

**THE ORGANIZATION FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND  
DEVELOPMENT'S CHANGING (?) DISCOURSE ON HIGHER  
EDUCATION**

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## Abstract

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has been influential in domestic education policy. Its education discourse has been condemned as neoliberal by critical scholars. However, OECD has been reforming, there is evidence that dominant political economy may be shifting, and there have been recent discursive shifts in some OECD policy fields toward a more inclusive liberalism.

This dissertation contributes to scholarly debate in higher education by offering a thematic and critical examination of OECD higher education discourse in terms of its liberal character. It offers a detailed description of OECD and a review of the changing political economy so the discourse can be understood against OECD's structures and history and shifting dominant economic paradigms. It makes explicit the tenets of neoliberalism and alternate paradigms such as Keynesianism and inclusive liberalism, and compares these tenets to recurrent themes, assumptions, constructions and values in four large higher education projects published by OECD between 1996 and 2012. In this way, the study documents and describes and details the features of the discourse in a way not previously available. This study illustrates how contexts presented in the texts frame the projects and limit policy imagination.

The dissertation paints a complex picture of OECD higher education discourse. This includes a strong concern for equity that might qualify the discourse as inclusive-liberal. The concept of equity is, however, often limited to opportunity to develop employability and the expectation that social mobility will result. Inconsistent with research in other OECD social policy fields, this study reports *rollout* neoliberalism: an entrenchment of neoliberal features.

This dissertation proposes that this entrenchment is facilitated by constructing the concept of the *Knowledge Based Economy* in a neoliberal supply-sided way and by presenting it as a key

framing context. In doing so, it strengthens assumptions of neoliberal economic doctrine and resists paradigm shifts away from neoliberalism. These features specifically include a reliance on market mechanisms through competition, privatization, devolution of State responsibility and the responsabilization of the individual.

## **Preface**

Preliminary findings from this dissertation (based on a thematic analysis of the two sets of country thematic reviews of tertiary education) is published in *Higher Education* in 2013 under the title “Shifting Themes in OECD Country Reviews of Higher Education”, DOI 10.1007/s10734-013-9630-z.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Preface .....	iv
Table of Contents .....	v
List of Tables.....	ix
List of Figures.....	x
List of Abbreviations.....	xi
Acknowledgements .....	xiii
Dedication.....	xv
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Problem.....	1
1.1.1 National versus International Policy Issues.....	2
1.1.2 Economic versus Social Policy Fields.....	3
1.2 Purpose and Research Questions.....	6
1.3 Significance .....	6
1.4 Situating the Author .....	7
1.5 Outline of the Dissertation.....	9
Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework.....	11
2.1 Introduction .....	11
2.2 A Complex, Dynamic Political Economy Approach .....	11
2.3 Keynesianism .....	16
2.3.1 A Historical Account.....	16
2.3.2 A Description.....	18
2.4 Neoliberalism .....	22
2.4.1 A Historical Account.....	22
2.4.2 A Description.....	23
2.4.3 Scholarly Critique of Neoliberal Education Policy .....	35
2.5 After Neoliberalism? .....	40
2.5.1 Conceptualizing Changing Paradigms .....	40
2.5.2 Scholarly Literature on Shifting Perspectives at OECD .....	46
2.6 Niche of the Dissertation and Framework for Analysis .....	49
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	53
3.1 Clarifying Terms .....	53
3.2 Theoretical Foundations of Discourse Analysis.....	54

3.2.1 Texts are Political .....	54
3.2.2 Critical Analysis .....	55
3.2.3 Multi-disciplinary Theoretical Foundations .....	56
3.3 Data Sources .....	61
3.4 Methodological Foundations .....	64
3.4.1 Grice's Principle – Communication as Cooperation .....	65
3.4.2 Communication as Persuasion.....	65
3.4.3 Texts as Inter-related .....	67
3.4.4 Contexting .....	68
3.5 Methodological Approach .....	69
3.6 Limitations of the Study .....	70
3.7 Trustworthiness .....	72
Chapter 4: The OECD .....	74
4.1 Introduction .....	74
4.2 Descriptive Account .....	74
4.2.1 The Birth of OECD .....	75
4.2.2 Who OECD Is.....	76
4.2.3 How the OECD is Organized and Funded .....	79
4.2.4 Mission and Values .....	80
4.3 OECD's Influence .....	82
4.4 OECD and Education .....	85
4.5 Summary and Niche for the Dissertation .....	88
Chapter 5: Findings .....	91
5.1 Thematic Review of Tertiary Education—The First Years .....	95
5.1.1 Introduction .....	95
5.1.2 Contextual Themes and the Purposes and Functioning of TE .....	98
5.1.3 Contexts, Goals and Strategies .....	100
5.1.4 Assumptions, Constructions and Values .....	108
5.2 Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Based Economy .....	110
5.2.1 Introduction .....	110
5.2.2 Contextual Themes and the Purposes and Functioning of TE .....	114
5.2.3 Contexts, Goals and Strategies .....	117
5.2.4 Assumptions, Constructions and Values .....	123
5.2.5 The Summary Document.....	124

5.3 Higher Education 2030 (HE2030).....	126
5.3.1 Introduction .....	126
5.3.2 Assumptions and Constructions .....	130
5.3.3 Predictions .....	143
5.3.4 Complexity of Perspectives.....	148
5.3.5 Summary Remarks .....	151
5.4. Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO).....	153
5.4.1 Introduction .....	153
5.4.2 Themes .....	156
5.4.3 Assumptions .....	161
5.4.4 Dialogism .....	163
5.4.5 Section Summary.....	165
5.5 Chapter Summary .....	165
Chapter 6: Analysis .....	169
6.1 The Thematic Country Reviews.....	170
6.2 HE2030.....	177
6.3 AHELO.....	184
6.4 Summary of Results .....	188
Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion.....	192
7.1 Highlights of the Dissertation.....	192
7.2 Understanding the Results in Terms of the Changing Political Economy and Changing OECD.....	193
7.3 Conclusions .....	201
7.4 Implications.....	202
7.5 Significance .....	208
7.6 Future Research .....	209
Endnotes .....	212
Bibliography .....	214
Appendix A: Style and Referencing.....	229
Appendix B: Structural Topics Surveyed by OECD.....	231
Appendix C: Sample Notes from Data Collection .....	232
Appendix D: OECD Members and Date of Membership .....	233
Appendix E: Departments and Directorates .....	234
Appendix F: Recommendation of the Council concerning Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education.....	235

Appendix G: Declaration on Future Educational Policies in the Changing Social and Economic Context .....	236
Appendix H: Documents Informing Thematic Reviews of TE in the 2000s .....	237
Appendix I: Documents Informing HE2030 .....	238
Appendix J: Meetings of HE2030 .....	239
Appendix K: Groups involved in AHELO Design and Governance .....	240
Appendix L: Participants in the AHELO Stakeholders Advisory Group.....	241
Appendix M: Data Sources from AHELO .....	242
Appendix N: Timeline of Events of Interest .....	243



## **List of Tables**

Table 1: Varieties of Liberalism.....	44
Table 2: Contexts, Goals and Strategies in the 1990s Reviews .....	102
Table 3: Comparing Strategies in 1990s and 2000s Reviews .....	119
Table 4: Skills in Focus in AHELO .....	159
Table 5: Contexts Considered for Collection in AHELO .....	160
Table 6: Comparing Contexts, Foci and Themes in the Projects .....	167
Table 7: Comparing Key Assumptions and Construction in the Projects .....	168
Table 8: Contexts, Goals, Strategies and Assumptions in the Reviews .....	172

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1: Interpretation of Texts.....	57
Figure 2: Structure of the OECD.....	79
Figure 3: Components of the Secretariat .....	80
Figure 4: The Number of OECD Instruments in Force.....	83
Figure 5: Contexts, Purposes and Foci of TE in 1990s Reviews .....	98
Figure 6: Contexts and Goals .....	101
Figure 7: Contexts and Foci in the 2000s Reviews .....	114
Figure 8: Contexts and Goals in the 2000s Reviews.....	118
Figure 9: Algorithm of KBE Assumptions.....	132
Figure 10: Forces on Social and HE Policy.....	199

## List of Abbreviations

### General Abbreviations

CS	Civil Society
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EU	European Union
EC	European Commission
EFTA	European Free Trade Area
G7/8/20	The G-7, G-8 and G-20 Nations
HE or TE	Higher Education or Tertiary Education – used interchangeably
HEI or TEI	Higher Education Institution or Tertiary Education Institutions
HRSDC	Human Resources and Skills Development Canada
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IO	International Organization
ISCED5A	International Standard Classification of Education – first post-compulsory theoretically based/research preparatory or giving access to professions with high skills requirements (e.g. Bachelor university degree)
ISCED5B	International Standard Classification of Education - first post-compulsory practical/technical/occupationally specific (e.g. College diploma)
ISCED6	International Standard Classification of Education – advanced research degree (e.g. MA)
KBE	Knowledge Based Economy
LLL	Lifelong Learning
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPM	New Public Management
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
WB	World Bank
WTO	World Trade Organization

## OECD Specific Abbreviations

AHELO	Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes
BIAC	Business and Industry Advisory Committee (independent)
CCNM	Centre for Cooperation with Non-Members
CERI	Centre for Educational Research and Innovation
CIME	Committee on International Investment and Multinational Enterprises
DAC	Development Assistance Committee or Development Co-operation Directorate
DELSA	Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs
ECO	Economics Department
EDPC	Education Policy Committee (of Directorate for Education)
EDRC	Economic and Development Review Committee
ELSAC	Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee
EPC	Economic Policy Committee
HE2030	Higher Education 2030 = University Futures
IMHE	Institutional Management in Higher Education
MAI	Multilateral Agreement on Investment
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
TUAC	Trade Union Advisory Committee (independent)

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## **Dedication**

To my father, Carl Hunter.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Problem

Scholars have suggested that present higher education<sup>1</sup> (HE) policy has been greatly influenced by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and its discourse on the knowledge-based economy (KBE) (Kuhn, 2006; Peters, 2001)<sup>2</sup>. Current KBE discourse has roots in the changing political and economic contexts of the late 1970s and early 1980s. *Stagflation*<sup>3</sup> and mounting neo-classical economic thought challenged the logic of Keynesian economics, the welfare state and social democratic policy. What Papadopoulos (1995, p. 494) called “radical neo-conservativism” produced an understanding of the relationships between the economy, knowledge and education that critical scholars have labelled neoliberal (Bastalich, 2010; Brown, Hesketh, & Williams, 2002; Kennedy, 2010; Nussbaum, 2010; Wall, 2000).

Popular protests in dissatisfaction of neoliberal policy and increasingly polarized wealth suggest possible ideological changes around the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Discourse in some social policy fields shows evidence of shifts away from strongly neoliberal notions (see section 2.5 ). What we do not know is the degree and character of those discursive shifts, particularly in some policy fields (Mahon & McBride, 2008). This research explores the degree and character of shifts in OECD HE discourse in terms of liberal character.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms *tertiary education* and *higher education* are used inconsistently in the literature and in OECD discourse. HE sometimes refers only to ISCED 5A or 6. Sometimes it is used interchangeably with TE to denote ISCED 5A or B or 6. In this dissertation, the terms are used interchangeably. When only university or ISCED 5A/6 is intended, it is referred to as university education or ISCED 5A.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for style and referencing notes

<sup>3</sup> High inflation and stagnant economic growth.



### 1.1.1 National versus International Policy Issues

Nations maintain sovereignty in educational policy, but do so in the context of an increasingly dense network of influential international actors (Mahon & McBride, 2008; Mahon, 2010). The growth of influence of international organizations (IOs) like OECD, an increasingly globalized and globally competitive economy, and the proliferation of information and communications technologies mean that what was once organized almost exclusively on a national scale and concerned with national contexts is being reconsidered in international terms and on a supra-national scale (Jessop, 2002). National boundaries of influence and governance are blurred. Mahon and McBride (2008) speak of a porous territoriality. Cox (2005) reports an internationalization of the state and the centralization of influence over policy. The "... state becomes a transmission belt from the global to the national economy, where heretofore it had acted as the bulwark defending domestic welfare from external disturbances" (Cox, 1994, p. 49). Bourdieu (1998) described how neoliberal economics created a transfer of power within the nation-state through the *Tyranny of the Market*. Ougaard (2010, p. 45) describes an "evolving global political superstructure" resulting in trends toward national policy convergence. IOs publicise broad policy perspectives, promote reform principles, develop slogans to mobilize agendas, and serve as a forum for policy transfer, coordination and learning<sup>4</sup> (Graefe, 2006a). They are increasingly implicated in domestic policy governance. Henry et al. (2001) claim specifically that as economic globalization has reduced the role of the State, OECD has positioned itself (in several fields, but these authors were interested in education) between the nation state and the supra-national, thereby, securing its importance in the new world order.

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<sup>4</sup>Policy learning refers to domestic policy makers assessing the policy choices and outcomes of other agents in order to inform their own future policy decisions.

Scholars have theorized mechanisms by which IOs such as OECD govern domestic policy (Bradford, 2008; Jacobsson, 2006; Marcussen, 2004a; Woodward, 2010). These are described in detail in Chapter 4. In brief, IOs need not rely on formal laws and legal penalties. Instead, forms of *soft governance*, can be effective in directing nations to converge policies around the recommendations of IOs. This can be accomplished, for example, through the generation of data, spread of ideas, formation of expert groups, auditing and reporting, construction of identities, and normalization of ideologies.

IOs like OECD are complex and dynamic. Their discourse products offer a window into dominant political-economic perspectives frozen in time, and perhaps even the tensions between alternate views. They not only reflect and respond to the changing political economy, they affect it. They provide opportunities to normalize understandings of the world and reify dominant ideologies, but their discourse also offers sites for contestation and destabilizing of prevailing perspectives. Therefore, in a somewhat cyclic way, IOs like OECD have power to construct social-political reality, and then reflect, challenge, and re-construct perspectives they helped to establish. By referring to *the* OECD perspective on an issue, one encourages a limited understanding of its complexity and dynamic nature. With this research, I seek to better understand and describe characteristics of OECD HE discourse respectful of and engaging with its complexity and dynamic nature. I seek to explore how it might both reflect and affect dominant political economy.

### **1.1.2 Economic versus Social Policy Fields**

OECD is an organization whose central and historically primary concern is economics. The only mention of education in its convention is a passing reference to vocational training. However, OECD has engaged since its inception with other social policy fields that intersect

with economics. Since the 1960s OECD has been increasingly engaged in educational policy discourse as it fostered a strong link between education and the economy (Rubenson, 2008). Furthermore, OECD has been criticized as a *rich-man's club* whose insights are inapplicable and illegitimate to most of the world (Woodward, 2011). It has “only modest legal or financial instruments with which it can enforce or implement policies” (Martens & Jakobi, 2010b, p. 2). Its social policy recommendations have often been ignored (Mahon & McBride, 2008; McBride, McNutt, & Williams, 2008). So, why is it important to analyse OECD for a social policy field like HE?

OECD has successfully influenced national policy in several social policy fields (Ougaard, 2010). It has conducted much research and published many documents in education (see Appendix B). Marcussen (2004a) has argued that OECD is very important in creating and disseminating ideas and comparing and evaluating policies. It offers a wealth of statistics for evidence-based policy. Chapter 4 details some of its work in education. Here, suffice it to say that OECD has been interested in education as an investment for individuals and nations toward economic and social objectives since its inception. Over the last two or three decades it became much more heavily involved in domestic policy evaluation and data generation. Critical scholars have critiqued its work after the 1980s as supporting a neoliberal agenda. Some claim also that although in its early years, OECD did not appear to perceive any conflicts between economic objectives, social equality, and a broader role for education in democratic societies, in more recent times “economics has come to colonize the educational agenda” (Rubenson, 2008, p. 251). In any case, the magnitude and potential influence of its work prompt Jakobi and Martens (2010a, p. 163) to claim that since the 1990s, it is “...one of the most significant international organizations” for national educational policy.

The OECD has been changing and its involvement in education has been growing. It increased its engagement with non-members, other IOs, and civil society. It has expanded its interest in a several social policy fields. Education is entwined in many. But the key connection for education is a strong link to the economy. That link has been there since OECD's early years. In the 1960s, however, the connection between education and economics reflected a Keynesian<sup>5</sup> and social democratic perspective. There was a foundational understanding of broad social roles for education that included (and was not in conflict with) addressing unemployment and social and economic inequality. It also positioned education largely as a social good, promoting increased public investment in education and free or low tuitions. In the mid-1980s, this understanding shifted to more neoliberal character (Rubenson, 2008). Since then OECD also constructed and propagated the term: *the Knowledge-Based Economy* (KBE): a term which constructs the economy and its relationship with education in a particular way. Since this time, OECD has also published educational data and analyses profusely. Most notable among those publications are educational country reviews; PISA data (Program for International Student Assessment); the annual *Education at a Glance* comparative indicators; TALIS (Teaching and Learning International Survey); and most recently, PIAAC (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies).

Although OECD “is considered to be a mythical, neutral, scientific and objective soothsayer that one cannot afford to ignore” (Marcussen, 2004a, p. 21) and “...its research, reviews, and data are highly acknowledged in academic circles, by politicians, and in the media” Martens and Jakobi (2010b, p. 1) argued that the organization has not been well or analytically studied and that much of what we know about the OECD comes from the OECD itself. My research does not fill much of that void. It does, however, review some of the critical scholarly

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<sup>5</sup> Chapter 2 explains political economic paradigms such as Keynesianism

work on the organization, and present and contemplate its HE discourse against the changing political economy so that we might better understand the features and direction of its discourse on HE in terms of dominant political economic paradigms.

## **1.2 Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this research is to engage in a thematic and critical examination of OECD HE discourse in order to identify and analyse the rhetorical themes, assumptions, constructions, and values in this discourse. It contributes to scholarly debate by documenting and describing the discourse in terms of its liberal character and reporting evidence of recent shifts in this discourse that can be compared to shifts identified in other social policy fields. The research questions are:

1. What assumptions, constructions and values about the economy, higher education and worker/learners are present in OECD HE discourse?
2. How are these assumptions, values and constructions related to neoliberal perspectives? What evidence is there, if any, of a shift away from neoliberal perspectives?

## **1.3 Significance**

Other scholars have provided critical examinations of OECD discourse and evidence of discursive shifts away from neoliberal doctrine in other social policy fields. This dissertation provides a detailed thematic and critical examination of OECD's HE discourse and looks for evidence of similar shifts. Based on the author's interpretation of several scholars' descriptions of neoliberalism<sup>6</sup>, the dissertation begins by describing a model of a neoliberal perspective in HE. This model specifies how knowledge, HE, individuals, equity and the State are perceived

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<sup>6</sup> Scholarly descriptions and models of Keynesianism and inclusive liberalism also inform the analysis and are described in the theoretical framework.

within a neoliberal market- and supply<sup>7</sup>-focused lens. It is against this model that assumptions and constructions in the discourse are compared allowing the author to report the degree and ways in which the discourse does (and does not) include neoliberal features. Applying this model to documents over time allows us to better understand the nature and trajectory of any potential discursive shifts. It therefore contributes to scholarly discussion about trends in dominant political economic ideology across fields. Shifts in HE discourse can be compared against shifting dominant political economy and against discursive shifts in other policy fields. The dissertation reports a strengthening of neoliberal character since the turn of the century in the documents examined. This is inconsistent with shifts away from neoliberalism identified by other scholars in OECD documents in other policy fields.

Calling on Gee (2011), Grice (1975), Bakhtin (1981) and other authors who have contributed to critical discourse analysis, this dissertation illustrates how the setting of contexts in discourse frame discussion and limit policy imagination. It identifies the KBE as such a constructed context framing HE policy discussions. Understood in a particularly neoliberal way, the KBE context imports particular perceptions of the economy and its relationship to HE and to individuals that are highly neoliberal. The subsequent discourse, therefore, develops, largely, in a neoliberal way.

## **1.4 Situating the Author**

My life experiences and motivations affect how I interpret and engage with the data. Therefore, it is important that I disclose my position and perspectives.

First, I have been an educator and corporate trainer. I am not an economist, sociologist, political scientist or linguist. My first exposure of note to economic, social, political and

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<sup>7</sup> Demand and supply sided economic policy are described in Sections 2.3 and 2.4

linguistic theories contained in this dissertation occurred during the last three years. I present these theories as I interpret them as an educator.

I was raised in a working class family in a working class manufacturing town in the 1970s. This background makes me sympathetic to labour and inclined toward progressive, left-of-centre political and economic perspectives. In contrast, I have worked additional jobs, struggled and saved in order to earn four university degrees and support my sons in their post-secondary studies in the hopes of improving our socio-economic status. This background illustrates a sense of personal responsibility that might be more associated with right-of-centre perspectives and an appreciation of the economic benefits of education for the individual. I also, however, hold a humanistic appreciation of HE as a path to a meaningful life where one can better understand and improve the world. I appreciate HE for the social effects it can have on a community: for strong informed democracy, cultural engagement, and for developing complex understandings of the world and its people. I endeavour in this dissertation to use the tension between these experiences to appreciate the complexity and tensions in the discourse, particularly those between economic and social purposes and between public and private benefits of HE.

I have been critical of some of the critical literature. While I appreciate the need to uncover injustice and support resistance, much of the literature has impressed me as binary and confrontational, lacking an appreciation of the complexity of discursive perspectives. Literature seems often to position OECD and other economic discourses as the enemy and leaves little room for any contemplation of negotiations of how these discourses and more humanistic or social democratic discourses might engage one another. It seems to inadequately represent the tensions between the economic and social or the public and private constructively. Thus, I enter this research not seeking to show that OECD is or is not a monolith of neoliberalist hegemony.

Rather, I attempt to leave myself more open, striving for an increased level of objectivity, expecting that a more complex picture of the OECD discourse will emerge grounded in the data. I enter the research hoping to engage these tensions fairly and constructively.

## **1.5 Outline of the Dissertation**

The next chapter provides the theoretical framework used to understand and contemplate OECD HE discourse. It provides a historical and critical account of neoliberal doctrine and a detailed description of tenets of neoliberalism against which OECD discourse can be compared. Scholarly literature is presented that suggests shifts in dominant political economy have been underway since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This allows the study to be positioned in the literature and illustrates the niche that this study addresses.

The third chapter presents the theoretical and methodological foundations of the critical discourse analysis that is used in this study. It specifically develops the importance of context setting in discourse as a way to limit meaning making and reader interpretation of text.

The fourth chapter presents a descriptive and analytic account of OECD. This includes its history and structures, its recent reforms, and analysis of its mechanisms of governance and influence. It also includes a description of its work in education and scholarly literature documenting discursive shifts in OECD policy away from neoliberal doctrine toward a more inclusive form of liberalism.

The results of the study are included in two chapters. The first provides a largely descriptive account of the findings of the study. There, each project is described in detail and the contexts, assumptions, constructions and values of each project under study are presented. The second of these chapters provides the analysis of the findings in terms of the tenets of neoliberalism. It reports that although other social policy fields demonstrate a shift away from



neoliberalism, OECD HE policy discourse shows evidence of entrenching neoliberal perspectives.

The final chapter summarizes and tries to make sense of the results of the study. It is argued there that the construction of the KBE concept in a certain way and its presentation as a context framing policy discussions causes HE policy to resist pressures away from neoliberalism and the shifts observed in other social policy fields. The final chapter also describes limitations of the study and areas for further research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the theoretical lenses through which data in this study has been interpreted and situates the study in the scholarly literature. The section that follows describes the political economy approach taken in this study. It explains that political-economic paradigms such as neoliberalism must not be understood as simple, static or clearly defined projects. Rather, they are complex and varied collections of ideas and values that are engaged in continual political, social and discursive struggle (and perhaps negotiation and integration) with alternate perspectives. Subsequent sections include a historical account of shifts in political economy since the 1940s to, and potentially away from, neoliberalism. Key characteristics of neoliberal doctrine, and competing paradigms, as they are understood in this study are described. Later sections present a sample of the scholarly literature that critiques the social effects of neoliberalism and the literature exploring if, and in what ways, a political-economic paradigm shift away from neoliberalism is underway since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The final sections summarize by describing the niche for this study and the framework used for analysis.

### **2.2 A Complex, Dynamic Political Economy Approach**

This study takes a political economy approach to analysis recognizing that economics, politics and HE policy discourse exist within the contexts of each other. Discourse and IOs are embedded in the political economy, affecting and being affected by it. At any particular time there exists a variety of ideas about relationships between education, the economy, the State<sup>8</sup>, the

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<sup>8</sup> Understood here as the government and government bodies responsible for educational and economic policy.

market<sup>9</sup> and individuals in civil society. These involve assumptions, beliefs, constructions and values constantly engaged with others in ideological struggle and negotiation. At any one time and in any one place, a roughly defined *set* of these beliefs may become dominant or even taken-for-granted. But even the dominant beliefs evolve and shift over time.

Primarily, the dominant ideological paradigm of reference in this study is neoliberalism. The classic liberal and Keynesian/Welfare State paradigms are presented to illustrate shifting political economy and to provide examples of alternate ways of conceptualizing the economy and its relationships with education, the State and individuals, which may be involved in discursive struggle within the texts. Additionally, there have been suggestions by scholars that a shift in political economy has been underway in the last few decades away from neoliberalism. Some scholars refer to this ‘new’ perspective as inclusive-liberalism (i.e. Craig & Porter, 2003; Mahon, 2008a). This study presents descriptions of inclusive liberalism and compares them to the discourse as it looks for evidence of competing paradigms and discursive struggle in the documents. However, it must be remembered that there is substantially more literature on neoliberalism and its assumptions are more clearly described by scholars. Furthermore, there has been much critique and concern about neoliberal agendas in education. Therefore, this study seeks not only to describe the ways in which the discourse reflects shifting paradigms, but also the specific ways in which the documents contain assumptions, constructions and values associated with neoliberalism. These perspectives are discussed in much detail in the sections to follow.

It is important to understand that dominance of a paradigm and its associated ideas happens gradually, non-linearly, and unevenly across populations, institutions, regions and countries as

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<sup>9</sup> “The market” generally refers to the systems in which goods and services can be exchanged. It is more specifically associated with a contemporary capitalist (mixed) market economy but with more emphasis on the private sector in the neoliberal model

different understandings are taken up and/or contested in different degrees at different times. Dominance of a paradigm does not mean it is accepted everywhere or that it is unchallenged in a region in which it is largely accepted. Shifts in paradigms are likely to occur unevenly: in some places the speed of change may be glacial, intermittent and multi-directional; in others it may be relatively fast and linear. It is also important to understand that the ideas that make up a paradigm like neoliberalism are not precisely defined. Describing a particular period as Keynesian or neoliberal or inclusive liberal is an attempt to impose categorization on a varied set of beliefs and practices as they are being understood and practiced differently in the world.

Discourse is embedded in, and can change with, the changing political economy. It may therefore reflect dominant ideology and even the discursive struggles that are happening in the political economy. This study explores OECD HE discourse for evidence of the ways and degrees to which it reflects neoliberal ideology, competing perspectives, and the changing political economy. I do not seek to *pigeon-hole* OECD HE discourse into any one of these categories but rather to describe the complexity of the discourse's character as it aligns with the perspectives of these paradigms.

A political-economy approach “helps avert the danger of a decontextualized focus on discourse” (Fairclough, 2006, p. 29). Thus, a more thorough understanding of the discourse and its potential effects on HE policy<sup>10</sup> requires it be viewed against the political conditions and dominant economic thinking of its time. We can relate the ideologies, assumptions, constructions, themes, and values represented in discourse to underlying dominant economic models and political paradigms.

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<sup>10</sup> A lay-person understanding of policy is applied in this dissertation and is focused on HE policy as a public policy field. It generally refers to guides and rules set by domestic governments to direct how HE functions.

Discourse however, particularly that of influential IOs such as OECD, is not only a product of its paradigmatic era. It is also implicated in affecting the ways in which the world is understood. This study is not positioned to investigate if and how OECD HE discourse has effects on our understandings of the world. However, as a critical analysis, it is positioned to make evident and critique the potential the discourse has to influence. Discourse has power to construct objects and subjects; reify ideologies; and define problems and solutions. The relationship between discourse and the social is further explained in Chapter 3.

Stuart Hall (2005) warns that political time is very short; economic time is longer; cultural time is longer still. Therefore, economic or political projects such as neoliberalism must be understood as operating on a base of a longer and more profound compendium of social, economic and cultural changes. Political or economic paradigms alone are insufficient to understand the profound and complex changes involved and the long history and trajectory of cultural change. Neoliberalism has been described as a culture espousing particular values and traditions (Giroux & Giroux, 2009; Jarvis, 2008; Ward, 2012). Hall (2011, p. 711) explains that “these ideas have long been inscribed in social practices and institutions and sedimented into the ‘habitus’ of everyday life, common sense and popular consciousness.”

Seen as a culture or as entwined with cultural change, neoliberalism must be recognized as complex, varied and dynamic. Its meaning cannot be reduced to indisputable and static characteristics. The term is, however, prolific in the critical literature and does represent a trend in policy practice and discourse (Mirowski & Plehwe, 2009). Furthermore, “...there are enough common features to warrant giving it a provisional conceptual identity, provided this is understood as a first approximation” (Hall S. , 2011, p. 706). Therefore, this study conceptualizes

and presents characteristics of neoliberalism as the author interprets them from the literature and as they are used in this analysis.

Jessop (2002) theorizes the dynamic nature of paradigms. He contends political-economic paradigms are subject to spontaneous generation and degeneration. Competing visions exploit destabilization of the central paradigmatic culture with varying degrees of success. Thus, at any stage of capitalism, there is an oscillation about a dominant paradigm. In HE policy, Ward (2012, p. 122) explains: “Knowledge has been shaped by a historic and ongoing political tension between state, market and profession and a resulting struggle over defining and delimiting and expanding or shrinking the private and public spheres.” This study, therefore, explores these tensions in the discourse and uses Jessop’s notion of oscillations to help explain its observations.

Graefe (2006a) describes three ways policy and discourse can operationalize these oscillations. The first, attributed to Peck and Tickell (2002), is *rollout*. Rollout entrenches the structures and perspectives that support neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is defined in detail in Section 2.4 *Neoliberalism*, however, in brief, *rollout* deepens and expands market-relations. *Flanking* (Jessop, 2002) supports neoliberalism by ameliorating its contradictions and dysfunctions. It addresses negative social effects with non-market solutions and strengthens neoliberalism’s core. Neither *rollout* nor *flanking* opposes neoliberalism. *Countervailing* seeks to undo neoliberalism replacing its assumptions and values with others. It may involve new attempts to democratize policy with popular participation in an effort to reregulate labour markets. This study looks for evidence of rollout, flanking and countervailing of neoliberal doctrine reflecting oscillations around a neoliberal core.

## 2.3 Keynesianism

### 2.3.1 A Historical Account

The school of macroeconomic thought developed by John Maynard Keynes in *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936) became known as *Keynesianism*. It developed, at least in part, as a response to classic liberalism's failure to prevent the Great Depression (Ward, 2012). Classic liberalism held that individuals act to secure their own interests and should be free to do so. Government's role is to protect individuals from each other through the protection of private property and the maintenance of order. The *invisible hand* of the market (*a la* Adam Smith) optimizes market relations naturally as people pursue their own interests (Mahon, 2008a).

Economic downturns in the early twentieth century challenged the value of classic liberalism and saw the spread of welfare state policy and social liberalism that promoted the State's role in economic and social issues such as welfare, healthcare and education. Manifest in economic theory as Keynesianism, this became a dominant perspective through to the mid-1970s in many countries. OECD was a strong proponent of Keynesianism in the 1960s (Mahon, 2010).

Keynes argued that economics driven by the private sector is sometimes inefficient<sup>11</sup>. Public policy action was needed to correct for such *market failures*<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, economic activity naturally fluctuates (expansion and contraction) over months or years. Negative effects during contractions can be reduced by increasing inflation through monetary policy (i.e. low interest rates) to boost employment. Government spending was a way to stimulate the economy,

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<sup>11</sup> This refers to economic efficiency, in an efficient system, supply and demand are balanced; resources are used to optimize production; and changes to any part of the system cannot be made to improve the position of one agent without making another agent worse off.

<sup>12</sup> Cases in which the market is not efficient. Through the concept of *externalities* (effects where the costs of a transaction are not borne out by the agents in the transaction alone), market failure is also taken to include situations where the public good is at risk. Examples include pollution, traffic congestion, and potentially, inequity.

creating demand for goods and services<sup>13</sup>, resulting in jobs and increased private spending. In short, promoting consumption, debt, deficit spending, high degrees of control over the money supply, progressive taxation, high wages, and the redistribution of wealth, Keynesian economics saw the State as a central actor for improving and controlling the market by creating the demand for goods and services (Caporaso & Levine, 1992).

The Keynesian paradigm aligns well with political policy such as the Welfare state. The greater role advocated for governments paved the way for government policy to address social issues of economic distribution. Keynesians saw the state “as the apparatus which creates conditions of equity and fairness” (Ward, 2012, p. 58). It was given central, direct and financial responsibility for education provision and direction. Issues of emancipation and democracy were part of the zeitgeist, and education was seen as a means to these ends. Knowledge and education were seen largely as public goods<sup>14</sup> to which the public had a right and through which society could be advanced in economic, intellectual, political, social and cultural ways. Both the economic and non-economic value of education for individuals and for society in general were strongly upheld, and not in competition, at that time. According to Marginson (1989, p. 16), in the 1960s OECD popularized education as investment (for individuals and for the State), supported greater government expenditure in education, and “provided a ringing affirmation of education’s role in creating growth and equality.” Economic growth, equality, and the social purposes of education were not perceived to be in conflict at that time (Rubenson, 2008). Perspectives on economics and education included substantial macroeconomic approaches involving systemic issues and development and addressing problems such as unemployment (Berner, 1974).

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<sup>13</sup> This is referred to as a demand-sided approach to economics.

<sup>14</sup> This does not imply an absence of an appreciation of the private benefits/responsibilities for knowledge and education. Nor does it suggest economic benefits were ignored.



As described above, at any period in time, dominant paradigms are faced with contesting perspectives. In 1962, Milton Friedman of the Chicago school of economics contested the Keynesian paradigm, predicting that it would lead to stagflation<sup>15</sup>. He also proposed that only supply-side economics<sup>16</sup> (i.e. neoliberal policy, see below) could ensure stable markets. It was assumed that the State could not understand the complexities of the market well enough. The mid-1970s did see global inflation coupled with negative or no economic growth and support for Keynesian economics waned. As HE expanded and diversified, as more people availed themselves of the opportunities to participate, and as the economic climate changed through the 1970s and into the 1980s, graduates started to find it more difficult to get jobs. Doubt began to spread concerning whether government funded expansion of education could lead to economic growth and social equity (Marginson, 1989).

### **2.3.2 A Description**

The reader is reminded that the description of the paradigm that was dominant prior to the rise of neoliberalism as it is described below is a generalization based on my interpretation of several scholars including (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009; Giles, 2008; Peters, 2011; Scholte, 2005; Ward, 2012). It is presented here to provide a comparative base against which the neoliberal paradigm can be understood. It does not necessarily describe how a Keynesian/Welfare State perspective was operationalized in any particular country or institution.

One way of conceptualizing the paradigm and how it differs from neoliberalism is based on the relative role of the State and of market-mechanisms. The move from classic liberalism to a Keynesian and Welfare State way of thinking involved a larger role for the State and a reduced reliance on market-mechanisms. Specifically, Keynesian economics advocated direct

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<sup>15</sup> High inflation concomitant with slow economic growth or decline and high unemployment.

<sup>16</sup> Policies to support the supply of goods and services instead of the demand for them.

government intervention in the market through (inter alia) deficit spending and low interest rates. It also advocated government funding to aid the creation of certain jobs such as what happened at Bell Laboratories and NASA during the expansion of *Big Science* in the United States in the 1960s (Smith R. W., 1993). It advocated government funded expansion of HE (including diversification within the HE system) with an expectation that this would lead to personal and national economic advancement and social equity. State spending in education was seen as an investment in the public good as is illustrated by this quote by Senator J. E. Murray (p. 1464) before the United States Senate Committee on Appropriations, Labour-Health, Education, and Welfare in 1954:

I know that you, Mr. Chairman, just as I do, look upon all Federal appropriations for vocational education as investment rather than expenditures. These investments will pay dividends in the future in good citizenship and strengthen the ability on the part of our people to provide for security.

It was in the 1960s that Theodore Schultz (1961) propagated his theory of human capital and educational capital and contended that the best way to achieve income equality is through making tuition free or low cost (Rubenson, 1992). “The hypothesis here proposed is that these changes in the investment in human capital are the basic factors reducing the inequality in the distribution of personal income” (Schultz, 1961, p. 2). It was proposed that income differences are a result of different individuals having different tastes, abilities and opportunities to develop their own human capital. Government intervention and investment is necessary to divert the inevitable inequality of economic results in a capitalist market. Human capital, at this time, was certainly seen as a factor in national economic health, but also largely as a route to equity and largely seen as a financial investment for both the nation and the individual (Burton, 1992).

This has been called demand-side economics because it involved the State helping to create jobs, increase income, and the demand for goods and services instead of the supply of them. Government intervention, including through the investment in and provision of education, was considered a market stimulus (Rubenson, 1992). It was also necessary in order to develop income equality. “The state was seen as providing a necessary balance between markets and larger social interests” (Ward, 2012, p. 166).

Although private conceptualizations of knowledge were not denied and there were industry-focused utilitarian HE projects in this time, knowledge was conceptualized largely as a public good.

In keeping with the liberalist and Enlightenment narratives, knowledge during the 1940s through the late 1970s was, at least conceptually, recognized as something that should largely stay in the public domain, while also recognizing its growing importance for serving private industry, the military and social planning goals of the state. (Ward, 2011, p.110)

The State accepted a large degree of responsibility for HE. It was involved in provision, direction setting, and financing. The development and spread of knowledge was seen to benefit society, humankind and individuals in economic and non-economic growth. HE was a mechanism for equity and social mobility. These purposes were not perceived as competing, but rather as mutually supporting. It was a macro-economic, systemic vision in which an educated population would advance equality, democracy, culture, and personal and national financial health. It would demand more goods and services and contribute to their production.

One did not see any conflicts between economic efficiency and social and economic equality or, expressed in different terms, between the private and social demand for

education. In fact, both forces went in the same direction—increased investments in adult and higher education. (Rubenson, 1992, p. 6)

OECD discourse in the 1960s reflected these understandings and are described in greater detail in the institutional description in Section 4.4.

Knowledge developed in the arts, humanities and social sciences was openly appreciated. Much owing to the Humboldtian tradition<sup>17</sup>, HEIs were places for intellectual pursuits protected from contaminating political or economic doctrine. It was a place to *challenge* doctrine. In the words of the first president of Cornell University, HE was “a place where intellectual culture might restrain mercantilism and militarism” (Schweber, 1992, p. 153). In fairness, Humboldt and this quote are from a time in which HE was exceptionally elite. One might hypothesize that in a more universal system, HEIs cannot stand apart to the same degree. However, the Keynesian era did not appear to contest HE as a place to challenge doctrine. It appeared to embrace the notion of education as a benefit to all of society in broad social and economic terms. If HE was asked to be *responsive*, responsiveness would mean addressing broad economic and social needs of society as a whole and advancing and challenging knowledge for its own sake.

HE was increasingly seen as a right that participants exercised to realize broad development goals: economic, social, political and self-actualization. Humboldt himself was purported to claim that “the sole purpose of education must be to shape man [sic] himself” (UNESCO, 2000a, p. 616). Individuals were understood as embedded in complex cultures and parts of a larger society that benefitted from their success and that could create challenges to it. Social and economic success depends on many factors and cannot be guaranteed by effort and

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<sup>17</sup> Aspects of the Humboldtian model of higher education most relevant to this dissertation include a student-centred and free-thinking approach to education that integrates and links lectures and research. Freedom of scientific research is important in this model, and universities were professional, bureaucratic institutions that were well funded and well equipped for research.

talent alone. The State was needed to actively ensure fairness. It was also a central agent in the provision, direction and financing of HE.

## **2.4 Neoliberalism**

### **2.4.1 A Historical Account**

Economic crises in the 1970s shook faith in Keynesianism. Its opponents contended that the State is too isolated from market forces to work. They further opined that the Keynesian Welfare State created inefficient, bloated, bureaucratic systems of social services; eroded personal and institutional responsibility; and created a dependency on government (Ward, 2012). “The state’s monopoly on education had also created a system of entitlement that produced complacent, unmotivated teachers and administrators, uninvolved parents and lazy, underachieving students” (Ward, 2012, p. 16). Margaret Thatcher offered:

I think we have gone through a period when too many children and people have been given to understand “I have a problem, it is the Government’s job to cope with it.”...They are casting their problems on society and who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first. (1987, p. ¶ 1)

There was a renewed interest in liberalism. Economists and policy makers looked to Friedman and the Chicago school for a new-liberal and supply-side model. Keynesian economics was a demand-side model, arguing that recessions could be avoided and economies stimulated by creating demand for goods and services (i.e. by creating jobs, increasing government spending and lowering taxes on the working class). Proponents of supply-sided economics argued that

reducing barriers to the *supply* of goods and services (i.e. lower corporate taxes, deregulation, and low unemployment benefits) would better ensure economic growth.

The new-liberalism shared much with classic. Classic liberalism sought to limit government power in order to enhance individual freedom (Ward, 2012). Neoliberalism is more acutely focused on limiting direct government intervention *in the market* (Peters, 1999) through such mechanisms as promoted by Keynes. As will be described below, there is a shift in the types of roles for the State proposed under neoliberalism.

The neoliberal paradigm is associated with theorists such as Hayek, Friedman, Stigler, Popper and Polanyi; with politicians such as Reagan and Thatcher; and with policy such as the Washington Consensus. There is no complete agreement on the definition or tenets of *neoliberalism* (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009). As discussed earlier in this dissertation, it is a common label for dominant socio-economic thought developing in some parts of the world<sup>18</sup> in the 1980s and 1990s. Therefore, this study begins with a description of neoliberal doctrine mindful that even as a *dominant* paradigm, the degree of influence of the paradigm across nations and time varies and the ways in which it is taken up and operationalized vary as well. As various discourses engage and compete, dominant paradigms are challenged and can be transformed. Peters refers to the neoliberal project as being involved in “an intellectual struggle that runs through the twentieth century.... It is therefore complex, subtle and dynamic, changing its historical and disciplinary forms as it matured” (2011, p. 1).

#### **2.4.2 A Description**

The conceptualization of the neoliberal paradigm used in this study is largely inspired by descriptions of neoliberalism by Ward (2012) but also influenced by my interpretations of other

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<sup>18</sup> Some countries, such as the Nordic countries, never took on a highly neoliberal paradigm. Others, such as the UK, USA and New Zealand, advanced a very neoliberal agenda in that time.

authors including Giroux (2011), Peters (1999; 2011), Hall (2011), Hill (2010), Munck (2005), Boas and Gans-Morse (2009) and Scholte (2005). The reader is reminded that neoliberalism was taken up in different ways and by different degrees over time and in different places. The descriptions here do not necessarily represent policy in any particular place, but rather a general description of the tendencies in the neoliberal paradigm. This description can be contrasted to the description of Keynesianism in Section 2.3.2 .

A shift from Keynesianism to neoliberalism can be considered in terms of a shift in the relative roles of the State and free<sup>19</sup> market mechanisms. In a neoliberal paradigm, there is greater emphasis on the needs and mechanisms of the market. The role of the State, then, shifts emphasis toward facilitating more efficient market mechanisms. Ward (2012, p. 59) says that “in the neoliberal system the market is the same a society” and Peters (2011, p. 7) reports “at every opportunity the market has been substituted for the state.” The market is conceptualized as more effective and efficient<sup>20</sup> at balancing supply and demand and growing the economy than is the State (Munck, 2005). Therefore, growth can be optimized by ensuring the market is supplied with the resources it needs unencumbered by external forces (i.e. government regulation, unions) interfering with natural price signals and market responses (Scholte, 2005). The market should be supplied with the resources it needs to maximize the supply of goods and services; and supply, demand and quality should be optimized through competition and the free distribution of market signals<sup>21</sup>. In this way, it is a supply-side vision. The market is seen as objective, efficient and fair. If left to its own devices, it improves quality through competition. Therefore, market-

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<sup>19</sup> Where freedom means absence of government intervention, there is no completely ‘free’ market. It would be more accurate to refer to it as a ‘free-er’ market. However, as an idealized conceptualization the terms ‘free’ and ‘free-er’ are considered equal in this dissertation.

<sup>20</sup> Economic efficiency refers to optimal equilibria of prices, supply and demand.

<sup>21</sup> Market signals are often prices, but in the context of higher education they would also include surrogate measures of quality such as graduate employment rates.

mechanisms should be promoted and where markets do not exist, they should be created (Harvey, 2005). However, it should be noted that education is not like any other commodity and does not exhibit all the characteristics essential to fully develop an economic market. Marginson (1997; 2004) explains that factors such as tuition subsidies and regulated spaces and enrolments mean that HE is only a quasi-market and HEIs are only quasi-firms.

Even if only quasi-markets are possible in education, when there is greater emphasis on the market, there can be a tendency to see knowledge, education, individuals, equity, and the state differently than under a Keynesian Welfare State vision. There is a tendency to focus more on individual responsibility, private investment for economic returns and on competition and market signals. The sections below discuss these changing understandings.

### ***Knowledge as the Base of the Economy***

The idea that knowledge and education can drive an economy is not new to neoliberalism. However, this relationship can be understood and operationalized differently under different political economic paradigms. The particular form that this relationship takes and the narrow focus on certain types of knowledge and growth are different in a neoliberal paradigm than in a Keynesian Welfare State approach. Scholars have argued that it is this particular neoliberal approach, coded in the term *the Knowledge-Based Economy*, that has driven education policy discourse since the mid-1990s (Kuhn, 2006; Peters, 2001).

Proponents of the new liberalism called upon the work of Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter who argued that price competition was not sufficient to drive growth. Innovation was needed fuelled by *Unternehmergeist* (entrepreneur-spirit) released in a free-capitalist society<sup>i</sup>. Knowledge acquisition became *the* focal point in economic policy. This position was strengthened by New Growth theory (Romer, 1986). Previously, knowledge was seen as



exogenous, not highly related to the economy. Romer provided evidence and argued it was endogenous and highly related to long-run returns on investment (Marginson, 1989; Robertson, 2005). Human capital perspectives (Becker, 1964) in a New Growth, Schumpeterian, and neoliberal environment created an understanding of knowledge as a commodity to be developed in people to create the innovation and productivity gains largely for firm and national competitive advantage and long-run economic growth.

Human capital development creates gains for individuals, firms and the nation. However, I interpret more of a *top-down* approach within a neoliberal perspective. Under a Keynesian Welfare State paradigm, equity and the economic conditions of the individual were centralized and were thought to co-generate national economic health. Under a neoliberal paradigm, the productivity of the nation and firm are more centralized with an understanding that equity and prosperity will trickle down to the individual. Education policy in the new-liberal era was not focusing as much on directly improving social mobility so that the growing middle class would demand more goods and services. It was focused on supplying a particular type of human capital so that the supply of goods and services could be optimized.

Ward (2012) describes these changes in how knowledge, its institutions and producers were understood under neoliberal politics. He suggests that this particular vision of knowledge was discursively constructed by the OECD publication *The Knowledge Based Economy* (1996-KBE) and manifest in the same term. “It is here,” he claims, “that the particular ideas of harnessing knowledge more directly *for production* become intertwined with neoliberal politics” (p. 155, emphasis added). The term becomes a short-hand for a specific supply-side vision of knowledge and economics and part of “the advent of a new discursive framing of the role knowledge was now called on to play in society” (Ward, p. 163).

Certainly, the economic value of knowledge and human capital was acknowledged prior to the ascent of neoliberalism<sup>22</sup>. For instance, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations in the United States in the 1960s were involved in what was later called *Big Science*: government-backed initiatives to stimulate knowledge production and innovation in the civilian economy<sup>23</sup>, create science jobs, and coordinate inter-disciplinary efforts between universities and civil- and government-science agencies such as NASA and Bell Laboratories (Smith R. W., 1993). Knowledge was featured prominently in early OECD discourse (Marginson, 1989; Ward, 2012). But its early knowledge policy featured a strong Keynesian understanding of knowledge production that involved an active and responsible State in knowledge development and dissemination so that the failures of the market could be addressed. For instance, a UK commissioned paper on the value of HE reported that the human capital concept was useful, “provided we always remember that the goal is not productivity as such but the good life that productivity makes possible” (Robbins Committee, 1963, p. 204) and argued “in favor of a substantially increased [public] expenditure on higher education” (ibid, p. 207).

What changed in conceptualizations of knowledge and HE since then is a shift toward a more supply/production orientation and the relative role of the State and private market interests. In the neoliberal model, there is a tendency to emphasize knowledge as a private good to be invested in by private interests for private profit through free market mechanisms to boost productive capacity, rather than a public good advancing the broader interests of the State and public at large<sup>24</sup>. OECD’s (1996-KBE, p. 22) focal publication on the KBE claims “...the extent

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<sup>22</sup> For example, see Drucker’s (1969) *Age of Discontinuity*; Machlup’s (1962) *Distribution of Knowledge in the US.*; and Bell’s (1973) *The Coming of the Post-industrial Society*.

<sup>23</sup> It was argued that science development in the military was not contributing to economic growth the way science development in civil industries could.

<sup>24</sup> I acknowledge Marginson’s (2007) contention that the terms *private* and *public good* in education are problematic and the actual situation is more complex than a simple binary allows. The terms are simply used here to differentiate in general terms a shift in the chief locus of perceived benefit and responsibility.

to which scientific knowledge can be appropriated, directly or indirectly, makes it necessary to modify or reject the idea that science is a public good.”

In a neoliberal view, *knowledge* tends to be associated more with technological advancement, and therefore, is believed to be rapidly changing and the source of rapid change to which HE must respond. Therefore, there is a sense of urgency around the need for rapid response to maintain national competitiveness. Furthermore, there is more of an emphasis on particular types of knowledge: essentially knowledge that drives innovation and productivity in profit-making and productive fields. Ward (2012, p. 145) refers to this as “the neoliberal natural selection of knowledge fields.” Hence, knowledge in certain natural sciences and business are valued as are skills that would increase creativity, productivity and efficiency. This understanding of knowledge and its relationship to the market is coded in the term the *KBE*.

As a term and concept, the KBE has been propagated widely since the mid-1990s. OECD collects nearly 60 indicators of the KBE (Godin, 2006). KBE discourse focuses on national prosperity and proposes that prosperity relies on innovation and productivity. It therefore relies on education to produce the higher levels of human capital so that labour can be productive and efficient and drive innovation (Brown & Lauder, 2003). It also promotes lifelong learning so that labour skills can remain current, creative, and adaptable<sup>25</sup>.

In spite of the attention, scholars have argued that it is a poorly defined concept (Carlaw, 2006). Peters (2001, 2010) refers to the contributions of economists<sup>ii</sup>, sociologists<sup>iii</sup>, management theorists<sup>iv</sup>, philosophers<sup>v</sup> and futurologists<sup>vi</sup>. He suggests that the term is still under conceptual development. Kuhn (2006, pp. 4-6) complains that we have little understanding of the KBE that is helpful in directing policy:

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<sup>25</sup> For example, see Fenwick’s (2010) description of Canada’s Essential Skills Initiative which stresses generic skills such as problem-solving, personal attributes such as perseverance, and labour force flexibility.

There is no knowledge about fundamentals of competitiveness, economic growth and their relation to employment; there is also no knowledge about the interplay of the three European policy levels both in a European as in a global context; there is no knowledge about the interplay between private and public knowledge production, knowledge transfer and knowledge, including political interventions; there is no knowledge about the contribution of education and training to a knowledge based society also in relation to other policy fields like employment and social exclusion; there is no knowledge about the impact of a knowledge society on the life of European citizens and related policy interventions; there is no knowledge about the effect of a knowledge based society on 'intergenerational relations' and about 'sustainable development'.

Other scholars contest the very existence of the KBE and argue that little is fundamentally and substantially different in today's economy compared to previous economies (Bastalich, 2010; Foray, 2006; Metcalfe, 2010). Some challenge the linear and causal relationship between knowledge and prosperity (Edquist & Riddell, 2000; Mokyr, 2002; Smith K. , 2009; Webster, 2006). Others deny that the knowledge and skills required in jobs today are substantially greater than before (Brown, Hesketh, & Williams, 2002; Lavoie & Roy, 1998; Livingstone, 2004; Markoff, 2011). Peters (2001, p. 15) argues that the discourse is little more than futurology that is "is populist and ahistorical."

The 'knowledge economy' has been received with considerable scepticism by scholars within the fields of political economy, social and political philosophy, and higher education... evidence supporting the idea of an emerging 'knowledge economy' is thin. (Bastalich, 2010, p. 847)

Smith (2000, p.9) contends that its claims "rest on analytical and empirical support that varies from sophisticated (but questionable) to nonexistent" and that we are far from understanding if ours is a new kind of economy. Godin (2006) contends it is a *buzz-word* used to legitimate OECD policy by directing attention to issues for which OECD already had indicators. Jessop (2004) argues that the term constitutes a discursive strategy to assert America's position as

economic hegemon. The point important to this dissertation is that the KBE concept and assumptions and interpretations about the economy are far from uncontested. This dissertation is positioned to examine how knowledge and its relationship to the economy are presented in OECD HE discourse.

## ***HE***

When our understanding of knowledge is underscored by an emphasis on the market and the supply of goods and services, it is easier to conceive of HE as a private commodity for profit, and HEIs as quasi-firms and a source of market supply. Institutions supply creative, productive labour and innovation-driving knowledge so private market interests can produce and profit. Historically, HEIs have been seen as the centre of public knowledge production, somewhat insulated from private or political interests (Ward, 2012). Neoliberalists contest that HEIs have been too isolated from market forces to optimize their economic impact. Understanding the KBE as rapidly changing and competitive, HEIs are asked to be *responsive*, understood as quickly addressing needs of private market interests so that they can optimize production and supply. The composition of institutional governing boards shifts so that representation from academics and students is reduced while the number of experts in business and industry grow (Vidovich & Currie, 2011). “Its [HE] purpose is now clear and practical: to aid in the generation of products, economic growth and to provide an effective, flexible workforce” (Ward, 2012, p. 147). Emphasis on the private value of knowledge may deemphasise the public value, and subsequently, State responsibility in funding or directing it. There is a shift toward more attention on private sources of funding and direction.

Increased faith in market-type mechanisms may involve a tendency to believe social services like HE could improve quality, efficiency and economic impact if governed less by

academics and more through market principles and competition. New Public Management (NPM) is a manifestation of neoliberal ideals applying competitive, market mechanisms to social services governance. NPM emphasizes strategic planning, measured outputs, performance indicators, quality audits and a discourse of accountability, competition and devolution of State authority (Olssen & Peters, 2005). The result of neoliberal deregulation, commercialization and corporatization of HEIs, according to Marginson (1997; 2004), is a steeper vertical differentiation in the hierarchy of HEIs.

### ***Individuals***

Neoliberalism and the Keynesian Welfare State constitute opposing “ideological metaphors of ‘individualism’ and ‘community’” (Peters , 2011, p. 1). The former “rests on an ideology of individualism as the most fundamental and unifying premise” (ibid, p. 1) and posits “the sovereign individual as logically prior and separate from society, emphasizing the primacy of the individual over community and State” (ibid, p. 8). When emphasizing the market, it is easier to conceive of individuals as reduced to their singular rational self-interested selves: isolated and disembedded. Neoliberals tend to see society not so much as a complex network of individuals and groups in overlapping and integrated contexts but more as a simple collection of agents all advancing separate interests: “Neoliberalism is, in essence, an attempt to remake society as a collection of individuals” (ibid, p. 213). Or as Thatcher announced: “There is no such thing as society. There is only the individual and his [sic] family” (quoted in Hall, 2011, p.707). The neoliberal lens “rejects all collectivist framings and solutions” (Ward, 2012, p. 213) conceptualizing people not as socially connected citizens situated in culture and complex social contexts and structures, but as “self-interested competitors, entrepreneurs and rational consumers

in a rapidly changing marketplace” (Ward, 2012, p. 12). With the spotlight on the individual, notions of community and structural barriers are left in the shadows.

A market lens encourages a view of workers as resources for production: human capital needed to pursue profit. They are subjects to govern to optimize their value to the market and economy. The market also sees them as consumers of the knowledge and education HEIs offer: rational self-interested investors in HE for personal economic returns.

As private, self-interested, isolated agents disconnected from social and political challenges, it is easier to conceive of individuals as having primary responsibility for their own success and failure. “Failure here is the result of bad or unfortunate individual choices” (Ward, 2012, p. 226). There is less emphasis on antecedent contexts (i.e. race, social status, luck, health, socio-political structures, regional economic conditions) over which the individual has limited or no agency. Responding to market signals with rational choice and effort, each increases their employability and success through education. Therefore, a neoliberal agenda focuses more on employability than employment. Individuals are resources needed by industry to supply goods and services. The focus is not on creating a demand for those workers (increasing employment) so much as it is on supplying the market with appropriate human capital.

As consumers and resources, each person is constructed as vital to national economic growth, and therefore responsible to the nation (Bastalich, 2010). Notions of the valuable citizen become entangled in notions of vocational worth. Hall (2011, p. 707) explained that neoliberals contend the Welfare State “eroded personal responsibility and undermined the over-riding duty of the poor to work.” Ward (2012, p. 224) adds that even “consumption is the duty of the citizen.” Thus, neoliberalism in HE has been “a profoundly moral project” (Ward, p. 213). As Thatcher (1979, p. ¶ 54) claimed: “Economics are the method. The object is to change

the soul.” It relies on a particular construction of citizens and their acceptance of risk and responsibility in their own and the nation’s welfare (Brown, Hesketh, & Williams, 2002). This dissertation is positioned to explore possible shifts in the various ways in which OECD HE discourse constructs and presents individual worker learners.

### ***Equity***

When there is greater emphasis on the market, there may be a tendency to reduce equity to aspects of economic success and opportunity to increase one’s employability and to turn solely to the market (not the State) for solutions to inequity. The Keynesian Welfare State paradigm also saw education as a tool to fight inequality of income and social status. But it also viewed the market as inadequate in this fight: the market has a tendency to perpetuate inequity. There is more trust in market mechanisms in a neoliberal frame, so that equity is construed to mean freedom to pursue opportunities to develop one’s marketability through education limited only by effort and ability. A neoliberal lens is less likely to construct people as equally deserving of a particular standard of living, happiness or other democratic freedoms, regardless of ability and socio-economic contexts. It is less likely to look for causes and solutions for inequality outside of the market. The market’s role in ensuring each is free to invest their private resources to gain market advantage is more likely to be emphasized. The market is assumed fair and more-or-less sufficient to ensure equity. Even the most neoliberal of states is likely to assume some market-failure and therefore, State responsibility in addressing aspects of equity, however, a neoliberal perspective is likely to stress inequity as largely the result of personal failure. Ward (2012, p. 226) reports it is “always an individual problem and never a reflection on the rational economic system which distributes things or the political system that allows and sets conditions for such an economic system to operate.” There is more likely a greater degree of market fundamentalism



assumed than in a Keynesian paradigm, and a higher tolerance of poverty associated with individual deficit. In fact, it is commonly understood in a neoliberal frame that inequality is necessary for efficiency, quality and economic growth: great efficiency gains can be achieved at the expense of small equity costs. As Milton Freeman of the Chicago School of Economics famously said, “A society that puts equality before freedom will get neither. A society that puts freedom before equality will get a high degree of both” (Freeman, 1990, p. no page). When a trade-off is perceived necessary between equity and efficiency, Segall (2003) says that the egalitarian approach is to favour distributive justice, and the utilitarian, neoliberal approach is to favour efficiency. This dissertation is positioned to investigate the discursive relationships between the State and the market in terms of equity, and discursive tensions between equity and efficiency (and possible shifts therein) in OECD HE discourse.

### ***The State***

Through a neoliberal market lens, there is greater emphasis on the State’s role in ensuring the market is free from encumbrances. Peters (2011, p. 2) calls this “the night watchman state.” This includes protecting private property and maintaining order, but also providing resources to industry so it can supply goods and services and supporting the information flows to ensure market signals are propagated. The State has a large role in economic, social and educational matters, but a less direct role than it might in a Keynesian lens. It organizes and catalyzes to ensure smooth and optimized production of goods and services. The shift from Keynesian to neoliberal States amounted to a

shift from being a purveyor of collective well-being, equality and general social welfare to an information conduit who was responsible for making sure that entrepreneurs and consumers were informed of their options in the market place; a

manager or auditor who looked to see if established economic goals were being met and accountability mandates were being followed and an agent who would establish a market where none existed before. (Ward, 2012, p. 17)

As described above, even strongly neoliberal states tend to allow a role for the State in equity and in addressing market failure. Some scholars are concerned about the degree of this involvement, however. Hall (2011, p. 706), for instance, argues that neoliberals believe that the State must not “take as its objective the amelioration of capitalism’s propensity to create inequity.” It can at least be said that a neoliberal philosophy is less likely to engage direct State solutions to inequity than a Keynesian paradigm.

### **2.4.3 Scholarly Critique of Neoliberal Education Policy**

Scholte (2005, p. 24) contends that neoliberalism has “tended to neglect other important issues and to produce or exacerbate a number of cultural, ecological, economic, political and social harms.” Marginson (1997; 2004) argued that the neoliberal approach is associated with a reduction in interventions aimed at social equity and less vigour in checks and balances to mitigate the negative impacts of competitive measures. He also explains that steeper hierarchies in HEIs results in access and funding differentiation that perpetuates existing inequity. Other scholarly critique of neoliberal education policy often involves themes of Foucauldian governmentality, community, industrial utilitarianism, ideological identity construction, democracy and lived experiences. A sample is presented here.

Michael Peters’ recent (2011) history and critique of the effects of neoliberal thought on education describes it as a moral project of Foucauldian governmentality<sup>26</sup> creating identities of

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<sup>26</sup> In short, governmentality refers to the ways in which governments produce the types of citizens that are most appropriate to its policies and governs their behaviour through strategies of social control. See (Foucault, 1980).

complacent, responsabilized learners and ideological consensus. He argues neoliberal ideologues blame the welfare state for creating “young illiterates, juvenile delinquents, alcoholics, substance abusers, school truants, ‘dysfunctional families’ and drug addicts” (p. 7). In these and the universalist construction of *homo economicus*<sup>27</sup> it ignores social and political structures involved in social problems and severely limits the solutions made visible. Problems and solutions reside only in individuals.

Peters (2011) argues that ideas of community and social aspects of a life well lived are muted by a view of people as selfish interest-advancing individuals. He laments a focus on competition and compares it to a more cooperative ethic in welfare liberalism where no one group advances at the expense of another. Neoliberal *liberty*, he explains, is freedom to advance your self-interests. The effect on others is not highly relevant. This extends to how HEIs treat knowledge. Where once HEIs were places of open debate among autonomous professionals advancing knowledge cooperatively, they are now, says Peters, hierarchical spaces to measure and compare outputs advancing knowledge competitively. He calls for us to rethink education as “the basis of an open society” and as a “welfare right” (p. 6).

An earlier work with Mark Olssen (Olssen & Peters, 2005) more specifically linked the KBE concept to HE through neoliberalism. The authors explain that the neoliberal view of the KBE raises the importance of HE as “the new star ship” (p. 313) in economic policy. HEIs are seen to drive the economy through production optimization and therefore are constructed as being in need of partnering with business and industry. The firm, not the individual, is centralized in developing HE direction. This, they argue, conflicts with traditional goals of disinterested inquiry and free academic thought, and they call for a broader purview of knowledge and HE. They say the role of the state was reduced to an accounting manager and

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<sup>27</sup> The understanding of humans as rational self-interested economic beings. See (Persky, 1995).

implicated in construction of “end goals of freedom, choice, consumer sovereignty, competition and individual incentive” (p. 315). They question competition as the source of productivity, innovation, quality, diversity, responsiveness and efficiency. They predicted further reductions in public provision of HE and increasing struggles over the meaning and value of knowledge.

Hill (2010) focused on the ideological work done by HE in a neoliberal climate. He complained neoliberal education threatens critical thinking and produces “passive worker/citizens with just enough skills to render themselves useful to the demands of capital” (p. 1). What is important to a neoliberal doctrine is not the production of an informed, engaged and questioning citizenry, but the provision of human resources that drive production. Similarly, Walker (2009) problematized the construction of the worthy citizen in OECD LLL discourse as aligned with the protestant work ethic. Workers are, Hill contends, indoctrinated into thinking there is no alternative<sup>28</sup> to neoliberalism and a bifurcation of wealth is normalized. “Competitive individualism with gross inequalities is ‘only natural’” (p.6). He describes neoliberalism’s promotion of an understanding of social relations where everything can be bought and sold and where “exchange value is value...exercising consumer choice is the next best thing to freedom” (p. 722).

Relatedly, Giroux (2011) focused on the importance of HE for democracy. He explained that as centres for critical thought, HEIs are vital to the public sphere. This vocation is threatened under neoliberalism as the HEI becomes “a marketing machine essential to the production of neoliberal subjects” (§ 4). He opines that neoliberal perspectives exhibit disdain for critical thought, undervalue the humanities, and reject science, evidence and informed argument in favour of dogma. “There is no time to talk about advancing social justice, addressing social

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<sup>28</sup> The concept of “there is no alternative” is so popular in the literature that the abbreviation “TINA” has developed.

problems, promoting critical thinking, cultivating social responsibility, or engaging non-commodified values that might challenge the neoliberal world view” (¶ 5). An earlier article with S.S. Giroux (2009) focused on hegemony claiming students are trained in the values of neoliberalism and market fundamentalism. It charges that neoliberalism creates “shocking levels of inequity” (p. 1) and calls for a transformation in culture and consciousness in response. Similarly, Lynch (2006, p. 11) contends that HE is the “lynchpin of civil society, laying the intellectual foundations for cultural, political, affective, ethical and social life” and reports that neoliberal HE policy weakens the position of the humanities, arts and social sciences that are not critical to goods and service production, and produces disincentives to being a public intellectual sharing knowledge in pursuit of the greater public good.

Vidovich and Currie (2011) reported on neoliberal HE governance in Australia between 1996 and 2007. They describe changes in governing bodies including a reduction in student representation in favour of industry and experts in commercial and economic affairs and also report a new requirement that the majority of board members be external to the university. It occurs to me that a shift from student to industry participation aligns with a shift from demand to supply. Industry supplies the goods and services to the market and HE supplies industry. The student is the locus of the demand both for those goods and services and for HE. Vidovich and Currie explain these changes in terms of a culture of mistrust across the sector and between agents. I suggest it might also reflect a shift in focus toward the agents of production/supply.

Brown, Hesketh and Williams (2002) focused on the lived experiences of workers in a neoliberal KBE lens. They complained that a move from discourses of employment to neoliberal

discourses of employability<sup>29</sup> and entrepreneurship shifts responsibility from the State and industry to workers. This responsibility becomes a moral imperative driving workers to continually retrain and accept an insecure, competitive labour market. The reader is reminded that when the focus is on optimizing production/supply of goods and services, the skills of the workforce (encoded as ‘employability’) is more likely to be a focus in discourse than is ensuring there is demand for the graduates of HE (i.e. an ‘un/employment’ discourse). Employability is *one* factor of many affecting employment of an individual. The authors say employment is demand driven, absolute and mainly fixed by the job-market, not by capabilities of persons. Employability is relative. But “virtually all policy statements” ignore demand and relative aspects of the job-market (p. 9). This discursive shift from employment to employability represents a significantly different orientation. Some scholars argue insufficient demand for highly educated labour making employability a decreasing factor in employment (Livingstone, 1999; 2004; Brown & Lauder, 2003). As early as the 1960s, economists started to talk about an over-supply of HE graduates (Rubenson, 2008). Brown and Lauder (p. 29) explain that people enter the workforce today with lower real-income and lower status than a generation ago and predict that with greater competition in HEIs, middle-class children will fail to access universities and “will be left to fight over the scraps.”

Ross and Gibson (2007) contend that neoliberalism creates massive inequity. They claim that for the working class, wages, savings and pensions are declining, debt is increasing and the wealth gap is spreading. They claim “public education is under attack in North America and across the globe as a result of neoliberal government policies” (p. 4). They cite British Columbia as an example describing evidence of a substantial provincial boom between 2002 and 2007

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<sup>29</sup> Note that a discourse focused on employability centralizes the skills of the worker whereas a discourse on employment focuses on the availability and suitability of jobs. These authors report employability as a strong theme in the neoliberal discourse and minimal concern for employment.

coincident with the “devastation” (p. 5) of schools and increases in tuition of 80% in universities and 100% in colleges.

With all this critique, some scholars contend that neoliberalism is losing its dominant status. Giroux and Giroux (2009, p. 1) say that the social state is “being recalled from exile.” Peters (2011) declared the 2008 American financial system crisis announced the end of market fundamentalism: “It is no longer fashionable to hold that the market can provide for the public good. The ideology had begun to unravel” (p. 2). The section that follows presents some of the scholarly literature addressing if and in what ways a shift away from neoliberal perspectives is underway.

## **2.5 After Neoliberalism?**

### **2.5.1 Conceptualizing Changing Paradigms**

Saul (2005) argued that neoliberal globalism<sup>30</sup> has been losing its dominant position since about 1995. Economic crises around 2007 made economists skeptical about free-market consensus. Even those who previously criticized Keynes called for State intervention in markets and social measures more related to a social liberalism than to a free-market neoliberal agenda (Galbraith, 2008; Krugman, 2008; Reich, 2008; Stiglitz, 2010). “The sudden resurgence of Keynesian policy is a stunning reversal of the orthodoxy of the past several decades” (Giles, 2008, p. 1). Neoliberal economic policy has “been deservedly put on the defensive as it fails to deal with looming human and ecological problems” (Albritton, Jessop, & Westra, 2010, p. xv). Macdonald and Ruckert (2009, p. 2) contend that after 20 years of hegemony “various cracks have recently surfaced in the neoliberal edifice.” They argue that large portions of the world feel

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<sup>30</sup> Saul described globalism as viewing the globe as a sphere of, and for, political influence (as opposed to a nationalist vision). He argued that citizens are starting to reassert national interests and contexts.

excluded in the neoliberal world and there is a new search for progressive alternatives. Even a foundational OECD document admits, “the current economic paradigm is being called into question as a result of the global economic crisis” (Eco10e)<sup>31</sup>. The paragraphs that follow provide examples of scholarly work exploring evidence of such shifts.

Hall (2011, p. 705) reports the “extraordinary political situation” in the UK under the *New Labour, Third Way*<sup>32</sup> policies of Tony Blair and asks if this represents a decline in neoliberal dominance. Although he describes minimum wage legislation, reduced medical wait times, raised health targets, reduced child poverty and efforts toward equal pay and human rights legislation, he reports other strong neoliberal characteristics. These include foci on market strategies, competition, entrepreneurial subjects, increased surveillance, and efforts to make labour more flexible. He documents a rise in proportion of part-time jobs, reduced pensions, reduced collective bargaining, and the construction of a moral identity of the individual as a taxpayer and consumer. Each of these, I suggest, supports the production of goods and services, and not the demand for them. He reports no reference in the discourse to citizens who may need the public service. What is most striking, he explains, is the “turn to social discipline and personal responsibility: its moralistically driven legislative zeal” (p. 714). He explains that the discourse tasks the market with providing the total explanation of conditions of our existence and as such, does not represent a shift away from neoliberalism but rather a “maturing of the neoliberal project” (p. 718).

The *extraordinary situation* described by Hall involves efforts to supply the market (i.e. flexible labour) and a perspective on markets as total explanation of social conditions, which

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<sup>31</sup> The reader is reminded of the referencing short-cut described in Appendix A

<sup>32</sup> The Third Way is the name of a trend in economic and social policy developing in some countries after a period of neoliberalism. It was an attempt to find a political - economic middle ground between right wing economic policy and left wing social policy. It is associated with politicians such as Tony Blair in the UK and Bill Clinton in the USA.



reflect strong neoliberal character as described by the description of the neoliberal model provided in Section 2.4.2 *A Description*. It is not, however, laissez-faire capitalism. It allows for non-trivial State involvement in the social (i.e. raised health targets) and a direct hand in labour-market supply/demand (i.e. minimum wages). The State is also involved in arms-length market influence through construction of moral identities (i.e. responsible taxpayer) and through surveillance. In these ways this approach might be seen as a negotiation between State and market approaches to economic and social problems.

Other authors looked at such cases of the *maturing of neoliberalism* asking if it heralds a shift toward a new paradigm. Craig and Porter (2003) coined *inclusive liberalism* to reflect a blending of neoliberal economic policy with increased concern for market failures and efforts to *include* those who were previously excluded in the neoliberal model. This liberalism aligns with *Third Way*<sup>33</sup> (Giddens, 1999) political parties and the policies of Clinton (USA), Blair (UK) and Clark (New Zealand).

Craig and Porter call on Polyani (1944; 2001) explaining that societies and markets do not move in tandem. Policy planning must account for dis-embedding and re-embedding of market/social relations. While re-embedding relations, core tenets of liberalism are retained while allowing State response to other social demands. Inclusive liberalism activates people's capacities so the excluded can be included productively in the market. It works toward inclusion, but is heavily circumscribed by liberal governance and economic frames. It is still focused largely on optimizing productive capacity and supplying the labour market.

Mahon and McBride (2008) predicted a strategic trend toward inclusive liberalism. As people become disenfranchised through neoliberalism, its proponents seek to re-embed it through social policy. To use Jessop's (2002) term, neoliberal policy must be *flanked* to protect it. It does

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<sup>33</sup> See previous footnote.

not undo neoliberalism, but re-embeds its values through social policy. Activating capacities reinforces worker responsibility and faith in market forces. Security for the excluded comes as they join the free, supply-driven market mentality. Contemporary liberalism is bolstered “decoratively” by the social to legitimate and secure it (Porter & Craig, 2004, p. 388).

Mahon sees inclusive liberalism slightly differently. She argues that inclusive liberalism “also incorporates elements of social liberalism” (forthcoming). It is liberal, emphasizing individuals, rational choice, and a market relatively free from intrusion. But its inclusion does not necessarily promote neoliberal assumptions or work specifically to enhance the supply of goods and services. A social democratic version, still wedded to market development, is also concerned about social protection, good jobs, equity and citizenship for their own sake.

In summary, inclusive liberalism does not *un-do* liberalism’s emphasis on market solutions in many cases, or its focus on individual responsibility and private investment for economic return. It does, however, offer a more active role for government (perhaps even in fiscal policy) and begins to reconsider social liberalism, offering a larger role for governments in social policy. The nature of that role might be:

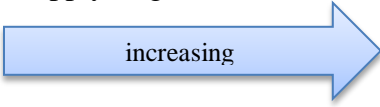

- a) To support social policy in order to enhance markets’ performance (e.g. offer child care programs so mothers can return to the labour pool); or
- b) To support social policy for its own sake (e.g. offer improved early childhood education even to parents already in or not planning to enter the labour force).

One might critique the former as *a pig in lipstick*<sup>34</sup>—the same old neoliberalism dressed up to be more acceptable. Others consider it an evolution of neoliberal doctrine to account for market failure. Additionally, one might consider such shifts as an attempt to negotiate the tensions

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<sup>34</sup> I have no source to which to attribute this colloquialism. However, it, and similar variants are used to denote public relations propaganda (or “spin”) repackaging old politics as new. For instance, see Clarke, V. (2006). *Lipstick on a pig: Winning in the no-spin era by someone who knows the game*. Simon and Schuster.

between, and create a new balance in the roles of the market and State. In any case, this study refers to that former variety of inclusive liberalism as inclusive neo-liberalism because it is primarily supportive of neoliberal tenets targeting the supply of goods and services and positions social policy as indirect economic policy. Concern for social issues independent of their market effects and attribution of the State's role in its support suggest that form be labeled inclusive social-liberalism. A summary of these varieties of liberalism is included in Table 1. The reader is reminded that there are no clear or undisputed edges to be drawn between these forms of liberalism. The models I call on and describe should be considered as descriptions of tendencies with hazy borders.

	<b>Keynesianism</b>	<b>Neoliberalism</b>	<b>Inclusive (neo)Liberalism</b>	<b>Inclusive (social)Liberalism</b>
<b>Role of Gov't in Economic policy</b>	Active; control demand for goods/services; control interest rates and prices	Less active Market sets supply of goods /services via price signals 		
<b>Role of Gov't in social policy</b>	Active; large role in financing; related to social liberalism and the welfare state	Minimized; small role in financing	Only where it supports the market. Minimal financing	Active; social policy for other-than-economic reasons; options for more financing
<b>Area to stimulate</b>	Demand for goods/services	Supply of goods/services 		

**Table 1: Varieties of Liberalism**

The concepts of inclusive neo-liberalism and inclusive social-liberalism may be useful in the present study because they allow us to document if, to what degree, and in what ways social considerations are manifest in the OECD HE discourse. When inclusion of the social is presented as supportive of markets and productive capacity, a more neoliberal character is reported. Where social and humanistic goals are reported that have little direct effect on the market and productive capacity, there is more social liberal character. These concepts may be useful in

helping the present study describe how social and economic issues are negotiated and weighed in the discourse.

Walker (2011) examined New Zealand adult literacy policy discourse as it evolved over a change from a National to Labour government at the turn of the century. She reported increased mention of social purposes of literacy but prioritisation of economically-focused adult literacy programs. She concluded that the form of inclusive liberalism reflected there represented attempts to blend paradoxical discourses more than it represented a substantial mediation or fair compromise between opposing perspectives. In the work, she also documented an inclusive liberal shift in OECD adult literacy policy discourse beginning with *Lifelong Learning for All* (1996-LLL) and continuing through several other publications (2002-RHC; 2003-BR; 2005-PAL). These documents, Walker explained, celebrate the role of education in strengthening democracy, increasing civic participation, facilitating intercultural understanding, reduced risk of smoking, better well-being, and reduced crime. This illustrates the humanistic history of education discourse as well as the complex nature of OECD education discourse.

Rubenson (2006) chronicled shifts in lifelong learning (LLL) discourse over time describing a move from a humanistic to a strongly economistic nature as neoliberalism became dominant. The latter discourse viewed LLL narrowly as a factor of production envisioning its optimization by free market forces (Cruikshanks, 2008; Rizvi, 2007). It set HE and individuals as responsible for socio-economic conditions and focused on employability and productivity rather than employment through job creation or personal growth (Bagnall, 2000; Barr & Griffiths, 2007; Bastalich, 2010; Usher & Edwards, 2007). Rubenson argued that after the turn of the century the LLL discourse softened giving more attention to equity, particularly for the marginalized. In considering if this constituted an inclusive liberalism shift, Rubenson (2008)

reminds us of the educational establishment's historical interest in inclusivity and equity. Under neoliberalism, employability became *terms for* inclusion and equity. He argues that although issues of equity and inclusion are central to the discourse, they are framed firmly in neoliberal ideology. Specifically, interventions that address inequalities or barriers are considered primarily in relation to how they bolster the notion of the economically productive subject. Thus, one might consider that discourse to reflect an inclusive neoliberal perspective.

### **2.5.2 Scholarly Literature on Shifting Perspectives at OECD**

OECD is embedded inside complex social and political contexts and within circulating and varied discourses in perpetual discursive struggle about economic, social and political relations. OECD discourse is affected by those contexts and discourses and will reflect them in some way. OECD documents might justly reflect the debates and tensions in the field, and they may filter for particular assumptions and values. This study examines OECD HE discourse and reports the specific ways in which it reflects neoliberal and other-than-neoliberal paradigms. Specifically, this study details the ways in which assumptions and values in major OECD HE projects have shifted in the last two decades understood against shifts in the broader political economic discourses. This section presents other studies that report shifting OECD discourse in other policy fields so that the current study can be situated within the existing research. Reflection on the research suggests that while there are shifts in OECD discourse in some policy fields away from neoliberalism, neoliberal doctrine remains firmly entrenched in other fields.

One case involves several OECD publications: the *Jobs Study* (1994-JS), *Jobs Strategy* (1996-JS) and the subsequent revised *Jobs Strategy* (2006-JS). The first of these projects spoke of balancing flexibility of labour with security of income. The second put forth specific strategies, ostensibly based on the first study, but spoke only of how to increase the flexibility of

labour (Noaksson, 2010). Labour ministers criticized the *Strategy* for a lack of focus on quality of employment, welfare support and inclusivity (OECD, 2003-TMBJ). Furthermore, Armingeon and Beyeler (2004) argued that recommendations in the *Strategy* failed to adequately account for diverse national contexts, histories and values, instead promoting solutions that were more like *one-size-fits-all* rather than acknowledging that different approaches might be appropriate in different countries. Additionally, several countries ignored recommendations in the *Strategy* yet still showed economic success. Also see McBride, McNutt and Williams (2008). These observations and criticisms led to the development of a revised *Strategy* (2006). It reflected a social-liberal shift including: a) generous welfare benefits; b) active labour market practices<sup>vii</sup>; c) employment protection laws; d) moderate minimum wages; and e) strong unions. Noaksson (2010) and McBride, McNutt and Williams (2008) contend that even the 2006 version remains strongly rooted in neoliberal economics. Mahon (2011) explains that the body of the 2006 report is nuanced; giving equity and employment equal weight. The conclusions and executive summaries, however, tend to be highly neoliberal. These authors suggest that inclusion is superficial and the *Strategy* represents rollout neoliberalism more than a substantial shift toward inclusive liberalism.

In 2008, Mahon argued that OECD family policy represented an inclusive liberal perspective. Individuals and employment were kept central but in terms of *capacity*, not solely individual responsibility. Whereas a neoliberal mantra would be: “You are responsible for your own and the nation’s good to participate fully in the labour market.” The inclusive liberal perspective in this discourse was: “Gain opportunity by developing your capabilities. The State has a role and a stake in investing in this.” There was a more obvious attempt to balance State, market and individual roles and responsibilities, including the responsibility for financing.

Neoliberal policy is more likely to assume individuals are unwilling to work and the State has a role pushing them into the job market. Conversely, inclusive liberal policy assumes barriers keep people from working and tasks the State with removing obstacles. Whereas neoliberalism would cut parental leave benefits, inclusive liberalism here suggests better child care<sup>viii</sup> (Mahon, 2012). She concluded that OECD family policy at the time was inclusive liberal in character. I would characterize it as inclusive neo-liberalism because its social agenda is largely tied to supplying the market with a capable labour pool, although it seems that recognition of barriers is a shift away from a view that individuals are totally responsible for their situations.

In a more recent analysis of OECD's department of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs (DELSA) discourse, Mahon (forthcoming) highlights a growing concern with social issues in their own right, and not just as mechanisms for labour optimization. According to Mahon, the final *Babies and Bosses* report (2007-BaB) suggests child development no longer take a secondary place to parental employment as in prior reports. It reflects a rising concern for gender equity apart from labour flexibility. It calls for regulatory standards to improve the quality of child care provision, fully gender-shared parental leave, and pro rata pay/benefits for part-time work. Mahon also reports that the *Starting Strong* program and network (OECD, n.d.11) focuses on the developing child in the present, not just as future human capital. *Doing Better By Children* (2009-DBBC), she reports, also centralized well-being of children in the present. Based on these descriptions, I suggest that these documents reflect inclusive social-liberal character and an attempt to find a balance between State and market roles and responsibilities.

In another OECD field, Pal (2008) reports a move toward inclusive liberalism in public sector reform. OECD was an early promoter of NPM, but recently embraced a broader discourse

emphasizing: a) public sector goals that are unachievable by the pursuit of efficiency; b) culture as important in complex government ecology; and c) the importance of domestic context.

Ruckert (2008) reports a *Post-Neoliberal* shift in OECD *Development Assistance Committee* discourse explaining that after its market-oriented policies of the 1980s and 1990s, it is now helping create a new regime in this field, even in persistently neoliberal states.

Williams (2008) argues, however, that there is no similar shift in the field of international investment. He describes OECD dogmatically promoting neoliberal ideology and failing to respond to or engage with alternative perspectives. Bradford (2008) reports that OECD's *Territorial Development and Policy Committee* discourse is simply neoliberalism *flanked* by community development. It tasks governments not with social programs to aid the marginalized or reduce inequity *per se*, but with providing physical and soft infra-structure (i.e. human capital) required for competition in a KBE. It expects dynamic cities to create inequity and segregation but offers no solutions other than market fundamentalism. I suggest that what he calls *innovative liberalism* is not a substantively new paradigm but rather an operationalization of neoliberal doctrine that assumes an expanded market will include the poor.

## **2.6 Niche of the Dissertation and Framework for Analysis**

The purpose of this chapter was to present the theoretical lenses through which data in this study has been interpreted and to situate the study in the scholarly literature. It began by describing the political economy and discourse as complex, dynamic and mutually influencing. It presented a historical and theoretical description of shifting political economy from classic liberalism through Keynesianism and the Welfare State and to neoliberalism and then, potentially, toward a new form of liberalism that some have called *inclusive liberalism*. The goals may or may not be different in a political economic shift, but the mechanisms to achieve



those goals and the values and assumptions upon which those mechanisms are built differ. This chapter described various assumptions and mechanisms associated with these various liberal doctrines and detailed how knowledge, higher education, the individual, equity and the State tend to be conceived of from each perspective. It described how each perspective weighted supply/demand, equity/efficiency, public/private and market/social relations.

Scholarly critique of neoliberal doctrine was presented that informs critical discussions of OECD HE documents in the present study and that may have helped precipitate a shift in the political economy away from a neoliberal paradigm. Literature conceptualizing if and in what ways there has been a shift in political economic paradigms in the last few decades illustrates the changes against which potential changes in the OECD discourse can be understood. Research has reported shifts in OECD discourse away from neoliberalism and toward a more inclusive liberalism in some social policy fields, but not in others.

HE is uniquely positioned in the changing political economy. It has two opposing pressures that may influence if, how, and to what degree its OECD discourse shifts. On the one hand, the humanistic traditions of education may support a shift toward a more socially inspired discourse. On the other, HE has been increasingly tied to economic strategies of production that may buffer it to a degree from such shifts. The present study contributes the special case of OECD HE discourse to the literature.

The model of neoliberalism described in Section 2.4.2 *A Description* and the descriptions of Keynesianism and inclusive liberalism in Sections 2.3 and 2.5 are the primary tools applied in the analysis of the HE discourse. With these descriptions we can consider the specific ways in which OECD HE projects reflect neo-liberal (and other) values and assumptions and we can explore how tensions between supply/demand, equity/efficiency, public/private and

market/social relations are addressed and balanced. In parallel with the other studies reported in this chapter, this dissertation is positioned to describe if, to what degree, and in what ways, OECD HE discourse is shifting from a neoliberal paradigm.

If OECD documents *rollout* neoliberalism, there will be evidence of a deepening or expanding of market relations and production/supply foci. These may include development of or increased emphasis on market solutions; a growing focus on private benefits, responsibilities and provision; or increased efforts and strategies to optimize the supply of goods and services. Knowledge would be understood mostly as the key to economic growth, created for the rapidly changing market and as a private commodity for investment. HE and its institutions would tend to be positioned as market supply machines, providing innovation and productive labour. It would emphasize private investment goals through partnerships with industry, funding by private sources and governance through market-mechanisms such as new public management (NPM). It would tend to construct individuals largely as isolate rational consumers pursuing their interests disembedded from social and cultural contexts; as responsible for their own success; and as having a duty to the national economy. Equity would be offered by the free market as a product of effort and ability alone. The State would be described as ineffective at influencing social and economic outcomes, but its role in smoothing market responses by promoting information flows and the supply of resources (i.e. human) to meet market needs would be developed.

*Flanking* refers to the maintenance or entrenching of neoliberal doctrine by ameliorating its negative impacts through non market solutions. If the documents flank neoliberalism, there will be evidence of many of the same tendencies as described above, but also non-market (perhaps State led) initiatives to bolster market-mechanisms or neoliberal assumptions. The ultimate effect would still be a strengthening of market relations and mechanisms and an emphasis on

productive capacity. An example might be inclusive neo-liberal proposals that could reify the notion of the individual as responsible to themselves and to the economy through providing better access to and terms for student loans.

*Countervailing* refers to the inclusion of assumptions that oppose those of neoliberalism. In most general terms, this could include recommendations for solutions that do not follow a market-mechanism and yet still are not supportive of neoliberal market emphases or production/supply centred objectives. An example might include support for knowledge development and education in fields that are less directly linked to economic growth (e.g. philosophy) or recommendations that emphasize the public and non-economic value of education, focusing on humanistic goals and the State's role in directing and funding HE. These might include inclusive social-liberal perspectives and might illustrate ways in which supply/demand, State/market, public/private, equity/efficiency can be balanced. Political economy is ever involved in a complex discursive struggle for paradigmatic dominance. The discourse products under review in this study have the opportunity to reflect that struggle and have an opportunity to illustrate how competing tensions can be balanced and dominant paradigms can be de-stabilized. This study can look for evidence of these struggles and countervailing of neoliberal hegemony. However, it is important to realize that this study focuses only on one area of policy discourse: HE. It therefore has limited capacity to identify forms of inclusive liberalism since it does not engage with discourse in other social fields.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

This dissertation explores assumptions, constructions and values embedded in OECD discourse. It assumes a relationship between discourse and politics. Discourse is an element of social life dialectically related to other elements of social life. It affects the social and is affected by it. Fairclough (2003) reminds us to think of discourse as “...an element of social life which is closely interconnected with other elements” (p. 3). A critical analysis of discourse investigates ideologies and assumptions in discourse that have an effect on power distribution, privilege and marginalization.

This chapter begins describing the theoretical foundations of discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA) specifically, which links discourse to the political. It then describes the methods undertaken to answer the research questions.

### 3.1 Clarifying Terms

In this dissertation I have attempted to be consistent with Fairclough’s (2003, 2006) use of the term *discourse*. He most often refers to discourse broadly: language and all ways of communicating and representing. Text, conversation, gesturing, facial expressions and dance, are all discourse. Bloor and Bloor (2007) similarly envision discourse as “symbolic human interaction in its many forms, whether directly through spoken or written language or via gesture, pictures, diagrams, films, or music” (p. 1-2).

Fairclough also acknowledges a more specific sense of the term associated with the definite article. In this form it refers to specific ways the world is being represented within a limited area of interest. This use also includes all of the texts, speeches, programming (general forms of discourse) associated with that vision. Examples include *the neoliberal economic discourse*, or *the skills-agenda discourse*.

*Text* is a product of discourse. Hodge and Kress (1988) say that “text is only a trace of discourses, frozen and preserved, more or less reliable or misleading. Yet discourse disappears too rapidly, surrounding a flow of texts” (p. 12). *Text* can include non-print discursual events such as speech and music. This dissertation is interested in print policy documents. Therefore, the use of *text* within connotes a print language product.

## **3.2 Theoretical Foundations of Discourse Analysis**

### **3.2.1 Texts are Political**

*Politics is about how to distribute social goods in a society: who gets what in terms of money, status, power and acceptance on a variety of different terms, all social goods. Since, when we use language, social goods and their distribution are always at stake, language is always ‘political’ in a deep sense. (Gee, 2011, p. 7)*

This research assumes the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckman, 1967) and a relationship of construction between OECD texts and socio-political reality. This relationship is dialectical: the social world influences policy documents; and policy documents influence the social world. The tool through which these influences happen is language.

...language is a key way we humans make and break our world, our institutions, and our relationships through how we deal with social goods. Thus, discourse analysis can illuminate problems and controversies in the world. It can illuminate issues about the distribution of social goods, who gets helped, and who gets harmed. (Gee, 2011, p. 9-10)

Critical discourse analysis combines the work of linguistic and social theorists to explore the construction of socio-political reality.

Gee (2011) describes the functions of language as “saying, doing, and being” (p. 2). Language allows us to inform each other, cause effects on reality, and enact identities. There are “things we can build in the world by speaking words that accomplish actions and enact

identities” (ibid, p. 16). He specifies seven “building tasks” of language. When we speak we always (and simultaneously) build:

1. Significance: We impart a degree of import.
2. Practices: We are recognized as engaging in certain practices (e.g. a formal meeting).
3. Identities: We enact our own identity (e.g. I am the expert), and ascribe identities to others.
4. Relationships: We establish and reify types of relationships. (e.g. authoritarian, intimate)
5. Politics: We convey our perspective on the distribution of social goods.
6. Connections: We can connect different things as mutually relevant or keep separate.
7. Sign Systems and Knowledge: We can privilege certain sign systems and understandings.

Gee (2011) suggests a moral role for the discourse analyst:

The fact that people have differential access to different identities and practices, connected to different sorts of status and social goods, is a root source of inequity in society. Intervening in such matters can be a contribution to social justice. Since different identities and activities are enacted in and through language, the study of language is integrally connected to matters of equity and justice. (p. 30)

### **3.2.2 Critical Analysis**

There is no such thing as an objective analysis of text. Analysis is selective and inspired by our motivations. Critical discourse analysis is decidedly critical: it seeks to question social life in moral and political terms. The CDA that Fairclough and others describe is therefore *critical* in a post-modern sense. CDA sees discourse as “a dynamic and changing force that is constantly influencing and re-constructing social practices and values” (Bloor & Bloor, 2007, p. 12). It

addresses macro issues of international importance and micro issues concerning individuals. The goals of a critical discourse analyst are to “...speak to and, perhaps, intervene in, social or political issues, problems, and controversies in the world” (Gee, 2011, p. 9). All discourse analysis needs to be critical because language itself is always political (Gee, 2011, Van Dijk, 2008a).

Bloor and Bloor (2007) propose the following as the main objectives of CDA:

- To analyse discourse practices that reflect or construct social problems;
- To investigate how ideologies can become frozen in language and find ways to break the ice;
- To increase awareness of how to apply these objectives to specific cases of injustice, prejudice, and misuse of power;
- To demonstrate the significance of language in the social relations of power; to investigate how meaning is created in context; to investigate the role of speaker/writer purpose and authorial stance in the construction of discourse. (p. 12-13)

This dissertation was partly motivated by a concern that the neoliberal ideology may have constructed an understanding of economic and educational reality that may create social and economic disadvantage for some worker/learners, and that this construction may have become *frozen* as an unquestioned assumption. A CDA study was undertaken to better understand and make explicit the degree and character of the neoliberal paradigm inherent in the discourse and to consider how it may be implicated in inequity.

### **3.2.3 Multi-disciplinary Theoretical Foundations**

Van Dijk (2000; 2008a; 2008b) argues that CDA does not describe a *method* but represents much broader methodologies and interests. He refers to it as a cross-disciplinary “domain of scholarly practice” (2008a, p. 2) that not only involves diverse methodologies, but diverse

theoretical perspectives. It “deals with complex social problems, for which it needs to apply or to develop complex theories and methods from several disciplines” (ibid, p. 7).

What we know about the world is contingent and partial. Therefore, we must acknowledge that text analysis is also contingent and partial. Researchers call upon the foundations most relevant to their specific cases. A description of the theoretical foundations of CDA, therefore, is necessarily partial and selective. CDA is interested in the relationships between language and the social world. It has core foundations in both linguistic and social theories. Below, I highlight some key theories in both realms that influence CDA and are relevant to this dissertation.

### **Social Semiotics and Systemic Functional Linguistics – Words as Potential Meaning**

Semiotics is the study of signs, and semiosis is the relationship between signs and meaning. Simply, a sign is something that represents something to someone. It is a *packet* of communication. A word, sound or gesture are all signs. Language, put simply, is a system of signs.

If a text is to have effects, the reader must make meaning from the text. Van Dijk (2008a) puts it this way: “Cognition is the interface between discourse and society” (p. ix).



**Figure 1: Interpretation of Texts**

“Meaning is created when a sign occurs in a specific context” (Bloor & Bloor. 2007, p. 15). Words themselves do not intrinsically carry meaning. A reader interprets meaning upon encountering a word. Interpretation is influenced by complex (and often subconscious) considerations of dynamic contexts. Words have “meaning potential” unfolding in consideration



of broad social contexts (Halliday, 1978). “Context and language are inextricably bound together in the production of meaning” (Bloor & Bloor, 2007, p. 26). Context allows the reader to select from various *dictionary* definitions (denotations) and experience a more emotionally charged meaning which is personal and idiosyncratic (connotation). By understanding the readers’ contexts, or by establishing contexts within the text, an author can elicit an emotionally charged response through the choice of words.

Bloor and Bloor (2007) explain that “connotation becomes important when we consider the lexical choices made by speakers and writers, not the least because it is a major factor in manipulating opinion” (p. 129). Put another way, *utterance-type* meanings represent the range of meanings an utterance can have, and *utterance-token* meanings which Gee (2011) calls “situated meaning” (p. 63) represent a more specific, interpreted meaning. CDA can investigate relationships between form and function of an utterance at the level of its situated meaning. Lexical choices can manipulate context, creating context through implication, and underscoring relevant pre-existing contexts. In other words, by examining author choices in words, grammatical form, and other textual features, one can explore the stimulation of emotional and personal meaning.

Halliday (1978) coined the term *Social Semiotics* and developed Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as a model of grammar that “stresses the importance of social context...in the production and development of language” (Bloor & Bloor, 2007, p. 2). SFL is “a valuable resource for critical discourse analysis” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 5). Halliday (1978) explains that language and society should not be seen as separate: the functions of language are social. Language has three *metafunctions*:

- a) interpersonal (facilitating social interactions),

b) ideational (representing ideas about the world), and

c) textual (connecting ideas about the world to make them relevant to each other).

He describes language as a “discrete network of options” (p. 113) with socio-political implications. Each utterance reflects choice from those options. SFL connects the social functions of language choice, and the contexts influencing those choices.

A sign is interpreted by a reader into a meaning. Each of these elements exists within and is influenced by contexts. Social effects of texts result from meanings made. CDA is interested in exploring the nature of the meanings made and the process of making (and influencing) meaning in texts. Thus, it carefully examines the choices and characteristics in texts and relates them to what is known about the contexts, including the contexts created by the texts themselves.

The relationships between signs, meanings and contexts are complex. Contexts are complex and dynamic. They exist in a dialectical relationship concurrently with the meaning-making that they influence. Each utterance alters the context in which it functions *as* it functions. “The context of a discourse event changes imperceptibly with every contribution” (Bloor & Bloor, 2007, p. 27). CDA must be cognizant not only of the contexts that affect discourse, but also (and some may argue, more importantly) that discourse affects context. Those altered contexts will be used to interpret the current text and other texts in the future.

This dissertation involves itself specifically with the identification and construction of contexts and the potential effects on interpretation of meaning. This is further developed in Section 3.4.4 *Contexting*.

### **Ideology and Hegemony**

*Do you see it's impossible to think of language without thinking of ideology and power.* (Freire, 1996, 4.17 minutes)

According to Hodge (2011, ¶6), ideology “plays a key role in semiotics oriented to social, political life” and therefore, an important role in CDA. The term *ideology* has varied contemporary meanings. For the purposes of CDA “we can gloss ideology as a set of beliefs or attitudes shared by members of a particular social group” (Bloor & Bloor, 2007, p. 10). Gramsci (1971) used the concept of hegemony to explain how the ruling class controls the working class through consent. Ideologies that support ruling class interests are positioned as universal and inevitable. The ruling class world view is seen as *common sense*. CDA examines world views being reproduced by discourse and world views that are marginalized or excluded. Linguistic elements in discursal events provide clues to underlying world views and how those views are accepted as inevitable, universal and naturalized.

The critical discourse analyst must always be on the lookout for hidden ideological positions since one of the main ways in which CDA achieves its aims is by making explicit those aspects of ideology that underpin social interaction. (Bloor & Bloor, 2007, p. 11)

Ideological beliefs “may not always be held consciously...where it has become a socially imbued unconscious attitude, it is much more difficult to question—even to oneself—and extremely hard to challenge openly in the social area” (ibid, p. 10). Complex subconscious ideological assumptions can be coded in linguistic elements, even in single words. This dissertation explores the KBE concept specifically as such an ideologically loaded phrase.

Van Dijk (2000) argued that dominant groups can use discourse structures to persuade others to adopt an ideology. He theorizes ideology in terms of social cognition, allowing us to “build the indispensable theoretical bridge between societal power of classes, groups, or institutions at the macro level of analysis and the enactment of power in the interaction and discourse at the social micro level” (p. 27). Readers engage (and may assimilate) ideological

assumptions as a contextual feature. This affects meaning-making. This dissertation interrupts the ideological assumptions of the KBE and neoliberalism as they are presented as a context in OECD HE discourse.

### 3.3 Data Sources

For this study, a thematic and critical discourse analysis was conducted on various OECD documents published between 1996 and 2012. Documents were chosen if they were part of a major project linked to HE. Documents and projects analysed were:

**Project: Thematic Review of the First Years of Tertiary Education**

Description: Reviews of tertiary education systems in 11 countries<sup>35</sup>

Publication: 1996 to 1998

Documents:

- Reviews of 11 country's TE systems
- Summary Report *Redefining Tertiary Education* (OECD, 1998-RedefineTE)
- Article in OECD *Observer* (for wider readership) *Redefining Tertiary Education* (Wagner, 1998)

**Project: Thematic Review of Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society**

Description: Reviews of tertiary education systems in 14 countries<sup>36</sup>

Publication: 2006 to 2009

Documents:

- Reviews of TE systems in 14 countries

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<sup>35</sup> Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, United Kingdom, Virginia (USA)

<sup>36</sup> China, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Spain

- Synthesis Report in 3 volumes *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society* (OECD, 2008-TE for KS)

These two sets of thematic reviews conducted about a decade apart give this study an opportunity to identify changes and shifts in assumptions and constructions over this time period. These were the only large scale comprehensive projects focused on HE at OECD over time.

**Project: Higher Education 2030 (also known as “Universities’ Futures”)**

Description: A long term project outlining the demographic, globalization and technological contexts framing HE in order to interrogate possible future scenarios for HE functioning.

Publication: 2008 and 2009

Documents:

- Higher education to 2030 – Volume 1: Demography
- Higher education to 2030 – Volume 2: Globalization

Volumes 3 (technology) and 4 (future scenarios) were not yet published at the time of this dissertation.

**Project: Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO)**

Description: Project (currently in pilot) to internationally and comparatively assess learning outcomes in several disciplines after a first (i.e. Bachelor) degree

Publication: 2008 to 2012.

Documents<sup>ix</sup>:

- AHELO website (OECD, nd1)
- Promotional brochure (OECD, 2010-2011)

- Background working paper on practices in learning outcomes assessment (Nusche, 2008)
- Consortium report on the design and implementation of the feasibility study (OECD-GNE/AHELO, 2010-des)
- A background report to inform development of AHELO's contextual survey (OECD-GNE/AHELO, 2011-cntx)
- Plan for research questions, analysis, validation for each strand of feasibility study (OECD-GNE/AHELO, 2010-pln)
- Description of the assessment (OECD-Dir.forEdu, n.d.1)
- Background on expected learning outcomes in Economics (OECD, 2011-LO.Ec)
- Background on expected learning outcomes in Engineering (OECD, 2011-LO.Eng)
- Newsletters of preliminary findings (OECD, 2011-May.News) (OECD, 2012-July.News)
- Project updates (OECD, 2011-May.UpD) (OECD, 2012-May.UpD)
- Interim feasibility report (OECD-GNE/AHELO, 2012-March12) and executive summary (OECD-GNE/AHELO, 2012-March)

These latter two projects represent the most recent, large-scale OECD projects related to HE and the economy. Through these, this study had the opportunity to examine OECD's most recent assumptions and constructions about the relationships between HE, the economy and worker/learners. Documents from these projects represent a variety of authors and intended audiences and purposes. This variety is described in the introduction to each project in Chapter 5.

### 3.4 Methodological Foundations

To see what has become normalized, Bloor and Bloor (2007) suggest we “make strange” with language: observe how we use and interact with it as if we were alien. There are many ways to do that. Take for example the following statement:

Tomorrow’s workforce is crucial to sustaining the wealth and development of nations and the social cohesion of their people. (OECD, 2010-2011, p. 2)

On first encounter a reader may not see anything troublesome or even interesting about this statement. It appears intuitive: common-sense. When we make strange we can look at the ways in which the words are organized and which words are chosen and ask questions such as: Why that word? What effect would a different word have? Why that word before that one? We might then find something interesting or even problematic with the statement. In this data segment, we might ask why the *workforce* and not the *citizenry* is crucial to social cohesion. We might ask if this suggests anything about how the authors view citizenship. We might ask who or what else is crucial to wealth and cohesion and seek its inclusion elsewhere in the text. We might note that wealth is collocated with and semantically precedes cohesion, and query the text to see if that is persistent. We might ask the author’s identity and contexts in which the statement was made. Was this the first sentence in the executive summary of a major publication, or buried in the text of a background report? What empirical support was there for this statement?

CDA is not a precise set of methods but a broad and expanding multi-methodological domain of research (van Dijk, 2008a). This section describes methodological concepts used in this research to help me “make strange” with OECD HE discourse.

### 3.4.1 Grice's Principle – Communication as Cooperation

Grice's (1975) cooperation principle posits that for communication to work, actors share an understanding of communication rules. The four maxims are:

1. Quantity: Say as much as is needed and no more.
2. Quality: Speak the truth.
3. Relation: Be relevant.
4. Manner: Be brief and orderly, not ambiguous and obscure.

People regularly break these maxims; however Grice contends that we assume speakers apply them (Bloor & Bloor, 2007). This allows a reader to make *implicatures*: a type of *reading-between-the-lines*. For example, if a speaker says: “We live in a knowledge economy. Workers must engage in lifelong learning.” The relevance maxim implies a relationship between the knowledge economy and LLL. We assume truth and quantity, so ours *must* be a knowledge economy. The manner maxim leads a reader to assume that *knowledge economy* is not ambiguous and must be sufficient justification for LLL.

### 3.4.2 Communication as Persuasion

*Rhetoric...is essentially geared towards persuasive communication....It is therefore not surprising that rhetorical structures play such an important role in ideological manipulation.* (van Dijk, 2000, p. 208)

A reader can be influenced by rhetorical devices. The critical discourse analyst explores ways such devices render documents rhetorically persuasive.

Metaphor can be a strong rhetorical device linking characteristics of one thing to another (Bloor & Bloor, 2007). Grammatical metaphor substitutes one grammatical class for another. An example is *nominalization*: representing a verb as a noun. Representing human orchestrated processes as nouns allows us to ignore the actor, her responsibility, and any acknowledgement of



choice in processes. Fairclough's (2006) example is *globalization*. Decisions of governments to encourage free flow of goods and capital is unacknowledged, the choice cannot be evaluated and the certitude of globalization is reified. *Privatization*, *massification*, and *devolution* are other nominalizations related to neoliberal higher education discourse.

Euphemism can soften something distasteful managing reader reaction. An example is the nominalization, *right-sizing* which brings connotations of logical necessity to the choice to eliminate jobs and overlooks the responsibility of the human actors. The term *cost-sharing* is a euphemism explored in this study.

This dissertation explores *convergence* as a rhetorical strategy with the potential to normalize. By offering evidence of policy convergence (e.g. countries making similar policy choices) an author may limit reader tendency to value alternate options. Although it is appropriate for an organization such as OECD to describe ways in which policy, politics and economic theories converge as it acts as a reflector of trends in policy, there is a sub-textual teleological implicature that these policy choices must be the most desirable, particularly if alternatives are filtered out or devalued.

The dissertation also explores *correlation* as a rhetorical strategy. Correlation is often conflated with cause. An author may offer a causal interpretation directly, or a reader may interpret one. For example, if one were to identify the correlation of higher participation rates in HE with economic growth, one might suppose the latter is a result of the former. In reality, the former may be a result of the latter, they may have a similar root cause, or they may not be causally linked at all. Social and economic systems and structures are complex. Any reference to correlation should be examined for causal implicature.

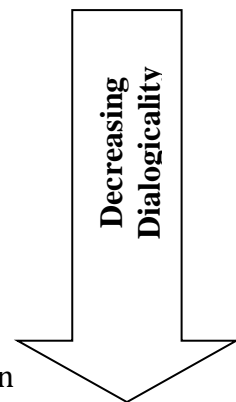
### 3.4.3 Texts as Inter-related

Other texts are part of the context in which a text is read. Meaning making is influenced by all texts in the reader's experience and other referenced texts. Attributed references can be questioned. Non-attributed references refer to the "world of texts" serving as accepted reality (Bloor & Bloor, 2007, p. 40) and can result in implicatures. Intertextual analysis can reveal strategies for cultivating beliefs (Bloor & Bloor, 2007).

Bakhtin (1981) explains that discourse "undergoes 'dialogization' when it becomes relativized, de-privileged, and aware of competing definitions or ideas" (Holquist, 1981, p. 427 in Fairclough, 2003). Undialogized language is authoritative. Dialogicality describes the degree to which a text recognizes difference. Fairclough explains that attributed intertextuality can bring in different voices increasing dialogicality. He describes five levels:

Orientation to difference:

- A. open acceptance and recognition of difference
- B. accentuate it; conflict, struggle, norms, power
- C. attempt to overcome difference
- D. bracketing it out; look for solidarity
- E. consensus, normalization of power difference; suppression



At the lower levels, the reader is less exposed to alternate perspectives and debate. Within policy discourse, this limits policy imagination. There are many competing perspectives at the intersection of economic and education theories. This study reports the degree of dialogicality in OECD HE discourse.

#### 3.4.4 Contexting

Recalling that an utterance only has meaning potential (Halliday, 1978); that meaning is created by the reader in context (Bloor & Bloor, 2007); that contexts can be established in texts (ibid); that authors make lexical choices that can manipulate, highlight or create contexts; that readers may assimilate ideological assumptions as a contextual feature (van Dijk, 2000); and the notion that unattributed and undialogized text is authoritative and can be accepted as unquestioned reality (Bakhtin, 1981), this dissertation develops a specific analytical strategy based on contexts. Authors cannot explicate all relevant contexts, so they are selective. The choices authors make, frame and limit the policy response imagination of readers. This dissertation examines what contexts are highlighted and what contexts are created in the texts.

This dissertation proposes and examines a lexical strategy built from Bakhtin's (1981) notion that undialogized texts are authoritative; Grice's (1975) maxims that truth, relevance, sufficiency and unambiguousness are assumed; Gee's (2011) concept of language as building significance and connections; and the concept of nominalization. *Contexting* occurs when a potentially debatable condition or decision is constructed in text as context. The concept of globalization discussed in Section 3.4.2 *Communication as Persuasion* offers an example. If a text offers "Globalization requires reassessment of labour policy", *globalization* is set as a context and the decision to open national markets to the flow of goods, capital and people is nominalized so that instead of being a choice that can be questioned, it is a context to be responded to. Contexting removes the human actor, their responsibility and the notion of alternatives. Contexting imports a set of beliefs as reality. It establishes the significance and connections to whatever follows. All subsequent discussion is considered in reference to the set context. It limits reader imagination for problems and solutions. Contexting shrinking budgets

will lead to different attentions than contexting income polarization or increasing work/life imbalance.

### **3.5 Methodological Approach**

A thematic and critical discursive grammatical and semantic analysis was conducted on each of the documents of the projects described in Section 3.3 *Data Sources*. Each project was analyzed as an independent collection, one document at a time. Findings from each project are reported in separate subsections of Chapter 5.

Each document analysis began with a first reading for general understanding. With a second reading data segments were extracted that related to assumptions, constructions and values about the economy, worker/learners, and/or HE<sup>37</sup>. Simultaneously, questions, concerns, patterns and ideas were recorded on the documents for later contemplation. Some examples (verbatim) of notes that were recorded are provided in Appendix C: Sample Notes from Data Collection. The researcher acknowledges her own subjectivity. Attempts were made throughout the collection and analysis of data to engage in critical self-reflexive activity<sup>38</sup>. In the interest of transparency, all data segments used in the analysis are available online for consultation at [www.novuscom.net/~carrie.hunter/index.html](http://www.novuscom.net/~carrie.hunter/index.html).

Documents were open hand-coded and categorized by the researcher. Analysis was an iterative process where themes and working hypotheses were developed, and then the documents and data were again consulted for directed coding and potential validation of the working hypotheses. Through the process, a poster was kept in view reminding me of the research questions, theoretical and methodological frames.

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<sup>37</sup> In total, 179 single spaced pages and over 95,000 words of data segments were extracted.

<sup>38</sup> For a description of reflexive practice in qualitative research, see (Findlay, 2002).

Specific emphasis was paid to what contexts were being set by the texts and on the semiotic and rhetorical choices made by authors. I looked at the whole text for structure and style choices but most analysis focused on grammar and semantics: choices in vocabulary, collocation, relative position, and nominalization. Through analysis I kept asking questions such as: *What assumptions are implied in this statement? How could this be interpreted differently with different language choices? Who or what is being privileged? Who or what options are being ignored?*

The processes of data collection, analysis and writing were not as separate and linear as the structure of a chaptered dissertation might suggest. At times, boundaries between the processes were fluid and blurred as reflection and analysis led me to re-formulate working hypotheses and codes, re-search the documents, and re-interpret data segments already under review and documents already analyzed. It was a very iterative process where I revisited the data constantly right through the writing of the drafts of the dissertation. After analysis of a project, those findings were compared to the findings of previously analyzed projects.

Preliminary findings from the first two projects (the thematic reviews) were presented at the Canadian Society for Studies in Higher Education conference in Waterloo, Ontario in June of 2012. This provided an opportunity to vet my processes and interpretations with other scholars. This opportunity caused me to reformulate how I differentiated between contexts, goals and strategies in these findings and how I engaged discussions about public and private benefits of HE.

### **3.6 Limitations of the Study**

The study could have been better positioned to explore shifts in HE discourse if it examined OECD HE discourse over a longer period of time. Ideally it would have examined

more types of products targeting more audiences over a 30 year period. Unfortunately, there are few major publications or projects involving HE that span that far. The reviews of education systems spanned a decade but there were no large multi-national OECD reviews of HE prior to 1995.

This research involved both thematic and critical discourse analysis and therefore is subject to the limitations of its methods. As a political project, any critical analysis of discourse involves subjectivity and often a declared intention to investigate sources of inequity. I have tried to minimize possible negative effects of subjectivity by working reflexively, being transparent (making available all data segments used online and including much supporting data in the text) and by declaring my positionality in the introduction. I entered the research without intention to conclude that the discourse either was or was not shifting from neoliberal paradigms. I did, however, specifically look for evidence of oppression believing that it is politically valuable to illuminate ways in which discourse might be inculcated in the entrenching of assumptions that lead to power imbalances.

CDA must be careful when assuming a causal relationship between discourse and social effects. It has been argued that in order for discourse to have social effects, there must be an understanding of the process by which the reader makes interpretation. Furthermore, there must be some theory or empirical way of linking that interpretation to actual social events. Such critics have argued that critical discourse analysts take a deterministic view of discourse without acknowledging the paucity of evidence in these areas. This dissertation endeavoured to present ways in which discursive choices *might* affect policy imagination. It does not claim that there have been or will be these effects. Many of these choices involve what is included and omitted from discussion. In this way policy options are limited. This study cannot conclude what the

ultimate effects are. This study does, however, point to the discourse's potential to normalize neoliberal approaches to HE and certain ways of understanding HE and its relationship to the economy, worker/learners, and society in general.

### **3.7 Trustworthiness**

Wodak and Meyer (2009, p. 31) claim that “within CDA, there is little specific discussion about quality criteria” and “classical concepts of validity, reliability and objectivity used in quantitative research cannot be applied in unmodified ways.” Since CDA analysis is subjective and because each study draws from different theoretical and methodological traditions, there are no standard validated ways of judging the trustworthiness of a study. Gee adds that any discourse analysis will always be far from complete<sup>39</sup> and that questions left unanswered “serve as an unfinished background to the analysis and it is fair game for any critic to raise one or more of them in questioning the validity of our analysis” (2011, p. 122). He argues, therefore, that a discourse analysis can have varying degrees of what he calls *validity* that is partly based on how thorough the analysis is in applying various tools and questions to the analysis.

I certainly did not apply every possible tool and question to the analyses in this study. However, I applied what I argue is an appropriate number of tools and questions for a doctoral study, to a large quantity of data. For the present study, I also propose the following parameters be used to judge its trustworthiness:

1. The work should be transparent and allow the reader to form their own interpretations from the data.

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<sup>39</sup> He offers 42 questions based on his 7 building tasks and 6 tools of inquiry that would be addressed in an ‘ideal’ analysis. He argues that no analysis can completely address all 42 questions. Wodak and Meyer (2009) offer a different understanding of completeness. They propose that completeness is a measure of quality and an analysis is complete if analysis of new data yields no new results. I am reluctant to equate that event to quality because lack of care, researcher reflexivity or depth of analysis can lead to the same result.

2. It should provide (or reference) sufficient and compelling data segments to support its assertions.
3. It should represent the complexity of the documents and not over-simplify their nature.
4. There should be evidence of rigorous attention to the data and care in its interpretation.
5. The theoretical frames should be appropriate to the study.
6. Analysis should apply the theoretical frameworks fairly.



## Chapter 4: The OECD

### 4.1 Introduction

As discussed in Section 1.1.1 *National versus International Policy Issues*, IOs have increasing influence over social and economic domestic policy (Barnett & Finnemore, 1999; Fang & Stone, 2012; Kuhn, 2006; Mahon, 2010; Peters, 2001; Cox, 1994). James Gustave Speth (1997, p. ¶ 4)<sup>40</sup>, former executive director of the United Nations' Development Program, announced that "...global governance is a powerful and growing reality. Global governance is here, here to stay, and, driven by economic and environmental globalization, global governance will inevitably expand." This chapter presents a descriptive and analytic account of OECD as a case of particular importance and provides the institutional frame so that the discourse can be understood against the structures and functioning of the organization.

### 4.2 Descriptive Account

This section presents a descriptive, largely primary account of OECD. This includes its history, membership, structure, mission and values. The paragraphs that follow describe OECD as an organization whose primary mandate is economic growth and whose core after the 1980s has been in neoliberal economics. However, it is also a complex and dynamic organization engaging with a broadening chorus of voices and with an expressed interest in social concerns and objective analysis. This description of the nature of the organization is important for considering how it might engage with the diverse and changing political economy and offer

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<sup>40</sup> "Global Governance for Sustainable Development," A speech by James Gustave Speth, Executive Director of the United Nations Development Program, delivered to the World Conference on Rio +5, Rio de Janeiro, March, 1997. <http://sovereignty.net/p/gov/ggspeth.htm>.

opportunities for contesting paradigms, and in interpreting its potential influence on domestic HE policy.

#### **4.2.1 The Birth of OECD**

In September 1961 OECD was born when it replaced the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC)<sup>x</sup> and Canada and the United States became members. Citing the success of OEEC in developing cooperation between nations and its belief that cooperation should advance their economies, well-being and international peace, the structures and functioning of OEEC were preserved. The first article of its convention sets OECD's aims:

- (a) to achieve the highest sustainable economic *growth* and employment and a rising standard of living in Member countries, while maintaining financial stability, and thus to contribute to the development of the world economy;
- (b) to contribute to sound economic *expansion* in Member as well as non-member countries in the process of economic development; and
- (c) to contribute to the *expansion* of world trade on a multilateral, non-discriminatory basis in accordance with international obligations. (OECD, n.d.2) (emphasis added)

The first Article established the primacy of an economic growth and trade mandate. This goal, of course, can be interpreted and operationalized in different ways depending on the political economic paradigm engaged. The mechanisms and strategies promoted for growth and expansion, for instance, could be Keynesian, neoliberal, or some combination of those or other approaches. Increasing employment and standards of living could be achieved by various means. But it is important to realize that a political economic approach is not determined by the mandate in the first Article. It is also important to acknowledge that this Article does not specifically address specific social concerns such as social justice, equity, wealth distribution, democratic participation or social development. Although OECD may or may not have developed other social goals which may or may not be represented in its discourse, in analysing OECD policy it

must be remembered that its official, historical mandate as defined by its Articles is economic growth and expansion and that therein lies the potential to balance the means by which those goals are achieved. A Keynesian might emphasize creating jobs. A social democrat might focus on ways to distribute and define living standards. A neoliberal might stress expanding production and trade. This dissertation is positioned to report on which emphases are evident in OECD HE discourse currently and how that may represent a shift in the last few decades.

In other Articles relevant to this dissertation, OECD is to:

- Mandate members to continuously co-operate and “keep each other informed,”
- Require decisions by consensus,
- Establish conditions of participation for non-member states and organizations, and
- Admit new members who assume the obligations of membership.

#### **4.2.2 Who OECD Is**

OECD’s 34-country membership (Appendix D) is increasingly diverse but is still mostly affluent, northern states. Brazil, China, India, Indonesia and South Africa are now involved in *Enhanced Engagement*, participating and partnering with OECD in sustained and comprehensive ways (OECD, n.d.3). Additionally OECD invites non-members to participate in other ad hoc and official ways and has increased involvement with other countries, IOs and civil society.

Currently, six IOs and 45 states have *participant*<sup>xi</sup> status in at least one OECD body (OECD, n.d.4). Invited *observers* attend meetings and working groups, contribute to work and information exchange, and fund expenses, but do not have voting or other rights of membership.

Currently, 110 IOs and 57 states are regular *observers* in at least one committee or group (OECD, n.d.4). Some IOs participate or observe in many bodies. In 2009, the World Bank participated in 43, the International Monetary Fund in 38, and the World Trade Organization in 18 (Woodward, 2010). There is, therefore, some opportunity for a variety of voices and

perspectives to be heard and developed into OECD discourse: opportunities to contest dominant paradigms and reflect the discursive struggles in the political economy. It is possible that this might strengthen OECD's perceived relevance and influence over domestic policy, increasing its reputation as a policy authority. There is also opportunity to share resources and influence with other IOs.

Some question the influence of the diversity. Membership requires states be *like-minded*, “committed to democracy and the market economy” (OECD, n.d.5) and members are still mostly affluent nations, producing about 60% of the world's goods and services (Martens & Jakobi, 2010b). The 40 countries with which it currently engages represent 80% of world trade (OECD, n.d.6). Woodward explains that membership is “emphatically not a meeting of equals. The most powerful member states provide most of the funding, set the agenda, make or break agreements, and exert a vice-like grip over the membership and remit of key committees” (2009, p. 4).

Some authors express concern about OECD's increasing engagement with the G7/8/20 group of nations. About 72% of OECD funding comes from these countries and G7/8/20 bodies rely heavily on OECD statistical and analytical muscle. Since 2007, the Heiligendamm L'Aquila Process<sup>xii</sup> is housed at OECD and in 2010 OECD officials attended 17 high level G20 meetings (Woodward, 2011). Woodward (2010, p. 69) suggested that OECD maintains its perceived importance and status in “an increasingly crowded marketplace for sources of global economic governance” by aligning itself with the G7/8/20. Guttery (p. 78, cited in Ougaard, 2010) argues that the G7/8/20 exhibits a degree of control over OECD, calling their relationship “hierarchical.” Indeed, OECD was excluded from G7 Summit preparations in the early 1980s because of the secretariat's support of Jimmy Carter's “locomotive strategy” for macroeconomic

reflation<sup>41</sup>, which Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher called “too Keynesian” (Putnam & Bayne, 1987). During the 1990s, G7/8 summits moved from increasingly referencing existing OECD publications to “peremptorily” asking OECD to carry out certain activities (Guttry, 1994, p. 45 as quoted in Ougaard, 2010). OECD has been called the *de facto* G8 secretariat and the G20’s ‘gofer’ (Woodward, 2010). This raises concerns over OECD’s freedom to support ideas differing from those of the finance ministers of the world’s largest economies. These economies represent 84% of world economic growth but only two thirds of its population. “The desire to avoid antagonizing the rump of G7 members might inhibit the willingness of the OECD to generate innovative policy solutions and in so doing enervate the organization's capacity for global economic governance” (Woodward, 2010, p. 69).

OECD has also increased its engagement with civil society organizations (CSOs), but Woodward (2008) argues that it is very selective about the CSOs it invites. He contends CSOs must fit the neoliberal mould. Although CSOs may have some impact in some committees in some fields, generally OECD uses CSOs to administer its projects, gather intelligence, and lobby states to further entrench OECD perspectives.

These criticisms must be kept in mind while examining the OECD discourse. They suggest that opportunities (or will) to challenge dominant thinking may be constrained at OECD. However, it also must be recalled that its process of decision making through consensus, its varied and changing personnel, its declared commitment to objectivity and evidence based decision making (see section 4.2.4 below), and its broadening engagement with other nations and civil society provide opportunities to challenge doctrine, discursively reflect tensions in political-economic paradigms, and potentially advocate for new and creative ways of balancing approaches and perspectives.

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<sup>41</sup> Increasing the money supply or reducing taxes in an effort to bring prices up, particularly in a recession.

### 4.2.3 How the OECD is Organized and Funded

OECD's budget (EUR 347 million in 2012) is provided by members and participants. Part I budget is the core budget, contributed by all members relative to economic size. The U.S. and Japan contribute about 22% and 12.6% of the core budget, respectively<sup>xiii</sup> (OECD, 2012-Bgt). Larger nations can leverage their funding to influence OECD policy. Part II budget is based on voluntary contributions for particular projects and accounts for about 20% of funding (Woodward, 2009; OECD, n.d.7). Therefore, it is difficult to develop programs and research that are not endorsed by the affluent.

The *Council* provides overall strategic direction for OECD and is broadly democratic. It includes one permanent emissary from each member country and one from the European Commission (EC). As does the rest of OECD, it makes decisions by consensus (OECD, n.d.8; Woodward, 2009). See Figure 2.

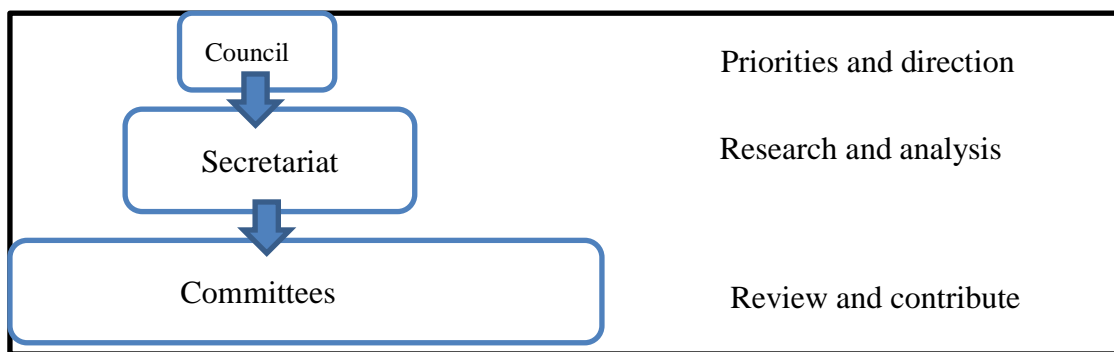
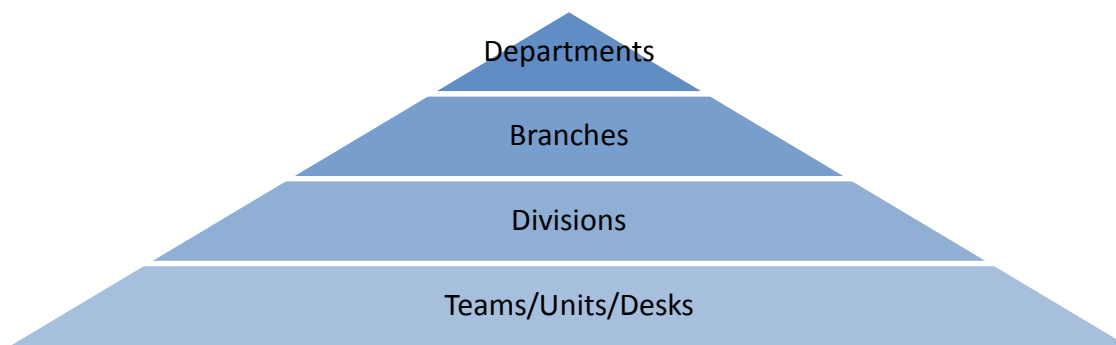


Figure 2: Structure of the OECD

Addressing priorities of the council, the *Secretariat* directs collection and analysis of data, forecasts trends and makes recommendations (Martens & Jakobi, 2010b). Its approximately 2500 professionals hail from public, private and civic realms, and are divided into Directorates (see Appendix E and Figure 3). The largest and most influential is the Economics Department (ECO) (Noaksson, 2010). It is the biggest consumer of OECD Part I resources and does much cross

departmental work. It tends to establish dominant economic theory espoused within OECD, even though other departments and committees function independent of it and with their own perspectives and memberships. Described as heavily influenced by neo-classical economic thought (Woodward, 2009), it generally limits what is ‘appropriate’ for research and policy. Yet, it is not completely autonomous from member states or social forces (Porter & Webb, 2008). However, it does offer a mechanism by which neoliberal perspectives might propagate through social policy departments and projects.



**Figure 3: Components of the Secretariat**

The structure of the OECD, therefore, also illustrates somewhat constrained opportunities to challenge doctrine and provide a discourse that reflects tensions and contestations in the field. The large number of involved professionals and experts in their fields from private, public and civic realms and the democratic representation and consensus decision making are supportive of such outcomes. However, overall direction from the council, the financial resources and influence of the largest nations, and the cross-departmental influence of ECO could potentially limit perspective diversity in its discourses.

#### **4.2.4 Mission and Values**

Article 1 is clear that the over-riding mandate of the OECD is economic growth. Economic growth, however, intersects with other policy fields. Papadopoulos (2011), for instance, argued

that it is through its first Article that OECD assumed an implied mandate in education since its inception. In contrast, OECD's current webpage describes a broader mission including promoting "policies that will improve the economic *and social well-being* of people around the world" (OECD, n.d.8) (emphasis added). It describes broad economic, *social* and *environmental* interests in a number of diverse fields, and a focus on democracy, fairness, evidence, and the polity. I quote their web-published mission statement in full (emphasis added to highlight the social):

The OECD provides a forum in which governments can work together to share experiences and seek solutions to common problems. We work with governments to understand what drives economic, *social and environmental* change. We measure productivity and global flows of trade and investment. We analyse and compare data to predict future trends. We set international standards on a wide range of things, from agriculture and tax to the safety of chemicals.

We look, too, at issues that directly affect the *lives of ordinary people*, like how much they pay in taxes and social security, and how much *leisure* time they can take. We compare how different countries' *school* systems are readying their young people for modern life, and how different countries' *pension* systems will look after their citizens in old age.

Drawing on facts and real-life experience, we recommend policies designed to make the lives of *ordinary people* better. We work with business, through the Business and Industry Advisory Committee to the OECD, and with *labour*, through the Trade Union Advisory Committee. We have active contacts as well with other *civil society* organisations. The common thread of our work is a shared commitment to market economies backed by *democratic* institutions and focused on the *wellbeing* of *all* citizens. Along the way, we also set out to make life *harder for the terrorists, tax dodgers, crooked businessmen* and others whose actions undermine a *fair* and open society. (OECD, n.d.8)

They further claim that their core values include:



- Objectivity: Independent and evidence-based analyses
- Openness: Encouraging of debate
- Boldness: Challenging conventional wisdom and their own ideas
- Pioneering: Sites on emerging and long-term challenges, and
- Ethics: Credibility and trust through integrity and transparency. (OECD, n.d.8)

These current remarks suggest broader concerns than the official and historical mandate outlined in Article 1 and flexibility in terms of forms of liberalism social policy. They suggest OECD sees itself as an objective producer of new policy directions, a reflector of diverse ideas and a forum in which various world-views and theories can be explored in order to advance both economic and social goals for the individual, the State and the world. This study is positioned to comment on whether or not and to what degree these values are evident in its HE discourse.

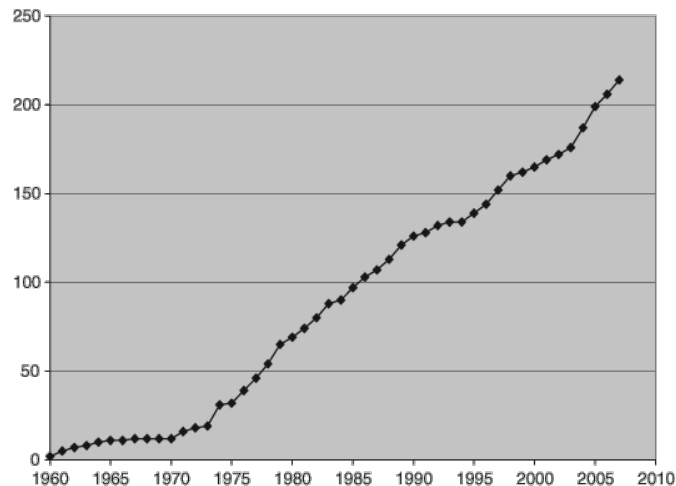
### **4.3 OECD's Influence**

The preceding section presented some concern over whether or not diversifying membership is influencing OECD policy direction and the degree to which OECD might be a legitimizing agent for the G20 countries. The current section is more focused on the OECDs influence on domestic policy, regardless of whether or not it narrowly represents the interests of the G20 and other Northern, Western and wealthy nations.

As described earlier in this dissertation, domestic policy is being developed under increasingly global contexts and OECD is a major influence in many policy fields (Cox, 2005; Jessop, 2002; Mahon, 2010; Mahon & McBride, 2008; Ougaard, 2010; Henry, Lingard, Rizvi, & Taylor, 2001). Figure 4 (taken from Ougaard, 2010, p. 29) shows the rapid increase in the number of formal instruments<sup>42</sup> in force by the OECD.

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<sup>42</sup> OECD formal instruments include negotiated treaties, and major policy statements that stipulate multi-lateral commitments. Examples are “decisions” that are binding on those countries who do not abstain from voting



**Figure 4: The Number of OECD Instruments in Force**

OECD's influence, however, extends beyond these formal instruments. Only three *consensus statements*<sup>43</sup> – which are either legally binding or at least commit states to attempt compliance – have involved education. These statements were restricted to broad notions of safety and quality<sup>xiv</sup> (e.g. see Appendices F and G). In spite of this lack of formal, legal influence, Henry et al. (2001) argue that OECD is a key influence in domestic education policy. Its influence in education is primarily through *soft* governance: “the development, at multiple scales, of a variety of mechanisms of regulation, operating in the absence of an overarching political authority” (Mahon & McBride, 2008, pp. 5-6).

Scholars have theorized mechanisms by which OECD governs in this manner. Jacobsson (2006) described OECD's involvement in *meditative governance*. This mode of governance influences through the generation, sharing, comparison, probing and transmission of ideas. It is often operationalized as discussion among experts about how best to understand the world or address its issues. *Inquisitive* governance, according to Jacobsson, involves auditing, reporting, comparing and ranking of practice. Compliance of the examined may result from social or

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on them; “recommendations” with which countries can voluntarily comply or not regardless of if they voted or not; and “agreements” that are legally binding on all members.

<sup>43</sup> These include *Decisions, Recommendations and Declarations*.

political effects (e.g. shaming, public opinion). In order to incorporate the dynamics of global-to-local policy transfer, Bradford (2008) added the *exhortative* mode of governance. These activities use the knowledge generated in global meditative and inquisitive activities to advocate for domestic policy change. Concrete action plans and recommendations are formulated. Projects that offer recommendations for national policy are implicated in exhortative governance.

Woodward (2009) described how OECD participates in *cognitive* governance by creating and reinforcing shared values and identity. It socially constructs a community, identifying the *We* and the *Other* and draws “our attention toward certain aspects of life and help us define our own role in ‘the new world’” (Marcussen, 2004c, p. 121). This can reify certain ways of interpreting the world through narratives about the past, present and future. Those with a shared identity and values tend to behave similarly. Cognitive governance is entwined with *normative* governance: cooperation through the development and spread of ideas and knowledge structures as natural. Normative activities occur when policy experts meet and develop a community of influence (cognitive component) reifying vocabularies, frames and methods. Best practices and standards are identified. Particular mind-sets and goals are normalized. In the cognitive dimension, agents change their identity association. In the normative dimension agents change their minds. They socialize a “logic of appropriateness” (Porter & Webb, 2008) whence peers tend to assess things similarly. When they return home they are more likely to promote convergence in policy.

OECD discourse is heavily implicated in these forms of soft governance. OECD maintains approximately 40 data bases in 26 areas (Woodward, 2010) and releases approximately 250 new titles each year in education and public policy (Martens & Jakobi, 2010b). Education is one of its most surveyed policy fields (see Appendix B). OECD has been credited as “...one of the most significant international organizations” for national educational policy in general (Jakobi &

Martens, 2010a, p. 163) and exceptionally influential in HE policy specifically (Kuhn, 2006; Peters, 2001). See (Henry et al, 2001).

In these ways, OECD establishes itself as an *ideational authority* (Marcussen, 2004a; 2004b; Martens & Jakobi, 2010b) in education through a number of means including:

- data generation;
- the establishment of expert committees;
- its associations with national Ministers of education;
- its engagement with other international organizations;
- the publication of policy working papers; and
- the evaluation of national systems of education.

Of particular relevance here are the expert groups, research, position papers and international education systems' reviews that are examined in this study. In country reviews of education, OECD reports on domestic policy and offers recommendations. This illustrates inquisitive and exhortative governance. AHELO, reports learning outcomes, and is therefore also implicated in inquisitive governance. The various committees and expert bodies that contributed to the development of both the AHELO and HE2030 projects offer opportunities for cognitive governance. Through the discursive choices, declaration of best practices, standards and problems in all of the documents from these four projects, OECD can exert normative governance.

#### **4.4 OECD and Education**

Since its inception, OECD has had an interest in education (Papadopoulos, 2011; Rubenson, 2008). The growth and shifts in that interest can be traced through its changing position in OECD structures. Education was originally addressed in the Office for Scientific and

Technical Personnel and was largely interested in manpower shortages in science. As OECD's interest in education grew, the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) was formed in 1968 and the Office for Scientific and Technical Personnel transformed into the Educational Committee. In 1975, the Directorate for Social Affairs, Manpower and Education was formed, and in 1991 was renamed the Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs (DELSA). The Educational Committee was one of two major committees in DELSA. Rubenson (2008) notes that this shift has been attributed to increasing concerns in the Keynesian era over (un)employment. Up until this time, proposes Rubenson, OECD did not ask how education could be more relevant to industry, but rather, how it could be used to develop opportunities for people so that economic and social inequality could be addressed and so that the economy could prosper along with its people. He further posits that the development of the Directorate of Education in 2002 may reflect the perceived increasing importance of education in a KBE.

Papadopoulos (1995) argued that as the cultural, political, social and economic landscape changed after the 1960s, education became more sensitive to external pressures. Increasing financial stringency in the 1980s and 1990s increased conflict around priorities in educational objectives. In the post-Keynesian era, OECD championed a weakening of the balance between private and public foci and a shift in the role of the State in education policy (Henry, Lingard, Rizvi, & Taylor, 2001). By the 1980s and 1990s "the main driving force for educational change was the economic imperative..." (p. 502). The focus on equal opportunities that were central in the 1960s and 1970s receded in favour of a "radical neo-conservativism" (p. 494) that applied to education the tenets of a free-market philosophy built on rational choice and open competition and addressed the relationship between HE and the economy from a perspective determined to

stimulate the supply of goods and services. By 1995, Papadopoulos was calling for a ‘new humanism’ in the discourse and predicted that “in the decades ahead the quest for a more even distribution of educational opportunities will reassert itself as a major component of policies” (p. 502). Thus, he predicted a more humanist direction and a withdrawal from some of the market-focus in education.

Humbled by the 1983 report *Nation at Risk*, the US urged OECD to develop indicators for education. In 1988 the International Indicators of Educational Systems project (INES) was launched. *PISA*, and *Education at a Glance* are part of INES. IOs could now utilize a larger collection of comparative data for transnational governance. OECD became more heavily involved in inquisitive, normative and cognitive governance in education.

Employability and individual responsibility for it became policy principles for education. Recall that a discourse focused on employability focuses on the needs of industry, centres the skill of the individual as a market/production resource and is less likely to engage structural issues affecting employment and unemployment rates. Data collection focused on performance outputs. Best practices were named and countries compared. By 2002 and the founding of the Education Directorate, OECD quickly surpassed UNESCO in its reputation and influence in educational policy (Jakobi & Martens, 2010a). This is partly because it networks its influence with and through other IOs such as the World Bank, UNESCO, and the EC.

In the mid-1990s, through projects like the *Jobs Study* and the *Adult Literacy Survey*, OECD identified inadequate workforce skills as impediments to growth. Note again that this keeps central the provision of appropriate labour to optimize production capacity. The 1996 Ministerial conference asked CERI to develop strategies to promote lifelong learning (LLL) (Jakobi & Martens, 2010a). In 2001 OECD began comparative analyses on LLL. Between 2000

and 2005, the *National Qualifications Framework* Project examined the role of qualifications systems in LLL. In 2003, directed by Ministers of Education, OECD circulated the LLL concept as a strategic objective.

In considering an inclusive liberal shift in education at OECD, Rubenson (2008) reminds us that the educational establishment has always been interested in inclusivity and equity. Even in their study of OECD and Australian policy after the mid-1980s, which reported a growing emphasis on performativity and a neoliberal framing of globalization and education, Henry et al. (2001) also report evidence of tensions in OECD work in education and interest in equity and social inclusion. What evolved since the 1970s is a narrowing focus on employability as *terms for* inclusion and equity. The discourse encouraged all to develop their employability equally. Rubenson suggests that from an educational perspective, this may be categorized as a shift from a social democratic to an inclusive liberal value system. He argues that although issues of equity and inclusion are central to the discourse, they are framed firmly in neoliberal ideology.

#### **4.5 Summary and Niche for the Dissertation**

OECD has successfully influenced national policy in several social policy fields<sup>44</sup> (Ougaard, 2010). Education and health are two of its most surveyed areas (See Appendix B). Marcussen (2004a) has argued that OECD is very important in creating and disseminating ideas and comparing and evaluating policies. It offers a wealth of statistics for evidence-based policy.

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<sup>44</sup> According to its own website (n.d.-SP), OECD's main areas of social policy activity include policies for families and children, for work incentives, for integrating the disabled pensions and other social indicators. Without due examination of these policies it is inappropriate to comment on the character of these fields. However, I do note the claim in the section on work incentives that "Unemployment and related benefits help prevent those without work from falling into poverty, but overly passive support can exacerbate joblessness and poverty." This suggests consideration of social welfare policy, but also blames such policy, to a degree, for poverty. I also note the paragraphs summarizing its monitoring of Child Well-being include questions such as "Is growing up in a single-parent household detrimental to children?" but none that specifically link child well-being to economic or labour market outcomes. This suggests a consideration of social policy for its own sake and not as an endogenous market factor.

Positioned at arms-length from national governments, involving many diverse people and much capital, and not concerned with making popular recommendations in order to secure re-election, it at least has the potential to be a somewhat objective reflector of diverse perspectives and a source of un-biased empirical data. This potential may, however, be partly constrained by the fairly homogeneous membership, associations (i.e. G20) and funding structures of the organization. The potentially great influence of OECD on domestic social policy suggests a need for thorough critical scholarly analysis.

According to Martens and Jakobi (2010b) there has been relatively little analytical scholarly work on what OECD is, its function and its effects. My broad, although not exhaustive literature review suggests that much of what there is portrays OECD as a normalizing and political actor (Marcussen, 2004; Martens & Jakobi, 2010; Papadopoulos, 2011; Wolfe, 2001). It condemns OECD as economistic and neoliberal often without making explicit the specific degree and character of its neoliberal discourse. Woodward (2006, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011) provides much of the detailed critical analyses of OECD. He explains that in spite of recent expansion and diversification, OECD still largely represents the interests of the wealthy North and West and is still firmly ruled by neoliberal perspectives that have negative social effects.

This chapter has presented the institution and its potential for influence on domestic HE policy. Chapter 2 described policy fields in which there is evidence of shifting discursive perspectives. This provides a background against which its HE discourse can be understood. I was unable to find similar research exploring recent discursive shifts in OECD HE discourse in terms of its liberalist perspectives. In fact, although its education discourse has often been criticized as neoliberal the specific degree and quality of its liberal nature is not always fully explicated. There is not always a detailed exploration of how various perspectives are or are not



represented and engaged in its discourse. This study describes the specific liberal character of OECD HE discourse in terms of its liberal character in detail and looks for evidence of shifts in perspectives in this field.

Education's historical concerns for inclusivity and equity (Rubenson, 2008) might buffer education discourse against some of the more extreme and economistic tendencies of neoliberal doctrine. In fact, Rubenson described a recent *softening* of IO economistic discourse on LLL. However, HE contexts and its discourse are distinct from those of general education.

First, developed countries have seen a rapid expansion of HE participation in the last few decades well beyond that of general education expansion. Secondly, McBride and Mahon (2008) argued that policy fields more strongly linked to economic objectives are less likely to shift. Rubenson (2008) argued OECD constructed a common-sense link between the economy and education. This was largely constructed in neoliberal terms through the concept of the KBE; a concept more acutely targeted at HE than general education. I would more narrowly define this link as one between education and economic *growth*. This differentiates it from other aspects of economics and focuses on the neoliberal assumption that growth is the primary goal (as opposed to, for instance, economic distribution). This link may compel HE more toward neoliberal assumptions. Furthermore, debates around the purposes of HE, who benefits and who should have access are different in HE than they are in compulsory education. Finally, themes of innovation, science, technology, globalization and competition are more acute in HE discourse than they are in compulsory education discourse. These issues suggest that HE discourse may be even more solidly constructed in economic terms and tied to a growth-mandate, and may therefore be more immune to contrasting paradigms than general education discourse.

## **Chapter 5: Findings**

This chapter presents findings from each of the four projects under examination. Each of these projects is presented as a different subsection:

- Thematic Reviews of Tertiary Education – The First Years
- Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Based Economy
- Higher Education 2030 (HE2030), and
- Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO).

Each section presents a largely descriptive account of the content, themes, assumptions, constructions and values that are presented in the documents of each project. It therefore, primarily addresses the first research question:

What assumptions, constructions and values about the economy, higher education and worker/learners are present in OECD HE discourse?

Chapter 6 addresses the second research question by providing a deeper and more abstract analysis of the data presented in this chapter, which is focused on how assumptions and values relate to a neoliberal (or other) perspective and the changing political economy. Therefore, if the reader keeps the descriptions of liberal doctrines from Chapter 2 in mind while engaging with the data segments and descriptions in this chapter, the analyses and discussions in subsequent chapters will be facilitated. Thus, a short summary of liberal doctrines as they are understood in this study is appropriate here.

The shift to a neoliberal perspective from a Keynesian Welfare State paradigm can be thought of as a shift of focus from demand- to supply-side economics. A neoliberal agenda emphasizes optimizing productive capacity more than stimulating demand for goods and services. The free-market is thought of as objective, fairly equitable and efficient at balancing

supply and demand through competition and the unobstructed flow of market signals (i.e. prices, wages) to rational-self-interested agents. The State's role in reducing barriers to the propagation of natural market-signals and to open competition is emphasized. The focus would be more on how to ensure the labour pool is supplied with skilled human capital that will improve productivity and increase innovation than it would be in creating jobs and the demand for graduates or regulating the ways workers are compensated for their skills. It is unlikely that any political platform or economic policy recommendation would completely deny the existence of market-failures<sup>45</sup> and would leave concerns of equity completely to market forces. However, a neoliberal doctrine emphasizes market-like mechanisms for equity and is less likely to involve large-scale and direct State involvement in areas of market-failure.

The value and understanding of knowledge and education tend to be more limited in a neoliberal lens to optimizing production capacity. Reforms to the education system would involve emphasis on market-type mechanisms. Knowledge and education are seen centrally as the drivers of economic health and perhaps only secondarily as mechanisms for social development goals. There is likely to be emphasis on economically fruitful disciplines (i.e. natural sciences), and the skills and knowledge that respond to needs of industry and drive innovation and productivity in the discourse more than those that focus on the interests of the polity and associated with democracy, self-actualization and citizenship. Indeed, notions of what it means to be a good citizen may be framed in market-productivity terms and one's value and deserved standard of living may be more constructed as tied to one's marketability in the labour pool. Low employability *value* and poverty is more likely to be construed as an individual failing than it is a product of structural and systemic problems. Efficiency, private investment, supply

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<sup>45</sup> Inefficient balance of goods and services such that one agent in the market advances their interests only at the expense of another. (See Pareto optimality)

support, and the market would tend to be privileged over equity, public investment, demand promotion and the State.

Inclusive liberal influences in the discourse may include a substantial number of these neoliberal characteristics. Inclusive neoliberal perspectives would largely be supportive of neoliberal assumptions (i.e. the efficiency of market mechanisms and supply-side solutions centred on the needs of industry), but would also illustrate a concern for inclusion of the previously excluded and equity. Equity has always been part of the education discourse at OECD. But when equity and inclusion are framed as ways to achieve market mechanisms or supply-side solutions, more neoliberal character is evident in that form of inclusive liberalism. Inclusive social liberal tendencies may be evident in the texts if they position equity and inclusion as goals in themselves even in cases that are not related to market-mechanisms and supply-side solutions. The study, examining only HE discourse, has limited power to fully identify inclusive social liberalism, because of the boundaries of education policy. However, the study does look for evidence of where the emphases currently lie; whether, how and to what degree tensions in the political economy are addressed; and in what ways and to what degree there is evidence of shifts in these emphases and tensions.

This chapter and the subsequent analysis and discussion draw from approximately 100,000 words of extracted data segments, copious notes collected in document review, and general understandings developed by the researcher while studying over 7,000 pages of text. Some findings can be illustrated well by sample data segments. Many such segments are included throughout the chapter. To improve readability, however, often only a small number of illustrative examples are included as specific quotes and reference is made to others that can be found on line. Furthermore, these data segments are included in a sans serif font and spaced at

1.5 instead of double spaced to distinguish OECD quotes from my analytic narrative. Other findings draw on more distributed data not easily summarized in a data segment, or on a more general understanding of the documents developed by the researcher. Readers may develop some of those understandings themselves as they engage the data segment samples included. Readers are reminded that all data segments used for analysis are available online at [www.novuscom.net/~carrie.hunter/index.html](http://www.novuscom.net/~carrie.hunter/index.html) and that a non-APA referencing system is used for these data segments. The format of the referencing is included in Appendix A.

## 5.1 Thematic Review of Tertiary Education—The First Years

### 5.1.1 Introduction

This project was a response to growing international domestic policy interest and action related to increasing demand for tertiary education (TE<sup>46</sup>). According to OECD, the “nature and extent of the national policy debates now underway throughout the OECD area may signal nothing less than a fundamental shift in thinking about the context for tertiary education and its aims” (1998-RTE, p. 3). Therefore, OECD decided to conduct its first comparative thematic reviews of domestic TE systems in 1995 and 1996. The goals of the project were to examine:

- how to accommodate large volume participation at this level (now the norm in OECD countries);
- how to ensure that tertiary-level learning options appropriately and effectively meet the needs and interests of learners as well as the demands from the economy and society;
- how to address the competing demands and constraints on public and private budgets in meeting the costs. (OECD, n.d.-TR-Web, p. ¶ 1)

This project took place: soon after the release of the 1994 *Jobs Study* and *Jobs Strategy* and prior to the revised 2006 version; prior to Daniel Johnston announcing the need for OECD reform and increasing engagement with civil society and CSOs; before the defeat of the MAI<sup>47</sup>; prior to the establishment of the Directorate for Education; toward the end of the economic crises of the 1990s; and prior to shifts from neoliberal doctrine in some OECD fields that were identified near the turn of the century. Therefore, it is possible that the discursive products of this project reflect a different political-economic perspective than projects undertaken in the 2000s.

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<sup>46</sup> The reader is reminded that although distinctions can be made (often relating HE more to ISCED 5A and 6 with TE including 5B), this dissertation does not distinguish between TE and HE and generally is interested in a broad but formal notion of post-compulsory education. The reviews refer to TE, and so TE is most often used in this section.

<sup>47</sup> The Multi-lateral Agreement on Investment was defeated after large scale civil society (and NGO) protest. Environmental and labour standards, human rights, and non-commercial interests were perceived by opponents of the MAI to be at risk.

Reviews were based on protocols of country reviews OECD conducts in several fields (e.g. economics, regulatory reform, the environment, *et cetera*). However, this was the first time that TE was specifically explored in a multi-national and comparative project at OECD (OECD, 1998-RTE). The project was led by the Secretariat, who designed guidelines for participation and a standardized questionnaire for participating countries. The questionnaire involved descriptions of national contexts (e.g. demographics, employment trends and history); education structures and processes (e.g. types of institutions, teacher training and enrolment rates); and policy (e.g. directions in reform, curriculum delivery and funding). The questionnaire was revised in consultation with DELSA's<sup>48</sup> Education Committee and the advisory group. Advisors were primarily non-academics in domestic education ministries<sup>xv</sup> and included 29 individuals from participating countries and three other educational experts.

The process was cooperative. Countries had input into review team selection and their questionnaire responses served as the background report which informed the reviewers prior to an 8 to 10 day country visit. Review teams consisted of four reviewers: two from the Secretariat and two education experts<sup>xvi</sup> from DELSA. During the visit, the teams observed and consulted widely with a number of stakeholders including government agencies, institutional personnel (i.e. administrators and faculty), councils, employer groups, workers' groups, professional bodies and students. After the visit and in extensive consultation with the advisory group, the team prepared a country report. The team called upon a number of sources to inform the report (See Appendix H: Documents Informing Thematic Reviews of TE in the 2000s). These included various OECD indicators (i.e. comparative markers of participation, persistence, graduate employment, time to completion, financial markers *et cetera*), various CERI<sup>49</sup> and IMHE<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs

<sup>49</sup> Centre for Educational Research and Innovation

work, the *Jobs Study* (1994-JS), *Lifelong Learning for All* (1996-LLL) work from other IOs, discussions from meetings with education ministers and literature reviews. After the report was drafted, countries under review could request changes to the final report prior to it being released publicly (OECD, n.d.-TR-Web; OECD, 1998-RTE).

Mostly individual reports are of interest to domestic policy makers in the reviewed country. The comparative report, *Redefining Tertiary Education* (1998-RTE) would be of interest to policy makers across the globe. The *OECD Observer*<sup>51</sup> published a four-page article for a wider readership summarizing the findings of this and other work on TE (Wagner, 1998). It should be noted that although individual countries would be keenly interested in reports particular to their country, the summary report and articles prepared for wider readership would likely be more influential to other countries interested in OECD opinion on HE but not participating in the reviews.

Twelve self-selected countries/regions participated: Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, United Kingdom, and Virginia (USA). France participated, but its report was not available. These nations were long standing OECD members, each had its own diverse contexts, economic systems, and HE systems. Portugal was struggling to build its economy and its HE system and was emphasizing democracy and social justice after the 1974 fall of a dictatorship. With high participation and per capita income, Japan's concern was a decreasing sense of national identity and projected decreasing enrolment from a low birthrate. The affluent welfare-state of Denmark was trying to address very high unemployment and the longest times to completion in OECD. Germany, post-unification, was attempting to integrate two different HE systems based on very different paradigms.

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<sup>50</sup> Institutional Management in Higher Education

<sup>51</sup> An OECD periodical publication for a wider readership that includes highlights of OECD work in many of its areas of interest.



The final report recognizes that education beyond what is compulsory can be broadly defined and has multiple purposes. However, the reviews were more focused on aspects of education related to employment and to the formal educational institutions associated with ISCED 5A and 5B<sup>52</sup> (i.e. 2-year colleges and undergraduate university) programming. They limit their consideration to these programmes and these *first years*—those leading up to a first credential recognized in the labour market—because “it is here that the pressures of growth and high volume demand for access, and the expansion in numbers and diversity of the student population are most directly and acutely felt” (OECD, 1998-RTE, p. 9).

### 5.1.2 Contextual Themes and the Purposes and Functioning of TE

Three common key contextual themes were used by the reviewers to frame their goals and recommendations. Figure 5 illustrates these themes and their effect on the goals in focus in the documents.

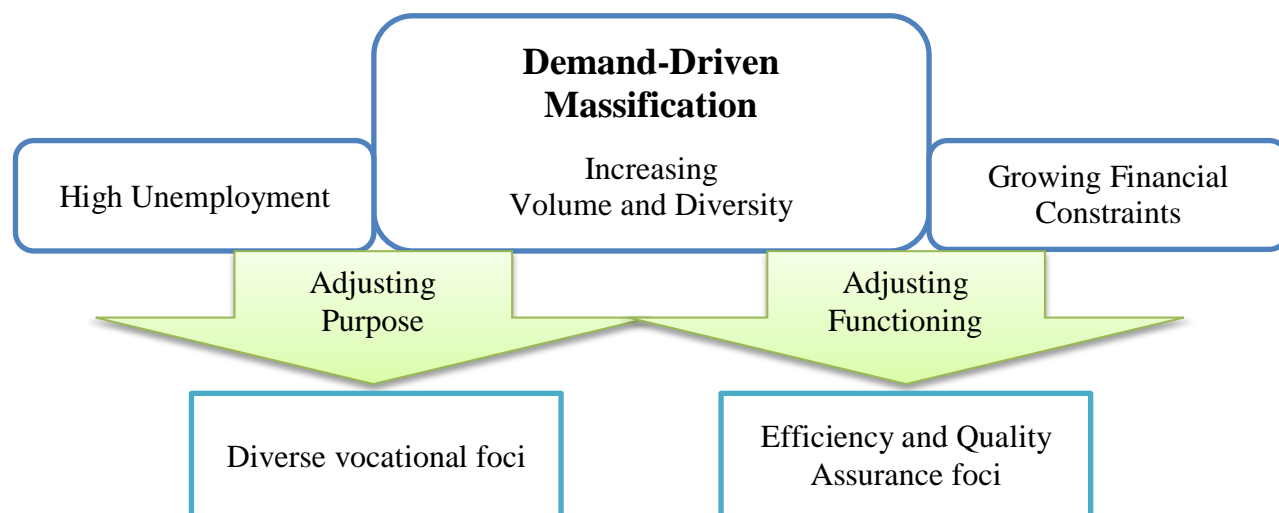


Figure 5: Contexts, Purposes and Foci of TE in 1990s Reviews

<sup>52</sup>ISCED5A is the *International Standard Classification of Education* designation for a first post-compulsory theoretically based/research preparatory degree that gives access to professions with high skills requirements (e.g. Bachelor university degree). ISCED 5B is the designation for the first post-compulsory credential which is more practical/technical/occupationally specific (e.g. College diploma).

The over-arching contextual theme is demand-driven massification of TE systems. The *Summary Report* (1996-RTE, p. 9). begins with:

Demand, both individual and social, is seen as the driving force.

Elsewhere:

...increasing social pressures for tertiary education access, will require gradual expansion of tertiary education opportunities (Chi8c)

Also see (Por26c; RTE, p. 9).

Demand is presented as coming from both individuals and “society” (not specifically the labour market or industry) but largely from individuals. Prior to the 1960s, only a small portion of the populace attended TE<sup>xvii</sup> (UNESCO, 2000b). By 1996 many OECD nations experienced increasing demand and enrolment rates in the order of 80% of the compulsory school leaving cohort (OECD, 1998-RTE, p. 9). Several countries struggled to meet demand and trends suggested enrolment rates would continue to grow. What was once a privilege for the elite few was seen increasingly a right for the diverse many (ibid).

Massification coupled with high (and reportedly, persistent) unemployment in many countries resulted in a narrowing of focus of the purposes of TE. Whereas parts of TE (e.g. universities) could previously focus on the development of knowledge for less immediately ‘practical’ purposes, in these new contexts it is reported that TE must meet the needs of the many, and those needs include vocational preparation (Aus15; Bel3; Den3; Jap5; Por2; RTE p. 20, 36).

The upward trend in unemployment experienced in most OECD countries over the 1980s and 1990s has been of special concern (Swe13)

..the shift to persistent high unemployment, experienced by most other European OECD countries (Nor4)

The changes are set in a new context, one in which much greater value is being placed on the skills and flexibility of individuals as a key to reducing unemployment (RTE, p. 4)

Rapid massification coupled with increasing financial constraints brought on by political and economic crises of the era and rapid expansion was seen as a threat to quality (Aus21; Bel7, 18; Chi6c; Jap12; NZ29; Swe21; UK3, 11, 13)

...to continue prior practices at a time when the student population is becoming more diverse in terms of backgrounds and interests and resources are limited would put at risk the quality and effectiveness of the student experience and potentially undermines learning. (Vir20)

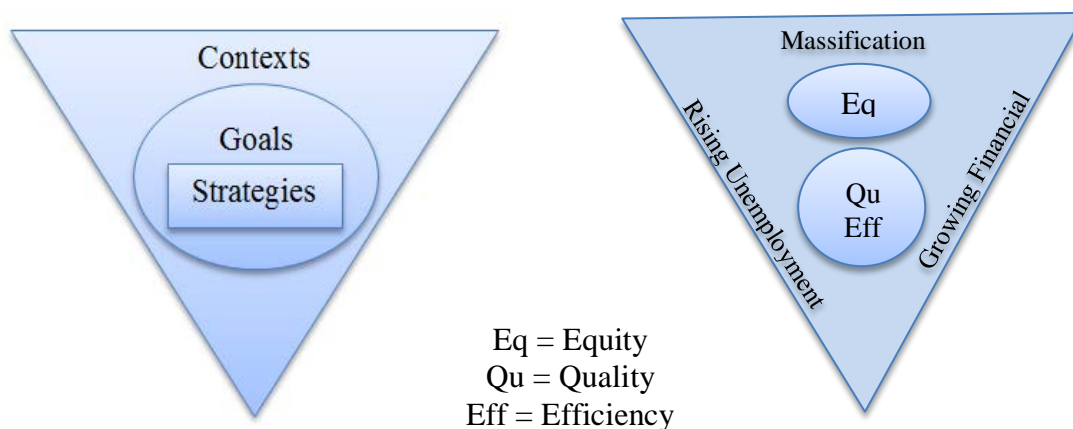
This reframed the perceived ways tertiary education institutions (TEIs) should function.

Efficiency measures output per unit cost. Thus, pressure to educate more (and diverse) students with relatively fewer funds promoted discourses of efficiency, and related concerns with quality assurance and accountability.

### **5.1.3 Contexts, Goals and Strategies**

The contexts an author chooses to establish in texts is important. They frame what goals can be considered and subsequently, what strategies and recommendations are available (See Figure 6). Therefore, the construction or highlighting of specific contexts has implications for suggested policy direction. Despite diverse national contexts, the three highlighted contexts (i.e. massification, unemployment and financial constraints) led to several key recurrent themes across the reviews; and two common key goals and recommended strategies for achieving them. Each theme and the key goals of *equity* and *quality/efficiency* are all highly connected to each other and all should be viewed as responses to the three contexts.

Quality and efficiency could be considered separate goals. One can imagine recommendations that would improve one of these, but not the other. However they are well



**Figure 6: Contexts and Goals**

linked both grammatically and functionally in the reviews. They are often co-located and strategies recommended for quality are also recommended for efficiency. One example is institutional funding linked to performance criteria, which is described as promoting both quality and efficiency. Another involves higher education institution (HEI) partnerships with other institutions and with industry. They can therefore be considered one goal set (Aus4, 11; Bel7, 18; Den4c, 20; Ger8; NZ27; UK6, 13; RTE, p. 87, 89, 118; Swe21).

...quality improvements have as one of their functions more efficient use of resources and greater productivity (Aus14)

...a valid objective in the quest for improved quality and more efficient use of resources (Nor12)

It is more accurate to describe this goal set as increasing both component goals without threatening the other. The texts rarely engage with the possibility of efficiency goals being a threat to quality.

Each of the two goals is associated with a number of strategic policy recommendations. See Table 2 and the discussion that follows.

Contexts	High unemployment	Demand driven massification	Financial crises
Foci	Vocational                      Quality/efficiency		
Goals	G1. Improve Quality and Efficiency of HE G2. Improve Equity of Access to HE		
First order Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HEI autonomy (G1)</li> <li>• Devolution (G1)</li> <li>• Diversity/flexibility of HEIs, programmes, delivery (G1 &gt; G2)</li> <li>• HEI competition (G1)</li> <li>• Partnerships with industry, community, institutions (G1 &gt; G2)</li> <li>• Client orientation (G1 &gt; G2)</li> </ul>		

**Table 2: Contexts, Goals and Strategies in the 1990s Reviews**

The notation G1>G2 indicates that the strategy was primarily associated with Goal 1 and secondarily with Goal 2.

## Quality and Efficiency

To achieve quality and efficiency, reviewers recommend strategies of *Institutional Autonomy* and *Devolution of Government Responsibility*. These are reported as “the keys to future development” (UK15) supporting a competitive market-mentality, innovation, efficiency, and institutional entrepreneurialism. Quality enhancement is expected from a curriculum that is more responsive to students and society, from creative ways of teaching and learning, and through new sources of revenue. A tactical role for governments is recommended:

One theme running through our comments is the advantage of a strengthened strategic role for the Ministry and government. (Den6b)

Second order recommendations (those strategies proposed to achieve a first order recommendation) include a central State role in: a) monitoring outcomes/quality; b) steering HEI decision making through guidelines and targeted funding; and c) the gathering and dissemination of data and input from stakeholders (Chi9; NZ15; RTE, p. 48).

...recentralizing through, for example, closer monitoring and dissemination of information, more frequent and in-depth accreditation, new criteria for the allocation of staff and finances, a more transparent and coherent framework of qualifications or more fully developed assessments of learning outcomes (RTE, p. 4)

The State is seen as having an important and direct role (e.g. monitoring) and a role in helping market mechanisms (e.g. information dissemination).

An associated strategy theme is *diversity and flexibility*. This is not just considered in terms of sourcing a diverse and flexible labour pool, but also in programming options for students; methods of teaching and learning; and in foci/types of institutions (Bel13; Por15d, 26c; UK8; Vir15b):

The best option may be to give individuals the widest possible choice, coupled with the best possible information. (Swe20c).

...adaptation of teaching and assessment practices in 'first years' of tertiary education, to accommodate diversity in backgrounds and interests in the student population. (Bel19)

Reviewers strongly linked institutional diversity to quality through competition, often in terms of responding to both labour market need and student demand. The reviewers claim that development of a new private HE sector in that country "...introduced new competition, pressing both public and private institutions to prove 'success'..." (Por10).

An integrated and complex notion of the relations between HE and various facets of society was evident in strong themes of strategies for *Partnerships and Collaboration* within the

education system and with other social partners. Improved articulation and coordination of programming between institutions<sup>53</sup> were seen as efficient and benefitting students moving between forms and levels of education. Collaboration with partners outside of the education system (i.e. regional and national government, international partners, public and private stakeholders, professions and community) were recommended. Reviewers claim,

The policy objective for the institutions of 'opening up to the world' needs to be vigorously pursued with greater emphasis on market sensitivity, students as clients, customer service and partnerships with industry, regional bodies and cultural institutions. (Swe20b)

The world to which HE is to open up to and engage does include, but is not limited to, industry.

The strongest recommendations for external partnership were, however, for collaborations with potential employers. Reviewers explain:

The key question is: are the students being prepared for a rapidly changing world of work whose final bearings are likely to be global as much as regional and for which highly competent, energetic and creative individuals will be needed in increasing numbers? (Bel15)

Industry is presented as providing opportunity for students to engage in practical work experience and a source of specialist teaching staff. Largely, industry partners are constructed as consultants for course and program design and for evaluation of students and teachers. A key objective is to align TE with the needs of the labour market, providing students with a competitive edge in a difficult labour market and providing regions with needed human capital. Such partnerships are expected to provide required labour market skills, to affect regional development, to improve HEI accountability, and to enhance efficiency. Reviewers summarize:

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<sup>53</sup> Note that integration and articulation between programs at different institutions does not necessarily contradict competition for funding or students based on overall quality (however that is perceived and measured).

In order to meet needs for local, regional and national development, to provide a kind of education that addresses emerging as well as established employment opportunities and to achieve greater efficiencies in the use of resources, industry-education partnership of many different kinds have emerged in a number of OECD countries. (Nor10)

Notice that in the above quotation, the needs of the regions (via development), the students (via employment opportunities) and employers (via efficiencies) are all included. These are each clients and reviewers reported complex *Client Orientation*, which often privileges the student as client, and in other cases recognizes a broader client base.

An over-arching question is: who is the 'client' to be served – employers, students, the broader economy and society? Or, as seems likely, some combination... (NZ27) The challenge is to adapt programmes, teaching and learning to student needs and interests rather than to require students to adapt to the programmes; in short, to seek ways to be more responsive to student demands within programmes or in combinations of programmes (Por17e).

How should tertiary education better respond to the interests and choices of "clients", students foremost among them? (RTE, p.3)

Students as clients suggests a "...need to review the conditions under which students learn...providing assistance in social and academic orientation and integration..." (Ger16). This includes counselling for articulation and success to ensure student choices are appropriate for employment opportunities, but also for their interests and capabilities (Bel13; Jap17; RTE, p.9; UK7b).

Student needs, however, are largely set as overlapping with employer and economy needs.

One review states:

...principal concern is the extent to which there are effective and widely-used means of feedback from the labour market and of responses on the part of institutions and



programmes. The key question is: are the students being prepared for a rapidly changing world of work? (Bel15)

Guidance is expected to increase efficiency by supporting the success of all students but particularly those who have previously been under-represented, part-time students and those for whom cost could be a barrier. This illustrates a central concern for equity (Bel11b; Ger23; Nor15c; Por17d; RTE, p.95; UK18b).

Educational guidance and information as well as career advice are even more important with higher levels of participation and a widening range of backgrounds and interests. (Vir25c)

### **Equity of access**

The second main goal, access equity, is presented as threatened by efficiency foci and financial constraints of a turbulent period. TE is cast as the great equalizer in economic and non-economic terms: a source of social mobility and enriched lives.

It is also recognised that there are non-monetary benefits and value is attached to equity in participation. (UK10)

Consequently, inequity of provision is seen as undemocratic, unjust, inefficient and a waste of human potential. It is described as a goal in its own right and as a condition necessary for economic development. One review offers a concise summary:

To fail to pursue the adaptations needed to extend tertiary education to 90 per cent or more of a generation is to ignore deeply held democratic values, to accept the social bias which presently remains, to risk further marginalisation and social exclusion and to reject the possibility that the additional monetary and nonmonetary returns on investment for even higher levels of participation in tertiary education will outweigh the costs. (Vir12)

Note that this data segment is worded in terms of offering TE to the populace, more or less as a right of citizenship with equity goals in mind, and not specifically as a mechanism to provide

human capital to industry. While it is true that the documents in other places discuss productivity and innovation, this data segment is an example of how social goals and equity are not side-lined and not treated as secondary to productive capacity. Although this particular data segment could possibly be interpreted as encouraging greater participation and demand for HE, the reference to democracy and the themes in the rest of the text lead this researcher to interpret this more as a response to high student demand for HE. This latter point will be developed more in Chapter 6. Finally, note the claim that benefits of extending TE to more citizens outweigh the costs. This may be somewhat suggestive of a large and perhaps increasing absolute responsibility for State financing. It can be said, at least, that this is not a call to reduce relative financial responsibility of the State.

Strategies for quality and efficiency are directly and clearly articulated in many pages of the reviews. Those for equity are less developed. However, some strategies developed for quality and efficiency goals (i.e. client-orientation and diversity of programming) are also linked to equity in the texts even if they are primarily described in terms of quality and efficiency benefits. This is represented in Table 2 above by the denotation “ $G1 > G2$ ”. Strategies which are developed and strongly linked to goals of quality and efficiency are suggested additionally as supportive of equity. However, a strong and direct role for the State (partly through income contingent loans) is highlighted in the assurance of equity.

...a stronger role needs to be played by central government in planning the scale and shape of tertiary education provision, assuring quality, ensuring more equitable access, and building articulation between the different parts of the system. (Chi9)

In summary, three context themes (massification, financial constraints, unemployment) framed two main goal themes (quality/efficiency, equity), each of which was associated with a number of inter-linked strategy themes. Main strategy themes included:

- Institutional Autonomy
- Diversity/Flexibility
- Partnerships and Collaboration
- Client Orientation.

Related sub-themes included competition, quality assurance, accountability, employability, entrepreneurialism, innovation and responsiveness.

#### **5.1.4 Assumptions, Constructions and Values**

Through these data segments we can interpret some assumptions, constructions and values related to HE, the economy, and individuals, which are useful in considering the liberal nature of the documents. In terms of knowledge and HE, while it is assumed that TE should prepare people for work (Bel15, Den8, Jap17, 20b,NZ11b, Nor10b, 19b, Swe8, UK18) the social benefits of HE for individuals and for a nation are also valued and positioned clearly (NZ22, 27, Nor10, Por16b, Swe7c, Vir12). HE is assumed to be able to address marginalization in social and economic terms (Nor6; UK10, Por9c), so equity of access is valued as a right and necessary to democracy: all individuals who aspire to HE should have access (Den4, 12, 13b, 24; Por17, 17c, 26; Swe7, 7b; UK10; Vir12, 25).

There is recognition of the right of all citizens to participate in tertiary education regardless of preparation, age or background. (Vir25)

While devolution of State responsibility is a key theme, a substantial role for the State is still understood. This does involve, but is not solely related to providing the market with signals (i.e. information) and resources. The role of the State in funding TE is not marginalized.

Although a major thrust of the reforms has been to devolve responsibility, strengthen local decision-making and stimulate institutional initiatives, these changes themselves depend upon practical working relations within a strong, clear,

well understood and agreed national framework of policy and central resourcing, monitoring, evaluation and feedback. (NZ15)

Still, the market is relied upon heavily to produce quality and efficiency gains through competition between autonomous TEIs (Bel18, Den4c, Ger9c, f; NZ29).

... we note that the competition among institutions/providers encourages a 'client' orientation and certain strategic alliances .... with improvements geared to client needs and expectations. (NZ29)

Of primary importance in the analysis to follow in Chapter 6, is the construction of reform as a response to public demand and a broad and complex understanding of that public that includes the market but does not minimize demands of individuals.

## 5.2 Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Based Economy

### 5.2.1 Introduction

Partially in response to HE massification, but also to changes in the global economy, OECD embarked on a second set of reviews of domestic TE systems.

With increasing globalisation<sup>54</sup> of the economy and labour markets, their tertiary education systems are facing new pressures. This led the OECD's Education Committee to request a major review of tertiary education. (OECD, n.d.-TRTE-Web, p. ¶ 1)

The overall purpose of the project was to assist policy makers in “implementing policies to achieve national social and economic objectives through tertiary education” (OECD, n.d.-TRTE-Obj, p. ¶ 1) and it proclaims equity, quality and sustainability to be key concerns (OECD, 2004-Gdl). As was true for the first TE thematic review, the Secretariat prepared and distributed guidelines for participation (OECD, 2004-Gdl) that outlined the terms, purposes and processes of country reviews including questions to be answered for background reports. Questions in this set of reviews appeared more wide ranging than in the 1990s reviews. They focused on national contexts, structure of the system, links between TE and the labour market, the regional role of TE, the role of TE in innovation, equity, resourcing, system governance, quality assurance and internationalization<sup>55</sup>.

Analysis was again informed by the background country reports, commissioned papers<sup>xviii</sup> (See Appendix H: Documents Informing Thematic Reviews of TE in the 2000s), OECD statistics and the wider literature on TE (OECD, 2004-Gdl). While the present study did not

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<sup>54</sup> The document appears to define globalized economy as involving the increased flow of knowledge, goods, services and labour across international boundaries. In HE contexts, it also involves international student and academic faculty mobility.

<sup>55</sup> The term internationalization is used in these documents seemingly to refer to academic globalization: the increased international character in HEIs in terms of student and faculty demographics.

analyze the background and commissioned papers in detail, what was available was reviewed for general content. A statement in the literature review on quality assurance stands out as having potential to direct the reviews:

In numerous countries, a further factor has been the growing pressure on governments to limit public expenditure. Furthermore, guiding student demand to fields that are important for economic development is a key issue in the transition to technology-based economies (Van Vught and Westerheijden, 1994). (Kis, 2005, p. 3)

The literature review on quality also outlines five general approaches to quality indicating that two are appropriate to HE:

Lomas (2001) suggests that fitness for purpose [as defined by provider] and transformation [qualitative change in the student; includes concepts such as empowerment and democracy] seem to be the two most appropriate definitions of quality. (p.4)

It specifically dismisses *value for money* as an appropriate form of quality in HE. It is also noteworthy that the review reports wide scholarly debate on whether funding should be linked to quality monitoring and that there is little empirical evidence on the effects of quality assurance mechanisms on quality of teaching and learning. Finally, the report suggests that quality assurance mechanisms may have influenced an increase in managerialism<sup>56</sup> and “extended the economic world of rational calculation and management to HEIs” (p. 28).

A commissioned paper written by two economists at the *Centre for Economic Performance* at the London School of Economics (Machin & McNally, 2007) addressed relationships between HE and labour markets. It argued that changing technology is

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<sup>56</sup> A way of governance associated with NPM with emphasis on efficiency, instrumentality, rewards, sanctions and accountability (Fitzsimons, n.d.)

responsible for an increase in demand for high-skill HE graduates. It contends there is a skills deficit and mismatch and that claims of graduate over-supply reflects the ability and poor choices individuals make to study in areas not in demand by the labour market. “It sometimes takes a long time for some (usually less well performing) graduates to find jobs” (p.3). It concludes there is “good reason to expand the system further” in order to promote economic growth and that the State should provide incentives and information to direct learners into particular fields for which there is market demand. To be clear, these comments are from the background reports that were reported to have fed the reviews under analysis in this dissertation. They are not taken from the reviews themselves. However, the reviews can be examined while recalling these claims made in the background report.

Twenty-four countries<sup>57</sup> prepared a background report. These countries had access to the background reports of other nations and their data contributed to the overall final comparative report (OECD, 2008-TEKS). Fourteen of these countries<sup>58</sup> additionally hosted a country visit. Review teams, this time, contained five reviewers, one of whom represented the Secretariat<sup>59</sup>. Otherwise, these appeared much like the visits for the 1990s reviews. Country notes produced, however, were substantially larger this time: between 100 and 150 pages compared to 20 to 30 pages. There is no comment in the documents indicating why these later reviews were longer.

The processes for these later reviews were essentially the same as for the previous. They involved cooperation between the reviewers and stakeholders in domestic education. In addition

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<sup>57</sup> Australia, Belgium (Flemish Community), Chile, China, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Iceland, Japan, Korea, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

<sup>58</sup> China, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Spain.

<sup>59</sup> As a reminder, the previous reviews involved four reviewers, two of whom were from the Secretariat

to the 14 country reviews, a large (723 page) summary entitled *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society* (2008-TEKS) was published. It repeated recommendations from the reviews but presented them as *directions to consider* instead of specific recommendations because they did not address a particular country context. The summary report was more nuanced and dialogic. What follows is primarily a description of the country reviews. Where the summary report differs, notation is made.

The reviews were published between 2006 and 2009. This timing was: after neoliberalism was becoming increasingly unpopular (according to scholars); soon after the release of the revised 2006 version of the *Jobs Strategy*; after civil society resistance with the defeat of the MAI; after OECD increased engagement with civil society; after some shifts had been identified away from neoliberalism in some policy fields in OECD; and after the establishment of the Directorate for Education. This timing could suggest opportunities for this project to reflect reduced neoliberal character compared to the reviews of the 1990s. However, it was also undertaken after a particularly neoliberal understanding of *the Knowledge Based Economy* (KBE) had propagated widely and gained wide acceptance. The relationships between knowledge, and the economy and other factors such as the State, market and individuals, can be understood and addressed in neoliberal, Keynesian, social democratic, or other combined ways. For instance, if we concede that economic development is increasingly related to the development of skills and knowledge, social democratic and coordinated market economies<sup>60</sup> might approach economic development through HE in a more balanced way. Other-than-market solutions, HE as a means to decrease unemployment, and more direct State involvement in funding and equity, might occupy more central positions. The conceptualizations of these

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<sup>60</sup> In general and brief, coordinated market economies rely to some degree on non-market mechanisms, see social policy as more than an adjunct to economic policy, and coordinate through cooperative means. See Hall and Soskice (2001) for a description of the differences between coordinated and liberal market economies.

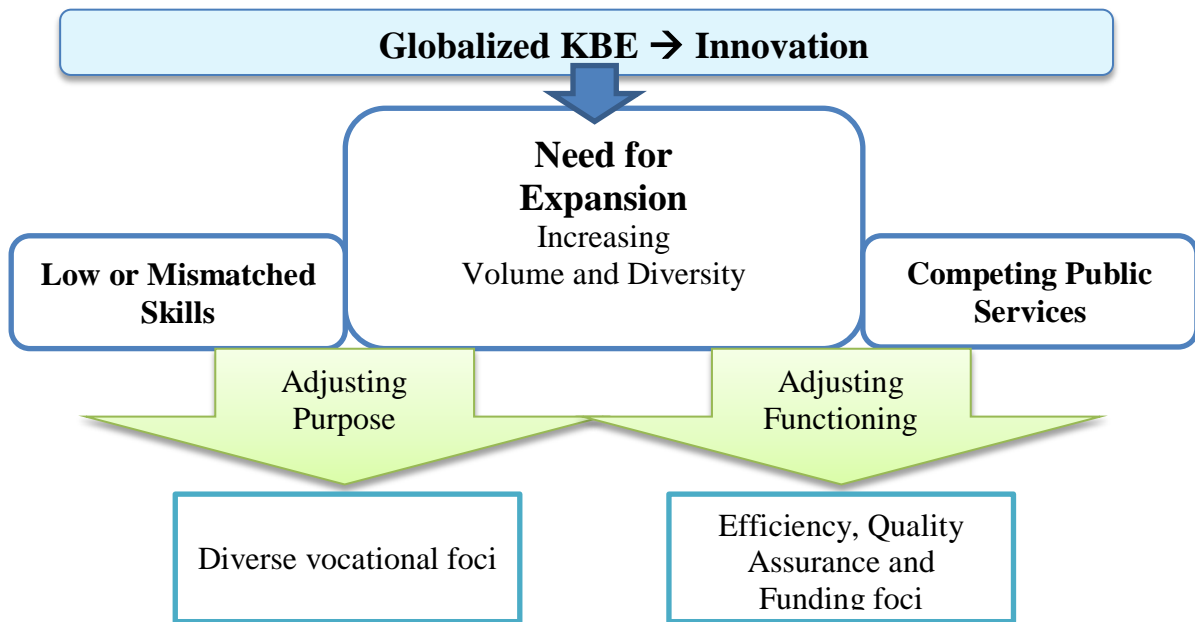


relationships propagated with the KBE discourse at this time, however, had a decidedly neoliberal flavour as described in Section 2.4.2 A Description. It centralized a perceived and primary reliance on knowledge and skills (particularly those associated with the firm and production through innovation, productivity and a flexible labour pool) on national competitiveness and economic health. It linked national economic growth to the supply of knowledge, goods and services, and not to the demand for goods and services. It focused on knowledge as a market commodity important for national and firm competitive advantage more than it did on applying knowledge to reduce unemployment and inequity. This reinforces a link between HE, the economy, and market mechanisms that is less interested in demand-side or other-than-market solutions, and which may have decreased the likelihood of a shift away from neoliberalism.

It is noted that in the later reviews four of five reviewers were educationalists and only one was from the Secretariat. In the earlier project, two of four were education ministry officials and two were from the Secretariat. This composition further provides opportunity for later reviews to reflect more of the humanistic traditions historically associated with education scholars.

### **5.2.2 Contextual Themes and the Purposes and Functioning of TE**

As was done for the reviews of the 1990s, this section begins by identifying the contexts that were established by authors in the reviews. Although they are similar in the two sets, there are subtle but important differences. Figure 7 illustrates those contexts and can be compared to Figure 5.



**Figure 7: Contexts and Foci in the 2000s Reviews**

The over-arching theme and reason given for TE reform is no longer demand driven massification. It is the globalized KBE (Chi54; Cro27; Czc97; Est53c; Ice34b; Jpn99; Kor19b, 112c; Nth38).

Higher education is a strategic means to ...contribute towards an increase in competitiveness and employment required by a knowledge based economy. (Mex21)

Universities are key organizations in the knowledge economy and in the Nation's system of innovation. (Ice49)

Based on the assumption that nations and firms must expand their knowledge development and innovation capacity to be competitive and maintain economic growth, innovation becomes an additional and central goal in these later reviews. Innovation was not absent in the previous reviews, but it assumes a more central position in these later reviews. The texts seldom question the assumption that HE must expand and TE expansion is related more to the desire to grow the economy in these later reviews than it is on responding to student demand. Also notice that the choice to promote expansion focused on competition through innovation is set as a context and

not as a policy direction decision (Chi6, 54, 99d; Czc17c; Est53d, 93c; Fin113; Ice18, 47, 49; Jap10; Mex20, 49,78, 79, 108, 109b; 108; TEKS, p. 15).

As in many other countries, policy-makers in Korea have called for expanding education (especially tertiary education) as a way of expanding the economy. (Kor42)

TEIs are now widely perceived worldwide as key engines for national and regional innovation and economic growth and competitiveness, requiring that they are strong across the full spectrum of pure and applied research. (Cro12)

Similarly, the authors chose to establish labour-skills deficit as a context framing policy options (Cro74c; Kor47, 52b).

There have been several reports of severe skills shortages, especially those requiring high technical levels....concerns have been expressed regarding skill and labour shortages. (Est33)

Given that one-third of working-age adults in the OECD countries have low skills, up-skilling the workforce and lifelong learning are particular challenges. (TEKS, p. 108)

This is in contrast to the context set in the 1990s of high unemployment: a shift from *employment* to *employability* and from addressing a systemic issue to supplying the labour market with appropriate human resources by focusing on the inadequacy of the individual. Note that although the mid-1990s faced higher unemployment rates in many countries than in 2007, by 2009 unemployment rates were again very high in many countries. Recall, also, that some scholars have debated such a skills gap (Brinkley, Fauth, Mahdon, & Theodoropoulou, 2009; Lavoie & Roy, 1998; Livingstone, 2002; Brown, Hesketh, & Williams, 2002). The framing shift focuses on the problems and needs of market-production more than on the demands of the worker/learners and therefore, has implications for what policy solutions are imaginable.

The imperative for countries is to raise higher-level employment skills. (TEKS, p.23)

Also see (Est66c; Nth88; Mex91).

The redirection of public funding toward other services and away from HE is also established as context. Doing so fails to acknowledge the decision involved in budgetary distribution, and sets the *necessity* of reducing public funding to education as an external constraint to which policy must respond. This is also established more as a permanent context and not necessarily as a temporary austerity measure for particularly difficult economic times. It is recommended even in countries like Korea that spend relatively little on HE (Kor39; Mex63; Pol13).

Pressures on the tertiary education budget are likely to continue. Other priorities such as increasing spending on pensions, medical care, or combating social exclusion are imposing growing pressure on the education budget. (Pol56; Spa72; TEKS, p. 174)

The vocational and quality/efficiency foci are maintained. However, the contexted need to reduce relative public funding to HE adds an additional funding focus. Ways of reducing HE expenditure and attracting alternate funding sources are recommended.

### **5.2.3 Contexts, Goals and Strategies**

Figure 8 illustrates the goals developed within the frame of the three contexts (i.e. intentional expansion, labour-skill deficit and competing public services). Comparing it to Figure 6 illustrates that two additional goal themes are strengthened in the later reviews:

- a) Funding: Reduce the relative reliance of TE on public funds; and
- b) Innovation: Increase the competitiveness of the country through knowledge production, distribution and innovation.

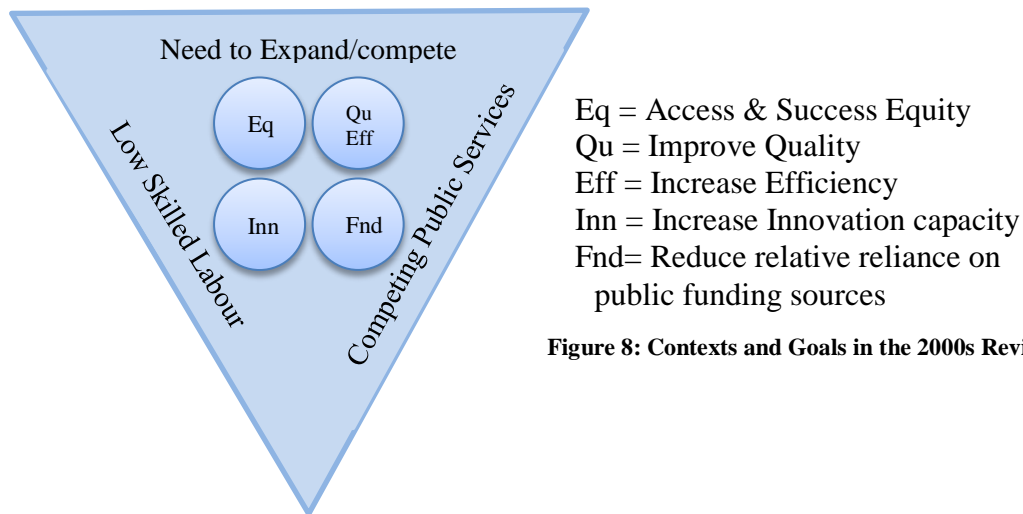


Figure 8: Contexts and Goals in the 2000s Reviews

The policy choices to drive HE expansion, focus on innovation, increase the skill-level of the labour pool and redirect public funding to other services are established as contexts in need of response and not as policy direction decisions. Each of these goals is associated with recommended strategies. Goals and recommendations are summarized in Table 3 alongside those from the earlier reviews for comparison.

Strategies in the 1990s reviews are mostly repeated in these later reviews. Some serve the additional goals as well. For instance, TEI autonomy serves quality/efficiency (G1), innovation (G3) and funding (G4) goals. The paragraphs below describe the strategies recommended for achieving each of these goals.

**Innovation** is centralized as important to production and competitive advantage of firms and nations. It is reported to require the following:

a) TEI economies of scale (TEKS, p. 118),

That private business investment in research and development has not risen as fast as investment from public sector may well reflect another dimension in the “problems of scale”. Small and medium-sized firms often lack the financial strength to undertake investment over the long-term that such activities demand. (Ice26)

	1990s			2000s		
Contexts	High unemployment	Demand driven massification	Financial crises	Under-skilled labour pool	Need to expand HE	Competing social services
Foci	Vocational		Quality/efficiency	Vocational		Quality/efficiency
Goals	G1. Improve Quality and Efficiency of HE G2. Improve Equity of Access to HE			G1. Improve Quality and Efficiency of HE G2. Improve Equity of Access and Success in HE G3. Increase Innovation capacity G4. Reduce relative reliance on public funds		
First order Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HEI autonomy (G1)</li> <li>• Devolution (G1)</li> <li>• Diversity/flexibility of HEIs, programmes, delivery (G1 &gt; G2)</li> <li>• HEI competition (G1)</li> <li>• Partnerships with industry, community, institutions (G1 &gt; G2)</li> <li>• Client orientation (G1 &gt; G2)</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HEI autonomy (G1, G3, G4)</li> <li>• Devolution (G1, G3, G4)</li> <li>• Diversity/flexibility of HEIs, programmes, delivery (G1, G3, G4 &gt; G2)</li> <li>• HEI competition (G1, G3, G4)</li> <li>• Partnerships with industry, community, institutions (G1, G3, G4 &gt; G2)</li> <li>• Client orientation (G1, G3, G4 &gt; G2)</li> <li>• Build STEM capacity (G3)</li> <li>• Greater student cost sharing (G4)</li> </ul>		

**Table 3: Comparing Strategies in 1990s and 2000s Reviews**

b) TEI competition (Czc79, Jpn50, 77; Ice16, 69-70; Mex73; Nth34c, 49b, 77b),

...national research capacity must be developed further and that competition is the driving force to realize such a strategy. (Ice31b)

By opening up the national universities to increasing competition, they will, it is believed, be fitter to face the challenges of the emerging global competition in higher education in the twenty-first century. (Jap18)

and c) increased science/technology/engineering/math (STEM) capacity (Cro70b; Est82b).

....require continuing efforts to build basic research capacity in selected universities, increase the science and technology researcher pool (Chi14)

There is an obvious need for implementing priorities in research and innovation....two main dimensions should be taken into account: the prospects for international competitiveness in the field in question, and the relevance in relation to concrete (future) needs in Estonian society. (Est82)

STEM capacity involves more students in these fields, more involvement with industry, and more research funding. Both basic and applied research are recommended with an emphasis on

commercializable products. TEIs act like quasi-firms and compete for funding and for students and rely on TEI autonomy. Competition is seen to support TEIs becoming more entrepreneurial, engaging in new ways with stakeholders and finding new revenue sources (e.g. Kor15, 85).

Developing and strengthening an entrepreneurial culture is an important prerequisite for successful knowledge and technology transfer and innovation. (Czc80b)

It is vital to attract talented students to science and technology fields and to careers in science and technology in order to help renew the research labour force, as well as for developing innovation and excellence. (Nth79)

Recommendations to promote STEM capacity, even at the cost of reducing resources to other disciplines such as social sciences, humanities and the arts is not problematized in the texts. There is the implicature that there is a tacit understanding that fields that do not contribute to competitive advantage do not deserve resources and that there would be no negative consequences to reducing these fields at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

**Equity** is described more in these later reviews as equity of access *and* success.

Recommendations are made specifically for improving outcomes of socio-economically disadvantaged and under-represented groups, for gender, geographic and age equity (Chi7; Czc57c; Cro92; Est27-28, 79b; Fin17b; Ice22).

Provide incentives for TEIs to widen participation and provide extra support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. (TEKS, p. 18)

Equity policies in Mexico, as in other countries, have traditionally emphasised equity of access. However, an increasing focus on equity of outcomes has emerged. (Mex75b)

There is emphasis in some reviews on opportunities and success for adult learners through program delivery options, funding considerations and prior competency assessment (Cro14, 50; Est50, 65e; Mex84,112b; Spa118; TEKS,p.46-47).

The provision for the admission on the basis of non-formal training (the recognition of non-credentialed prior learning, part of the National Qualifications Framework assessment model) and the access to the student support system for individuals of all ages has greatly benefited the participation of adults in tertiary education. (Nwz54)

...educational authorities should ensure that the assessment and recognition of prior learning is widely accessible and attractive to use (Pol 113; Spa130)

The most common recommendations for enhancing equity involve introducing income-contingent and needs-based loan schemes alongside increasing tuitions. It is argued that the increased funding received by HEIs in this manner could be used for expansion, research, and quality improvements. The other most common recommendation is for recruitment through improved guidance and counselling services so that under-represented groups can understand the benefit of TE.

In some cases strategies that are linked strongly to goals of quality/efficiency, innovation or funding are also secondarily and more weakly associated with the goal of equity. For instance, partnerships with industry, the community and other institutions are expected to improve quality of outcomes in terms of labour force skills and to improve access and successes more broadly (Czc44b; Cro13e, 50; Fin31, 32; Ice35b; Mex75, 93).

...a more coherent system would help to improve its efficiency, whilst also increasing its equity, flexibility and responsiveness. (Kor107b)

...it is often not recognised that increasing private contributions can be an engine for equity by creating more resources and more study places at a wide range of public HEIs. (Czc57)



The **funding** goal—specifically, the requirement to reduce TEI relative reliance on public funds—is associated with several strategies. Again, central is TEI autonomy: entrepreneurial institutions should creatively seek new revenue sources and compete for tuition-paying students and financial backers (Czc46b; Jpn46; Mex112b, 117; Nth36, 50) .

Third stream research funding from non-governmental and private sources, becomes increasingly important as universities diversify their revenue base. **The encouragement of an entrepreneurial culture in universities would seem to be the logical follow on** from this both in respect of institutions and individuals. (Ice70, original emphasis)

Countries that rely more on a mix of resources are also in a better position to maintain or improve quality in higher education, research and innovation than those that rely solely on public resources to fund their systems. (Czc42)

As a general principle, diversity of financing sources is desirable for tertiary education institutions. It tends to enhance autonomy, to promote the engagement of TEIs with society and the economy, and to protect institutions from unexpected downturns in revenue from individual sources. (Cro30c)

One might note the claim in the last data segments that diversity of funding increases institutional autonomy. Industry is a potentially large source of alternate funding. The documents do not present concern that receiving funding from industry could potentially have negative impacts. Industry funding could influence the type of research that is done and the direction curricula take. It may lead to a privileging of STEM and business fields at the expense of other disciplines not aligned as directly to industry. There is no recognition of this in the reviews.

One strategy theme more prevalent in these reviews is *cost-sharing*: students, it is claimed, as primary beneficiaries of TE, should bare a substantial proportion of the cost. Sizable tuitions are endorsed, supported by means-tested loans repaid after graduation on a progressive and

income-contingent basis. Grants to students should be minimized and large block grants to TEIs are condemned as benefiting those already privileged as much as those who are not (Chi13b; Cro33d; Ice37b; Nor67; Pol95; Spa73, 111, 112).

The primary means for increasing the share of private resources is to increase cost sharing in the system through higher fees combined with more student financial aid such as grants and loans to offset the impact of higher fees on students who cannot afford them. (Czc42b)

The **quality and efficiency** goal is not substantially different in these reviews than in the earlier ones. The reviews contend that institutional autonomy, devolution of state authority, diversity, flexibility, competition, partnerships and client orientation all promote both quality and efficiency. It is additionally claimed that increased cost sharing will improve efficiency and quality of outcomes because students will be motivated to work harder and finish faster.

#### **5.2.4 Assumptions, Constructions and Values**

Goals and strategies were based on assumptions, many of which are not radically different from those found in the earlier reviews. TE is still assumed to have a significant role in preparing people for work. However, it appeared to this researcher as though this preparation was weighted toward and concerned with increasing the productive capacity of the workforce (as opposed to, for instance, unemployment or social mobility concerns) compared to the earlier reviews. Social benefits of HE are still acknowledged. However, it appeared to this researcher that emphasis was on private non-economic benefits such as personal health, and not more widely on larger social impacts such as those on culture, democracy and critical thinking. The notion of HE as a right was not extinguished, but there was a strong notion of it being a responsibility as well. National economic well-being relies on a well-trained workforce. Furthermore, the individual is constructed as responsible for their own condition: a condition that can be improved through HE.

Other assumptions of note include:

1. The labour market is assumed to be rapidly changing and in need of a highly skilled and flexible labour pool;
2. TE must be expanded and reformed in order for it to provide the labour market with a pool of human capital that will be productive and efficient, and to develop the innovation (via STEM) that will gain the nation competitive advantage; and
3. The private benefits to the individual student who invests in HE as a market-valued commodity is greater than the public benefits, and therefore, the individual should pay more for TE than the State.

Note the contrast to the claims in the earlier reviews that industry, individuals and society are all equal clients of HE and that the added benefits to society of expanding HE far outweigh the added costs. Note too that competition had a smaller role (although not insignificant) in the 1990s documents. Finally, note what seems to be a shift from responding to public demand for expansion to a drive to supply private interests and the market with human resources and innovative knowledge.

### **5.2.5 The Summary Document**

The summary document likely targeted a similar audience as individual reviews (policy makers, HE scholars and administrators) but on a more global scale. It is possible that it would have a larger influence on countries who did not directly participate in the reviews and on the general direction of the global discourse in HE. It summarized findings of the 14 country reviews, 10 additional country background reports<sup>61</sup>, and included a substantial amount of literature in support of its positions. It did not claim to represent an exhaustive literature review.

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<sup>61</sup> For countries that prepared background reports but did not participate in a field visit.

As were the country reviews, the summary report was in academic policy genre with minimal use of colour or graphics. Three of the four main authors of the report were OECD personnel: two from the Directorate for Education and one from the Directorate for Science, Technology and Industry. The final main author was a consultant<sup>62</sup> and the authors were further supported by various OECD personnel whose associations were not disclosed. Unlike the country reviews, the summary did include many scientific-looking graphs and tables, which could add to its perceived status as an impartial expert publication. Unlike the reviews, the summary also included a large number of attributed references including peer reviewed publications from scholars in education and economics. The body reflected a more nuanced vision, openly admitting to debate in some areas. However, assumptions and recommendations toward which the summary is weighted are precisely those also found in the reviews. Several data segments from the summary report have been included in the descriptions above and in the analyses in Chapter 6. Additionally, the executive summary and conclusions of the summary report lack the dialogic and nuanced nature of the body. They tend to distil the variety of perspectives on policy and present only those also in focus in the reviews. This may lead a reader to accept the findings less critically, assuming that the authors have fairly weighed all opinions. Additionally, reference to convergence in policy direction between countries is used heavily in the summary document which may imply consensus and teleology.

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<sup>62</sup> I was unable to ascertain the area of expertise of the consultant.

## 5.3 Higher Education 2030 (HE2030)

### 5.3.1 Introduction

This section presents a description of CERI's *Higher Education 2030* project<sup>63</sup> and the assumptions, constructions and predictions within it. The project "...aims to inform and facilitate strategic change to be made by government decision-makers and other key stakeholders in higher education" (OECD, 2012-2030Web). It aimed to offer forward looking analytic and thematic reviews of "trends and dialogue with the stakeholders and experts" in HE (OECD, 2012-2030Web).

The project presents itself as aligned with the missions and values described in the Section 4.2.4 *Mission and Values*, specifically, a commitment to evidence based, objective, open, transparent and pioneering research. Reported aims of the project are:

- to highlight recent changes in higher education and underline the opportunities offered to countries by new trends in higher education and related social fields.
- to analyze key trends from an international standpoint and look at developments in a disinterested way.
- to offer avenues for strategic reflection on the major questions to be confronted in higher education in coming years.
- to create future scenarios with a 15-20 year time-line to link complex trends in separate areas and engage stakeholders in strategic thinking. (OECD, 2012-2030Web)

The project called on a number of commissioned and background papers. The few listed on OECD's website are listed in Appendix I: *Documents Informing HE2030*. These were not

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<sup>63</sup> *Higher Education 2030* is the name of the four volume book series and the project is often referred to with this name. However, the project, including the 2008 international conference that launched the publication of Volume 1 is also called the *University Futures Project*.

analyzed in detail for this dissertation. Thus, I restrict my comments on these to noting they were mostly authored by OECD personnel.

A central part of the methodology of HE2030 involved meetings with stakeholders and experts in HE. OECD reports 13 such events between 2003 and 2008 (See *Appendix J: Meetings of HE2030*). Some involved single stakeholder groups (e.g. government policy makers) and others involved a cross section of interested parties (OECD/CERI, n.d.-HE2030-Mtg). Some had a specific theme (i.e. access in a time of globalization; labour market orientation; academic research) and others were more broad (i.e. expectations of varied stakeholders). A variety of stakeholder voices provides the project with opportunity to reflect and engage a number of perspectives and tensions in the field.

On its website, OECD has published some of the presentations, agendas, participant information and background papers related to some of these meetings. More than a cursory review of these was beyond the scope of this dissertation. One such international seminar was conducted in Turkey in 2006. It gathered approximately 60 participants to discuss their changing expectations for HE. Participants included representatives of industry (i.e. Coca-cola), students (i.e. The National Union of Students in Europe), finance (i.e. Industrial Development Bank of Turkey, World Bank-USA), academia (i.e. Canadian Association of University Teachers) but mostly participants were associated with Ministries of Education or educational institutions (i.e. Ministry of Education and Research-Norway, European University Association) (CERI/OECD, n.d.-HE2030Sem).

Among the 13 meetings, I note that only one meeting focused on quality and equity (and efficiency). The others focused largely on labour and other market forces and upon HE's role in a KBE in terms of competitive advantage through innovation. A case in point is the 2005

conference in Washington, D.C. entitled *Advancing Knowledge and the Knowledge Economy*. Its presentations<sup>xix</sup> included a keynote by OECD Deputy Secretary-General Berglind Ásgeirsdóttir, which concluded that “The development of the knowledge economy is dependent on four main ‘pillars’: innovation, new technologies, human capital and enterprise dynamics” (slide 4).

Although it is far from clear in such a limited data source and although I have not done a detailed analysis of this speech, this statement and the associated presentation slides seem to suggest a weighting toward supplying industry with productive capacity more than creating demand for goods and services. For instance, new technology appears related to production and efficiency gains more than to consumer products and demands.

The final product of the project is a four-volume report. By the end of 2012 two volumes had been published. Volume 1 was a 302 page description of global demographic changes, predictions of future change and reflections on how these changes might affect HE. Volume 2 was a 360 page work describing trajectories of various processes associated with “globalization<sup>64</sup>” and considering their possible impacts on HE. Volume 3 (Technology) was scheduled for release in late 2012 but at the time of writing this dissertation, it was still not publicly available. Volume 4, scheduled for 2013, launches from these reports exploring possible scenarios for HE in greater detail.

Each published volume contained several chapters, each authored by scholars from various backgrounds. For instance, among other topics, Volume 1 (2008-HE2030) chapters include:

- a) student enrolment trends in OECD countries written by researchers at the International Centre for Higher Education Research, University of Kassel, Germany;
- b) an exploration of shrinking student populations in the far east by researchers at the Center for the Advancement of Higher Education, Tohoku University, Japan and at Brunel

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<sup>64</sup> Largely described in the project as competition, collaboration and mobility across national boundaries.

University and the Centre for Higher Education Research and Innovation, Open University, United Kingdom;

- c) an assessment of disabled student needs authored by a member of the OECD Directorate for Education; and
- d) an exploration of the reversal of gender disparity authored by a senior analyst at CERI.

Volume 2 (2009-HE2030) includes:

- a) authors from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology discussing institutional mobility;
- b) experiences concerning the Bologna process presented by authors from a Bavarian Higher Education agency, a Centre for HE management in Bath and the Irish Universities Association; and
- c) the rise of private provision is explored by a scholar at the University of Porto, Portugal.

This project differs from the country reviews reported on in the previous two sections (5.1 and 5.2). It does not make recommendations directly, but uses experiences of countries, empirical studies and theory to make predictions about possible demographic, political and technological futures and how they might impact HE. Assumptions and opinions of authors can be deduced from the text. Country reviews would be of interest mostly to policy stakeholders in the countries under review and were directed more toward reform in the immediate future. HE2030 takes a longer term and more global view. Country reviews were concerned primarily with first credential programs across various formal post-secondary institutions (i.e. ISCED5A and 5B). HE2030 was concerned with first and subsequent credentials (i.e. graduate degrees, professional degrees, ISCED6) and in research, but primarily only at universities (i.e. ISCED5A, ISCED6).



The remainder of this section is divided into three main explorations:

- a) assumptions and constructions;
- b) predictions; and
- c) complexity of perspectives as they are presented in the project.

### **5.3.2 Assumptions and Constructions**

This section is divided into three subsections. The first explores assumptions and constructions about the economy. The second explores those related to individual worker/learners. The last presents those related to HE. Of course, these three areas are highly interrelated.

#### ***5.3.2.1 The globalized KBE***

The state of the world's economic relations is declared as a globalized KBE. Authors offer considerable explanation of what is meant by *globalized* (V218a, 18-9, 19a, 20a, 27b). In fact, the second volume is devoted to globalization. In short, it is characterized by growing cultural and economic connection:

“The widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness” is here understood as a geo-spatial process of growing inter-dependence and convergence, in which worldwide or panregional (for example European) spheres of action are enhanced....Globalisation can be variously understood as the roll-out of worldwide markets; the globalisation “from below” of environmental, consumer rights and human rights activists; and the exchange of knowledge and cultural artefacts within a common space....we can today imagine an increasingly plural environment. (V2p19b)

It is where national policy increasingly articulates with global strategies. Domestic policy is uprooted from national frameworks into more international contexts as described in Section 1.1.1

*National versus International Policy Issues.* These ‘inescapable’ convergences constrain nations’ self-determination. International perceptions become increasingly important and systems of accountability and steering become more complex (V2p20b, 24, 25a, 26b, 46, 47b, 49b, 131a, c).

One author offers:

Beerkens (2004) defines globalisation as “a process in which basic social arrangements within and around the university become disembedded from their national context due to the intensification of transnational flows of people, information and resources.” (V2p47a)

The KBE is a major unquestioned construct framing the understanding of and predictions for the future of HE in these documents (V1p181-2, 205; V2p75, 82a, 189):

...within a rapidly changing, highly competitive, technology based, and most importantly, knowledge-based global environment (V1p260).

The fact that global economic competition is seen as knowledge-driven...(V2p25c)

Although *globalized* is well described in the project, the KBE is left as a floating abstraction in these documents to be interpreted by the reader. Throughout the reports one can assemble an understanding of the KBE as a highly networked, business-integrated service economy relying heavily on ICTs and a growing supply of well-educated and highly productive knowledge-workers (in a bifurcated skills labour market) who develop through research, the knowledge and innovations required for the nation to be competitive and powerful in a more globalized world (V1p14b, 54b, 74b, 82a, 181b, c, 181-2, 187, 189b, 242, V2p13a, 19d, 119, 131a, 149, 150, 180b, 286a). As knowledge, skills and technology are central in a KBE, HE has a special role in the development of human capital and in research.

Nothing will matter more to Europe’s future than the ability of countries, governments, workers and companies to innovate – a process which will depend in no small degree on ... the quality of our human capital (Ederer, 2006) (V2p286a).

It [HE] trains the highly skilled workers and contributes to the research base and capacity for innovation that determine competitiveness in the knowledge-based global economy (V2p13a).

Higher participation rates and LLL are announced as important for maintaining the nation's human capital. World-class research universities are in focus for attracting top talent and producing leading edge innovation (V1p205, 225, 232, 242; V2p 45-6, 98, 114b, 123, 189, 291).

They concur that desirable characteristics for inhabitants are that they reach high levels of education and develop their capacities to become economic and social “agents of change” within a rapidly changing, highly competitive, technology based, and most importantly, knowledge-based global environment. (V1p260)

It [Higher Education] trains the highly skilled workers and contributes to the research base and capacity for innovation that determine competitiveness in the knowledge-based global economy. (V2p13a)

Although the importance of HE to the individual is not absent, the project focuses more on the importance of HE for the country's competitive advantage. Knowledge is a factor in production and production (as opposed to consumption or demand) optimization is unquestioned as the way to stimulate economic health.

Figure 9 is an algorithm representing the steps assumed to lead to national well-being in a KBE.

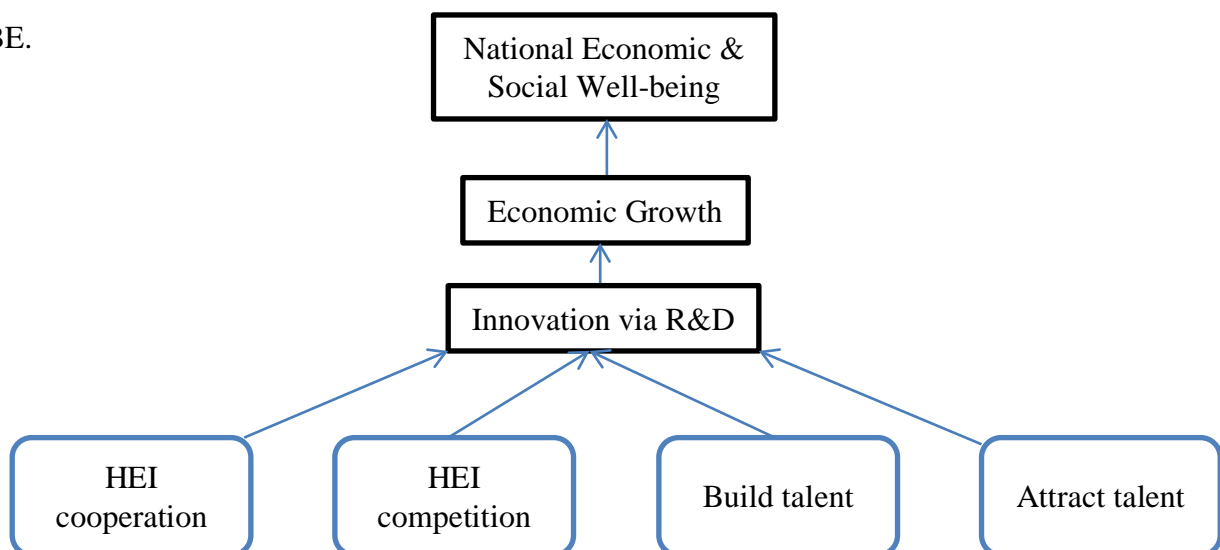


Figure 9: Algorithm of KBE Assumptions

The initial assumption is that national well-being is a product of economic growth. Subsequently, economic growth is a result of the competitive edge that innovation provides through research and development. Innovation is seen as both the cause of and response to rapidly changing knowledge, skills and technology, and competition.

...growth in the knowledge economy relies on innovation and R&D... (V2p150. See also V2p54a,b,d, 286a, 292, 316a)

Note that demand-side economic options are not considered. The assumption is that if the supply of goods and services is stimulated with innovation, the economy will grow. Innovation is assumed to be supported by four strategies:

1) **Cooperation within HEIs** (V2p18c, 22, 26a). If HEIs within a country cooperate with each other, it will improve the efficiency of the system and opportunities for innovation. Also, if countries within a region cooperate, the region will be more innovative.

...international co-operation in higher education is expected to enhance the global competitiveness of Europe as a whole (V2p22).

Similarly, HEI cooperation with industry is also assumed to promote innovation (V2p51, 55b, 101, 117, 119b, 126e).

2) **Competition between HEIs**. Market effects are assumed to create innovation through competing HEIs. Increasingly, out-put based national funding competition is linked to innovation (e.g. more funding for researchers and institutions with better citation records). It also involves institutions competing for status internationally to win funding and attract the best students and faculty (V2p18c, 220a, b). In the end, “governments in many nations are wrestling with the question of whether competition at home improves competitiveness abroad, and which combination of competition with collaboration will deliver the best results outside the border” (V2p54c).

3) **Building talent.** It is assumed that the human capital driving the KBE is built within HE. This includes training top researchers through ISCED6 programming and making *world class* research universities (V2p14b, 180a). But the emphasis is on building productive labour capacity. It is assumed that an ISCED5A/5B labour force will increase efficiency and productivity and contribute to innovation (also see V1p119, 120, 174a, 181c, 212, V2p180a, 189, 239, 281a, 286a, 291, 292a, 316b):

...a good level of education has both a positive impact on worker productivity and is conducive to improved performance in terms of innovation (V1p64).

[HE] trains the highly skilled workers and contributes to the research base and capacity for innovation that determine competitiveness in the knowledge-based global economy (V2p13a).

4) **Attracting talent.** Through developing international education and high international rankings, HEIs and the countries they reside in hope to attract the brightest students and most promising researchers to fuel the country's innovation capacity.

In line with the logic of the knowledge economy, it aims at attracting talented students (and academics) likely to become knowledge workers for the host country's economy and to enhance the quality and competitiveness of the country's research and higher education sectors. (V2p74b).

Each of these strategies supplies industry with human capital and innovation capacity. In summary, the project represents certain assumptions about the economy. In general, it positions national well-being as dependent on economic growth, competitive advantage and innovation which is assumed to be advanced through cooperation and competition and through human capital development in HE. It assumes that the skills and knowledge in the labour pool required by the market for national economic growth are increasingly advanced and rapidly changing.

Therefore, the human capital in the labour force must be continually improved in order for industry to be supplied with current resources and for the nation to be competitive.

It also assumes a bifurcated job market with high-skill high-wage jobs and low-skill low-wage jobs. There is little evidence of authors problematizing this situation or suggesting that this need not be the case in the texts. It is a condition taken for granted. There is no discussion of the degree of bifurcation that is acceptable. To some degree, it may or may not be true that a labour *market* requires some inequality in price signals (wages) to function efficiently<sup>65</sup>. But one might also think some particular level of income and wealth inequality would be deemed unacceptable. This reader is left wondering what level of bifurcation and income inequality the authors would accept and at what level State intervention would be welcomed. It is not acknowledged that policy decisions (e.g. minimum wage laws) could affect wage distributions. This could potentially normalize a politic of radically disparate income distribution and standard of living.

Note the assumption that more workers with higher education will result in greater economic growth, which in turn, is assumed to result in prosperity. There has been substantial growth in TE participation and attainment since the 1960s, however, there has not been a substantial commensurate growth in the economy or in average standards of living in that time. These particular texts do not offer empirical evidence to support these assumptions, although it may be a commonly held belief. It was beyond the scope of this study to explore all of the background documents for empirical evidence. A reader of these documents, however, cannot know the degree to which such statements are driven at least in part by theoretical considerations rather than empirical observations.

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<sup>65</sup> In economic terms

### ***5.3.2.2 Individual worker/learners***

Worker/learners are described in three key ways:

1. As increasingly diverse but equally deserving of HE opportunity;
2. As consumers; and
3. As human capital.

Each is described in turn in the sections that follow.

**Diversity:** Students are understood to be increasingly diverse. Diversity is expected in terms of culture, ethnic background, physical and academic dis/ability, aspirations, lifestyles and learning styles. Equality is emphasized and it is argued that equality should be targeted for diverse student populations.

First, the very varied possible forms of inequality should be borne in mind, ranging from inequality between the sexes, inequalities between socio-economic, ethnic and religious groups, between immigrants and the remainder of the population, and between people from urban and rural communities and castes, etc. (V1p71)

One area of diversity emphasis is age. Because it is expected the KBE requires increasingly advanced and rapidly changing skills and knowledge, increasing LLL participation will diversify student population ages (V1p13, 16b, 77, 132c, 174b, 178, 212, 222b, 242, V2p291, 292a). Older students have different life/work-experience, commitments and life-structures and may require different funding arrangements, part-time study, non-traditional class times, delivery methods and assessment.

The growing importance of lifelong learning means that traditional students coming out of secondary education would gradually cease to be the primary clientele of tertiary education institutions. As a result, universities and other institutions would need to organise themselves to accommodate the learning and training needs of a very diverse clientele: working students, mature students, stay-at-home students,

travelling students, part-time students, day students, night students, weekend students, etc. (V2p292b)

Another area of diversity emphasis is socio-economic background. The text is clear that personal economic situations should not obstruct participation and success (V1p17b, 73, 194, 250, 259, V2p195a). It is assumed that expansion will lead to more equal access and that more equal access will result in reduced socio-economic inequality.

...as higher education has expanded, access to it has become more broadly based in most – perhaps even all – OECD countries, so that quantitative inequalities have been lessened...It is probable that this will continue with the expansion of higher education in the decades ahead... (V1p72a)

A related equality issue is gender inequality (V1p85, 126b, 207). In many OECD countries, males are increasingly outnumbered in HE participation. Gender distribution in specific subject areas is highly skewed. An entire chapter in Volume 1 explores gender imbalance (see p. 265).

Of note is the fact that these documents speak more of *equality* than of *equity*. Indeed, a frequency count in Volume 1 (demographics) reveals that the words *equality* or *inequality* are used more than three times as often as *equity* or *inequity*. These terms are not synonymous. In fact, what is equal is often not equitable. The latter is concerned with fairness and outcomes. Yet, these documents are far from clear in the distinction. In many places, while claiming that *access* is not the same as *equity*, they seem to equate equity with equal access.

Not the same issue as access, equity involves higher education for population groups that may be underrepresented in the system and includes, depending on the country or region, gender and socio-economic inequalities, rural and urban disparities, and ethnic or other minority groups. (V2p195)

Access, in these documents, seems only to refer to increasing the total number of spaces in HEIs, not the distribution of those spaces. The documents also do not seem engage adequately with



issues of success (beyond access) for these diverse populations. Equal access does not guarantee equal success in HE or equal social and economic outcomes.

**Consumers:** The market-model of HE encourages the vision of students as consumers (V2p50d, 77, 102, 121, 128d, 129, 130, 197, 297). This presupposes that HEI rankings, competition and rational student self-interested choice will contribute to market-responsiveness, efficiency, quality and innovation in HE:

The assumption is that, as tertiary education institutions compete for students, they become more sensitive to the need for improving the quality and relevance of their course offerings....Students, in turn, would be more aware of the value of their education and better motivated to study hard, which in turn could lead to better academic results and increased internal efficiency. (V2p312)

A view of students as consumers is also associated with the ascription of the student as the primary beneficiary of HE (V1p77, 126a, 167, V2p241d). The commodity of HE is positioned as belonging to the student and as being subsidized by the public.

... students and their families still benefit from generally high levels of public subsidisation.... There are only 6 countries where students (and their households) contribute more than 30% on average to the tertiary institutions' budgets....This means that students are still publicly subsidised in most (but not all) OECD countries. (V2p274)

**Human capital:** Strongly supported by KBE assumptions the documents tend to take a more supply-side approach to human capital and consider students as resources to be developed for firm and national competitiveness. Although students are often spoken of as individuals, the language sometimes slips into treating them as under-developed commodities (V1p106, 114. 120, 205, V2p239). In this deficit model, their *lack* of skill and knowledge is presented as a threat to optimizing productivity.

...employers repeatedly report that many new graduates are ill-prepared for work and lack the critical thinking, writing and problem-solving skills that are needed in the workplace. To quote from the report, “unacceptable numbers of college graduates enter the workforce without the skills employers say they need in an economy in which, as the truism holds correctly, knowledge matters more than ever” (Department of Education, 2006). (V2p337)

Note that the data segments represent declarative statements that are often non-attributed.

As per Gee (2011), they develop the identity of the worker/learner as a capital commodity and the significance of human capital and its connection to prosperity.

In summary, these texts rely on and propagate assumptions about worker/learners. In general, the texts position individuals as self-interested rational individual consumers who are the primary beneficiaries of HE and who are motivated largely by economic returns and social mobility. Although their diversity is acknowledged, they are not understood in terms of complex communities and relationships with other social groups. They are seen as deficit commodities required by industry that will and must continue to learn throughout their lives in order to advance the nation’s economy. They are responsible for the nation’s prosperity and for their own success and failure. Their responsibility notwithstanding, their right to HE is also understood. Their participation and success should be limited only by their effort and ability.

### ***5.3.2.3 Higher education***

HE is constructed as both the partial cause of and response to globalization (see V2p18d, 19e):

... all [HEIs] are subject to the same processes of globalisation – partly as objects, victims even, of these processes, but partly as subjects, or key agents, of globalisation (Scott, 1998, p. 122).

Associated with the discussion above, it is assumed that HE is responsible for supplying the human capital nations need in the globalized KBE (V1p119, 120, 181f, V2p13a, 232, 337).

It [Higher Education] trains the highly skilled workers and contributes to the research base and capacity for innovation that determine competitiveness in the knowledge-based global economy. (V2p13a)

This is constructed as a primary purpose of HE, although social and private benefits are also acknowledged (V1p223, V2p111, 117, 164a, 286b).

The increase in the educational level of the population...is important for several reasons. Among them are a whole set of social reasons concerned with public health, criminality and individual and national welfare. (V1p64)

Discussions of social benefits are most often included as a part of a statement that discusses economic benefits of HE, potentially seconding the social benefits (V2p111, 286b). Note in the following example how HE is made responsible for reducing inequality:

We expect higher education to reduce the economic and social impact of the many sources of inequality (V1p223).

Note also that this is another example of a discourse of equality and not necessarily equity.

This data segment was taken from a section of Volume 1 focused on students with disabilities. In that context, it suggests that access to HE for that population is expected to increase their workplace and income equality. The implied goal is increasing access to HE for students with disabilities.

This article will endeavour to identify the transformations and types of adaptation which have favoured the *enrolment* of disabled students and helped higher education open up to diversity. (V1p223, emphasis added)

However, the section in question fails to deal with adjustments within HE that might be necessary for success of this population in HE. In that way, it inadequately addresses that source of inequity.

HEIs are constructed as responsible for their own quality assurance (V2p215) in both teaching and research, which is encouraged through market-like competition measures (V2p303, 304, 312, 337). One effect of this competition is the tendency of regions to specialize and concentrate their talent and resources in *centres of excellence* (V1p132b, V2p54d, 114a, 157a, 168):

One of the interesting effects of these new practices is the creation of a more concentrated academic research. This challenges the Humboldtian idea and the academic professional ethos according to which teaching and research should go together in higher education. (V2p156c)

As in the reviews of the 2000s, a key assumption is that HE must reduce its relative reliance on public funds (V1p131, 190, V2p94, 241a, 243, 298a).

Johnstone (2001) discusses how worldwide “fiscal austerity” in tertiary education is caused by the “increasing scarcity of public revenue”. The chief cause for this scarcity is competition from other public needs like health, infrastructure, public order, and poverty alleviation programs. (V2p298b)

Note that ‘fiscal austerity’ is set as a context requiring policy response. It is not considered a policy choice itself (V2p241a, 243).

Governments cannot fund everything: they make decisions about what to fund and to what degree. Funding HE is constructed as a threat to other social services like health and pensions. But governments fund a great many things including the military, public debt, political campaigns at home and abroad, and even government excesses and waste. HE is not positioned as a threat to those forms of spending. Additionally, recall that increased public spending is a form of demand-side economic stimulus that can create jobs and the demand for goods and services. This aspect of State spending is never acknowledged in these documents and all State expenditure is spoken of only as a cost to be reduced. Note too that increased taxes in general or

on any particular portion of the population (i.e. corporate tax or wealth taxes) are not offered as options. The only option offered to the reader is whether or not to underfund health care and pensions in order to fund HE. The fact that other distribution patterns exist that might not require reduced relative public funding for HE and the position that State spending on education can be an economic stimulus, is not acknowledged.

Reduced reliance on public funding is partly addressed through efforts for HE efficiency (V2p232) but it is largely addressed in discussions of diversifying funding sources. Options include allowing private provision of HE, increasing contributions from students, and developing entrepreneurial revenue-generating activities (V2p94, 243, 298a).

The templates of the new public management include the modelling of national systems as economic markets; government-steered competition between institutions, and executive-steered competition between academic units; part-devolution of responsibility for administering and often for raising finances; incentives to reduce costs per unit, and to engage in entrepreneurial behaviour; new or augmented price signals; incentives to link with business and industry; performance measures and output-based funding; and relations with funding agencies and managers based on quasi-corporate forms such as contracts, accountability and audit. (V2p55b)

In summary, the texts rely on and propagate assumptions about HE. In general, HE is both the object and subject of globalization and is responsible for supplying the nation's human capital and innovative capacity in order to develop the national economy. It is also responsible for reducing social inequality. It produces non-economic advantages as well, although these are not the focus of the texts. It must reduce its relative reliance on public funding in order to save from threat other social services such as health care. Competition between HEIs will help them be more effective and efficient.

### 5.3.3 Predictions

This section discusses key predictions presented in the project. The publications begin with warnings that predictions are difficult:

Future scenarios do not aim to predict the future, or to picture what a desirable future would be like, but merely aim to provide stakeholders with tools for thinking strategically about the uncertain future before them, which will be partly shaped by their actions and partly by factors beyond their control. The use of scenarios enables complex trends to be combined, tensions between people's actions to be highlighted, emerging trends to be brought into the picture, and what trend reversal or radical innovation might entail. Scenarios are just possible futures, they do not have (or mean) to be likely or desirable (V2p173).

Yet, there are many predictions in the reports that are not simply scenarios to consider. Six are summarized below.

#### **1. Tertiary Education will continue to expand**

HE2030 is introduced with an overt prediction of the continued expansion of HE. The first paragraphs of the forward of the first volume claims "...the expansion of higher education will most likely be sustained in the years ahead, and that most systems will continue to grow" (V1p3). This sets expansion as a foundational prediction upon which other predictions will be launched. Direct predictions are made again elsewhere (V1p14c, 72c, 172) and are further supported by indirect presuppositions of expansion as part of another discussion (V1p76, 86b, 89a, 169b). For example:

The expansion of tertiary education is expected to have a substantial impact... (V1p167).

Although expansion is set as a context (which may suggest demand-based expansion), elsewhere it is acknowledged that expansion is a political choice and should be encouraged in order to

supply the labour market with skilled labour and the economy with competitive innovation (V1p52c, 89a, 167, 169b, 172). The prediction relies on the assumption that HE expansion will result in economic growth and that self-interested worker/learners will demand it for personal benefit. As these assumptions are not questioned, the sensibility of the push to expand is accepted (V1p52c; V2p316-7).

...realise that higher education is key to development and recognise *the necessity to* expand their higher education systems and to build some world-class research universities at the top of a differentiated system (V2p180a, emphasis added).

Note too that this data segment also implies the need for a differentiated system: one which separates world-class research universities from other institutions. This also seems to suggest hierarchical provision of education. Implications of differentiated system of this sort, particularly those related to equity, are all but absent in the texts.

Equality is closely linked to expansion but is presented as a foundational principle in its own right. It is constructed in terms of economic/vocational potential, however, and not more broadly understood:

In democracies, combating inequalities is not just subordinate to equality in the labour market. It is a matter of principle. Equity consists of ensuring that everyone is given the right conditions in which to achieve his/her potential (V1p293).

It is presented as potentially threatened by the costs of expansion but expansion is also linked to opportunity to reduce inequity (V1p72a, V2p15d, 138b; V2p195a).

## **2. Higher education systems will become more diverse**

This recommendation from the country reviews is a prediction here: student, faculty and institutional mobility across national boundaries will continue (V2p13d,e, 14b, 63, 65, 85a, 85c, 138a, 219).

Unless a war, return to nationalism or international pandemy stops it, possibly as a development of a severe economic and social crisis, the internationalisation of higher education...is likely to continue...(V2p164).

Institution types are predicted to expand (V2p65, 85a, 219), partly because of “profile-building of individual institutions and competition between them....hand in hand with the blurring of boundaries between state-defined institutional types including private HEIs” (V2p217). Furthermore, even domestic student populations are predicted to diversify due to expanding access and LLL trends (V1p13, 16b, 17b, p71, V2p195a, 291, 292a,b).

### **3. Tertiary Education and research will be governed more by market-like forces**

The texts directly and unequivocally predict that market-like forces will increasingly govern HE (V2p13b, 15b, 255a).

One reason why American higher education is so globally successful is its....institutions are engaged in a plethora of unregulated exchanges with institutions throughout the world (V2p55e).

This manifests specifically in discussions of performance based and competitive funding (V2p15b, c, 298a, 304, 315):

This reflects recent trends in public management and in the governance of higher education institutions (OECD, 2008b), using to a greater extent than in the past competition and quasi-market forces to foster efficiency and accountability (V2p156a).

...general principles of good funding....: rely on funding mechanisms that are performance-based and, when appropriate, allocated in a competitive manner; (V2p316-7).

More specifically, this is part of a larger focus on *New Public Management* (NPM).



The templates of the new public management include the modelling of national systems as economic markets; government-steered competition between institutions, and executive-steered competition between academic units; part-devolution of responsibility for administering and often for raising finances; incentives to reduce costs per unit, and to engage in entrepreneurial behaviour; new or augmented price signals; incentives to link with business and industry; performance measures and output-based funding; and relations with funding agencies and managers based on quasi-corporate forms such as contracts, accountability and audit (V2p55b).

Research, specifically, is predicted to become less connected to teaching in the Humboldtian sense, and more concentrated in centres of excellence (V2p54d, 114a). There are hints of other possible futures, but the choice to increasingly separate teaching and research is not challenged substantially (V2p156c, 157a). Research in HEIs is predicted to be held more accountable to national strategic concerns and resourced more competitively through targeted priority projects (V2p153, 155).

The increase of competitive research funding in many OECD countries...reflects the global quest for accountability, efficiency and effectiveness (V2p15c).

Research is predicted to be increasingly funded by and integrated with industry. This choice is not substantially challenged or problematized in the texts (V1p145; V2p150, 157b, c, 158).

...the business sector carries out and funds the bulk of R&D in the OECD area....This increasing performance and funding of R&D by businesses is one of the *most significant trends* of the past decades (V2p146a, emphasis added).

#### **4. There will be less public funding for HE**

The reduction in relative reliance of HE on public funding is presented as a *fait accompli* context (v2p94, 267, 270, 298a, b, c, d, 329).

There is a *well-established trend* in recent years...to reduce the state component of funding for higher education. Where there is not an absolute decrease in public

funding, there is likely to be a proportional decrease due to a policy *consensus* toward increasing the non-government/student share of contributions to education costs (V2p94, emphasis added).

It is further justified in terms of the increasing cost of HE and competition for public funds among other public services (V2p297, 298b, d, 299b).

This [reduced public funding] is *likely to spread and accelerate*, as the demographic profile of developed countries may imply that those governments will be focussing on meeting the expenses for pensions and health care of the ageing population (V2p94, emphasis added).

### **5. HE will increasingly compete for or raise its own research funding**

Reduced relative public funding for HE pressures HEIs to gain more private sources of research funding. It is generally not presented as a choice but as a contemporary condition acknowledged (V2p145, 146b, 147a, 157d).

...higher education research has increasingly relied on private sources of financing during the two past decades (V2p157c).

...recent growth of private provision has introduced increasing shades of profit-seeking behaviour (V2p245).

Note the choices of words with fairly positive connotations highlighted in the text below.

Should these trends continue in the future, mainly *thanks* to the higher education and non-profit sectors, one can imagine academic research half privately and publicly funded in the OECD area: this *balanced* funding would represent a gradual *evolution* of academic research and of higher education systems towards a more private system...(V2p159-60, emphasis added).

### **6. Students will pay more tuition**

Students paying a larger share of the cost of HE is presented as though it is widely agreed upon, and a necessary context to be acknowledged. It is supported by the rhetorical euphemism ‘cost sharing’ which may suggest *fair* allocation of burden. It is also associated, as noted earlier in this

chapter, with the notion that the government is subsidizing a private benefit (V2p259, 298d, 315, 316-7).

...there is likely to be a proportional decrease [in public funding] due to a *policy consensus* toward increasing the non-government/student share of contributions to education costs. This is likely to spread and accelerate... (V2p94, emphasis added).  
It is likely that tuition fees will be raised in the coming years....The financing models of Australia, New Zealand and now England have become the *most appealing* to many tertiary education experts and economists (V2p274-5, emphasis added).

### **5.3.4 Complexity of Perspectives**

HE2030 reflects upon complexity in issues and presents readers with tensions and debates. In this way, the project is dialogic. What follows are some of the contrasting perspectives offered in the texts.

#### **HE has social purposes.**

The substantial support the texts give to national economic benefits of HE are described above. Throughout the volumes, however, authors describe the “diverse objectives” (V2p14c) of HE. Among the purposes cited are social cohesion, public health, crime reduction, development and distribution of culture, advancement of grass-roots political action in environmental, consumer and human rights issues, and advancing knowledge for the sake of knowledge (V1p64, V2p19f, 20d, 50d, 73, 111, 120a, 138b, 164-5).

The expansion of tertiary education is expected to have a substantial impact in many areas. It is indispensable for advancing knowledge in society, it plays a role in culture, it is hoped to help reduce inequality of opportunity (V1p167).  
...the strong emphasis that many in the higher education community have placed on “higher education as a public good” and on the role of universities with respect to social and cultural objectives rather than economic purposes, especially in the context of the Bologna Process (V2p117).

### **Expansion of HE may not reduce inequity.**

There are many references (i.e. V1p72a, 167, 223, V2p195a) to the expectation that HE expansion will reduce inequity. However, authors allowed this assumption to be contested (V1p15a, 17a,b, 73, 89a; V2p196b).

While quantitative “democratisation” of higher education systems is well established, many sociologists do not equate it necessarily with lesser injustice, defined as inequality of educational opportunity. Expansion and increasingly open access have indeed been associated with a hierarchical stratification of systems...and it is possible that this works more to the advantage of children from the most privileged social backgrounds (V1p72b).

Equity is in many ways a more difficult challenge than higher education access....In the past few decades, equity has become a less important priority than access (V2p196a).

### **Research may not be best done in Centres of Excellence.**

As discussed above, research concentration in centres of excellence is promoted in the text. However, authors still document debate in the area (V2p128b, 156c, 168).

...the model of concentrating resources in a few institutions is not necessarily superior to the model of supporting excellent research departments across the different institutions and regions in a given country (V2p14c).

### **Disembedding is only partial and national contexts are primary.**

In spite of discussions of disembedding, authors warn against over-attributing the force of globalization or discounting the role of the State (V2p21c, 23b, 23-4, 26c, 27a,b,c, 110b).

Still, at this time the implications are more in the realm of the potential than the actual. The degree of separation from the nation should not be overstated. The great majority of institutions continue to be nationally embedded and dependent on governmental legitimation and resource support. The nation-state is not fading away: it remains the main site of economic activity..... Most governments devolve,

and some deregulate, but none legislate themselves out of higher education (V2p25b).

**Student return-on-investment for HE may decline.**

The text is heavily weighted toward the view that students gain substantial economic benefit from HE and that this benefit is not threatened as HE expands. Benefits to the graduate cited include a wage-premium and reduced risk of unemployment (V1p16a, 52a, 106, 114, 167, 169a, 181a, d, 189b). Still, some authors hint that the relative benefit may not be stable.

Given the oversupply of higher education and an increasing unemployment rate among university graduates in Japan and Korea, the value of higher education has been questioned (V1p205).

...on average, tertiary education graduates had an advantage in terms of the risk of unemployment, but this advantage has generally diminished (V1p168).

**HE may be best governed by non-market forces and not through NPM.**

The strong assumption that HE is best governed by market mechanisms and that NPM strategies constitute best practice is discussed above. Even this prototypical expression of neoliberalism is presented as controversial in the text (V2p120b, c, 121).

Olsen (2005) underlines...the argument that higher education cannot be solely market-driven because the logic of the market does not apply easily to education (V2p120a).

There is particular concern over international HEI rankings related to market-forces (V2p124, 125a, b, c, 126a, d, 137).

[Rankings] seem to have a compelling popularity regardless of questions of validity, of the uses of the data and of the effects in system organisation and the quality of higher education (V2p122).

**Increasing ‘cost-sharing’ may not be appropriate or necessary.**

HE2030 is strongly weighted toward students paying higher tuition (in most countries). As discussed above, this is presented in much of the text as a normalized prediction. There is some evidence of debate in the texts about the growing cost of HE (V1p15b, 59).

...changes in the size of higher education systems...should not necessarily result in greater pressure on national public expenditure or on the investment of national resources in higher education: in fact increases in costs are partly unrelated to changes in student enrolments, which leaves policy makers with some room for political manoeuvre (V1p89b).

There are also concerns about the effects of increased tuitions expressed (V1p194, V2p281b) and authors acknowledge the “...the complex debate on cost-sharing” (V1p86c).

... if students have to bear excessively high private costs, this could in principle lead to decreased student participation or possibly even to downward pressure on birth rates in some countries (V1p86b).

Research on the effect of rising tuition...suggest that the impact was hardest on lower income students....the gap in the college going rate between low income students and high-income students widened in states with higher public tuitions (V1p191).

### **5.3.5 Summary Remarks**

The scope of the HE2030 project was defined differently than the country reviews. It focused on universities (ISCED 5A and 6) and not other forms of TE and took a long-term look at the possible futures of HE instead of reflecting on what is being or could be done currently. A detailed comparison of this project to the country reviews reported on in Sections 5.1 and 5.2 is found in Chapter 6. However, a brief summary of the project is appropriate here.

What stands out for this researcher is the acute focus on innovation for competitive advantage, the shift toward an emphasis on equality instead of equity, and the inclusion of what were recommendations in the reviews as predictions in HE2030: specifically, predictions of the

growing importance of market-like mechanisms and NPM, reduced public funding, higher tuitions and expansion. The more dialogic nature of HE2030 also stands out and is illustrative of the opportunity that OECD discourse has to challenge dominant (and even its own) assumptions and predictions.

## **5.4. Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO)**

### **5.4.1 Introduction**

At their annual meeting in 2008, OECD education Ministers discussed the importance of and ways to evaluate quality in HE. The Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) feasibility project was proposed based on two beliefs: a) that identifying the extent to which students achieve learning outcomes can allow institutions to improve quality; and b) that improving achievement of learning outcomes will enhance economic and social well-being of nations.

Tomorrow's workforce is crucial to sustaining the wealth and development of nations and the social cohesion of their people.... Students need to acquire the right skills to contribute to economic, scientific and social progress. (OECD, 2010-2011, p. 2)

After subsequent consultations with international experts<sup>66</sup>, OECD launched the AHELO feasibility study primarily to provide insights into how reliably learning outcomes could be identified and assessed in HE across disciplines, cultures and institutions. It also sought to explore questions of: how and what should be measured; how results should be used (i.e. summative accountability, formative improvement, student competencies, value added by HEIs); who/what is really being assessed (i.e. students, institutions, or systems); and how results could be misused (OECD, 2010-2011).

At the end of 2012, OECD published a first Volume on AHELO design and implementation. A second volume on data analysis and national experiences was released in

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<sup>66</sup> Three meetings were held in 2007 and focused on the desirability, possibility and feasibility of an AHELO. They did not include many stakeholders. Participants included 10-20 policy makers, HE researchers and assessment specialists. These are described in detail in Chapter 2 of Tremblay, Lalancette, & Roseveare, 2012.



March 2013<sup>67</sup>. A third and final volume with further insights and conclusions about the feasibility of the study will be released in April 2013 following a March 2013 conference releasing the study's findings. The study involved 17 countries,<sup>68</sup> 270 HEIs and 23000 students<sup>69</sup>. Its focus was on the skills and knowledge of university students graduating with a first degree. It assesses generic and discipline specific skills in two disciplines (i.e. economics and engineering) and collected student background and learning environment information. If found feasible, the project will be expanded to include other disciplines and expects to launch in 2016. The study also examines the feasibility of examining output against input (i.e. skills at graduation, grades at entrance) in order to report on value-added by HEIs.

AHELO was developed within the Programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE), within the Directorate for Education. Its design and governance involved several different groups (Appendix K: *Groups involved in AHELO Design and Governance*). It was primarily steered by the Directorate's Education Policy Committee (EDPC) and the IMHE governing board. Groups of national experts (GNEs) were involved in the technical decisions (i.e. methods, timing, principles) and national project managers (NPMs) managed implementation at the country level. The bulk of the work was carried out by a consortium of international contractors lead primarily by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). This included the development of assessment tools through a *Tuning Process*<sup>70</sup>. Expert

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<sup>67</sup> These volumes were not released in time to be analyzed in this dissertation

<sup>68</sup> Abu Dhabi, Australia, Belgium, Canada (Ontario), Colombia, Egypt, Finland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Kuwait, Mexico, The Netherlands, Norway, The Russian Federation, The Slovak Republic, The United States (CT, MO, PA)

<sup>69</sup> Data has been inconsistent. These numbers were taken from the most recent AHELO online newsletter—July 2012.

<sup>70</sup> *Tuning* is a process of detailing learning outcomes at the program level that has become popular in recent years, particularly in Europe. Outcomes statements are developed collaboratively by faculty members and industry experts across institutions. They are not prescriptive and uniform statements but rather reflect convergence and common understandings of key outcomes across diverse institutions and nations. Tuning processes have not been taken up in any substantial degree in Canada.

groups were consulted for technical matters and discipline specific matters (i.e. engineering and economics experts). There was also a stakeholders' consultative group (Appendix L: Participants in the AHELO Stakeholders Advisory Group) composed of quality assurance organizations, students, faculty and institutions organizations, and representatives of industry. The feasibility study is financed by participating countries and through sponsorship of several large organizations, including the Hewlett Foundation<sup>xx</sup>.

AHELO is not a ranking plan. Its findings are not made public. Anonymous comparative results are released to individual HEIs to enable policy makers and HEIs to comparatively gauge success and plan improvement. Its intents are formative.

Feasibility study documents lay principles for assessment of HE learning outcomes and reflect recent OECD assumptions about HE. The documents under review are publicly available but not intended to promote or recommend to a broad audience. They mainly target developers of AHELO and are authored mostly by the consortium or the Group of National Experts in the case of discipline specific development. The AHELO website, brochure and newsletter may have a larger target audience. These sources are included in my analysis. Although a broad selection of AHELO documents were analyzed and are summarized in Appendix M: Data Sources from AHELO, these documents are not as obviously rich in assumptions as were the other three projects in focus in this study. Volume 1 contained substantial detail about the rationales behind decisions in the AHELO project and therefore, some relevant assumptions. Although because of its timing, the report was not included formally as a data source and analysed in full, I did a cursory review of the document and use it to inform my overall understanding of the project and to provide some supporting data. Therefore, the analysis of the AHELO study is relatively short compared to the other projects. It does, however, still contribute something to our understanding

of *'the OECD discourse'*. The remainder of this chapter is divided into three parts: themes, assumptions, and dialogism.

## **5.4.2 Themes**

### ***5.4.2.1 Contexts and Foci***

Unlike country reviews and HE2030, AHELO does not make recommendations or predictions. Thus, its contexts are presented differently. In the documents analyzed for this study, financial constraints are not its concern, so there is almost no discussion of efficiency or funding. However, the recently released Volume 1 feasibility report (Tremblay, Lalancette, & Roseveare, 2012) contains substantial discussion about the importance of reducing relative public funding, diversifying HE funding sources, competitive funding schemes and a growing emphasis in HE on accountability and market-like forces in HE governance. Unemployment rates are also not considered as contexts in the documents analyzed. Current labour skill is minimally discussed in the documents under review, however Volume 1 of the feasibility report clearly claims the importance of developing those skills for economic prosperity (and as often is the case, social well-being is included). Note also the emphasis on technology and national competitiveness in the following segment, which introduced the main body of the report:

There is widespread recognition that skills and human capital have become the backbone of economic prosperity and social well-being in the 21st century. In contemporary knowledge intensive economies and societies, individual and societal progress is increasingly driven by technological advances. Prosperity requires nations to retain their competitive edge by developing and sustaining a skilled workforce, maintaining a globally competitive research base, and improving the dissemination of knowledge for the benefit of society at large. (p. 16)

The two driving contextual themes in this project are the *globalized KBE* and *massified HE* (Eco16,b, Eng7, 12U2). Although the apparent purpose of HE in the texts appears to favour, to a degree, a supply-oriented perspective (i.e. supplying the labour pool with human capital and knowledge for national competitive advantage through innovation and prosperity), the specific discussions of HE expansion are less obviously demand- or supply-driven (Eco6; Eng19; Fsr10; 11U2). In the following example, for instance, expansion in student numbers could be a reaction to student demand or it could be a product of encouraging greater participation in order to supply industry with productive human capital.

Higher education is a central contributor to the success and sustainability of the knowledge economy.... Substantially driven by rapid expansion in student numbers, investment in higher education is significant and growing (Fsr7)

The documents maintain a strong vocational focus: HE must prepare labour effective for the KBE (Bro2e, 5, Cnt26, Des14c, Eco15, Eco17-18, eng21, eng21b, 11U3b). Employers are identified as key stakeholders and partners (Bac11-12; Eco7b, Eng37; Fsr7; 11U2c).

Educational institutions need to make better/different use of their industrial partners who can provide input to curriculum/education experience design....valuable teaching sources and... help assess learning outcomes. (Eng37c)

There is little in AHELO on efficiency, funding, equity or innovation. AHELO is focused on quality of learning. Students enter HE affected by antecedents such as demographic and experiential backgrounds. After process and other inputs therein, students are to emerge better prepared for the labour force. AHELO's premise is that output quality must be assessed to improve quality of learning.

Tools are needed to measure students' knowledge and whether they are equipped, at the end of their tertiary education, with the skills needed for the emerging job market. (Bro2e)

#### ***5.4.2.2 Outcomes and Competencies***

The key theme in AHELO is the importance of outcomes assessments beyond content: specifically, competencies demonstrated through novel performance tasks. The documents argue that in a massified system and globalized KBE, teaching-centred knowledge-transmission models of elite HE is inappropriate (Eco6b, Eng11b). AHELO promotes a learner-centred model focused on demonstrable outcomes (Eco23; Fsr5).

[Assessing learning outcomes] has gained momentum since the 1990s and today is considered to be a *prime change agent* in higher education (Eco16c, emphasis added).

It is further argued that both generic and discipline specific skills and knowledge are important in the workplace, as are outcomes in both the cognitive and affective domains:

Attitudinal and value outcomes may include social responsibility, motivation for learning and understanding of diversity... (Bac11)

The project contends that what are most important in a KBE are higher order thinking skills: the ability to extrapolate and apply what is learned in new situations. *Competencies* involve combining generic and specialist skills and knowledge applied in both the cognitive and affective domains (Bac11e).

Competencies represent a dynamic combination of cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, knowledge and understanding, interpersonal, intellectual and practical skills, and ethical values. (Eng8)

Thus, AHELO assesses competencies above content (Aiw4, Des23, 26, 30, Eco5c, 12, 11U6-7).

These programmes...need to develop the capacity to manage this knowledge and apply it in practical contexts. This knowledge must include the capacity to judge inconsistencies, the ability to create solutions, communicate results and focus on a number of subject specific as well as transversal competencies. Learners have to be able to meet future academic and professional challenges. (Eng11c)

### **5.4.2.3 Skills/competencies of interest**

Specific knowledge outcomes were not described other than with reference to assessing the knowledge of the discipline deemed by the Groups of National Experts (GNEs) as essential. However generic skills deemed important to develop were specified. Some represent combined activation of linked skills and might better be considered competencies. Table 4 is a collection of skills referenced in AHELO. I have grouped them into rough categories. Some seemingly similar outcomes are included to ensure the language of the documents is respected. The entries of the first two columns were referenced far more often than the entries in the latter.

<b>Higher order processing</b>	<b>“Soft” and interpersonal skills</b>	<b>Affective Outcomes</b>	<b>Other</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Critical thinking</li><li>• Analytical reasoning</li><li>• Creative ability</li><li>• Metacognition</li><li>• Synthesis</li><li>• Problem solving</li><li>• Sound judgement</li><li>• Assessing sources</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leadership</li><li>• Collaboration</li><li>• Teamwork</li><li>• Written Communication</li><li>• Verbal communication</li><li>• Interpersonal skills</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Behave ethically</li><li>• Desire for LLL</li><li>• Independence for LLL</li><li>• Flexibility</li><li>• Internationally oriented</li><li>• Adaptability</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use data</li><li>• Manage knowledge</li><li>• Gather evidence</li><li>• Interpretation</li><li>• Extrapolation</li><li>• Apply knowledge</li></ul>

**Table 4: Skills in Focus in AHELO**

### **5.4.2.4 Learning Contexts**

AHELO authors explain that antecedents and contexts of learning affect outcomes. A 46-page report (OECD-GNE/AHELO, 2011-cntx) was dedicated to determining the most important context data to collect in the short 10 minutes that was allowed during the evaluations. This data will inform interpretation of results in order to guide program improvement. By linking contexts and antecedents to outcomes, AHELO hopes to better report on the effectiveness of HEIs (Aiw13).

With the combination of context data and learning outcomes performance measures, it will be possible to analyse what is distinctive of high-performing institutions...and to identify best practice for each type of goal mission (11N4b)

Reports do not describe how outcomes and input data will identify best practices. AHELO authors explain that not all outcomes are a result of HE. Some may result from maturation or extra-curricular activities. AHELO would like to report on the value-added by HEIs and the pilot will explore the feasibility of doing so. Contextual information is hoped to contribute to this. However, I suggest that it will have to be cautious in its conclusions. AHELO will report some antecedents and outcomes, but the HEI is still mostly a *black box*<sup>xxi</sup>. Furthermore, although contextual data will allow a better understanding of how outcomes can differ under similar contextual factors, interpretations of outcomes against contexts will have to be made with care. The picture will be far from complete.

Data was collected from and about students, faculty, HEIs and systems (Cnt26-29, Des45). Some of the factors identified as potentially important for interpretation of results are listed in Table 5. The final questionnaire has not yet been released, so could not be analyzed in this study.

<b>Student Contexts</b>	<b>Program Contexts</b>	<b>Institution/System Contexts</b>
student background initial knowledge and skill student effort demographics full-time/part-time status student sources for fees (ie. scholarship, loan, savings) parental education faculty perceptions of student aptitude	programme design teaching resources teaching practices and quality work experience emphasis on application in courses degree of student interaction with faculty/staff	faculty workload faculty and HEI connections with industry funding proportion provided by government student support services government subsidies per capita income (national) Gini index <sup>71</sup> (national)

**Table 5: Contexts Considered for Collection in AHELO**

<sup>71</sup> A measure of income/wealth (in)equality in a country.

#### ***5.4.2.5 Awareness of Cultural Difference***

AHELO reports its awareness of differences in understandings across countries, cultures and HEIs. It seeks to have its findings valuable across the globe and to not disadvantage any participating HEIs (Cnt16b; Des64d, Eco8, 31b). The countries participating in the pilot represent much diversity.

...ensuring that from a cognitive and conceptual point of view, test items reflect diverse modes of thought, and diverse cultural and national perspectives, experiences and priorities, particularly with a view to considering the feasibility of developing an instrument that could be used in a broad range of countries in the future. (Des37)

Assessments and protocols for evaluation were therefore developed by international teams of experts in their disciplines. AHELO reported initial concern that consensus would not be reached, particularly in economics. However, updates report that teams easily developed assessments reflecting what all participants felt important.

#### **5.4.3 Assumptions**

The documents in question, likely because of their more limited focus compared to the other projects, do not contain as many obvious assumptions about equity, worker/learners, the State and the market. They do, however, contain assumptions about the relationship between HE and the economy. Based on the background and rationale texts, the project itself was launched under the assumption that measuring (and subsequently improving) learning outcomes will result in national economic and social well-being. This suggests an understanding of the responsibility of individuals and HEIs in national well-being and a focus on supplying the labour pool with the human capital that will optimize the production of goods and services. Thus, the project appears



to have national benefits of HE and its ability to serve production needs at its core, even as it does reference benefits to individuals.

Higher education is an increasingly strategic investment for countries and for individuals (12U2)

Without making claims about the workforce in general (e.g. under-skilled), AHELO authors claim the skills and knowledge required in work have, and will continue to, change. They are ‘higher’ than in our manufacturing-based economy past and there is an emphasis on knowledge and skills that are ‘new’. (Bro2b, Cnt15, Des30c, 64e; Eco10c, 11; Eng7, 19; Fsr7).

As society and employability are rapidly changing...many traditional jobs are disappearing or changing in content and form, new jobs are emerging. Both require new knowledge and skills...a dynamic job market. Higher education graduates are expected to...remain current (Eco6)

The assumption that we are in a KBE where knowledge and skills are the foundation for national prosperity is central. The project is focused on ISCED5A programming, so does not involve discussion of knowledge generation and innovation as much as do other projects analyzed. It does, however, assume that improving the skills of the labour force will contribute to productivity, and to some degree, innovation. HE is held responsible for supplying the human capital deemed appropriate for growth in a KBE (Bro2, 2c; Eco10; Eng7; 11n5).

Tomorrow’s workforce is key in sustaining the wealth and development of nations and their people. (Bro2)

Elsewhere:

Higher education is a central contributor to the success and sustainability of the knowledge economy....The reliance of industry on well-prepared graduates is escalating as unskilled and semi-skilled jobs diminish in the labour market. (Fsr7)

I am not in a position to argue the validity of the claim that unskilled and semiskilled jobs are declining. However, as described in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, there are scholars who have argued and provided evidence that the skills needed in the workforce today are not necessarily higher than they have previously been (Brinkley, Fauth & Mahdon, 2009; Brown, Hesketh & Williams, 2002; Brown & Lauder, 2003; Edquist & Riddell, 2000; Lavoie & Roy, 1998; Livingstone, 1999, 2002; Markoff, 2011; Smith, 2000; Webster, 2006). My point here is that the documents under review in this study do not provide the reader with empirical support for this claim and do not present this assumption as potentially contested.

#### **5.4.4 Dialogism**

The background report reviewed experiences in HE outcomes assessment in OECD and partner countries. It described conceptual and methodological aspects of 18 existing assessment systems, offering diverse perspectives and examples of practice to inform AHELO's design. It is fairly dialogic and self-reflective. In this document purposes of HE are not confined to the economic and to employability. The outcomes are defined beyond skills and knowledge. Humanistic values, citizenship and personal happiness objectives are included which are consistent with the values declared in Section 4.2.4 *Mission and Values*.

However, the definition of learning outcomes in terms of occupational competence may raise several issues of concern. Important dimensions of higher education, such as providing opportunities for in-depth study and helping students to develop their potential, may be undervalued if HEIs focus solely on occupational competencies (Bac12)

Other AHELO documents more strongly centre employability and economic objectives and perspectives. In most of the documents, there is no evidence of questioning the assumptions described above. There is, however, other evidence of self-reflection. For example:

These deeper questions include:

- What are the desired learning outcomes of higher education – and what can/should be measured?
  - Is the main purpose of an assessment instrument for measuring learning outcomes to underpin accountability, provide data for improvement or enhance transparency – or all of these?
  - Who or what is really being assessed – the students or their higher education institutions?
  - Is the purpose to measure the level of competency achieved or to measure the value added from attending a specific higher education institution?
- (12N3)

Also:

The AHELO Feasibility Study makes assumptions about the nature and future of higher education that are considered by some to be radical and even controversial....A well structured and reflective methodology will advance core principles in ways that reflect the innovation and growth that is required for AHELO (Des15)

AHELO acknowledges some of its limitations and warns of the potential for unfavourable directions. Note concerns over how the results are used and validity of the results expressed in the following examples:

A common problem of assessments aiming to measure programme quality or institutional performance is the lack of incentives for students to perform at their best....students do not have a direct stake in the outcomes..... However, involving high stakes for students in program/institution-level assessments may also introduce a motivation bias. (Bac27)

It is important that the measures are carefully considered in order to avoid the risk that data availability will dictate overarching quality objectives. (Cnt23)

...some authors have voiced concerns that organizing courses around a standardized test may reduce the diversity of learning environments, as programmes may concentrate excessively on teaching to the test (Bac22)

#### **5.4.5 Section Summary**

The scope of the AHELO project does not engage as directly with issues of funding, innovation, efficiency or equity<sup>72</sup> as do the other projects, and therefore offers less to consider in terms of the research questions of this dissertation. What does stand out is the foundational understanding that quality of education (as measured by demonstrable learning outcomes) is important and that high order, soft, general, specific and affective skills and knowledge are all valuable to the labour market. How these skills or other outcomes intersect with other-than-vocational goals of HE are not addressed, although the background document does express acknowledgement that such goals are part of the mandate of HE.

### **5.5 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented a primarily descriptive account of the four projects under review in this study. These descriptions primarily address the first research question:

What assumptions, constructions and values about the economy, higher education and worker/learners are present in OECD discourse?

Comparing the reviews of the 1990s with those of the 2000s offers an opportunity to explore potential shifts in the discourse over the time period in which shifts were identified in other social policy fields at OECD. The reviews of the 2000s and the HE2030 and AHELO projects offer a window into the most recent OECD discourse on HE.

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<sup>72</sup> Other than a reference to a Gini Index as a possible contextual antecedent to collect

Table 6 summarizes and compares the contexts, purposes, foci, recurrent themes, degrees of dialogism, and worker/learner identities in the four projects. Table 7 similarly compares key assumptions and constructions. What we see is that after the turn of the century, the contexts presented in the discourse shift so that the KBE is the central context upon which the purposes and foci are built. Resultantly, labour-force skills deficits and innovation/STEM become central concepts, and the *necessity* to expand HE for national competitive advantage is promoted.

	<b>1990s Reviews</b>	<b>2000s Reviews</b>	<b>HE2030</b>	<b>AHELO</b>
<b>Contexts set</b>	Demand driven massification ↑unemployment Financial crisis	KBE~innovation Need to expand TE Skills deficit/mismatch Competing services	Globalized KBE Need to expand TE Skills deficit/mismatch Reduced public funding	Globalized KBE Massified HE
<b>Purpose(s) mentioned</b>	1° Vocational Others vaguely	1° Vocational	Vocation and innovation (i.e. R&D)	1° Vocational Broader in background report
<b>Foci</b>	Efficiency & Quality (linked) Access equity (some success)	Efficiency & Quality Access & success equity Funding Innovation	Innovation Equity-more specifically in gender, geographic, economic, age etc.	Quality of learning Identify key output measures for labour pool
<b>Key recurrent themes</b>	HEI autonomy Devolution HEI flexibility HEI competition Partnerships Client-orientation	Same as 1990s + Build STEM for innovation + ↑ “cost sharing” Reduced client orientation—more focused on national prosperity	Entrepreneurial HEI competition ↑ “cost sharing” ↑ revenue sources Performance funding State steering	Competencies beyond content Antecedents affect learning outcomes
<b>Dialogism</b>	Highly declarative and unattributed	Highly declarative and unattributed	More dialogic in some parts	Substantially dialogic in one document
<b>Learner identities in focus</b>	Client	Deficient human capital 1° beneficiary	Deficit human capital Rational consumers 1° beneficiary	Human capital Rational consumer

**Table 6: Comparing Contexts, Foci and Themes in the Projects**

	1990s Reviews	2000s Reviews	HE2030	AHELO
<b>Key assumptions &amp; constructions</b>	TE for social and economic benefit TE must prepare labour Quality through competition ↓ government Rational self-interest TE for all who desire it/capable Equity is important in its own right	Same as 1990s + Labour market skills/knowledge change rapidly and are of ‘higher’ order + TE must expand + innovation via competition and STEM = prosperity +private benefits > public +TE must prepare high skilled labour	TE’s role= build human capital and R&D Labour market skills/knowledge change rapidly and are of ‘higher’ order Growth= wellbeing Innovation=growth “ =talent & HEI compete/cooperate Quality via competition Naturalized increasing wage bifurcation Students motivated by financial return Private benefits > public TE & research by market forces	High labour skills = prosperity TE’s role to build labour skills Labour market skills/knowledge change rapidly and are of ‘higher’ order Cognitive and affective domains are important Generic and specialist skills are important Measurable outcomes reflect quality

**Table 7: Comparing Key Assumptions and Constructions in the Projects**

Additionally, we see a shift toward *cost-sharing* and an associated declaration of the student as the primary beneficiary. Assumptions common in the recent discourse include a faith in supply/demand optimization through competitive market mechanisms and a belief that innovation through higher workforce skills leads to national prosperity. These assumptions and other characteristics of the discourse are analyzed more deeply and in more abstract terms in the following chapter. In this way, Chapter 6 addresses more directly the second research question:

How are these assumptions, values and constructions related to neoliberal perspectives? What evidence is there, if any, of a shift from neoliberal perspectives?

## **Chapter 6: Analysis**

As the previous chapter largely answered the first research question by providing a mostly descriptive account of the assumptions, constructions, themes and values in the OECD HE discourse, this present chapter offers a deeper and critical analysis of those assumptions, constructions and values in the documents. Specifically, the projects are examined using the frame developed in Chapter 2. In this analysis, I seek to relate the assumptions, constructions and values described in Chapter 5 to tenets of liberalisms and describe any observed shifts that may be evident away from (or toward) neoliberal doctrine. The purpose of this analysis is not to pigeon-hole the discourse into a political economic category. Instead, I aim to provide a more complex picture of how the discourse presents relationships between the economy, individuals and the State as they relate to HE. This analysis describes how the texts engage with differing notions such as State and market; private and public; equity and efficiency; supply and demand; social and economic goals; cooperation and competition; and the individual and the State. I seek to describe how such perspectives are reconciled with each other and where the balance lies. In this way, the analysis explicates the specific liberal characteristics of current OECD HE discourse and reports to what degree and in what ways these projects provide evidence of discursive shifts.

The country thematic reviews of TE policy which were conducted over more than a decade provide the best opportunity for evidence of shifts in the discourse. For that reason, these two projects are compared in Section 6.1. Two subsequent sections compare and analyze HE2030 and AHELO to these reviews. A final section summarizes the results of the analyses.



## 6.1 The Thematic Country Reviews

Findings from the two sets of thematic reviews, in terms of contexts, strategies and assumptions, are presented in the two-page Table 8. This table is analyzed below in relation to the tendencies in neoliberal doctrine as described in Chapter 2. The arrows highlight the areas in which a shift was evidenced in the documents.

Key characteristics of these shifts are discussed in greater detail below. First, however, the reader is reminded that the first set of reviews was conducted prior to much of the reform at OECD and prior to shifts away from neoliberalism noted in other fields. The second reviews occurred after these events and after Giddens published *The Third Way* and Blair, Clinton and Clark began to operationalize this synthesis of right wing economic with left wing social policy in the UK, USA and New Zealand. One might predict from that timing that if a shift was to occur in OECD HE discourse away from neoliberalism there may be evidence of that shift between these sets of reviews.

The analysis below suggests that this is not the case. In fact, although both sets of reviews might fairly be described as inclusive liberal because of a persistent stated interest in equity, (specifically, ensuring access and success for those who would have previously been excluded from opportunities developed in HE), my analysis to follow documents specific ways in which aspects of neoliberal doctrine are further entrenched in the later reviews. To some degree, some of these shifts might be considered flanking, as they strengthen neoliberal perspectives by ameliorating the negative effects of neoliberalism and market failures through non-market solutions. But generally, some shifts might more accurately be thought of as rolling out of neoliberalism because they further deepen a common-sense acceptance of supply-sided economics.

	<b>Thematic Review of Tertiary Education—The First Years</b>		<b>Tertiary education for the Knowledge Based Economy</b>
<b>Contexts</b>	Demand driven massification	⇒	Expand supply of skilled labour for the economy
	High, persistent unemployment	⇒	Labour skill deficit and mismatch
	Economic crises; rapid expansion → fiscal constraints	⇒	Lasting competition from other social services → reduce dependency on public funds
	Vocational focus		Vocational focus
<b>Goals</b>	Equity of access	⇒	Equity of access & success
	Quality/efficiency		Quality/efficiency
		⇒	Innovation
		⇒	Funding
<b>Strategies</b>	Strategic role for state: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Devolution of state involvement</li> <li>• Steering via guidelines and targeted and outcomes based funding</li> <li>• Setting conditions for market response (i.e. competition)</li> <li>• Backing progressive student loans</li> </ul>	⇒	Strategic role for state: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Devolution of state involvement</li> <li>• Steering via guidelines and targeted and outcomes based funding</li> <li>• Setting conditions for market response (i.e. encouraging competition)</li> <li>• Backing progressive student loans</li> <li>• Encouraging wider participation in TE and LLL</li> </ul>
	Institutional autonomy → competitiveness and efficiency		Institutional autonomy → competitiveness and efficiency
	Fewer separate and specific strategies for equity than for quality and efficiency		Fewer separate and specific strategies for equity than for quality and efficiency
	Flexibility in program/TEI offerings and of teaching and learning		Flexibility in program/TEI offerings and of teaching and learning
	Partnerships with employers/Educational institutions → benefits students and improves quality of TE		Partnerships with employers/Educational institutions → benefits students and improves quality of TE
	Guidance for students including support for academic success and for labour market intelligence	⇒	Guidance for success and labour market intelligence, but more emphasis on convincing non-participants of the benefits of TE
	Needs based student loans; grants for under-represented; income contingent repayment	⇒	Needs based student loans; grants for under-represented; income contingent repayment. Fewer grants; higher tuitions;
	Data generation and dissemination (i.e. employment outcomes of graduates; needs of employers)	⇒	Data generation and dissemination to include and focus on the benefits to the student of TE participation
	Promote innovation through competition, institutional autonomy, and entrepreneurialism	⇒	Greater emphasis on TEI competition and entrepreneurialism for innovation. Additional emphasis on STEM capacity
	Encourage efficiency to reduce costs	⇒	Promote TEIs finding alternative sources of funding including higher tuitions and HEI entrepreneurial activities
		⇒	Increase national competitiveness through <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• innovation through competition, STEM capacity,</li> <li>• increasing labour force skills</li> </ul>

Assumptions	Thematic Review of Tertiary Education—The First Years		Tertiary education for the Knowledge Based Economy
	TE should respond to student demands and industry needs	⇒	TE's role in developing the economy is more centralized
	TE should address diverse student interests, needs, abilities		TE should address diverse student interests, needs, abilities
	Equity is a goal in its own right and supports economic development	⇒	Equity is still a goal in its own right. Greater explication of specific forms of inequity including socio-economic background, geographic, age and gender
	TE is a solution for marginalization		TE is a solution for marginalization
	Societal benefits (i.e. equity, democracy) of increasing enrolment outweighs the increased costs	⇒	Students are primary beneficiaries so should pay more. Societal benefits are downplayed.
	Competition and entrepreneurialism support innovation, quality and efficiency		Competition and entrepreneurialism support innovation, quality and efficiency
	TE is responsible to multiple clients; students are central. Student needs overlap with economy needs	⇒	Students are constructed as primary beneficiaries The focus is on supplying the needs of industry → create a highly skilled labour pool
	Competitive market mechanisms are highly efficient and should be promoted		Competitive market mechanisms are highly efficient and should be promoted
	Monetary & non-monetary benefits for students, industry, society		Monetary & non-monetary benefits for students, industry, society
	Access to TE should be available to all who have ability and interest (demand)	⇒	Everyone should be encouraged to attend TE and to continue with lifelong learning (supply)
	Rational self-interested choice		Rational self-interested choice
		⇒	Assumptions of the KBE including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills and knowledge needed are different and changing rapidly</li> <li>• Innovation is required for national competitiveness</li> <li>• Innovation requires STEM capacity</li> </ul>

**Table 8: Contexts, Goals, Strategies and Assumptions in the Reviews**

The first set of reviews was certainly not devoid of neoliberal and economic characteristics. There was a focus on vocational goals and a reliance on market mechanisms including the assumption of rational self-interest; quality and efficiency through HEI autonomy and competition; and shifting the State's role largely to setting conditions for market response through outcomes based funding and steering.

These characteristics remained in the second set of reviews as did a strong sense of equity for its own sake and not simply as a way to supply the market with more and diverse workers. Equity, it can be noted however, was largely delineated in terms of socio-economic success and

achieved through the market with the opportunities developed in HE. Furthermore, neither set of reviews offered many specific strategies for equity that were not also largely tied to efficiency, quality, and expansion goals. Even so, equity as a foundational principle and humanistic aspects of the texts suggest that neither set of reviews should be considered completely neoliberal. There are inclusive qualities. The paragraphs below analyze some of the shifts in the two sets of reviews.

The setting of contexts within the documents is of crucial importance. Contexts provide a frame for what is developed in the text and constrain how the reader might interpret it. The overarching context established in the second set of reviews is a supply-side interpretation of the KBE in which knowledge, skills, and higher education drive economic growth through productivity and innovation. The economy is *based* on knowledge, so it must be supplied. Supply industry with these resources, and the economy will grow. Supply workers with skills and they will prosper. Fostering the production of goods and services takes precedent over creating demand for them. The KBE discourse in these documents does not talk about creating jobs so more consumers can afford to buy. Perhaps it should not be expected to. That may not be within the purview of HE policy. However, it does emphasize the up-skilling the workforce so labour can be more efficient and industry can be productive with fewer workers. Any notion that other mechanisms for economic growth may exist are absent and reader imagination is limited.

The responsibility of HE for national economic growth is strongly emphasized in the KBE discourse. Establishing that economic growth can only (or at least, best) be achieved by supplying the market with what is needed to fuel the production of goods and services, *defines* the economy as supply-sided. Contexting the economy this way may make it more difficult for a reader to consider demand-side solutions to economic and social problems. It may also make it

more difficult to imagine solutions (or even problems) that exist outside of the purview of skills and education. After such contexting, the only questions left to address in the texts are the best ways to optimize the supply of skills and education.

This need to optimize the supply of skills and education is largely interpreted as a need to expand the HE system: create more institutions of different kinds; increase participation; and extend participation through more of the life course with LLL. Note the shift from the earlier reviews which tended to speak more of meeting public demand for expansion toward a forced expansion in order, largely, to meet the needs of firms in the KBE and promote national economic growth. Instead of responding to existing student demand, the later reviews suggest that students should be encouraged to participate, convinced of the value of HE, and persuaded to extend their education through the life course. Again, this illustrates a shift toward more supply-character.

The later reviews set two more contexts. The first, related to the needs of the KBE, is the under- or mismatched skills of the labour force. This is another supply-sided construction. Compare this to the earlier reviews that were concerned with unemployment. In the later reviews, HE is failing to supply the appropriate skills to the labour pool. Even where a mismatch is described, it is constructed that workers do not match the needs of industry, not that jobs are not optimizing the skills of a labour pool that has never been more highly educated and skilled. There is limited appreciation in the texts of the evidence of workers who are not using the skills and knowledge they have. Indeed, it is fair for documents on HE to discuss how HE can improve the skills of the labour pool. Its scope lies in reconstituting the labour force and not reconstituting the job market. However, any appreciation that other demand-side or more socially-liberal

inspired solutions might exist is all but absent. This shift from discourses of employment to those of employability amount to a shift in emphasis to supply perspectives.

The other context set by the second set of reviews is the necessity to reduce the relative financial responsibility of the State in HE. Consider the change in balance suggested in comparison to the reported goal of the first set of reviews:

to address the competing demands and constraints on public and private budgets in meeting the costs. (OECD, n.d.-TR-Web, p. ¶ 1)

Again, this represents a market/neoliberal approach to HE. A more Keynesian or social democratic approach might tend to address an economy in which HE was important by increasing public funding to HE. Recall that the first set of reviews claimed that increased public expenditure on HE was worth it. They also emphasized benefits for a wider group of stakeholders. The later reviews centralized permanent reduced relative public funding of HE and emphasized the benefit to and responsibility of the individual worker/learner much more. They also constructed HE as in competition with other social services such as health care. This appears to represent a shift in balance from public to private benefit and responsibility associated with neoliberalism.

The goal of HE reform is more clearly developed in the second set of reviews to “ensure that tertiary education finds its place and best serves the national economic strategy” (TEKS, p. 138). Notice the change in balance when this is compared to the stated goal of the first set of reviews:

to ensure that tertiary-level learning options appropriately and effectively meet the needs and interests of learners as well as the demands from the economy and society (OECD, n.d.-TR-Web, p. ¶ 1)

HE, through the market, is responsible for economic growth. Devolution of State authority redirects some responsibilities. In this view, responsibility for the innovation and productivity gains that are to contribute to national competitive advantage and economic growth are shifted more toward individuals and HEIs. The State takes on more of a steering role, creating conditions for market responses. In the case of the 2000s reviews, this includes providing general direction, targeted and performance based funding, and disseminating market signal information (i.e. markers of HE quality and employment rates). In this way the second set of reviews demonstrates a shift in balance toward a focus on national competitive advantage and market mechanisms where the State's role is increasingly about supporting market efficiency.

With the later reviews the individual is constructed as more responsible for both their own and the nation's economic well-being. Both of these goals are captured in the term *employability* which is a more central theme in the later reviews than in the former.

Individuals are purported to have the responsibility to afford themselves of the opportunities HE provides for them to increase their marketability. This is expected to be just and equitable because people from disadvantaged backgrounds have the chance to pull themselves up by their own boot straps. Furthermore, as primary beneficiary, the individual is also constructed as ultimately responsible for a larger portion of HE funding.

But the individual is not only responsible for themselves. They are also seen as responsible to the national economy. The workforce in general is constructed in these documents as deficit of the skills and knowledge needed by the economy for national development. Individuals who are underemployed and/or under skilled are specifically constructed as deficit. Thus, we see in the later reviews evidence of the moral project that

Ward (2012) spoke of and a construction of the valuable citizen who accepts risk and responsibility that Brown, Hesketh and William (2002) described.

HEIs are also held largely responsible for the economy. The economic health of the nation is constructed as depending primarily on the skills and knowledge developed in HE. Their processes and structures are asked in the later reviews to adjust from a more Humboldtian model to one that links research more to industry needs than to learning. It is asked to convert from bureaucratic structures to more market-like structures of managerialist organization and NPM. They are asked to prove their responsiveness, here defined more in terms of developing national competitive advantage by producing the human capital needed by industry, in order to secure competitive and targeted public funding. Additionally, HEIs are given the responsibility to develop new sources of funding. Themes of STEM, entrepreneurialism, innovation and competition are emphasized more in the later reviews than in the former. In these ways, we again see evidence of a shift toward more market-related and supply-sided perspectives.

## **6.2 HE2030**

The preceding section argued that there is evidence in the thematic reviews of a shift in OECD HE discourse toward more market-based and supply-side perspectives consistent with neoliberal doctrine. Even with this shift, it was argued that recent reviews contained substantial attention to equity for its own sake, although that equity was largely defined in terms of access to opportunity to participate in HE and develop one's own employability. The path to equity is constructed largely as paved by equality of access, although in the later reviews, equity for success in HE is more fully developed. This does point to a degree of inclusivity in this liberal discourse. The result is a discourse that is highly concerned with equity (at least equality of



access), acknowledges on some level non-economic goals for HE, yet is very neoliberal in character. In this section, the findings from the HE2030 project are analysed for their liberal character. The HE2030 documents under review were published by CERI about the same time as the later reviews. Therefore, with this analysis, we can look back to the thematic reviews and explore if and how HE2030 has the same (or different) liberal characteristics.

Recall HE2030 did not make recommendations as did the reviews. Instead, it gathered and presented the reflections of many diverse practitioners and academics in higher education with respect to the developments in and possible futures of HE. It therefore offered an opportunity for the project to reflect diverse perspectives and tensions in the field. It did, however, describe trends and made predictions. In that way, it is implicated in cognitive and normative governance.

The project is chiefly about HE's importance to the economy. To be clear, the relationship between education and the economy is not a new concept and is not unique to OECD or a neoliberal perspective. Furthermore, one might consider it fair for an organization whose primary mandate is economic growth to focus on economic purposes of HE. What we can ask is how knowledge and education are constructed in terms of the economy, the State and individuals. It is also noteworthy that in spite of OECD's more broadly declared mandate involving social well-being and the 'lives of ordinary people', other purposes of HE including social welfare, civic participation, advancement of knowledge for its own sake, and self-actualization, are all but absent (or at least seconded) in these documents. Of course, not every OECD project must address all of its broad missions, however, HE is a policy field in which social welfare, civic participation and the 'lives of ordinary people' is relevant. HE policy discourse, therefore offers opportunities to address these missions, and therefore, its absence is noteworthy.

Assumptions and values in HE2030 were presented in Chapter 5 and are summarized below in comparison to the reviews. HE2030 and the later reviews shared a substantial number of characteristics. Specifically, these are associated with a high degree of neoliberal character, particularly in their supply-side and market focus. Four key areas are described below.

The first similarity is the establishment of a supply-side conception of the KBE as an overarching context framing the entire project. A healthy and growing economy is one in which there is a large (increasing) exchange of goods and services. This project focuses on national competitive edge as a key (largely, *the* key) to that exchange. It assumes Schumpeterian growth through innovation is needed for international competitiveness. Innovation is linked to the supply of goods and services. It also tends to embrace market fundamentalist ideas of well-being for all through national economic growth and promotes markets or market-mechanisms being developed where they did not previously exist (i.e. HE). It assumes that in such an economy, the supply of knowledge and human capital to the market is the key driver of national competitiveness; LLL is necessary to address the ever and rapidly changing demands of the labour market; HE must expand to supply these skills and knowledge; and the labour market is increasingly bifurcated with high-wage/skill and low-wage/skill jobs. The balance here is weighted heavily toward supply-side and market visions of the economy and economic health through innovation and competition.

Secondly, HE2030 shares with both sets of reviews a focus on market models for quality and efficiency. These include emphases on competition, NPM and HEI autonomy. Not only are there direct predictions that both research and HE governance will be more governed by market forces, but the assumption is also applied in predictions of increasing performance based funding.

Additionally, constructions of worker/learners are similar in HE2030 and the later reviews. Learners are appreciated as diverse in a large number of ways and it is expected that HE should adjust to meet their various needs such as learning styles and abilities (but not necessarily interests). Learners are expected to be able to achieve equality (again, presented as a foundational right) by developing their employability through HE. They are described as isolate, disembedded, rational self-interested individual consumers of HE and its primary beneficiary, thus, primarily responsible for its funding. Note how the following data segments assign possession of education to the student. This could possibly reify a private-benefit understanding of HE and mute its public benefits. Consider how these texts read differently if the word “their” is omitted (also see V2p82b, 260, 271).

Students, in turn, would be more aware of the value of *their* education and better motivated to study hard (V2p312).

...a program that requires students to contribute to the cost of *their* education (V2p313).

It is unlikely that in two decades the cost of higher education would be such as to discourage large numbers of students from pursuing *their* education at this level (V1p52b).

Some readers could develop the implicature that HE is primarily a private good for which the State has little economic responsibility.

Furthermore, as was the case for the later reviews, learners are constructed under a deficit model of human capital responsible to the economy and to their own social and economic well-being. Effort and ability are posed as all that is required to develop one’s employability. Therefore, social and economic failure is largely (if not only) a result of personal inadequacy.

Finally, as did the reviews, HE203 makes mention of the individual and public social benefits associated with HE. There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of this position in the

documents. However, there remains an overwhelming emphasis on the economic benefits. The main thrust of the entire project is heavily weighted toward national economic benefits, specifically, national competitive advantage and overall growth. Other purposes are only considered in one background document.

Differences between HE2030 and the later reviews are subtle. For instance, the concentration on the KBE includes more stress on its globalized nature than did the 2000s reviews. This appears to this researcher to result in greater emphasis on international competitiveness through innovation and research. This may in part be related to the focus in HE2030 on both ISCED 5A and 6 programming instead of 5A and 5B in the reviews. In any case, innovation through knowledge creation, less tied to teaching and more tied to industry partnerships, has a more central place in these documents than in the reviews. This adds to its neoliberal character as a market-oriented and supply-sided perspective. Note that in Figure 9 each of the four factors (i.e. HEI competition, cooperation, growing and attracting talent) supply the innovative productive capacity of industry.

Another subtle difference is that some of the recommendations of the 2000s reviews are set as contexted predictions in HE2030. Specifically, these include the declarations that HE will continue to expand, that relative public expenditures on HE will decline; and that HE governance and research will be increasingly driven by market-like mechanisms. The latter of these includes a greater emphasis on the entrepreneurial university that secures new sources of revenue (increasingly from industry) and research in Centres of Excellence responding to the research needs of industry and more removed from the university's teaching mission. The documents show no concern for potential negative impacts of industry and markets directing research and curriculum. There is no evidence of awareness of the threat that this might impose on liberal arts

programs or humanities and social sciences that might not have direct and immediate innovation or economic application. By constructing these as predictions instead of recommendations, a reader may interpret more of an inevitability of these policy trajectories. They may be reified as necessary.

Because HE2030 was not making direct recommendation, but rather was gathering the input of many educational and economic experts, this project provided an opportunity for OECD to objectively and fairly reflect the tensions and debates in the field. To some degree it accomplished this. It provided discussion of and evidence for alternate perspectives including concern that HE may be best governed by non-market forces. In the main body of the texts, however, the assumption that market forces are efficient and should be optimized is still a key focus. However, even the reference to other-than-market-forces as an option for HE governance is a direct challenge to the core principle of neoliberalism that free-market forces are self-optimizing and markets should be created where they do not already exist. HE2030 also challenged the very central ideas that tuitions should rise and that the investment for the student will still be worth the added cost. Although the key neoliberal assumptions are still central in the documents, alternatives were described. Dialogism was more evident here than in the reviews. These alternate perspectives were all but absent in the reviews.

Although dialogic in other key areas, what HE2030 does not challenge, or even acknowledge debate in is the KBE. Repeated declarations that the economy is based on knowledge are rhetorical. Most are non-attributed; however a few are associated with single scholarly references that are not exceptionally compelling. Data segment V2p239, for example, attributes the finding that increasing human capital has a positive economic effect on a community to a 1986 peer-reviewed scholarly article and the claim therein is that “The *recent*

economic discourse... has but strengthened this view..." (emphasis added). The reader is here reminded that there is scholarly debate about the KBE. Assumptions about relative skills needed in the labour market are far from undisputed. That debate is not acknowledged in these texts. What is also not acknowledged is that to whatever degree and in whatever ways the economy does rely on knowledge and HE, solutions can be found in supply-, demand-, market- and State-approaches. The understanding of the economy as driven by the supply of knowledge and innovation and promoted through market competition that appears to be coded in the term KBE and set as context, weights the balance toward a neoliberal understanding.

By reporting on trends in public policy around the world, HE2030 offers more evidence of policy convergence than did the reviews. The following examples are illustrative of the language (also see V1p212; V2p14b, 18c, 21a, 23b, 94, 101, 114a, 157a, 243, 292a, 303, 304):

In many nations and regions, especially in Europe and East Asia, governments... (V2p54d).

...the increasing dominance of a competition-oriented paradigm...(V2p220b).

Both countries realise that higher education is key to...(V2p180a).

The European Union also recognises the importance of...(V2p291).

In *nations throughout the world*...draw on the techniques of the new public management. (V2p20c, emphasis added).

The shift towards more autonomy and entrepreneurship is *a common trend* in higher education management in *most* OECD countries (V2p156b, emphasis added).

Words like *realize* and *recognize* hint of inevitability. Referencing large groups of diverse nations such as the EU and Asia might also suggest universality of the position regardless of national contexts, histories and values. Much of these convergences are linked to globalization with the claim that national systems are increasingly disembedded from domestic contexts and forged in more global contexts. While it is certainly appropriate for experts to describe policy

trajectory, I suggest it is also appropriate for a critical examination of discourse to consider the ways in which policy convergence has the potential to reify practices. At one time, the trajectory was toward demand-side economics and education for empowerment, self-actualization and democracy. As any parent whose child has claimed, “but all the other kids are doing it” can attest: convergence of behaviour is not necessarily indicative of best practices. The power of discourse to normalize through description of policy convergence should at least be considered.

In summary, there is much similarity in the neoliberal characteristics of HE2030 and the later reviews. There is also a similar concern for equity and social goals for HE. The differences are subtle but by focusing more on innovation through research (particularly that tied to industry goals) and by presenting assumptions about governance through market-like mechanisms and reducing the State’s relative financial responsibility to HE, this project has the potential to reify a neoliberal perspective on HE.

### **6.3 AHELO**

This section holds up the assumptions and constructions that were presented in the AHELO project against those in the reviews and HE2030 and against the description of liberalisms presented in Chapter 2. In review, AHELO is a project currently in pilot that aims to assess the learning outcomes of graduates after a first degree. The documents reviewed were background, working, publicity and update texts and were authored by IMHE within the Directorate of Education and in consultation with stakeholder committees and an international educational consortium. AHELO also takes a strong vocational focus and is chiefly concerned with ensuring that HE supplies the labour pool with the human resources that will make it innovative and productive, and therefore, internationally competitive.

The purposes of these texts were different than the previous projects. They have a much more limited focus on learning outcomes and do not engage many of the issues found in the reviews or HE2030. Therefore, it is much more difficult to assess this project in terms of its liberal character. However, some relevant assumptions were identified in Chapter 5 that parallel those found in the other projects. These include contexting a supply-side conceptualization of a globalized, competitive KBE, and the importance of HE as “a central contributor” (Fsr7) to the economy by supplying the skills needed in the labour market. Massification of HE is not as clearly supply- or demand-sided in these documents, but HE is tasked with developing the generic, specific, cognitive and affective skills deemed important.

Fiscal constraints were not presented as contexts in these documents. As a result, discussions of efficiency and funding were not engaged. The key focus in these documents was quality, determined by fitness of outcomes in vocational terms. Therefore, it is not well positioned to provide evidence of shifting State responsibility. AHELO also does not engage questions of equity. It is simply not positioned to do so. Nor is it particularly well positioned to provide evidence of supply- or demand-side approaches to growth. It does illustrate a supply-sided tendency to a degree in its understanding of HE as providing a supply of the human capital that will drive innovation, productivity, international competitiveness and growth. The first sentence in the Director of Education’s preface in the brochure is,

Tomorrow’s workforce is key in sustaining the wealth and development of nations and their people (Bro2).

Elsewhere it reads:

... students need to obtain the right skills to ensure economic, scientific and social progress (Bro2c).



It is, however, by its nature, a declaration of the economization of HE and the link between HE and the economy. The KBE is established as justification for and explanation of the need for higher order skills. AHELO seeks to measure those skills that are deemed to be important to industry so that the economy can flourish by being innovative, productive and competitive.

The fact that AHELO does not seek to rank institutions is relevant. A purely neoliberal perspective seeks to enhance data and 'market signal' availability in order to allow the market to optimize through rational choice. By reporting results anonymously, feedback on the quality of education at different institutions is not available to student-consumers. Therefore, market-response is muted.

AHELO provides some evidence of a self-reflective and dialogic nature. However it must begin by deciding what is important to assess. The project has the potential to build significance in some disciplines and for some types of skills and knowledge. It does present higher order thinking skills as essential, but otherwise promotes the development of a wider repertoire, particularly specific and general skills/knowledge and affective and cognitive capacity. The suggestion in the project however, is that HE should be tasked with at least assessing and validating, and most likely developing, the skills described in the text. This could be questioned, and the texts do not do so. Some skills in highlight might better be considered attributes than skills (i.e. adaptability). Others might develop through maturation and not through HE specifically (i.e. behave ethically). Others may be developed well in other venues (i.e. interpersonal skills). For reasons of access, cost and equity, it is appropriate to consider other venues and validating systems for promoting some of the attributes deemed important. In particular, one might also argue the appropriateness of developing these skills in the workplace

and emphasize the employer's responsibility, particularly if it is argued that industry needs these skills and knowledge to be productive, innovative and competitive.

AHELO hopes to provide evidence of the value added by HEIs. The first point to make about this is that value is being restricted to what the labour market deems valuable. The outcomes that are measured are those deemed vocationally important. Beyond that, it collects antecedent information such as family background, and contextual data such as level of government funding so that input data can be assessed alongside outcomes data in order to identify the added value. The relatively few resources and little time allotted during the assessments for collection of this data, however, means that AHELO must be selective and careful when it makes its conclusions. At the time of writing this dissertation, the antecedent surveys were not available. The background report, however, described potential information for collection. It recommended the collection of little funding data, but what it did recommend included the proportion of revenue received by HEIs from government. It did not, however, include the *total* revenue per student in HEIs. This has potential to mislead conclusions about well-funded private institutions like Harvard compared to underfunded publicly supported institutions.

In summary, compared to the other projects, documents currently available for AHELO do not provide as much evidence to confidently describe how it reflects various forms of liberal perspectives. They are simply not engaged with issues of funding, expansion, access, governance, structures, inclusion and equity as are the other projects and they provide minimal opportunities to reflect on the role of government in economic or social issues. As is the case in the other reports, however, it does position the KBE as an unquestioned context and resultantly, it constructs HE as in service to the economy: as supplying key resources for productive

capacity. Also, as was true in HE2030, the background report involves substantial dialogism on a number of issues that suggests that OECD projects are not always dogmatic in their perspectives.

## **6.4 Summary of Results**

From the later three projects, a number of features can be discerned as representative of the character of *current* OECD HE discourse. I am cautious about neatly classifying current OECD discourse as neoliberal or inclusive liberal (of either form) simply by reflecting on those features. The objective of this study was not to pigeon-hole the discourse, but rather to describe it in its complexity and reflect upon its specific features and trajectories. The boundaries between paradigmatic distinctions are blurry, and the texts are limited in their scope, representing assumptions about government interventions to varying degrees, but necessarily limited to HE and not engaging with broader aspects of State and market relations. It can be said that with strong emphasis on economic and vocational goals, market-like mechanisms and assumptions, supply-side perspectives on economic growth, representation of equity as foundational, and reference to social and public benefits of HE, these projects show a heterogeneous mix of inclusive- and neo-liberal features. Finally, texts represent only a “trace of discourses, frozen and preserved, more or less reliable or misleading” (Hodge & Kress, 1988, p. 12). It would be inappropriate to over-simplify current OECD HE discourse by simply assigning it a category. It is appropriate, however, to describe the tendencies and leanings in the discourse. The following paragraphs do so.

The documents show tendencies toward inclusive liberal understandings of the economy, worker/learners and HE. The inclusive nature of the discourse is largely based on its substantial interest in equity, both for its own merit and as a means of optimizing market mechanisms. Therefore, it can be said that there is evidence of both inclusive neoliberal and inclusive social

liberal perspectives. There is some understanding that the market and expansion of HE can have a positive effect on equity, however it is acknowledged in varying degrees that these are not necessarily sufficient to ensure thorough equity and there is room for government involvement. That involvement largely takes the form of backing needs-based student loans, steering HEIs toward more diverse programming, and encouraging the dissemination of information and market signals so that individuals better understand the individual's value of HE and more strategically plan their studies.

These projects describe barrier-reduction strategies instead of punitive measures to encourage participation in HE and target the middle class and low-skilled workers who might still be able to attend HE. It does not involve itself with the poorest in society, such as the homeless. It does not offer solutions for those whose abilities or motivations (perhaps due to family responsibilities or other issues) do not lead them to partake in developing their employability through HE. Its conceptualization of equity is based on the concept of desert—those who deserve to prosper, should prosper—and thus implies wealth distribution through merit fostering particular notions of what it means to be a valuable citizen. It has the potential to foster reader implicature that the poor deserve to be poor.

Although inclusive in these ways, the discourse has a high degree of neoliberal character as well. It provides mostly a supply-sided model focusing on reducing production barriers through the supply of knowledge and skilled human resources for productivity and innovation. It positions quality and efficiency as products of competition through rational choice and market signals. It constructs worker/learners as responsible for both themselves and for national economic prosperity. It minimizes the State's direct role by reducing its financial responsibility to HE and by limiting its involvement to steering, and providing conditions for market success

by encouraging competition. The State's role in social policy is constructed largely to ensure that social conditions do not threaten market mechanisms and to ensure the efficient functioning of the market so that the market can promote prosperity and well-being. This is evidenced in recommendations and normalization of discourses of employability and capacity development.

By comparing these features of the current discourse to that of the reviews of the 1990s we have an opportunity to explore evidence of a discursive shift during that time. Although the importance of education for economic development (inter alia) was never denied, the overarching change was the introduction of a *particular conceptualization of the economy* that intimately links the supply and use of knowledge to the economic growth of the nation. Coded as *the KBE*, this definition of education-market-economy relations was set as an *a priori* context to t HE policy must respond. This was associated with a number of shifts. Primarily this produced documents that were much more heavily focused on the role of HE in promoting national economic growth and competitive advantage than they were on other purposes of HE. This role was certainly not absent in the 1990s reviews, but it shifted to a much more central position in the current documents and the focus was much more strongly associated with international competitiveness through innovation and productivity. Furthermore, solutions for innovation and productivity were supply-sided: HE needs to provide the knowledge and skills that will improve production capacity for goods and services. This shift resulted in increasing a construction of the worker as a deficit resource and the normalization of volatile labour markets and bifurcated wage structures. It involved a move away from a demand-based massification of HE toward intentional expansion to supply human capital. It focused increased attention on Schumpeterian innovation, STEM, responsiveness to firms and production, competition, and productivity. The texts

examined in this study are suggestive of an increased emphasis on market- and supply-focused aspects of neoliberal doctrine since the 1990s.

## **Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion**

This dissertation explored how OECD HE discourse might reflect and affect dominant political economy and to better understand the features and direction of its discourse on HE in terms of dominant political economic thought. The preceding chapters presented a dense collection of political, economic and linguistic theories, background information on the political economy and the OECD, and a mix of findings, analyses and discussions. The main purpose of this final chapter is to make sense of it all and create a clearer and integrated picture of the OECD discourse. It starts with a summary *tour* of highlights of the dissertation thus far.

### **7.1 Highlights of the Dissertation**

Chapter 1 proposed it important to examine an IO like OECD with a mandate in economics in terms of domestic social policy (i.e. HE) because domestic policy is increasingly influenced by a network of transnational actors and dominant international ideology. Scholars have claimed that OECD specifically has been very influential in domestic social policy, including education. In light of academic critique of OECD and neoliberalism in general; of popular protest and unrest over increasing wealth polarization; and of scholarly suggestions of shifts in political economy and discursive shifts in ideology in OECD in some policy fields, this study proposed to document the features of recent OECD HE discourse in terms of characteristics of liberal perspectives and to look for evidence of a recent discursive shift.

Chapter 2 presented the theoretical frames that guided interpretation and analysis of the discourse. Features of classic liberalism, Keynesianism and neoliberalism were described. Descriptions of tenets of neoliberalism served as a primary framing tool for analysis of the data in this study. Additionally, changing features of the political economy were described that are suggestive of a shift in dominant paradigms. Some authors refer to this *new* paradigm as

inclusive liberalism. Evidence of discursive shifts in some policy fields at OECD toward inclusive liberalism were presented so that the current study could be understood against that literature.

After a third chapter presented the methodological theory and methods used in this study, a fourth chapter presented the case of the OECD as one of import to HE policy development. OECD was described in the dissertation as a complex, dynamic and influential organization concerned formally, originally and primarily as mandated for promoting economic growth and as largely reflecting the interests of wealthy, Western and Northern states. OECD also claims, however, an interest in objectivity, the social and the general well-being of “ordinary people.” It has reformed since the 1990s, enhancing its engagement with Eastern, Southern and developing countries and with civil society and CSOs. This provides opportunities for OECD to reflect more divergent perspectives and perhaps also to demonstrate how various tensions and debates engage. Its influence in domestic policy is largely through various forms of soft governance, in which the texts examined in this study are implicated.

Key findings and results of the analyses were summarized at the end of Chapter 6 and are not repeated here.

## **7.2 Understanding the Results in Terms of the Changing Political Economy and Changing OECD**

As an international agency involving a growing and diverse national membership, somewhat divorced from acute political pressures in domestic contexts (at least pressures for re-election), and drawing on a wealth of financial and research resources, OECD has the potential to present objective, impartial and evidence based discourse on HE policy. Its discourse could show evidence of the continual struggle between competing political economic paradigms and



could reflect shifts as competing perspectives engage, conflict, coordinate, assimilate and morph into new understandings of the economy, the State, the individual and HE's role in their relations.

Scholars have argued that the neoliberal paradigm has been receding in favour of perspectives that are more socially inspired and inclusive of those who were marginalized under the style of neoliberalism associated with the Reagan and Thatcher administrations. By examining documents from the 1990s and those after the mid-2000s, this study looked for evidence of discursive shifts in OECD HE discourse over that time that would be reflective of a changing OECD and a changing political economy. It failed to find evidence of a receding of neoliberal perspectives. It did not find evidence of an increasingly inclusive liberal character that was reported by scholars in other social policy fields. Indeed, this study found substantial evidence of a concern for equity and some acknowledgement of social goals for HE that might contribute to it being considered an inclusive liberal perspective. However, those perspectives can be linked to education's long tradition of humanistic concerns that Rubenson (2008) noted and do not appear to increase to any notable degree after the 1990s. Not only was there no evidence of an increase in humanistic or inclusive tendencies, this study reports a further entrenching of neoliberal assumptions. In this section, I try to understand that shift.

I propose the following explanation: The construction of the KBE in a particular way, and the subsequent contexting of it, solidifies a neoliberal understanding of the relationship between HE and the economy. It does so in two key ways.

### **1. Supply sided approach**

On first engagement with these documents, it did not occur to me that demand sided approaches to HE were absent. This absence is curious, particularly when we recall that OECD was a strong

proponent of demand-side economics in the 1960s. However, options for creating demand for goods and services are difficult to conceive of under this particular KBE conceptualization of the economy. It defines economic development as the product of supplying the market with the knowledge and human resources needed to promote production and increase international competitiveness. Knowledge is centralized as a resource for industry and national competitiveness. HE is the central source of that supply. Calling on Schumpeterian and endogenous growth assumptions, supply-side strategies reducing barriers to production are the only strategies developed. I suggest that it may be more difficult to imagine demand-side options in this context. One might question if the contexting of this particular construction of the KBE makes it appear unnecessary to consider demand-side solutions. If the contexting of this conceptualization of the KBE becomes common-sense, one might wonder if it will be more difficult for policy makers in other fields (i.e. interest rates) to consider demand-side options? If it is a KBE of this sort, what other options could there be other than to supply knowledge? Labour is constructed as a deficit resource and it is proposed that intentional expansion of HE will address this deficit. The documents, therefore, claim a need to supply more human capital and HE spaces instead of claiming their response to popular demand for HE.

For this argument to have impact, it must be demonstrated that other-than-supply-side models of HE could be represented in documents such as these. Certainly, HE discourse may be limited in its opportunity for consideration of demand-side approaches. HE discourse does not generally discuss labour regulation, minimum wages, employment protection, interest rates or other such policy areas. Although, there may be some opportunities in the HE discourse to discuss job creation or to relate knowledge and skills to the demand for goods and services in some other way. The question is: What recommendations and assumptions might be involved in

HE discourse, which do not promote only the supply of goods and services? Is there any room in these documents or in this particular construction of the KBE to allow a more balanced approach between supply- and demand-side solutions? I admit to having had a difficult time in imagining them in the HE discourse. This may be suggestive of the common-sense, hegemonic nature of a supply-side approach to HE. It might also reflect the limitations of the field of HE that has limited ability to capture demand opportunities like deficit spending or increasing minimum wage laws. Regardless, after much reflection, I offer some thoughts for consideration.

Supply and demand are related. On the one hand, increasing supply may have an effect on demand. On the other, increasing demand may have an effect on supply. Where economists differ is in how they would allocate efforts and resources to encouraging supply and demand. The question we can ask in HE is in what ways do HE policies affect supply and demand and what is the optimal balance? Other than the estates we leave when we die, for the most part, people spend all the money they have. If debt loads are high and disposable incomes are low, supply cannot create demand. Money students (or their parents) spend on tuition is money they are not spending on something else. If we want to increase the demand for goods and services (other than tuition) we could lower tuitions, increase grants, raise student loans and use reduced interest rates so that students (and parents) would have more money to spend. In the 1960s, OECD did recommend increased public spending on education which would be consistent with these options. We could also better develop paid work-study programs. We could provide business development loans to students who want to start their own businesses. A demand side approach might also involve exploring ways of identifying the skills that graduates have and how industry might optimize them. This surplus model (as opposed to a deficit model) could query what

knowledge/skill strengths particular regions have and contemplate how they could be used to create new jobs or attract new industry.

These suggestions are not well thought out. I am not an economist and do not suggest that these ideas are necessarily better than what OECD discourse suggests. I only seek to illustrate that demand-side options may exist and they are not considered in the current texts. As explained in Chapter 2, OECD did promote demand-side models of economic development and governments like the Kennedy and Johnson administrations in the United States in the 1960s applied more demand-side approaches to research and the relationship between industry and HE. My suggestions are meant to open up thinking about what this might look like. There appears to be no consideration that such policies could exist in the documents.

## **2. Shifting State responsibility in favour of market mechanisms**

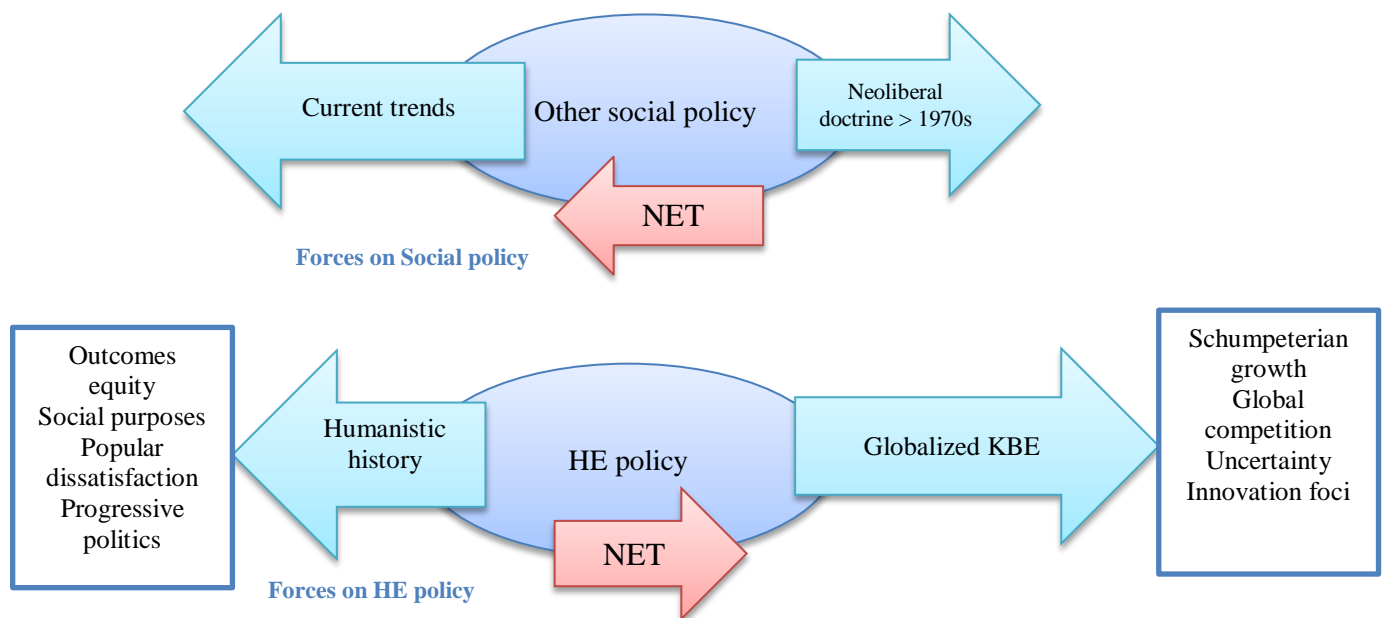
By re-constructing the individual and TEIs as responsible for themselves and for the economy, the KBE concept supports a change in how the distribution of responsibility for HE is conceived. This involves a move from a more bureaucratic/professional HEI management paradigm to a more managerial model where the State steers and the market directs institutional decision making. It also involves a partial devolution of State financial responsibility in favour of more private investments. Texts build individual's responsibility by a) presenting them as primary beneficiary; b) using a skills-deficit model to attribute economic growth to labour; c) the normalization of LLL; and d) promoting counseling and market-signal information dissemination to individuals. TEIs are made responsible through a) reducing the role of the state in governance to steering; b) promoting autonomy and competition between TEIs with outcomes based funding; and c) pressing for privatization, entrepreneurial activity and alternate funding sources. Direct State involvement is further reduced by setting reduced public funding to students and TEIs as an

unquestioned context. The public good of HE is over-shadowed and HE is positioned as in competition with, and perhaps a threat to, social services.

The KBE concept centralizes a primary, and seemingly indisputable causal link between knowledge and the economy, and therefore more specifically between HE and economic growth. It has the capacity to constrain our view of the economy and tendency to think of other ways of promoting prosperity and well-being. It potentially limits our ways of conceptualizing HE. It centralizes the economization HE making it a key (if not *the* key) mechanism for national competitiveness and reifies an understanding of HE not so much as a social policy field, but more centrally as an economic policy field.

To be clear, I do not claim that HE does not have substantial economic potential. Nor do I claim that other paradigms including Keynesianism did not and would not use HE for economic goals. My concern lies more with the limited appreciation of other goals for HE represented in these documents and the difficulty of keeping strong other goals for HE when the relationship between HE and the economy is constructed in this particular neoliberal way. Yes, social goals are referenced in the documents; however they are not substantially engaged. Furthermore, yes, it is appropriate for an organization whose mandate is to develop the economy to focus on the economic utility of HE. I only suggest awareness that perspectives in OECD documents tend to filter for economistic visions of HE and offer that this conceptualization of the KBE makes this easier to do. I also reference economization of HE to help explain the lack of shift away from neoliberal doctrine reported in other social policy fields. Recall McBride and Mahon's (2008) contention that more socially-oriented policy fields were most likely to shift. Economic policy fields resisted the pressure. Also recall the categorization of Third Way politics as a way of reconciling right-wing economic policy with left-wing social policy. Considering HE as an

economic policy may allow it to resist a shift. Furthermore, since education policy comes from more humanistic traditions, a shift in HE policy toward neoliberal doctrine might allow it to position itself alongside other economic policy fields. Recall Jessop's (2002) notion of oscillations about a paradigm and consider Figure 10. Under neoliberalism, other social policy fields at OECD had been pressured to assume more neoliberal assumptions: decreased direct intervention by government in favour of market-mechanisms. A shift in political economy away from neoliberalism would allow OECD discourse in these fields to cast off some of that neoliberal character. The concept of the KBE, with its supply-side assumptions about HE servicing industry through innovation and productivity, may exert pressure on OECD's HE discourse toward neoliberalism.



**Figure 10: Forces on Social and HE Policy**

The sensibility of neoliberal economic policy, specifically privatization, competition, innovation, individual responsibility and economization of HE are all reified in the common

sense notion of the KBE. It is left poorly defined and non-attributed, so it is hard to question. It appears obvious from the decline in manufacturing and the increase in ICTs. Its positioning as context illustrates its hegemonic acceptance. Furthermore, it reinforces a neoliberal view of economics and allows the State to reduce its perceived responsibility in financing HE.

This results in an interesting contradiction. The KBE concept affects a shift in the discourse toward reduced State responsibility for financing HE. It also constructs the worker/learner as primary beneficiary and responsible for greater funding of HE. In contrast to the reviews of the 1990s, the recent texts are clear in their claim that the private benefits to the individual are much greater than the public benefits to society. However, with the contexting of this conceptualization of the KBE, the thrust in all of the texts is on the *public, national economic* benefits of HE. The declared over-arching purpose of HE reform and evaluation is to ensure that HE meets the needs of the economy in a specific way: it promotes productivity and innovation; it aims to ensure the nation's competitive advantage internationally; and it seeks to provide skilled human capital that will drive economic growth. The texts are largely focused on the public, national benefits of HE. That focus shifts completely, however, to a focus on *private* benefits of HE only when questions of financing arise. Two of the strongest themes in the discourse are difficult to reconcile:

1. HE must ensure national competitive advantage and economic growth.
2. Individual students are, by far, the biggest beneficiaries of HE.

The former centralizes the *obvious* primacy of the public benefit. The latter centralizes the *obvious* primacy of the private benefit. The effect of placing the KBE concept as a context in the policy discourse then, is that it allows the State to announce the imperative of HE expansion in order to promote the public good, and at the same time, remove itself from the need to fund it.

### 7.3 Conclusions

Critical literature has condemned OECD discourse for its neoliberal nature without always being clear what aspects of neoliberalism are most entrenched. Furthermore, research has demonstrated recent discursive shifts from neoliberal toward inclusive liberal doctrine in some social OECD policy fields. This study has contributed to these discussions by making explicit the features of OECD HE discourse in terms of liberal doctrines and those discursive moments that illustrate inclusive liberal character. It reports that although a substantial concern for equity has persisted, which might justify classifying the discourse as inclusive-liberal<sup>73</sup>, the discourse appears to have shifted toward an entrenching of neoliberal assumptions.

I suggest that this shift is primarily a form of *rollout*. *Flanking* also entrenches neoliberal perspectives, but does so by ameliorating the negative social effects or inconsistencies in neoliberal doctrine through non-market mechanisms. The documents offer little in the way of non-market mechanisms. Suggestions to offer progressive loans and guidance to lower socio-economic and previously excluded populations are non-market solutions, but they are linked to the market-solution of advancing ones employability to compete in the labour market. Furthermore, these recommendations are not new to the more recent discourse. Therefore, I would not consider this a strong example of flanking. Rollout, however, deepens and entrenches market-relations. In the privatization of HE, entrepreneurialization of institutions, the emphasis on NPM, and most importantly, the defining of the economy as dependent on the supply of particular forms of knowledge and skills that promote innovation and productivity, neoliberal market-relations are extended and strengthened in HE policy. Other than evidence of questioning some assumptions in one AHELO document, there is little evidence of any countervailing of

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<sup>73</sup> Although I maintain that I prefer to describe the characteristics of the discourse than categorize it.



neoliberalism in these documents. In spite of OECD's potential to engage differing perspectives and present the conflicts between them, there is little evidence of push-back against neoliberal doctrine.

This is important because through its discourse OECD has the potential to influence domestic HE policy. The field of education has a tradition of humanistic and social democratic perspectives. If it normalizes a neoliberal and economistic vision of HE, valuable aspects of the social and humanist tradition in HE could be threatened. This dissertation calls attention to this discursive shift in an effort to interrupt hegemonic economization and neoliberalization of HE.

## **7.4 Implications**

Critical research has the responsibility to question social life in moral and political terms. Language is always political. So critical discourse analysis must call attention to how language can influence socio-political reality and is implicated in how social goods and power are distributed. "Intervening in such matters can be a contribution to social justice" (Gee, 2011, p. 30). As critical discourse analysts, we "investigate how ideologies can become frozen in language and find ways to break the ice" (Bloor & Bloor, 2007, p. 13). This study developed the methodological strategy of examining how contexts constructed in the texts affect text. It specifically illustrated how the setting of the concept of the KBE is implicated in the 'freezing' of neoliberal and economistic ideology into HE discourse.

So what? It is hardly surprising if an organization whose formal and traditional primary mandate is to promote economic growth constructs HE as an economic strategy. OECD still engages a great number of educational 'experts' in its HE projects, and not just economists. It does not deny non-economic benefits of HE. It appears genuinely interested in how HE and economic growth can improve equity. Furthermore, the key themes of neoliberalism do not

sound particularly *evil*: competition, efficiency, employability, responsiveness, innovation, entrepreneurialism, and partnerships. Is there anything wrong with building HE systems that will encourage a national competitive edge and economic prosperity? Why does it matter if this study has suggested that neoliberal ideology has been further entrenched in HE discourse? This section contemplates implications of three aspects of neoliberal entrenching in HE discourse.

### **Responsibilization of the Individual**

Neoliberal rollout involves devolution of direct State involvement in favour of market-mechanisms, particularly in terms of funding. One way in which the State devolves in these texts is through the attribution of responsibility to the individual. This is associated with, *inter alia*, higher tuitions that are justified by the texts by attributing status of primary beneficiary to the individual. Not only is this somewhat contradictory in texts that are primarily focused on using HE to develop international competitiveness, as described earlier in this dissertation, but it is also associated with some potential social justice issues that are not addressed in the documents.

The texts suggest that progressive and income contingent student loans and the broad promotion of the benefits of HE, minimizes the risk that access for some groups might be threatened by higher tuitions. However, even under these conditions there are still important questions left unaddressed. We do not know if higher tuitions will perpetuate access barriers for certain under-represented groups (i.e. lower socio-economic groups may still be risk averse). Will students' whose parents cannot afford to pay for HE be at a disadvantage (perhaps they will have access only to lower status schools or shorter study programs) over those whose parents can? Will high tuitions reduce students' ability to change programs or institutions when they discover they are not well matched? Will students postpone admission until they have worked and raised money? Will mature students who have added responsibilities be less likely to return

to school? How will applications to graduate study be affected? Research in these areas would help us understand the effects of increasing tuitions.

One area that has received much attention, particularly in the United States, is the total student debt burden and its economic impact. The Economist (2012a; 2012b) reported that in 2011 the average student graduating with a Bachelor degree in the United States carried over \$26,000 in debt. The total student debt burden in the United States was approaching a \$ 1 trillion in 2012<sup>74</sup>. This has been called a *debt bubble* and the concern is that it will burst (as the housing bubble did) and spiral the American economy further downward. The worry is that graduates with enormous debt cannot afford to buy homes, start businesses, buy cars, start families, or spend any money other than repaying their loans. Some cannot even do that: over 14% of those loans are past due.

The skills-deficit model is another way of placing responsibility upon the individual. It constructs worker/learners as the problem and solution behind not only their own economic failure and success, but also behind national economic failure and success. It does not recognize the institutional and systemic structures that are implicated in trends toward bifurcated skills and wage markets, and therefore does not investigate those structures for possible solutions. Other approaches are not considered in these documents. Several other questions are left unaddressed. We need to ask to what degree and in what ways an individual-responsible-deficit model discourages policy imagination away from other economic solutions for growth. We do not know if it exerts downward pressure on wages at all higher skill levels. We do not know if it exerts upward pressure on skills development beyond what is useful in the labour market (credential inflation). Does such a model condone and normalize low wages and poverty for those who do

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<sup>74</sup> In Canada, average student debt in 2007 in Canada was \$18,800, but 27% of students graduated with over \$25,000 in debt (Statistics Canada, 2010).

not or cannot attend HE? Will older workers who are not in a position to return to school be disadvantaged? Does the model foster high unemployment rates, low wage jobs and a bifurcated wealth structure? What affects will this model have on work/life imbalance? This discourse has inadequately considered industry's responsibility in developing its own specific skills in-house. Does this model foster the development of more highly skilled workers than the labour market can absorb at appropriate wages?

Of prime importance is that the texts do not provide compelling evidence that more highly educated labour results in economic growth or greater national prosperity. In fact, if we consider the massive expansion in TE since the 1960s in many industrialized countries and reflect on average living standards (particularly when accounting for dual income households and reduced numbers of children) it might be hard to believe there is a relationship<sup>75</sup>.

### **Responsibilization of TEIs**

Devolution of State involvement is also accomplished through shifting responsibility to TEIs. One of the key effects of this is lowering the overall government funding to TEIs and/or making funding linked to measurable outputs. There are risks associated with this shift that the texts do not adequately address. First, not all important results of HE are measurable outputs. Furthermore, we must wonder the degree to which such financing will encourage institutions to cut programs and services and reduce quality under tighter budget restraints. Depending on the discipline, research may be favoured over teaching, or vice versa. We should ask if research could potentially be directed primarily toward what industry would find profitable, thus marginalizing other forms of research and disciplines which may not have immediate profit-

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<sup>75</sup> It was beyond the scope of this study to look for answers to these questions. But these are important questions left out of the documents in question. If the main assumption is that higher skills of the labour force will result in economic growth, it is reasonable to suggest that empirical evidence should be included if it exists. If not, it is an area that needs investigation.

value but may have social value. Will programs considered too expensive be put at risk? Medicine and science are generally expensive programs to run. Business is not. Will student services such as disability services, ombudsman's services and crisis counseling be put at risk? We should wonder if a tiered quality system might develop where certain institutions attract funds from industry and benefactors and others do not. What happens under the expansion of for-profit institutions which do not necessarily have the public good in mind? How will TEIs fare when there are downturns in the market? We should question the degree to which such competition will discourage cooperation between institutions and researchers and threaten open access to information. Will smaller and rural TEIs be viable? Will there be a threat to community service mandates of TEIs?

These problems may or may not come to pass in a HE system where responsibility shifts from governments to institutions. I do not mean to speculate that they will. I only wish to point out that the texts do not engage with these possible effects. They only promote this direction on the assumption that devolution will increase quality and efficiency. Perhaps we should not expect these texts to engage these possible effects. There are a lot of unanswered questions and the authors cannot be responsible for addressing all possibilities. But again, it is important to recognize that the texts do not provide compelling evidence for assumptions such as the relationship between devolution and quality and efficiency. I do not claim that there is no such evidence. It was beyond the scope of this study to review all of the background documents and meeting transcripts that informed these projects. Indeed, many authors in these projects were educational experts and economists whose understanding of the literature far exceeds my own. I only point out that the reader of these texts does not know whether and to what degree there is

theoretical or empirical support for that assumption. The reader is asked to trust the authors' opinions and relies on the reputation of OECD as an ideational authority.

### **Economization of HE**

Another major component of the shift is the re-casting of HE more strongly as an economic field. One might worry about losing attention to issues of democracy, civic participation, social inclusion, justice and personal fulfillment that are part of education's rich humanist tradition. The texts, however, assume that even social issues will largely be addressed by the market through overall economic growth and prosperity. We should be concerned if this threatens certain forms of programming. We must recognize that some forms of and solutions for inequity are not directly associated with economic growth. We do not know to what degree a narrow economistic vision of HE (which marginalizes other purposes of HE) contributes to increasing wealth polarization, marginalization of the poorest in society or constriction of our understanding of well-being. We might also question if this is a precedent for the economization of other social services so that they might be ruled more by market forces. Will health care be next? Compulsory education? The judicial system? Transport systems? Environmental protection? Food safety? Pensions?

In summary, there may be economic and social justice risks associated with entrenchment of neoliberal perspectives in HE. There are a number of important questions for which we do not have answers. The texts do not engage these risks to any substantial degree, and perhaps should not be expected to, but they generally do not provide compelling empirical data to support their assumptions. There may be compelling evidence. However, the texts often do not provide them, so policy makers that rely on OECD opinion are left unable to consider the evidence for themselves.

One has to wonder if the neoliberal economic paradigm has become so hegemonic that we do not even question its assumptions, and instead rely on its *common sense* nature and the ideational authority reputation of the OECD. When I first read the documents, nothing stood out to me as missing or inaccurate. It was easy to nod and think, “indeed, that makes sense.” It is only when *making strange* with the texts was I able to begin to question what has become common-sense. It has become common sense that the expansion of HE will lead to more knowledge and skills that can be used to improve productivity and drive innovation to ensure economic growth. However, is there not room to question these assumptions? Is it possible that maybe HE does not need to expand and that growth might happen anyway? Is it possible that HE is producing enough skilled labour for the availability of jobs? Is it possible that our labour system also requires low- and mid-skilled workers (who might still be deserving of a descent standard of living)? It is common sense that economic growth should be the goal. But is it also not fair to suggest that growth means little to general prosperity if it is not accompanied by discussions of how to distribute that growth? If the richest 10% among us doubled their income and the poorest 10% halved theirs, would this still not be sizable economic growth? Would it also not contribute to increased poverty? These are some of the assumptions that are becoming common sense that need to be examined.

## **7.5 Significance**

This dissertation has contributed to the literature in a number of ways. By making explicit tenets of liberalisms and comparing them to features of the discourse, it has provided a previously unavailable detailed description of recent OECD HE discourse in terms of liberalisms. It has identified a shift in the discourse that is inconsistent with changes in political economy and shifts in discourse in other social policy fields. It explained this incongruity by

proposing that the KBE concept as it has been constructed, constructs HE and its relationship to the economy in a causal, neoliberal, supply-sided manner and hyper-focuses on the importance of education in economic policy in terms of innovation and productivity driven competitive advantage. It further proposes that the KBE concept has been given the power to drive the discourse by being constructed as a context through non-attributed and undialogic declarative statements and through reliance on the OECD's reputation as an ideational authority.

Context has been previously identified as important in meaning making and an area to consider in CDA. However, it had not previously been combined with the theories of Gee, Grice and Bakhtin and the notion of nominalization before to offer it as a specific strategy for discourse analysis. This dissertation develops and illustrates how that strategy can be applied to investigate how texts can limit reader imagination and interpretation of texts. *Contexting* is offered as a mechanism through which HE is linked to the economy.

## **7.6 Future Research**

Section 7.4 *Implications* raised a number of questions and potential concerns about an entrenchment of neoliberal ideals in HE policy discourse. This suggests a number of areas for future research. In general, we need empirical research to explore the assumptions made in neoliberal economic doctrine. Specifically, what evidence is there that a neoliberal approach to HE results in innovation, economic growth, prosperity, well-being and equity?

OECD has been accused of sometimes taking a one-size-fits-all approach to policy (i.e. see Martens and Jakobi's 2010 discussion of the early *Jobs Strategy*). However, different nations have different institutions, traditions and values for which such universalized recommendations are not appropriate. Specifically, Hall and Soskice (2001) have described two types of market economies: liberal market economies (LMEs) and coordinated market economies (CMEs). What



have the comparative experiences been in these economies which have very different approaches to competition, deregulation, social protection, skills profiles and training? Are HE recommendations made by OECD to CMEs different than those made to LMEs? Do CMEs and LMEs take up OECD recommendations differently? What are the comparative effects when LMEs and CMEs take up OECD policy recommendations?

OECD is a complex and dynamic organization. Its different departments, authors and audiences may draw on different assumptions and yield different constructions in different publications. Its discourse products are windows, frozen in time, into the world of ideas. It has opportunity to reflect a range of dominant and alternate paradigms and to present debates and tensions between them. It can also *filter* in some ways, representing select perspectives. There is no *one* OECD perspective. The dissertation investigated one area of OECD discourse. Other scholars have investigated others. However, there are still policy fields to be explored. Furthermore, OECD will be publishing more detailed results of the HE2030 and AHELO projects by the end of 2014. This dissertation could be supplemented by an analysis of those reports.

Additionally, there are other IO's whose discourse in HE can be explored. The World Bank, UNESCO, and the European Union (EU) are all influential in domestic HE policy. The EU would be of particular interest since it is a) a relatively new entity defining itself and more directly involved in domestic policy<sup>76</sup>, b) it too is highly engaged with the concept of the KBE<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> i.e. through the Bologna process

<sup>77</sup> i.e. through the Lisbon Strategy to make the EU "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world"

and c) its membership includes several social democratic countries (i.e. CMEs) and it has some history of resistance to purely economic and neoliberal agendas for education<sup>78</sup>.

To explore empirical evidence of effects of this discourse, a researcher might follow a genre chain from OECD (or other IO) discourse through national policy discourses to actual policy implementation. The chain might extend to HEI promotional materials aimed at students and/or may involve student and policy maker interviews. It might also look at policy and practice changes that have occurred such as governance structures, funding schemes, and program reform. If done in an internationally comparative way we might see how IO HE discourse is enacted, interpreted and resisted in different countries under different contexts. We could examine how LMEs and CMEs take up OECD HE discourse.

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<sup>78</sup> Wain (2007) posits that the EU failed to ratify a constitution in 2005 partly because in the EU's 1995 White Paper on LLL, economics overshadowed social and political concerns and member countries wanted a more integrated approach to LLL.

## Endnotes

- <sup>i</sup> Somewhat ironically, Schumpeter also argued that socialism would gradually replace capitalism (Carroll & Pol, 2006).
- <sup>ii</sup> Marschack and Stigler for economics of information; Machlup for economics of production and distribution of knowledge; Schultz and Becker for economics of human capital; growth theorists who explore human capital in the development of new knowledge.
- <sup>iii</sup> Most notably Harry Braverman (1974) who theorized de-skilling and intensification of management control, and Daniel Bell (1973) who emphasized theoretical knowledge in science based industries in his sociology of post-industrialism.
- <sup>iv</sup> Most notably Drucker (1969) whose emphasis on knowledge workers helped found the field of knowledge management. But also theorists involved in Just-in-Time production; Lean production; Kaizen (Continuous improvement); Total quality management; and benchmarking.
- <sup>v</sup> Including Lyotard (1984) who characterized the post-modern condition as one of complexity, contingency and dispersed knowledge; and David Harvey (1989) who explored shifts from Fordist to flexible production; and Bourdieu (1986) who developed notions of social and cultural capital.
- <sup>vi</sup> Most notably Allan Toffler who forecasted knowledge-based production in a third wave economy.
- <sup>vii</sup> Programs to help people get back to work.
- <sup>viii</sup> Dr. Mahon confirmed my interpretation through an email correspondence.
- <sup>ix</sup> Just prior to the completion of this dissertation, the first volume of the AHELO feasibility study was released. It is not included as part of the main analysis in my study. However, it is referenced therein for some background data.
- <sup>x</sup> The OEEC was formed in 1948 to develop and administer the European Recovery Programme and allocate Marshall Plan aid. Its mandate included promotion of cooperation in national production/reconstruction programs in Europe; intra-European trade; and to study the feasibility of a free-trade area and improve the utilization of labour (OECD, n.d.1).
- <sup>xi</sup> *Participants* have the same responsibilities and rights in committees as members, but have no representation in council.
- <sup>xii</sup> The G7/8/20's formal dialogue process with emerging economies.
- <sup>xiii</sup> In 2012, Canada was the 8<sup>th</sup> largest contributor to OECD Part I funding at 3.59%. In decreasing order, the top 10 contributors are: the USA, Japan, Germany, France, the UK, Italy, Spain, Canada, Australia and Mexico.

- <sup>xiv</sup> Specifically these include: a) a recommendation about earthquake safety in schools; b) a recommendation for guidelines of transparency in cross-border education; and c) a 1978 declaration prioritizing certain directions in education in member countries. Those priorities include: a) the development of educational standards, b) improving teacher preparation, c) the development of educational measures to promote equity in a variety of populations, and d) to develop more opportunities for recurrent learning.
- <sup>xv</sup> Examples of experts participating on the advisory group for the thematic reviews include the Director General for Secondary Education Department of the Flemish Community; the Director General, Department of Higher Education; and the Chief Advisor for Tertiary Ministry of Education.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Examples of educational experts participating in review teams include the Vice President for Policy Analysis and Research at the American Council on Education; and a Professor and Vice-Chancellor at the University of South Australia.
- <sup>xvii</sup> According to UNESCO, the total global enrolments in TE were 6.5 and 12.1 million respectively in 1950 and 1960. By 1997, it was 88.2 million.
- <sup>xviii</sup> I was unable to confirm all of the papers that were commissioned and used, however, the guideline document indicates that papers might be commissioned in the following areas: financing; quality assurance; system governance models; graduate supply and demand; innovation, productivity and growth; the effect of equity policy on quality. I personally find this last one curious.
- <sup>xix</sup> Agenda and presentations for the Washington conference is available at <http://advancingknowledge.groups.si.umich.edu/program.htm>.
- <sup>xx</sup> The Hewlett foundation, established in 1967 and with more than \$7 billion (USD) in assets, is one of the largest foundations in the United States and provides grants to non-profits and governments “to solve social and environmental problems.”
- <sup>xxi</sup> A black box is a system for which input and output information is available, but the internal workings are still largely invisible.

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- Woodward, R. (2011). Fifty more years? Reform and modernization in the OECD. *Political Insight*, 2(2), 18-20.

## Appendix A: Style and Referencing

This dissertation primarily uses APA standard referencing (6<sup>th</sup> Edition). However, due to the large number of OECD documents, to avoid long list of sources such as (OECD 1997a, OECD,1997b....OECD, 1997n), groups of related documents such as the Country Thematic Reviews of Tertiary Education will use an abbreviated referencing system. Generally, for the data segments that system involves an abbreviation of the document followed by a page reference for paginated sources, and a serial reference for un-paginated sources such as websites. For example, Bel7b represents the second data segment collected from page 7 of the review of Belgium's tertiary education. A complete summary of data segment abbreviations by project is included below. Other OECD documents are referenced with a small abbreviation after the year. For example, OECD, 2002-RHC references *Rethinking Human Capital*.

Furthermore:

- All data segments analyzed are available for reference online at [www.novuscom.net/~carrie.hunter/index.html](http://www.novuscom.net/~carrie.hunter/index.html)<sup>79</sup>.
- Canadian spelling is used throughout, except in quotes.
- Headings are numbered for convenient referencing.
- Footnotes are used for information of more immediate use to the reader. Endnotes are used for extra referent information less immediately necessary.
- Foot notes, end notes, appendices, lists of abbreviations and final references are single spaced to improve readability.
- Data segment quotations are centred, written in a sans-serif font and spaced 1.5X to differentiate them more clearly from my comments in the dissertation.

### Thematic Review of Tertiary Education—The First Years

Country Code + page + serial reference if necessary

Country Codes:

Australia (Aus), Belgium (Bel), Denmark(Den), Germany (Ger), Japan (Jap), New Zealand (NZ), Norway (Nor), Portugal (Por), Sweden (Swe), United Kingdom (UK), Virginia,USA (Vir).

Examples : Bel21, Ger 14b, Swe7c

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<sup>79</sup> This source is best viewed through Google Chrome as a browser to preserve the format of the webpage

### **Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Based Economy**

Country Code + page + serial reference if necessary

Country Codes:

China (Chi), Croatia (Cro), Czech Republic (Czc), Estonia (Est), Finland (Fin),  
Iceland (Ice), Japan (Jpn), Korea (Kor), Mexico (Mex), Netherlands (Nth), New  
Zealand (NwZ), Norway (Nrw), Poland (Pol), Spain (Spa)

Examples : Chi26, Kor75c, Nrw81d

### **Higher Education 2030 (HE2030)**

Document Code + p. page + serial reference if necessary

Document Codes:

Vol1 = Volume 1: Demography

Vol2 = Volume 2: Globalization

Examples: Vol1p89b, Vol2p112c

### **AHELO**

Paginated sources: Document Code + page + serial reference if necessary

Un-paginated sources: Document Code + serial reference

Document Codes found in Appendix F

Examples: Bac3d, Web2, Cnt12b

### **Other OECD publications (generally)**

(OECD, Year-XYZ) where XYZ is an abbreviation of the title

## Appendix B: Structural Topics Surveyed by OECD

Policy area	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	Total
Competition policy, privatization	1	3	4	3	1	2	1	1			16
Labor markets	1	2	3	3	2	2		1	2		16
Tax reform	4	1	1			1		1	1	1	10
Budget and other fiscal	2			1		2	1	1	1	1	9
Environment/Sustainable development	1	3	1		1		1			2	9
Public sector issues (general, other)	2	1	1	2	1	1	1				9
Ageing populations	1		1	1					1	1	5
Health		1	2	2	1	1	1	3	3		14
Industrial adjustment, competitiveness, trade policy		1	2	3	1	1					8
Financial markets, financial sector reform		1	1			2			2		6
Education and training, human capital			2		1	4	2	5			14
Public enterprise sector			1						2		3
Social security, pension reform				1		1	2	4		1	9
Social protection issues (other)				1	2						3
Corporate governance					1	1	3	1	1		7
Business sector policies and selected topics					1	1	1		1		4
Regulatory reform						1	1	1			3
Entrepreneurship								4	1	1	6
Innovation and technology									1		1
Other	6	5	4	2	4	2	2	1	2		28
Total	18	18	23	19	16	22	16	23	18	7	9

Structural Topics Surveyed by the OECD 1990–1999.

Number of topics by year and policy area.

Total for the twenty-four early members.

Created from unpublished Office of the Structural Issues Co-ordinator data 1999.

Source: (Ougaard, 2010)

## Appendix C: Sample Notes from Data Collection

- is this backed up by data/comments? Check location (order) of reference: does one interest always precede another? What is in 232 collocated text?
- Noticed this a couple of times: reference to a problem, and then ‘minimizing it’ by saying that it’s a common problem elsewhere. Consider this and look for it
- language seems to position these two as in tension
- what else could they have looked at? How do these relate to the social aims earlier stated?
- How is quality defined?
- (nothing about personal development—will it discuss liberal arts education)
- Note collocated with employers....might tend to restrict what we think of as value.
- no way for reader to judge if it’s appropriate.
- I’m having trouble reconciling these two. Seem conflicting.
- identifying critique as economic rationalism. Use of “perceived” and “it is claimed” “tend to favour” seems to soften the critique.
- identifying critique as economic rationalism. Use of “perceived” and “it is claimed” “tend to favour” seems to soften the critique.
- seems to be creating a dichotomy between broad education which meets the needs of the labour market for broad skills, and more narrow vocational education. Seems to suggest that extra study in broad skills is for the employer/economics and not for the individual. Read this again.
- Does acknowledge complexity of the economic rationalist vs non debate.
- How could this be worded differently?
- Who is not being considered?
- what do the choices of these topics mean about the assumptions/values of the reviewers.

### Appendix D: OECD Members and Date of Membership

Australia	7 June 1971	Japan	28 Apr 1964
Austria	29 Sept 1961	Korea	12 Dec 1996
Belgium	13 Sept 1961	Luxembourg	7 Dec 1961
Canada	10 Apr 1961	Mexico	18 May 1994
Chile	7 May 2010	Netherlands	13 Nov 1961
Czech Republic	21 Dec 1995	New Zealand	29 May 1973
Denmark	30 May 1961	Norway	4 July 1961
Estonia	9 Dec 2010	Poland	22 Nov 1996
Finland	28 Jan 1969	Portugal	4 Aug 1961
France	7 Aug 1961	Slovak Republic	14 Dec 2000
Germany	27 Sept 1961	Slovenia	21 July 2010
Greece	27 Sept 1961	Spain	3 Aug 1961
Hungary	7 May 1996	Sweden	28 Sept 1961
Iceland	5 June 1961	Switzerland	28 Sept 1961
Ireland	17 Aug 1961	Turkey	2 Aug 1961
Israel	7 Sept 2010	United Kingdom	2 May 1961
Italy	29 Mar 1962	United States	12 Apr 1961

Source: (OECD, n.d.)



## **Appendix E: Departments and Directorates**

Development Co-operation Directorate

Economics Department

Directorate for Education

Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs

Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs and Local Development

Environment Directorate

Directorate for Financial and Enterprise Affairs

Public Governance and Territorial Development Directorate

Directorate for Science, Technology and Industry

Statistics Directorate

Centre for Tax Policy and Administration

Trade and Agriculture Directorate

Source: (OECD, n.d.)

## Appendix F: Recommendation of the Council concerning Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education

The following represents only the actual recommendations contained within *the Recommendation*.

**RECOMMENDS** that Member countries:

1. Develop appropriate frameworks for quality provision of higher education across borders, especially focusing on:
  - a) Providing students/learners with adequate information resources for informed decision-making to protect them from the risks of misleading guidance and information, low-quality provision including rogue providers, degree mills that offer low-quality educational experience and qualifications of limited validity and accreditation mills.
  - b) Making qualifications readable and transparent in order to increase their international validity and portability and to ease the work of recognition and credential evaluators. This objective should be facilitated by reliable and user-friendly information sources and needs to be combined with the commitment of institutions/providers to provide cross-border higher education of comparable quality to that offered in the home country.
  - c) Making procedures for the recognition of qualifications more transparent, coherent, fair and reliable, and imposing as little burden as possible on mobile students and professionals.
  - d) Intensifying international co-operation among national quality assurance and accreditation agencies in order to increase their mutual understanding.
2. Take the appropriate steps for the implementation of this Recommendation, as set forth in greater detail in the Guidelines on Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education (hereafter *the Guidelines*), which are contained in the Annex to this Recommendation and form an integral part thereof. The Guidelines are not legally binding and Member countries are expected to implement the Guidelines as appropriate in their national context;
3. Assist as appropriate non-member economies to implement the Guidelines and in particular, helping them to strengthen their capacities to that effect;
4. Widely disseminate the Guidelines to all relevant governmental departments and agencies, to higher education institutions/providers, student bodies, quality assurance and accreditation bodies, academic recognition bodies, professional bodies, and to other relevant stakeholders;
5. Encourage and support higher education institutions/providers, student bodies, quality assurance and accreditation bodies, academic recognition bodies and professional bodies to take the appropriate actions to implement the Guidelines at international, regional and national levels; and

**INSTRUCTS** the relevant OECD bodies, if and when possible in co-operation with the relevant UNESCO bodies, to survey developments by appropriate stakeholders in countries regarding implementation of the Recommendation and to assess the Guidelines in light of developments in cross-border higher education, and to report to the Council as appropriate.

Source: (OECD, 2005)

## Appendix G: Declaration on Future Educational Policies in the Changing Social and Economic Context

20 October 1978 - ED/MIN(78)4/FINAL

*[The following is only the declaration section of the formal Declaration.]*

A. That, in the light of the changing economic and social context, they agree that the following aims deserve priority consideration in the formulation of policies in the Member countries and Yugoslavia:

- i) To promote the continuous development of educational standards, as conceived within each country, and to ensure that all young people are helped to acquire the basic competencies needed to embark successfully upon adult life;
- ii) To develop schools as active communities which offer a stimulating environment, contributing to the self-reliance, sense of responsibility and co-operative spirit of young people;
- iii) To improve the professional preparation of teachers and to encourage them, in the context of changing needs and tasks, to take an even more active and responsive part in strengthening the links between the school and adult life;
- iv) To adopt positive educational measures which contribute to the achievement of equality between girls and boys, women and men;
- v) To adopt positive measures to enable migrant workers and their children to profit more fully from education and training opportunities, taking into account their special needs as appropriate;
- vi) To adopt positive educational measures to promote equality for under-served groups such as the socially disadvantaged, immigrants and the handicapped;
- vii) To ensure that any necessary procedures related to educational choice, assessment and certification, take place in such a way and at such stages as to allow each pupil to develop his or her full intellectual and personal potential;
- viii) To help the young to prepare more effectively for adult life and work, by working towards the best possible balance between general and vocationally-oriented education and encouraging the provision of opportunities for work experience during schooling;
- viii) To stimulate the development of more "recurrent" educational opportunities for young people and adults to continue education at all levels after periods of work;
- ix) To facilitate the transition of young people to adult life and, in particular, to strengthen the contribution of education to solving the problem of youth unemployment, in co-operation with other authorities and groups concerned, including employer and trade union organisations, by:
  - a) Endeavouring to give all young people an opportunity to obtain a usable vocational qualification;
  - b) Expanding opportunities and providing appropriate means for unemployed young people to gain access to further education and/or specific training;
  - c) Encouraging improvements in the structure of work;

Source: (OECD, 1978)

## **Appendix H: Documents Informing Thematic Reviews of TE in the 2000s**

### **Background Paper:**

Grubb, W. N. (2003). *The roles of tertiary colleges and institutions: Trade-offs in restructuring postsecondary education*. Paris: OECD. Available at <http://www.oecd.org/edu/highereducationandadultlearning/35971977.pdf>

W. Norton Grubb is a professor of higher education at University of California, Berkley.

### **Commissioned Paper:**

Machin, S. and McNally, S. (2007). *Tertiary education systems and labour markets*. Paris: OECD. Available at <http://www.oecd.org/education/highereducationandadultlearning/38006954.pdf>

Stephen Machin was a professor of economics at University College, London, and the Research Director for the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics and the Director of the Centre for the Economics of Education.

Sandra McNally was a research fellow at the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics, and the Deputy Director at the Centre for Economic Performance

### **Literature Review:**

Kis, V. (2005). *Quality assurance in tertiary education: Current practices in OECD countries and a literature review on potential effects*. Paris: OECD. Available at <http://www.oecd.org/education/highereducationandadultlearning/38006910.pdf>

Viktoria Kis was a graduate student at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris and an intern at the Education and OECD's Training Policy Division of the Directorate for Education.

### **Previously Commissioned Paper:**

OECD (2000). *Lifelong learning as an affordable investment*. A paper prepared for the international conference organized by OECD and HRDC Canada, Ottawa, December 2000. Available at <http://www.oecd.org/education/highereducationandadultlearning/1917541.pdf>

### **Other documents cited on the Thematic Review Website:**

**Education Policy Analysis 2004**--Alternatives to Universities Revisited

**Education Policy Analysis 2003** – Changing Patterns of Governance in Higher Education

**Education Policy Analysis 2002** – The Growth of Cross-border Education

**Education Policy Analysis 1999**– Tertiary Education: Extending the Benefits of Growth to New Groups

**Education Policy Analysis 1998**– Paying for Tertiary Education: The Learner Perspective

**Education Policy Analysis 1997**– Responding to New Demand in Tertiary Education

## Appendix I: Documents Informing HE2030

### Discussion Papers:

Atkins, D. E. (2005). University futures and new technologies: Possibilities and issues.  
Available at <http://www.oecd.org/edu/highereducationandadultlearning/36758866.pdf>

Professor Atkins is the W.K. Kellogg professor of Community Informatics at the school of information and professor of electrical and computer engineering at the University of Michigan.

Vincent-Lancrin, S. (2005). Six scenarios for universities. Available at  
<http://www.oecd.org/edu/highereducationandadultlearning/36758932.pdf>

Stéphan Vincent-Lancrin is a senior analyst at CERI. He is responsible for HE2030. He works on the *Human Capital Working Group* and worked on the *Innovation Strategy* project. Prior to working at the OECD, he was a researcher in economics at the University of Paris-Nanterre and the London School of Economics.

OECD/CERI (2008). Four future scenarios for higher education. Paper prepared for the OECD/France International Conference on Higher Education to 2030: What Futures for Quality Access in the Era of Globalisation? Available at  
<http://www.oecd.org/edu/highereducationandadultlearning/42241931.pdf>

### Background Papers:

Kärkkäinen, K. (2006). Emergence of private higher education funding within the OECD area. Paper written for HE2030 by an intern under the guidance of Vincent-Lancrin and CERI. Available at  
<http://www.oecd.org/edu/highereducationandadultlearning/38621229.pdf>

Sauvageot, C. (2007). Employment-training prospects at the horizon of 2015. Available at  
<http://www.oecd.org/edu/ceri/38038292.pdf>.

Claude Sauvageot is the Head of the Sector for European and International Relations at the Directorate of Evaluation, Forecast and Performance in the French Ministry of Education. He is chair of INES working party. He represents France in CERI.

OECD/CERI (2008). Conference Speakers Biographies and Forward-looking Perspectives on Higher Education. Paper served as a background to the OECD/France international conference on Higher Education to 2030. It documented the responses of key speakers (international HE experts and stakeholders) to questions about the future of HE. Available at  
<http://www.oecd.org/site/eduhe30/41801234.pdf>

## Appendix J: Meetings of HE2030

### 2008

The OECD/France International Conference "Higher Education to 2030: What Futures for Quality Access in the Era of Globalisation?"  
8-9 December, Paris, France

### 2007

OECD-France Seminar The Labour Market Orientation of Tertiary Education in France and in OECD Countries: Assessment and Prospects  
14 February, Ministère de l'éducation nationale, de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche, Paris, France

How might the changing labour market transform higher education?  
12-13 February, Paris, France

### 2006

The Future of Academic Research – OECD/CERI expert meeting  
19-20 October, Vienna, Austria

Cross-border higher education for development – World Bank/OECD/Nuffic international workshop  
14-15 September, The Hague, Netherlands

Higher Education, Quality, Equity and Efficiency – Meeting of OECD Education Ministers  
27-28 June, Athens, Greece

The Future of Higher Education: The Stakeholders' Perspective  
22-23 June, Işık University seminar, Istanbul, Turkey

Globalisation, Market forces and the Future of higher education  
4-5 May, Lisbon, Portugal

### 2005

Advancing Knowledge and the Knowledge Economy – OECD/US/European Commission conference 10-11 January, Washington DC, United States

University Futures and New Technologies – OECD/CERI workshop  
12 January, Washington D.C., United States

Demography and the Future of Higher Education  
5-6 December, Paris, France

### 2003

The Future of Universities: Roles, Driving Forces of Change, Scenarios and Policy Challenges – OECD/Japan seminar  
11-12 December, Tokyo, Japan

OECD Project on the Future of Universities – OECD/CERI expert meeting  
24-25 June, Paris, France

## **Appendix K: Groups involved in AHELO Design and Governance**

### **Steering Committees:**

- Education Policy Committee (EDPC)
  - Overall direction and decides if to proceed beyond feasibility study
- Programme for Institutional Management in Higher Education Governing Board (IMHE GB)
  - In consultation with the Secretariat, determine and ensure compliance with policy objectives of AHELO; and inform all participants of all aspects of implementation

### **AHELO Group of National Experts (GNE):**

- Develop methods, timing and principles of the feasibility study—main technical steering
- Members are nominated by national delegations—including countries not participating in AHELO
- Works in consultation with the Secretariat

### **National Project Managers (NPMs):**

- Nominated by participating countries to manage program at country level

### **Secretariat:**

- Overseeing and guidance

### **Country Representatives:**

- Participate in IMHG-GB and AHELO GNE and NPMs

### **International Contractors:**

- Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)
  - Carries out the bulk of the work including assessment design
  - Leads a consortium developing the engineering and contextual instrument as well as overall project management
- Council for Aid to Education (USA)
  - Development of generic skills instrument
- Educational Testing Services (USA)
  - Development of economics instrument

### **Expert Groups:**

- Technical Advisory Group
  - Provides technical, practical and scholarly expertise and advice to contractors
- Expert Groups for Economics and Engineering
  - Composed of respected scholars in these fields
- Stakeholders' Consultative Group
  - Members include Quality Assurance organizations, students' and university groups, and industry representatives

## **Appendix L: Participants in the AHELO Stakeholders Advisory Group**

Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)

American Council on Education (ACE)

Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique & Musikhochschulen (AEC)

Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN)

Business and Industry Advisory Committee to the OECD (BIAC)

Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

Council of European Employers of the Metal, Engineering and Technology-Based Industries (CEEMET)

Coimbra Group

Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)

Education International (EI)

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE)

European Economic Association (EEA)

European University Association (EUA)

European Students' Union (ESU)

The Higher Education Authority (HEA), Ireland

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)

International Association of Universities (IAU)

International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE)

Lumina Foundation

European Society for Engineering Education (SEFI)

Riksbankens Jubileumsfond

The Spencer Foundation

Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD (TUAC)

Union of Universities of Latin America and the Caribbean (UDUAL)



## Appendix M: Data Sources from AHELO

<b>Text</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Data Segment Referencing</b>
Website (OECD, nd1)	OECD's AHELO home page	Web+ sequence # (i.e. Web2)
Brochure (OECD, 2010-2011)	A colourful power-point-style promotional presentation published in 2010-2011 and available on OECD website	Bro+ page + letter (i.e. Bro5b)
Backgrounder Report (Nusche, 2008)	A comparative review of selected HE learning outcomes assessment practices in 5 countries. Serving to guide development of AHELO assessment tools	Bac+ page + letter (i.e. Bac3d)
Contextual Dimension Framework Report (OECD-GNE/AHELO, 2011-cntx)	A report prepared for consultation and review prepared by 'experts in the field' (p. 2) [GNE = Group of National Experts] to inform development of AHELO's contextual survey	Cnt+ page + letter (i.e. Cnt12b)
Design Report (OECD-GNE/AHELO, 2010-des)	Consortium report on the design and implementation of the feasibility study	Des+ page + letter (i.e. Des44b)
Analysis plan (OECD-GNE/AHELO, 2010-pln)	Specific plan for research questions, analysis, validation for each strand of feasibility study	AnP+page + letter (i.e. AnP6c)
Assessment instruments website (OECD-Dir.forEdu, n.d.1)	Description of the assessment instruments in the feasibility study. Webpage on OECD website. Not an (initially) internal document subsequently declassified.	Aiw+ sequence # (i.e. AiW12)
Economics framework report (OECD, 2011-LO.Ec)	Background on expected learning outcomes in Economics. Developed in cooperation with the Tuning Academy.	Eco + page + letter (i.e. Eco32d)
Engineering framework report (OECD, 2011-LO.Eng)	Background on expected learning outcomes in Engineering. Developed in cooperation with the Tuning Academy.	Eng+ page + letter (i.e. Eng24c)
Newsletter-May 2011 (OECD, 2011-May.News)	One of 2 newsletters published online summarizing preliminary indications and issues arising	11N+ page + letter (i.e. 11N3b)
Newsletter-July 2012 (OECD, 2012-July.News)	One of 2 newsletters published online summarizing preliminary indications and issues arising	12N+ page + letter (i.e. 12N3b)
Project Update-May 2011 (OECD, 2011-May.UpD)	Update of process and preliminary findings of feasibility	11U+ page + letter (i.e. 11U3b)
Project Update-May 2012 (OECD, 2012-May.UpD)	Update of process and preliminary findings of feasibility	12U+ page + letter (i.e. 11U3b)
Interim Feasibility Report Executive Summary (OECD-GNE/AHELO, 2012-March)	See below	IRX+ page + letter (i.e. IRX7b)
Interim Feasibility Report (OECD-GNE/AHELO, 2012-March12)	Interim insights and findings. Produced by the consortium for the GNE, IMHE and Education Committee.	Fsr+ page + letter (i.e. Fsr22b)

## Appendix N: Timeline of Events of Interest

<b>1968</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CERI formed</li> </ul>	<b>1998</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demise of MAI</li> </ul>
<b>1970</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secretary General, Van Lennep denounces Keynesian economics</li> </ul>	<b>2000</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First PISA survey</li> <li>• CIME public consultation process</li> </ul>
<b>1977</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• McCracken report</li> </ul>	<b>2002</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedicated Directorate for education established</li> <li>• Vol 1 of <i>Babies and Bosses</i> published</li> </ul>
<b>1978</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reagan and Thatcher claim that the OECD locomotive strategy was “too Keynesian”</li> <li>• First ministerial conference of ministers of education</li> </ul>	<b>2003</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting of ministers of Labour: recommend reassessment of Jobs Study/Strategy</li> <li>• Publication of <i>The Non-profit Sector in a Changing Economy</i></li> </ul>
<b>Late 70s</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International organizations taking over some work done by OECD</li> </ul>	<b>2004</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>A Strategy for Enlargement and Outreach</i> published</li> </ul>
<b>Early 1980s</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secretariat was openly supply sided</li> </ul>	<b>2005</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Going for Growth</i> Launched</li> <li>• Global forum on education launched</li> <li>• CivSoc launched</li> </ul>
<b>1980</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DELSA conference concluded that social policies are barriers to growth.</li> <li>• 84-96: Payne becomes Secretary General</li> </ul>	<b>2006</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revised Job’s Study</li> <li>• <i>External Relations Committee</i> with an expanded mandate that included relations to other international organizations</li> <li>• <i>Starting Strong</i> published</li> <li>• A. Gurria named Secretary General</li> <li>• OECD named top performer by One World Trust</li> </ul>
<b>1990</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• G7 Heads of State Summit at Houston. Encouraged OECD to strengthen its surveillance and review procedures.</li> </ul>	<b>2007</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishment of the heiligendamm l'aquila dialogue process at OECD</li> <li>• Accession Discussions with Chile, Estonia, Israel, Slovenia</li> <li>• Enhanced Engagement with Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, South Africa</li> <li>• Invitation to G8 summits</li> <li>• OECD.Stat launched</li> <li>• <i>Resolution on Enlargement and Enhanced Engagement</i></li> <li>• <i>A General Procedure for Future Accessions</i></li> </ul>
<b>1994</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jobs Study/Strategy</li> </ul>	<b>2009</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OECD invitation to G20 summits</li> </ul>
<b>1996</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publication of <i>Lifelong Learning for All</i></li> <li>• Publication of <i>The Knowledge Based Economy</i></li> </ul>	<b>2010</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Innovation Strategy</i></li> <li>• Chile, Estonia, Israel, Slovenia ascended</li> </ul>
<b>1997</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PISA Programme launched</li> </ul>	<b>2011</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Green Growth Strategy</li> </ul>