate province-level results and enhance their relevance for the decision making of provincial ministries. CMEC, with partner agencies that have changed over time (e.g. Statistics Canada), have managed this participation on behalf of ministries.

CMEC [is] the conduit for provincial participation in terms of payment, but also expertise, review of items, development, and administration ... In addition to administering the assessment itself, we're asked to come up with reports. ... The ministries use that mainly for their own internal research. Very rarely will they publish something that is related to PISA or another international assessment.

The CMEC PISA reports focus on comparing provincial performance and Canadian average performance, including in relation to the performance of other countries and systems. However, there is some slippage between discussion of the performance of Canadian students and performance at a provincial level, suggesting a view of Canadian education as a homogenous space in relation to this assessment. This translation of provincial performance into a representation of national performance is much stronger in the OECD's PISA reporting, which focuses mainly on Canadian average performance with disaggregation between provinces occurring only in less prominent sections of the PISA reports.

Canada was ranked second in the PISA 2000 assessment of reading literacy behind Finland, and this generated a narrative about the high quality of many provincial education systems and international interest in Canadian education policies and practices. Indeed, Alberta performed more strongly in reading literacy than Finland, with British Columbia, Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan performing better than all other participating countries other than Finland. In her analysis of media coverage of Canada's performance in PISA 2000, Stack (2006) demonstrates how the PISA results were used by governments and the media to represent students as homogenous groups that reified regional stereotypes and generally accepted the strong performance of 'Canada' at face value. This coverage of the first PISA results helped to establish both national narratives about performance across Canada, but also a narrative about Canadian performance and the quality of Canadian schooling systems, which elided the differences emphasised in sub-national comparisons and other important contextual information for interpreting the results. The image of 'national' student performance was thus established on the basis of diverse data emerging from different provinces.

Media coverage and interpretation of PISA remained relatively consistent until 2013, when the provincial and national narratives regarding PISA shifted following the reporting of the PISA 2012 results, which focused on mathematics literacy. Mathematics was first assessed as a major domain of PISA in 2003 and it was the major domain for a second time in 2012. The publication of results in December 2013 thus provided the first opportunity to properly compare mathematics performance over time. Canadian provinces had performed well in 2003, with a national average score of 532, and all provinces performed at or above the OECD average. By 2012, the Canadian national average score had decreased to 518, and all but two provinces—Quebec and Saskatchewan—saw significant declines.

Canada's mathematics performance in 2012 made the headlines nationally. For example, *The Globe and Mail* reported on the day of the PISA release that "Canada's fall in math-education ranking sets off alarm bells" (3 December 2013), and the editorial in the same issue was titled "Quebec adds, Canada subtracts on its math scores" (3 December 2013). As our informant noted, the PISA 2012 results gave rise to policy debate about mathematics curricula and pedagogies at a provincial level, but also across Canada more generally:

It's been attributed, by both the media and experts in ministries, to how mathematics is taught. The debate between sticking to the core of mathematics

versus going to Discovery math has raged here for a number of weeks, if not months, after the release of the results. ... it is influencing the revision to curricula in a number of provinces where they want to put back some “back to math” basics, but certainly not to shift altogether there.

Provincial participation in PISA, facilitated by an intergovernmental body, thus gave rise to national media coverage and policy debate about the state of ‘Canadian’ mathematics education (see also Sellar & Lingard 2018).

4. Discussion

In both cases, we can see how state infrastructures, namely collaboration in respect of assessment, provide a basis for building a national identity for schooling. These national imaginaries have emerged partly through involvement in PISA and the statistical work undertaken to construct national performance as a unit of comparison that can be glorified or scandalized (Steiner-Khamsi & Waldow, 2018). Both cases thus demonstrate the role of PISA in what Appadurai (1996) described as the increasingly embattled relationship between nation (culture, demography) and state (government apparatuses of politics and policy) inside nation-states. PISA, as a surrogate measure of the quality of potential human capital, contributes to both processes simultaneously by promoting the globalising logics of human capital and magnet economies, while helping to constitute new ideas about national projects of schooling. If we think in terms of Anderson’s (1996) metaphor of the haunted house to describe the relationship between the nation-state, PISA operates as a visitor that activates the switchboards to animate the house, that is, the nation.

In the Australian case, there is a federal infrastructure for education, including an intergovernmental council comprising all education ministers, ACARA and a national ministry, but the OECD’s education work and narratives about Australian schooling shaped by declining PISA performance have influenced the development and use of this infrastructure to establish national curriculum and national assessments. The achievement of a national curriculum, national testing and national standards for teachers in Australia’s federal system demonstrates how the federal government, working collaboratively with the states and territories, helped create a *de facto* national schooling system. This was enabled to some extent by the idiosyncratic character of Australian federalism, with extensive vertical fiscal imbalance almost creating mendicant states and territories, at the same time as globalisation

precipitated centripetal pressures in schooling policy. The national government manages the economy, while the human capital construction of schooling, promoted by the OECD, almost demands an enhanced federal government presence in schooling policy and its economisation, but always mediated by federalism. Reporting of Australia's PISA performance has also contributed to the creation discursively of a national imaginary of schooling. Also important here have been effects of globalisation, namely, the loss of economic sovereignty and complementary stress on national ethnos, as argued by Appadurai (2006), demonstrating the nation and the state as the project of each other. The international education work of the OECD has helped constitute the globe as a commensurate space of measurement of comparative school performance, which has been legitimated by the work of the nation.

The Canadian case is interesting because it is the only OECD member without a national governing body in education. With no federal ministry of education, CMEC has played an important role in coordinating national involvement in PISA that has enabled Canadian schooling performance to emerge in the form of a statistical average across provinces. The constitution of a national schooling imaginary has been made possible by the reporting of PISA results that, in some cases, represents Canadian students as a homogenous group celebrated or problematized as a matter of national pride or concern. Whilst Canada presents itself as a postnational state, it still requires a national imaginary to function. The empty space of the Canadian 'nation' is not filled with references to an ethnic or cultural nation (ancestry or traditions), but with a civic culture and values which privilege diversity and multiculturalism. The national imaginary of Canadian schooling thus responds to this civic construction of nationhood. 'National' schooling performance appears as the 'soul' of the educational infrastructure, which is firmly grounded in provincial systems. The soul, as a representation of a non-existent national schooling system, is praised or blamed for the performance of the different state parts. The ontotheological relation between the nation and the state functions in such a way that it benefits from a context of global competition, whilst sustaining supra- and intra-national claims of sovereignty (e.g. First Nations, Quebec, globalism).

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have analysed the cases of Australian and Canadian participation in PISA to demonstrate how national imaginaries of schooling have a 'ghostly' nature insofar as they are primarily symbolic, yet this presence rests upon the material work of states and provinces.

We have shown how PISA contributes to the development of these imaginaries by enabling students educated in different educational systems under different curricula to become represented as a ‘national student body’, and how the data infrastructures of federal states and provinces give ‘flesh’ to otherwise non-existent national schooling systems. PISA, along with other policy tools and institutions of global governance, offers an additional legitimisation particularly for federal nation-states. Regardless of whether these states are potentially ‘threatened’ by internal processes of state-building (e.g. Quebec in Canada) or not (e.g. Australia), human capital framings of global education policy create opportunities for the nation-state to present itself as a single entity unifying its two bodies. Without the opposition that these spaces facilitate, “the elements constituting popular unity would disintegrate and its identity would fall apart” (Laclau, 1990, p. 32). The imagined nation needs the state and its educational apparatuses to exist as much as the states and provinces need the nation to legitimise their sovereignty. Only insofar as the global education race exists, facilitated by international large-scale assessments such as PISA, can the bodies and souls of national schooling manifest in Australia and Canada as they have over the past two decades. Paradoxically then, the very processes of globalisation that have reworked national education policy since the 1990s have also potentially abetted the return, or the new constitution, of national imaginaries of schooling in both contexts.

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