PISA, the Media and the Governance of Education Policy in England and Sweden

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Submission for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, UCL, 2020
Declarations

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Signature: Susan Caroline Grey      Date: 2 December 2019
Dedication

For my father, who taught me to look for the other side of the story.

John Hand, 1928-1985
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Abbreviations and Acronyms Used in Thesis

CE - Comparative Education

IEA - International Association for Educational Assessment

IELS - International Early Learning and Child Well-Being Study (OECD)

ILSA - International Large Scale Assessment

NFER - National Foundation for Education Assessment (England)

OECD - Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

OFSTED - Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (England)

PB - Policy Borrowing

PIRLS - Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (IEA)

PISA - Programme of International Student Assessment (OECD)

PISA-D - PISA for Development (OECD)

TIMSS - Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (IEA)

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UNICEF - United Nation Children's Fund
Abstract

Since its introduction, the OECD’s PISA programme has been portrayed as central to both the emergence of a regime of global governance and a convergence of educational policies towards a western model. Whilst there is an extensive literature describing both the impact of the OECD as an international organisation on national education policies, and the selective interpretation of the PISA results by policymakers, there is a relative paucity of analysis of how PISA data is presented to the public within nations by three main sources; namely the OECD itself, politicians and the media. This study focuses on the operations of the media in two countries: England and Sweden, after the publication of the PISA 2012 results. Using tools of semiotic and linguistic analysis against a theoretical framework based on media logic, it explores the ways in which PISA data is transformed and used by different actors to further established domestic agendas, as well as helping to define ‘what matters’ in education in media and policy spaces. The study argues that PISA data is subject to a ‘Rashomon effect’, whereby different actors portray the same body of data differently, creating multiple prisms through which the global messages of the OECD are filtered and transformed as they enter public space via the media. While transformations take place within the OECD Education Directorate itself, and at the initial media launch of PISA results, it is at local media level that policy messages from the OECD are most liable to reduction and transformation. The norms and practices of ‘media logic’ drive the operations of those whose role includes scrutinising the powerful and holding their actions to account on behalf of the governed. It is argued that the media in the two countries studied treated the PISA results as local political news stories, seeking to further debates on domestic reform agendas and arguments while largely ignoring the underlying remit of the OECD and its educational activities.

This thesis demonstrates that the media in the democracies studied do not function as a neutral means of conveying information about PISA to their audiences, and that reporting focuses on local concerns of crisis, blame and proposed salvation, while the power of the OECD to increase its reach into education spaces is taken for granted, tacitly legitimised and uncontested. This results in a form of ‘mediatised global governance’, whereby the media help to shape and alter the ways in which PISA acts on global education policy.
Impact Statement

The findings in this thesis have implications for academia as well as outside it. Firstly, my study offers new insights into the modes of governance exercised by transnational organisations such as the OECD. The thesis demonstrates that the media do not function as a neutral means of conveying information about PISA to their audiences, but act on that information to shape and alter it, thus also influencing how the OECD operates. The thesis shows how the media directly affect the ways in which power which can be exercised by global actors, and offers the term ‘mediatised global governance' to express this phenomenon. By introducing this concept, my thesis has potential to contribute to a debate about the nature of democracy and the role of the media in modern society. Some of the material in the thesis has already contributed to academic articles, which have reached a mass media audience through online news platforms. I have been in discussion with several journalists while researching this thesis, and have been asked to contribute to mainstream media coverage of the PISA 2018 results, perhaps in collaboration with other interested academics. The thesis offers a unique and detailed insight into the workings of the media, and I also hope to carry this interest forward and contribute to media articles from an academic perspective, something which rarely happens, but which I feel offers a way forward for the critique of modes of governance which, without media attention, will remain unchallenged.

The contribution of the thesis to scholarly literature lies in the unique application of media theory to the materials produced by a transnational actor, resulting in an extension of existing theories of Policy Borrowing to include a deep interrogation of an important local actor - the media. While scholars have begun to look at the impact of the media on domestic policy, the field of mediationsation studies is still in its
infancy and a project of this nature has not been attempted before. The use of text analysis methods such as Critical Discourse Analysis and Multimodal Discourse Analysis to interrogate media data offers a novel set of methods for gaining a deep understanding of the workings of media logic. This combination of theory and methods might usefully be applied in other contexts by scholars wishing to examine in detail the influence of the media on organisations in whom power, mandated or otherwise, is invested. The role of language in governance is an interesting area for study and one to which I hope the work carried out for this thesis may contribute.
Chapter 1

Introduction

Motivation: Personal and Academic

The genesis of this thesis lies in my personal experiences. When I began my teaching career, in the 1980s, the focus of my practice was on my young pupils. My primary teacher training, undertaken at a UK university, had taught me to focus on their holistic development, their individual needs, and a programme of study which I was largely free to devise myself, trusting my own professionalism and expertise.

Over the course of the next 30 years, I taught in a variety of settings, from Reception to Sixth form (4-18 years); in Special Education; and, finally, in the target-driven, results-led environment which English education had by then become, as a 1-1 tutor working with children who were deemed to be 'failing' to meet targets set for them. During this period, I had three children, who, despite being each separated by only two years, all experienced different testing and examination systems - each appearing to come under more pressure than the last to meet externally-imposed targets and grade aspirations.

When my children were young, my husband and I decided to remove them from school, and travel with them for a year, to experience life in other European countries, as we were unhappy at what we saw as the increasingly formal environment of the primary classroom. During this time, I developed an interest in the education systems of the countries we stayed in; and as a linguist, I was able to explore some of them in greater depth. My near-fluency in German and Swedish,
and my reasonable grasp of Spanish and French, enabled me to gain an insight into how children were educated in different areas of Europe, and a passion for Comparative Education was ignited.

These two factors - the increasingly target-driven 'league table' culture which had come to dominate English education, and my interest in education systems other than that in which my children were by then immersed, led to further study in the field of Comparative Education, and eventually to this thesis. As I tried to understand the governance of UK education, which had created the diverse and increasingly competitive educational landscape which my children were experiencing, I was drawn to Scandinavian models which appeared to offer a contrast, and an alternative, to what I saw as an increasingly pressured English environment, far-removed from the early days of my own teaching career. Nordic models of education, especially in the Early Years, have long been viewed as progressive, child-led and eschewing formal testing (Bulle, 2011; Sousa et al., 2019), with a focus on democratic and human values (Wagner, 2006). Scandinavian models of education have traditionally been in harmony with the ideas of the early 20th century Swedish feminist writer Ellen Key, who in 1900 called for children’s rights to be respected, for children themselves to have a voice in shaping their futures, and for a pedagogy based on the child’s own perspectives (Key, 1900, online). In particular, and relevant to this thesis, is a key distinction made between what Kristjansson calls the 'prospective value' of a child - what it has the potential to become in the future - and the 'here and now', which 'values children and childhood for their own sake' and which has traditionally underpinned Nordic models of education (Kristjansson, 2006, p.21).
This distinction lies at the root of the debate undertaken in this thesis - that the 'prospective value' of a child can somehow be quantified by being made amenable to scientific metrics; and that the intrinsic value of childhood is less important as a focus of education than the need to produce a highly-skilled workforce for the 21st Century. This development can in part be traced back to the rise of 'Evidence Based Education' and its partner term, 'World Class Education'. The term 'Evidence Based Education' (EBE) began to appear in academic literature in the late 1990s, and drew self-proclaimed parallels with 'evidence based medicine'. The medical term itself is relatively new: Claridge and Fabian, in their historical exploration of the concept, assert that it was used for the first time in the 1990s (Claridge and Fabian, 2005). Defined as 'the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients' (Sackett et al., 1996, p.71), this principle has come to underlie modern medical and surgical practice in western countries in the last 20 years or more. The appearance of the term 'evidence-based' in relation to education appears to some to be a logical and axiomatic extension of something which undoubtedly has benefits in the medical world. The phrase appears to have crossed into the education world in 1996, when David Hargreaves caused something of a stir with an address given to the then Teacher Training Agency (TTA) on the subject of 'Teaching as a Research-based Profession'. Hargreaves explicitly linked medicine and teaching, and boldly asserted that he had 'no doubt' that teaching would be an altogether more effective profession if only it would learn lessons from the applied scientific research fields informing medicine (Hargreaves, 1996, online). The speech gave rise to a robust response from Martyn Hammersley, and the polarisation of opinion which arose at that point has been mirrored to an extent in the field of education research, particularly Comparative Education (CE), since. The tension revolves around those who believe that reproducible large scale educational 'trials' are the way to ensure policy is informed
by evidence; and those who, like Hammersley, feel that analogies with medical research are fundamentally flawed, as the ‘distinctive problems associated with studying social phenomena’ (Hammersley, 1997, p.154) cannot be captured by the type of research, then in its infancy, which was informing clinical practice. EBE received a boost with the 1998 Hillage Report, commissioned for the then UK Department of Education to investigate the impact of research on school practice. This report concluded that there was insufficient large-scale, generalisable research input into educational practice, and made an explicit recommendation of ‘establishing a commitment to evidence-based policy development and approaches to the delivery of education’ (Hillage et al., 1998, p. xii).

The divisions in the field of CE reflected by these developments remain to the present day and help in some ways to explain the current situation in which data-driven large scale comparisons and ‘academic’ research are sometimes, though not always, seen to be in conflict. Davies, for example, bemoans what he sees as ‘the triumph of hope over reason, sentiment over demonstrated effectiveness, intuition over evidence’ which leads to

top-down [direction of change] from central governments, think tanks, opinion formers, educational regulators (such as OFSTED), the media, and academic departments whose research is often selective, unsystematic, and prone to political or scientific bias (or both) (Davies, 1999, p.108)

One of the main advocates of EBE, Slavin, sees few issues in transferring ideas and practices learned in medical research to the field of education. He is evangelical about the idea of the randomised controlled trial – a standard feature of clinical research but, for practical, logistical and ethical reasons, rarely seen in educational settings. So enthusiastic is Slavin for evidence-based policy initiatives that he
considers their failure is only likely to arise because of unwillingness from the academic or educational communities to implement them, rather than because of any potential flaws in concept or design.

The evidence-based policy movement is by no means certain to succeed. Education has a long tradition of ignoring or even attacking rigorous research. Researchers themselves, even those who fundamentally agree on methodologies and basic principles, may disagree publicly about the findings of research. Individuals who oppose the entire concept of evidence-based reform will seize upon these disagreements, which are a healthy and necessary part of the scientific process, as indications that even the experts disagree. (Slavin, 2002, p. 19)

Thomas (2004) argues for ‘evidence’ to be seen in scientific terms, judging it in terms of three criteria - relevance, sufficiency and veracity. This, he admits, presents educationalists and teachers with a problem, of how to appear rigorous, methodical and meticulous; of creating and maintaining an impression of the kind of systematic study assumed by the general public to be the hallmark of science (Thomas, 2004, p.6).

The principles underlying EBE have been problematic for many scholars since they were first mooted. Hargreaves was accused (e.g. Hammersley, 1997, Elliott, 2001) of proposing an ‘engineering model’ of education, which he positions in opposition to the ‘enlightenment model' and which lacks any useful generalisable or predictive qualities in terms of ‘what works'. Elliott, (2001) focuses on questions around positivity and links the work of Hargreaves with the performativity of teachers and outcomes-based learning (OBE). He foresees that ‘standards, targets and benchmarks’ - measurable outputs - will become the focus of EBE (Elliott, 2001, p. 558). Taking his argument to the heart of what it means to be educated, he
contrasts this approach to the work of Stenhouse, who called for education to be considered more holistically, and not in terms of measurable outcomes:

For Stenhouse, the dynamic nature of the procedural standards and principles that structure intrinsically worthwhile activities implies that they constitute resources for thinking about experience, and leave space for students’ individuality, creativity and imagination. They structure thinking in ways which open rather than close the mind to new ways of interpreting the world (ibid., p566).

Stenhouse does not oppose the use of evidence; but as Elliott argues, the type of evidence he envisages is very different from that proposed by Hargreaves. As the 2000s progressed, it became clear which model was becoming hegemonic, as governments in the US and UK in particular began to seek research evidence to support and justify education policy initiatives aimed at improving standards in education. Allied to this trend, the term ‘what works’ began to appear frequently in discussions of EBE. This term, which became fashionable in UK and US education policy circles in the mid-2000s, frames ‘scientific’ research in the language of common sense pragmatism. An organisation called ‘The what works clearinghouse’ was set up by the US department of Education in 2002, ‘to provide educators with the information they need to make evidence-based decisions. We focus on the results from high-quality research to answer the question “What works in education?”’ (IES WWC, 2019, online).

The UK coalition government in 2013 announced the creation of a series of specialist centres designed to ‘disseminate research to local decision-makers, supporting them in investing in services that deliver the best outcomes for citizens and value for money for taxpayers’ (Gov.UK, 2013, online). The document announcing the initiative draws an immediate parallel with medicine, and announces
four ‘what works’ centres and a national ‘what works’ advisor to ministers, with a prominent medical doctor and journalist writing in a parallel document that the ‘revolution’ which brought randomised trials and evidence-based practice into Medicine ‘could - and should’ also happen in education (Goldacre, 2013 online). In 2016, the UK government white paper ‘Educational Excellence Everywhere’ called for a focus on ‘outcomes not methods’ (DfE 2016, p.9), and assured the electorate of a commitment to ‘improving and spreading the evidence on what works in education - including expanding its remit to support evidence-based teaching…’ (DfE, 2016, p.13).

One of the most vocal critics of this trend is the educational philosopher Gert Biesta, whose many works on the subject form almost undoubtedly the most coherent scholarly critique of EBE (Biesta, 2007; Biesta 2009; Biesta 2010). Biesta argues that frameworks for evidence-based practice are not easily transposable from the field of medicine to education. His argument is summarised below:

This first problem with this approach is the role of causality: apart from the obvious fact that the condition of being a student is quite different from that of being a patient— being a student is not an illness, just as teaching is not a cure — the most important argument against the idea that education is a causal process lies in the fact that education is not a process of physical interaction but a process of symbolic or symbolically mediated interaction. If teaching is to have any effect on learning, it is because of the fact that students interpret and try to make sense of what they are being taught. (Biesta, 2007, p. 8)

Biesta asserts that the type of evidence which is valued is that which mirrors scientific evidence, ‘often exclusively considered in cognitive terms’ (Biesta, 2010, p. 494), which generates ideas of ‘what works’. Biesta’s criticisms are pertinent to PISA in several ways. Firstly, he takes issue with the idea that the type of research
which demonstrably has led western medicine to great advances can be usefully deployed to confer such progress in education. He calls for ‘value based’, rather than evidence based education (Biesta, 2010). Secondly, and importantly for methodological reasons, he suggests that EBE is essentially a form of Dewey’s transactional epistemology, focusing on the relationships between actions and consequences. Evidence which arises as a result of experimentation, he asserts, can only tell us what has worked in the past - it has no power to predict what can or may happen in the future. He describes what he calls a ‘knowledge deficit’, ‘a gap between the knowledge we have and the situations in which we have to act’ (Biesta, 2010, p. 496), which he believes renders the type of evidence gained from experiments and trials of very limited value in predicting what will happen in the future. As well as this, two other kinds of ‘gap’ - an efficiency deficit which makes it impossible to determine cause and effect; and an application deficit, which renders invisible the work done to allow transformative practice to begin - combine with what he calls the notion of complexity reduction, which he describes as a way of making things

‘...‘work’, that is, to create more ‘patterned’ connections between actions and consequences. The way to do this is to reduce the number of available options for action within the system. (Biesta, 2010, p. 500).

Going on to raise questions of power - ‘who has the power to reduce options for action for whom’ (ibid.), Biesta challenges advocates of EBE to rethink the very premise underlying their work.

Other critics of the EBE movement include Tröhler, who links EBE with what he calls a ‘technocratic shift’, in which public confidence has been transferred from professionals to experts. Like Biesta, he sees democratic implications for this shift
towards the ‘medicalisation’ of education research and trust in an ‘expertocracy’, as other stakeholders (teachers, parents, for example) are denied the opportunity to participate in negotiations around reform. Tröhler explains the rise of statistics in education as a ‘paradigm shift’, and offers another argument for the non-transferability of evidence-based research to the field of education:

It is of utmost importance to realize that clinical trials are not aimed at understanding why a medicine works but at evidence that it works, and that is why statistics become so crucial: statistical evidence replaces the (abandoned) quest for understanding. (Tröhler, 2015, p.762)

Grek (2013) also comments on the role of ‘experts’, especially those who can offer ‘scientifically robust’ data to support their status, to inform and drive policy reform, and cites ILSAs as an example of this. PISA is marketed in scientific terms, and arguably provides the best example of EBE in current global policy space. Allied closely to the rise of EBE, the related concept of World Class Education is discussed below. It is around this ideal that the PISA programme has increasingly been focused, and it is thus central to the critique undertaken in this thesis.

**World Class Education**

In 2001, the newly re-elected UK Prime Minister Tony Blair gave a speech in which he announced that the priority of his Government would be ‘education education, education’, delivering ‘World Class standards’ to British school children (Blair, 2001, online). In 2002, German schools, shocked by their poor results in PISA 2001 and the ensuing ‘PISA Schock’, learned of their results. One school, in Fürstenwald, ‘breathed a sigh of relief’ upon receiving its score:

> Die Schule ruft Hurra!, sieht sich in der Weltklasse und geht an die Presse
The school shouts hurray! Sees itself as World Class, and goes to the media (Kahl, 2002, online).

In 2015, a Malaysian newspaper asked, ‘is our education system still World Class?’ - a question which it answered a few paragraphs later in the negative:

The fact that our ministers still insist that we have a "World Class" education system, in the face of overwhelming evidence stating otherwise, shows that we are still not acknowledging the full extent of the educational challenges we are facing. (Ong Kian Ming, 2015, online)

In short, ‘world-class’ has come to define the notion of quality in education, and world-class is what all countries want to be. The ‘overwhelming evidence’ which the Malaysian journalist refers to is, unsurprisingly, PISA. Andreas Schleicher calls his autobiographical account of PISA ‘World Class’ - an unashamed reference to the instrument’s claim to measure what is important for schools as they enter the 21st century. Johnston and Caldwell appeared fairly certain in 2001 of what a World Class school would look like. According to them, a consensus of international governments and educational institutions were agreed that:

All students in every setting should be literate and numerate and should acquire a capacity for life-long learning, leading to successful and satisfying work in a knowledge society and a global economy. Nations that achieve these outcomes may be said to have "World Class schools". (Johnston and Caldwell, 2001, online)

Notably, this definition was published before the first round of PISA results was to appear later that year, and arguably began to redefine the concept. Other authors had already begun to link a strand of research popular at the time in the United States, that of school effectiveness research, with the ideas of being ‘World Class'; it was also associated with ideas of ‘best practice'. School effectiveness research
(SER) was first practised in the 1980s, with a view to identifying the features of 'effective schools' and producing models which could be transferred to less effective schools, with the aim of making them more effective. Pioneered by Reynolds, who published many articles and books outlining its merits during the 1990s and early 2000s (eg Reynolds and Packer, 1992; Reynolds et al., 1993; Reynolds et al. 1996; David, Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000), SER came to rely on 'performance indicators', which were largely uncritically received into UK and US education in the 1990s, where they are still found in some form (see Auld and Morris, 2014). A thorough critique of SER is beyond the scope of this thesis; here it is sufficient to point out that the trajectory from identifying effective schools, through identifying the factors deemed to cause their effectiveness and thence to model these statistically in order to transfer them to other, less effective schools, has not been a trouble-free one. Coe and Taylor-Fitzgibbon offered an early critique, which resonates today with those studying the ILSAs which followed in the wake of SER:

Moreover, school effectiveness research has tended to define 'effectiveness' in terms of a restricted and often inappropriate range of outcomes, to be limited by the absence of longitudinal data and has often been characterised by unsupported assumptions about the homogeneity of school effects. (Coe and Taylor-Fitzgibbon, 1998, p. 422)

In 2002, Reynolds and his co-authors produced a book entitled 'World Class schools: International Perspectives on school effectiveness' (Creemers et al., 2002). This was followed in 2006 by another article in which Reynolds criticised the work of the IEA’s TIMSS studies, while advocating instead the International School Effectiveness Research Project (ISERP), a study which ran in 9 countries between 1992 and 1994 (Creemers et al., 1996) for its power to identify the factors which would lead to schools becoming World Class. Interestingly, Reynolds does not
attempt even a basic definition of ‘World Class’, despite claiming to have found the variables whose pursuit will lead to it. His article is also interesting for not mentioning PISA or the OECD at all, although by the time it was written, PISA was into its second round and beginning to make an impression on the global education scene.

Pinpointing exactly when PISA became linked with the concept of World Class schooling is difficult. The language around the instrument began in the early iterations with a few references to ‘high performance’ and ‘top performers’; the term ‘World Class’ did not appear in the PISA in focus reports until the results of the 2009 round were released in 2010. In this report, the term appeared twice, once in quotation marks as part of an unelaborated assertion which in itself is fairly extraordinary:

An inspection of the kinds of tasks students at level 5 are capable of suggests that those who get to this level can be regarded as potential “World Class” knowledge workers of tomorrow, making the proportion of a country’s students reaching this level relevant for its future economic competitiveness. (OECD, 2009 online, p.2)

In the 2012 and 2015 results reports, the term did not appear at all. But in 2018, Schleicher’s book ‘World Class: How to build a 21st century school system’ appeared, and the link between PISA and being World Class was made. In a novel twist, in 2017 an organisation called ‘World Class Schools’, led by an OFSTED inspector and a strategy consultant, was set up in England to act as an awarding body for a new ‘World Class schools award’. Unsurprisingly, the award has its own assessment framework, and the website carries a prominent endorsement from the then UK Prime Minister Theresa May. The language around this award mirrors very
closely that used by the OECD and other international organisations about the concept of ‘World Class’. For example:

It is universally acknowledged that we are preparing young people for a world which is significantly different to that of twenty years ago. Young people need to perform in a diverse global economy which is typified by technological innovation, is highly competitive and where entrepreneurship is celebrated. World Class schools equip students with knowledge, skills and confidence to thrive in a challenging international environment where those who succeed take risks and continually pursue improvement. World Class students are educated to be active and effective citizens who have qualifications which give them choices, and the competences to choose well. They have developed a level of emotional and intellectual literacy which enables them to navigate a potentially bewildering plethora of opportunities and achieve success and contentment for themselves. (World Class schools, 2017, online).

Alexander, in characteristically direct fashion, tackles the rise of world-class education head-on in an article entitled, ‘World Class schools’ – noble aspiration or globalised hokum?’ (Alexander, 2010). He traces the uses, and translations, of the term across several cultures and concludes that ‘World Class’ is essentially an Anglo-American construct, facilitated and furthered by data from the OECD and other ‘global’ organisations:

What above all has facilitated and encouraged the supremacist view of World Class education in high income countries is the growing availability of data which positively invite the league table treatment. (Alexander, 2010, p. 806)

Criticising not only the OECD but also the consultancies and agencies which mediate and sell its data in repackaged form to governments (e.g. the ‘McKinsey
report’, Barber and Mourshed, 2007), Alexander echoes some of Biesta’s concerns about measurement, this time dressed up as a quest for ‘World Class’ standards:

Because the exercise is a statistical one, the input and process correlates which are chosen, like the outcome measures, are limited to those aspects of education which are measurable. The enterprise as a whole, therefore, is massively skewed away from aspects of education which are not measured, either because they are unmeasurable or because they are not deemed significant enough to justify the effort. (Alexander, 2010, p. 811-2)

Thus, ‘World Class’ becomes a proxy term for those systems which feature at the top of league tables; and league tables in turn measure only things which can be measured, and are ultimately a reductive, economic tool. Morris (2011) explains how the term ‘World Class’ has come to the aid of policymakers seeking to justify reform initiatives in their own countries, without the need to supply details of actual policies referenced or considered for ‘borrowing’. He suggests three advantages for the use of the term ‘World Class’ in reform scenarios:

an appeal to emulate best practice elsewhere, especially that of ‘World Class systems’, has the distinct advantage for its proponents that (a) it is difficult to reject what is described as ‘good/best practice’ without being portrayed as a Luddite; (b) the vast majority of people are unaware of the features of other school systems and are not in a position to dispute the claims made; and (c) locating a policy in the discourse of international and global reforms… (Morris, 2011, p. 90)

This conceptualisation of ‘World Class’ is also seen in higher education (HE), in fact, arguably more so as universities are now essentially commodities, or brands, in a global education market, and must compete to attract students. Deem et al. (2008) explore the use of the term in the university market, noting its tendency to
focus so much on international (and particularly Anglo-Saxon) criteria for excellence that the role of universities in their host country becomes completely neglected and publishing in English-language journals comes to dominate over almost everything else (Deem et al., 2008, p.84).

Its use in HE is also linked strongly to league tables, and to ideas of quality which are of Anglo-American origin. 'World Class' is now the way of assessing which institutions are going to lead the way into the gleaming future of the 'Knowledge Economy':

Knowledge generation has replaced ownership of capital assets and labor (sic) productivity as the source of growth and prosperity. Innovation is seen as the mantra for development. This realization is so pervasive that nations are scrambling to create institutions and organizations that would facilitate the process of knowledge creation. Knowledge creation requires a network of scholars actively engaged in its pursuit because the search for the unknown is a product of engaged minds, constantly challenging the known in an enabling environment. The modern university is the ideal space for the ecosystem of scholars to search for new ideas in a spirit of free inquiry. (Sibal, 2011, p. xiii)

The World Class university is at the forefront of the Knowledge Economy. International league tables of ‘top’ or ‘best’ universities have, since their inception, been dominated by US and UK institutions, with more recent iterations featuring occasional others - in Switzerland, Singapore and other Asian nations. Altbach points out that the criteria for being a World Class university are such that not many can attain it, although many aspire towards it. This is because it is very expensive to attain 'World Classness' using defined criteria centring on funding, ability to attract and retain the best staff, quality research, intellectual freedom, and favourable tax rates.
He concludes:

For most countries, even large and wealthy ones, only one or two world-class universities are possible or even desirable. Many nations simply cannot afford to support such institutions (Altbach, 2004, online).

Hazelcorn (2011) speaks of the ‘fetishisation’ (p.35) of World Class status, which has replaced the idea of mass participation as the goal of HE. But while there may be some logic to the league tables of university rankings in a global market where the international student is ‘both an object of desire and a diligent user of rankings’ (Hazelcorn, 2011, p. 37), it is less easy to see why ‘World Class’ status is now so desired for compulsory education systems at local level.

The move towards the measurement and international comparison of educational performance began in the 1980s and was initially led by the International Association for Education Assessment (IEA). The educational activities of the OECD were at that time largely confined to increasing access and ensuring minimum levels of attainment at the end of secondary schooling. However, since 2000, the OECD PISA programme has rapidly become the most important and widely respected international benchmark for countries seeking to compare and improve their education systems; and this test is explicitly linked to the rise of the 'knowledge economy' and to knowledge capital theory (Peters, 2003).

The work of Novoa and Yariv-Mashal, who proposed a chronology for identifying key trends in the borrowing of education policies, casts light on the ways in which the rise of ILSAs has come to dominate ideas around learning from 'other countries'. They suggest that Comparative Education has become a 'mode of governance', and that benchmarking is no longer a 'method of inquiry, but a political stance' (Novoa
Their conceptualisation of the stages which has led to this is reproduced in table 1.1 below; it is important to my thesis in that my data demonstrates a move beyond their final stage, of 'measuring the other', and into a fifth dimension, a mediated and mediatised form of 'constructing the other', or 'mediatising the other'. This is explained in more depth in the final chapter of my thesis.

In this thesis, I examine and critique this development and explore in close detail how the PISA tests have come to dominate discourses of quality, and of what matters in education, during the 21st century. As Goldstein and Moss (2014) note, access to statistical data does not remain confined to those who have designed and generated it, or have the necessary expertise and experience to test its robustness, interpret it critically, and evaluate its veracity:

On the contrary they travel out into public, policy and educational domains that appropriate them for other purposes and test them in different ways. (Goldstein and Moss, 2014)

This thesis explores this 'appropriation' for 'other purposes' of data generated from one massive statistical exercise.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1880s</td>
<td>Knowing the 'other'</td>
<td>Curiosity to learn about other countries. Missions, exhibitions, international encyclopaedias. Aim: To help in the construction of national education systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920s</td>
<td>Understanding the 'other'</td>
<td>Inspired by the aftermath of World War I, there was an urgent need for cooperation and mutual understanding. An interest in new forms of knowledge production, a natural desire to compare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>Constructing the 'other'</td>
<td>The beginning of direct export of educational ideas. Post-colonialism led to a renewal of comparative approaches aimed at spreading social and economic progress to 'new' countries</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000s</td>
<td>Measuring the 'other'</td>
<td>Growing influence of large comparative studies, and a 'growing belief in the key role of education in the endowment of marginal advantage' (p. 424-5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1.1 Novoa and Yariv-Mashal's 2003 chronology of Policy Borrowing (Novoa and Yariv-Mashal, 2003)*
The central problem at the heart of the thesis lies in questioning how discourses around PISA have passed into policy talk (Tyack, 1991) and policymaking space, apparently unchallenged, and have increasingly come to define what is meant by 'good education'. My own positioning here is strongly aligned with that of Biesta, in seeing 'effectiveness' as an *instrumental* value targeted at process and outcome, but which overlooks, or has no space for, 'what we might best call *ultimate* values: values about the aims and purposes of education' (Biesta, 2009, p.3). The divergence of scholarly opinion in the Comparative Education field, between those who see evidence in terms of data which can be used to manipulate education systems and improve 'input', with a view to improving 'outcomes', and those who critique this stance as putting at risk the normative value attached to children and education, is central to the critical stance taken by this thesis and which argues against the reductive nature of the 'raising standards' discourse which is fed by large comparative data sets. The thesis approaches analysis of these discourses through the lens of the media, because it is through the media that education 'stories' enter public space.

**The Media**

Luhmann famously stated that 'whatever we know about our society, or indeed about the world in which we live, we know through the mass media' (Luhmann, 1996, p. 1). This apparently simple statement only hints at the complexities of understanding a world which is not only socially constructed - and this thesis assumes a fundamental constructivist stance - but *mediated*, that is, interpreted through the many lenses and prisms of not only the mass media, but of many new and evolving forms of social and personal media. My thesis goes a step further than acknowledging this interpretative and communicative role of the media, however, and takes the view that the actions of the media help to mould, and to change, the
messages of an organisation. As Altheide, one of the founders of the concept of 'media logic', used widely in this thesis, asserts:

Where media logic is employed to present and interpret institutional phenomena, the form and content of those institutions are altered. (Altheide, 2004, p. 4)

This thesis examines, using techniques of language and media analysis, this 'alteration' of the OECD through the educational governance messages of PISA. It explores the inter-relationships between the various actors involved in constructing the 'stories' of PISA using the same data to construct different messages which are tailored not only to discourses of global governance, but to the local operations of media and political actors. Media logic offers explanations as to how 'political life is clearly being recast to fit the demands of major media' (Altheide and Snow, 1979, p. 136); and it helps to explain not merely the extent of media contributions to the decision-making process, but the way the process has been transformed through an underlying media logic' (ibid., p. 103)

Key to the central propositions of this thesis is the idea that the media in modern democracies is expected to uphold a 'Fourth Estate' role of holding the powerful to account on behalf of the governed. As Van Aelst et al. (2008) point out, this aspect of media power has been relatively under-researched, particularly outside the United States:

Media are often considered the Fourth Estate of political power, but in public and academic discussions, there seems to be little systematic reflection on what exactly that power entails. For example, in several recent key textbooks on political communication (Kaid and Holtz-Bacha, 2008; Lilleker, 2006; Louw, 2005; McNair, 2009) the issue of media
power is not systematically discussed. In political science, the concept of power has received a more prominent position (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962, 1970; Dahl, 1957, 1961; Wrong, 1979), but the question of media (political) power seemed mostly relegated to the periphery. (Van Aelst et al., 2008, pp 495-6)

It is notable also that such studies as do exist into the power of the media and which do not focus on media effects on audiences, largely concentrate on the domestic political situations of individual countries. Van Aelst's study focuses on Belgium and the Netherlands; Newman et al. (2012) carried out a case study in Britain which proposed a 'fifth estate' based on social media, but again only looked at domestic politics; and VonDoepp and Young (2012) undertook a critique of the manifestations of media harassment in Africa, concluding that the Fourth Estate role is undermined in times of crisis when governments seek to restrict the power of the media. There is, however, a paucity of studies into the role of the media in challenging the governance role of global organisations; and it is this area which commands the attention of my thesis. I argue that the application of media logic, and the tendency of the media to treat PISA as a local, political news story, is instrumental in allowing the economic governance messages underlying the OECD's large scale assessments to slip into public space unchallenged.

In exploring this subject, I have focused on two countries, England and Sweden; and on one sphere - the mass media. Below I will briefly explain my choice of countries, before going on to outline the work carried out in each of the forthcoming chapters.
Countries for Analysis: England and Sweden

I am English. I grew up in England and have lived here for most of my life; my working life has been spent, largely in the education sector, in England. My three children have all been to school, and now to university, in England. English is my mother tongue. For these reasons alone, it would be logical to use England as a context for my thesis. There are, however, more robust academic reasons to study England when seeking to critique the increasing influence of international education testing on educational governance.

The education policy environment in England arguably provides a fertile ground for the proliferation of discourses fostered by the OECD. Three factors have created ideal conditions for PISA to work as a powerful influence in England: the political appetite for serial educational reform; the prevalence of a testing and ‘league table’ culture in education; and the creeping hegemony of portrayals of education as a ‘global race’.

The English educational policy landscape has seen almost constant serial change (Chitty, 2009) in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Since 1988, the English National Curriculum was introduced and followed by several major reviews and countless minor ones; the academies programme has been introduced and changed, from its initial focus on poorly-performing schools, through a period when only outstanding schools could apply for academy status, to the current situation where all schools are encouraged to be academies; free schools have been introduced; major changes have taken place several times to initial teacher training programmes and the GCSE and A level examination systems have been overhauled twice. The breathless pace of change has become almost impossible to track, as initiative after initiative is announced, sometimes to be rescinded before
becoming policy (as with the 2016 White Paper idea that all schools would be forced to adopt academy status); sometimes to be quietly dropped after implementation (the statutory literacy and numeracy hours of the late 1990s); other times to be abandoned amid loud disagreements (statutory testing for 14 year olds in the 1990s, dropped after an acrimonious marking scandal); and sometimes even making it into durable policy (‘durable’ being a relative term in this context; the teaching of reading via synthetic phonics has been policy in England for more than ten years at the time of writing). Stronach and Morris (1994) use the term ‘policy hysteria’ to describe a policy environment characterised by nine features, including shortening reform cycles, frequent policy switches and the ‘erosion of professional discretion by centralising control’ (p.6). Within this climate, PISA data provides an endless source of ‘data’ for serial reformers.

The post-Thatcher period since 1990 has seen the gradual withdrawal of the state as a direct provider and funder of schools and the associated rise of accountability systems based on ‘league tables’ of comparison between schools to facilitate parental choice and improve the quality of schooling. David Blunkett, the then Education Secretary, explained the rationale in the 1997 White Paper:

We already hold much more comprehensive data than is held in other countries…The publication of performance data benefits parents and acts as a spur to improve performance. We will publish more such data than ever before.’ (Education England, 1997, p.25)

Alexander (2010) states that pupils in England are the most tested in the world, with statutory assessments at ages four, seven and 11, with an emphasis on the same subjects assessed by PISA; namely Maths, English and Science. Along with a strengthening of the state schools' inspectorate, OFSTED, these tests were
instrumental in paving the way for the production of ‘league tables’ of school performance, which have dominated schooling in England for around 20 years.

Thus, the PISA tests, with their emphasis on reading, Mathematics and science, and their presentation in league table format, have been easily assimilated into a society long accustomed to rankings of performance, as well as the associated rhetoric of success, failure and the need for improvement. Combined with the regular testing of children and inspection of schools by a government body (OFSTED), this trend has facilitated the easy acceptance of international testing as both a feature of the educational architecture and as a source of new policy initiatives. The mass media in Britain have tended to respond to instances of ‘failure’ by public bodies with crisis reporting and headlines, often written in the sensational language of catastrophe and threat to safety (either actual or metaphorical). This style of reporting has accelerated in the last decade with the setting up of further regulatory and inspection bodies like the Care Quality Commission (2008) and the tendency for results to be published in ‘league table’ format under banners like ‘good’, ‘requires improvement’ and ‘inadequate’. Formulaic media reports often follow, with comparisons made between different protagonists, often in the form of simplified ranking tables and often also accompanied by salutary or shocking anecdotes.

A parallel development has been the emergence and rise of a hegemonic discourse of global competition between nations and the looming spectre of losing the ‘global education race’. This discourse has its origins in the economic imperatives attached to ensuring continued growth for the US economy, and was first seen in the 1990s. Central to that discourse is the claim that those nations who do not demonstrate the appropriate, measurable skills, will be ‘left behind’ while competitors snatch opportunities from them. This discourse has been enthusiastically embraced in
England, and was first expressed in UK politics by the then Education Secretary David Blunkett in 1997, when he spoke of ‘investing in human capital in the age of knowledge. To compete in a global economy, to live in a civilised society…’ (DfEE, 1997, online), but by 2010 this had become the overriding and overt aim of education. The Government White Paper of that year stated:

…what really matters is how we’re doing compared with our international competitors. That is what will define our economic growth and our country’s future. The truth is, at the moment we are standing still while others race past. (DfE, 2010, p.3).

Thus, the choice of England for study is justified by its particular appetite for reform, its enthusiastic embracing of the league table culture, and the easy passage of messages around the imperative of winning the global education race into policy discourse.

Sweden, however, is not like this. My own relationship with Sweden goes back to an early fascination with ABBA and Björn Borg, and a rather more mature one with the structure of the language, which I studied at university. Since then I have travelled extensively in Sweden and come to love its quiet democracy, the placing of nature at the heart of society, and its respect for human rights. Swedish education policy has never been made in a hurry, unlike in England - the consensual and collaborative nature of Swedish politics is reflected in an intellectual engagement and respect for professional opinion and experience which is lacking in English politics. And yet, in 2013, Sweden suffered a drop in PISA rankings which saw a shock reaction similar to that seen in Germany in 2001, and, for a while at least, the political and media rhetoric mirrored that seen in sometimes hysterical newspaper reports in England.
Swedish education has traditionally been rooted in the Nordic tradition of egalitarianism (Wolfensberger, 2015), which, until the 1990s, saw children going to a local school for the entire period of their compulsory education (7-16 years), with formal testing eschewed and differentiation only after age 16. In the early 1990s, however, a right-leaning coalition government introduced a series of sweeping educational reforms, which brought Sweden into line with some of the more radical developments seen in English policy. Increasing moves towards local autonomy, parental choice and, most controversially, the legalising of privately-sponsored friskolor (free schools) were the key features of these reforms, which Hartman describes as being

certainly linked with the international neo-liberal trend and the awareness of the market that have been visible in international educational development in recent years (Hartman, 2007, p. 258)

Mirroring some of the developments around the introduction of the Academies programme in England, the state withdrew much of its administrative work around schools, and governance was devolved to local authorities and teachers. The resulting change in dynamic is summarised by Hartman:

Thus teachers' autonomy with reference to central authority is said to be increased, but at the same time the dependence of their position relative to school managers and local educational politicians has grown. (Hartman, 2007, p. 258)

These developments formed the background to the PISA tests in 2012, and to the political and media responses which followed the publication of the results. Some of the controversies around friskolor were heightened by the 2012 PISA results - several of the for-profit companies running them got into financial difficulties and some even went bankrupt. There were questions around the quality of teaching; and
the 'worrying' PISA results (Wolfensberger, 2015, p.141) were instrumental in causing the government to state that private equity funds should not be permitted to run schools.

Thus, while the pace of reform in Sweden could not in any way match that seen in England, the marketisation of education had taken hold and begun to influence the policy environment. The responses to the PISA results in Sweden need to be viewed in light of these reforms, and form the background to the analysis of the discourse and policy responses seen after PISA 2012.

**The Research Focus: PISA and the Media**

While there have been numerous critiques of the methodology of PISA (e.g. Dohn, 2007; Dancis, 2014); and some examinations of its impacts in individual countries (e.g. Ertl, 2006; Dobbens and Martens, 2012), there have been fewer explorations of the interaction between the media and the OECD in forming and changing the governance role of PISA on education. Baroutsis and Lingard (2017); Sellar and Lingard (2013, 2014); Grek (2008, 2009) and Waldow et al. (2014) have all made contributions to the literature here; yet none of these explicitly explores the Fourth Estate role of the media with regard to the OECD, and only Baroutsis and Lingard (2017) attempt an interrogation of the concept of mediatisation, which is central to my thesis. Overall, the focus has been on describing and interpreting how PISA is covered in the media.

Thus, while the media is widely acknowledged to be the most important form of communication, and while the OECD is a sophisticated user of both mass and social media to project its messages, the paucity of literature examining this important synergistic relationship leaves key aspects of the increasing power of the OECD
largely unchallenged and uncontested. This thesis aims to address this gap in the literature and to provide a thorough and robust examination of the ways in which the media not only portrays the messages of PISA, but sees its role in holding the powerful to account on behalf of the governed. I argue that the ways in which the OECD exercises its power through educational governance are not held to account by the media in the same ways as domestic political actors, and that this lack of challenge has helped to facilitate the easy passage of transformative, albeit altered, global educational governance into domestic contexts. This has led to the reconstruction of the concept of educational quality in human capital terms, whereby children are educated primarily as a means of improving a nation's future economic prospects. The subtle reframing of key concepts around attainment, and, more recently, around human traits such as resilience and tolerance, have not only helped to redefine education for the 21st century, they have done so largely without critique or challenge. This thesis examines how the media have facilitated the creeping hegemony of educational excellence defined by scores on PISA, and the underlying lack of challenge to the key economic messages which underpin the organisation and its educational work.

Because the work of the media is undertaken using language, in its broadest sense, the thesis is about language - about the signs and symbols and words used to convey meaning between producers of text and recipients of it - between sources of mass communication and their audiences. The thesis interrogates in detail the use of language by the OECD as 'primary producer' of PISA messages; and of the 'secondary users' - in the media and in political circles, which translate, or mediate, the material for issue into public space, where the 'end users' - the audience - receive it and then interpret it. The synergistic action of these levels of change works on PISA data to transform it and shape it so that it becomes a catalytic agent
in global educational governance. My thesis demonstrates the levels at which this action occurs, and interrogates several media arenas to show different manifestations of the work done by language to achieve the action. It concludes that the translation and transformation effects of the media on the governance potential of the OECD can be seen as a new form of governance, which I term mediatised global governance, reflecting the active shaping of data and policy messages which takes place at media level, before, during and after the event of the PISA results release. I argue that PISA data is altered by being filtered through several prisms. The first of these occurs in the OECD itself, where staff working on the project see their work in humanitarian terms, and subordinate, or reframe, the underlying economic mission of the organisation. The ways in which this transformation occurs are evident in the interviews which I undertook with OECD staff, extracts from which appear at the end of chapter 5. The second transformation occurs when the PISA material is presented to the media, usually by the Education Director of the OECD, Andreas Schleicher. The material selected for transmission represents a small fraction of the possible data, and is presented in a highly-mediatised way for consumption and interpretation according to the media logics outlined in chapter 3. Thus, at this stage, much of the potential information is lost to public space, and that which is selected for inclusion in press briefings and conferences is tailored for ready uptake by media actors. A third prism, and one upon which the analysis in this thesis focuses, is applied by those media actors when they write stories about PISA. I argue that the treatment of PISA as news, and specifically as political news, represents a significant shift, which transforms PISA from a global governance mechanism to a local one, albeit one which is underpinned and legitimised by discourses at the global level. In this way, the economic agenda of the OECD remains unchallenged by journalists and slips into policy spaces, while the media focus entirely on local tensions and policy messages.
Three research questions (RQs) underpin the analysis undertaken for this research. They do not, however, define or constrain it. Instead, they are included here to enable the reader to understand how the above generic statements are crystallised and translated into a research agenda. The chapter descriptions which follow this section will briefly refer back to the RQs in order to guide the reader through the structure of the thesis. The questions are as follow:

**RQ1. How has the OECD interacted with the media to project its PISA messages into public and policy spaces?** This question allows an exploration of the strategies and materials used by the OECD to project the messages of PISA into the media and political spaces.

**RQ2. How have local media in Sweden and England responded to, and worked in synergy with, the messages of PISA?** The emphasis in this question is on the ways in which the media interprets the data and messages of PISA at a local level, and how local media engage with the strategies and materials analysed to answer RQ1.

**RQ3. How has media logic affected the global governance power of the OECD?** This question drives to the heart of the thesis and concerns the ways in which global organisations are able to exercise soft governance on education systems worldwide. As nation states increasingly look to international organisations such as the World Bank, UNICEF and UNESCO to offer policy guidance, the ‘hard governance’ of regulation is giving way to ‘soft power’ of consensus, peer pressure and ‘best practice’ as defined by evidence, often provided through data. This question leads to an interrogation of the media role in facilitating the soft governance role played by the OECD on education policy in England and Sweden,
and leads to a robust exploration of the challenge role the mass media is expected to play by holding power to account on behalf of the governed.

In the following section I give a brief outline of the structure of the thesis, which begins with an exploration of the history of educational comparison and moves through media theory to undertake a detailed examination of the 2012 PISA results and their influence in both Sweden and England.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis begins with a chapter introducing the OECD, and particularly its work in education, since the inception of the organisation in 1961. The transition of its involvement in education globally, from 'think tank to policy actor' (Henry et al., 2001, p.53) is briefly charted, and the rise of the PISA tests, the brainchild of Andreas Schleicher, described in some detail. Literature and scholarly critiques around PISA, and the governance role played by the OECD, are included in this chapter.

The literature supporting the thesis forms the material for chapter 3. This literature provides the theoretical framework for the thesis and is found in the field of media studies, specifically work on media logic, and mediatisation. An in-depth exploration of the key media concepts of news values, newsworthiness and headlines, as well as framing, agenda setting and persuasion theory, leads to the central framework against which the data in the thesis is analysed.

Chapter 4 describes the methods for data collection and approaches to analysis found in the subsequent four chapters of the thesis. The chapter begins with a description of how data was selected and collected, and describes the issues
around bounding the material in time and space. There follows a detailed
description of the language and semiotic analysis techniques used to interrogate the
material collected, with a rationale for their use on media text, as well as an
explanation of how foreign language material was treated.

The first of four analysis chapters, chapter 5 focuses on the PISA materials
produced by the OECD and offers a detailed history of the organisation's developing
sophistication in its dealings with the media since 2000. The chapter focuses
particularly on the materials produced and disseminated at the time of the results of
the PISA 2012 assessments in December 2013 and beyond. The techniques
described in chapter 4 are employed in this chapter to demonstrate the strategies
and methods used by the OECD to ensure that its messages reach the target media
and policy audiences. This chapter primarily addresses RQ1.

Three analysis chapters address RQ2, and chapter 6 is dedicated to an analysis of
how the PISA results were received in Sweden in 2013. Key events at the time were
press conferences and briefings, and detailed MMDA in this chapter helps to critique
the power relationships evident in these media events. The chapter is organised
chronologically and demonstrates the changing levels of engagement in Sweden
with the data, and with the interventions of the OECD which were sought in Sweden
after what were seen as disastrous PISA results in 2013.

England's engagement with PISA 2012 is the subject of the analysis in the following
chapter, chapter 7. A direct comparison with Sweden is not undertaken, but this
chapter demonstrates different manifestations of OECD engagement as the
domestic political environment influences the enactment of PISA messages
differently. The bulk of the material analysed in this chapter is in the form of media texts - mainstream print and online media reports.

The final analysis chapter, chapter 8, is dedicated to interviews carried out with education journalists at large national media organisations in both Sweden and England. The purpose of this chapter is to gain an understanding of the pressures and imperatives under which those responsible for reporting on PISA operate. The data in this chapter was analysed using the same techniques as in the previous ones; and after the primary interviews, two journalists were re-interviewed for further elucidation of the original findings. The themes explored in this chapter arise from a thematic analysis of earlier materials, and as well as extending the work on RQ2 undertaken in chapters 6 and 7, the analysis here forms the basis for the exploration of RQ3, which is developed in chapter 9.

RQ3, which aims to explain the ways in which the norms and logics of the media have worked on PISA data to facilitate a soft governance role is the focus of the final chapter, which takes the form of a detailed discussion of the findings demonstrated in the preceding chapters to answer RQ1 and RQ2. As well as summarising the key points of the analysis and offering a deep critical engagement with the explanatory power of the theoretical framework informing the thesis, this chapter also looks briefly at the future of PISA as the OECD moves into new domains of assessment. The chapter concludes, centrally, that the mass media do not meaningfully exercise their Fourth Estate role when it comes to global, rather than domestic, governance forms; that the OECD is viewed as lacking an ideological foundation, which helps to put its governance via PISA beyond challenge; and that this lack of challenge has facilitated the easy passage of new forms of education governance into local contexts. These elements are central to what I call mediatised global governance,
whereby the norms and practices of media at local level help to shape and facilitate the governance messages delivered by global actors like the OECD. The chapter draws on the detailed analysis of media messages in the preceding chapters to demonstrate how three prisms, operating firstly within the OECD, secondly, at the point of engagement with the media, and, finally, at media level, transform the global messages of PISA into a local political news issue in both countries studied. The chapter concludes with a call for further research into the importance of media power in helping to construct and enact new forms of supranational governance.
Chapter 2

The OECD and PISA

Introduction

This aim of this chapter is to set PISA into the context of the OECD as an organisation, and to outline PISA's role in the rise of large scale international assessments (ILSAs) which has characterised and helped to define the global education environment in the 21st century. The shift away from normative ideas about the purposes of education, to the newer discourses around 'quality' which can be measured and compared, reflects a move away from a western pedagogical model focusing on the needs of the child (Sousa, Grey and Oxley, 2019) and towards a human capital model which not only the OECD, but other global organisations have helped to drive, and have fully embraced.

The aims of education have always been tailored to the needs of the society, or nation, in which a child finds itself growing up. Early schools in many western nations were run by the Church, for example, to further reading of scriptures. The Prussian education system, envied by many other nations, was driven by the need to form a strong army led by educated officers. By the mid-twentieth century, however, following advances in the study of psychology and child development, most western models of education were predicated on the belief that a child should be nurtured and developed through education (the German concept of 'Bildung'; the Russian 'образование' - forming).

At some point in the late twentieth century, the prevailing western model of education started to shift, subtly at first and then with greater momentum, away from a normative process designed to form children into future citizens who would uphold
the values and further the visions of their societies, and towards an industrial model of input and output, whereby outcomes could be measured and then compared and ranked. This shift has been portrayed as being driven by political developments from the 1980s onwards, especially 'neoliberalism' and 'globalisation' (Rivzi and Lingard, 2009), which began to enter the everyday vocabulary of those living in western nations. It is not my intention to undertake an exploration of these contested terms, but it is necessary to point out that an increased focus on accountability and measurability contributed to the rise in linking performance to assessment, which in turn led to ranking of skills and traits, often in league table format. The other, arguably in fact the most, significant factor in this process was the explicit linking of the economic growth potential of a nation with the ability of that nation to foster in its citizenry a mastery of the skills needed to compete in the 'Knowledge Economy' (Hanushek and Woessman, 2008; Hanushek and Woessman, 2012). The OECD had been at the forefront of moves towards defining the Knowledge Economy for some time: in 1996, it produced a report entitled, 'The Knowledge-Based Economy' (OECD, 1996, online), in which the importance of science and science-based knowledge and skills was emphasised. This report also tackled the issue of producing indicators to measure knowledge, foregrounding the problems attached to attempting to use input-output measures like those used for traditional economic purposes. Responding to pressure from the USA to produce measures which could be aligned with its own economic indicators, researchers at the OECD grappled with the difficulties of quantifying knowledge:

In the knowledge-based economy, problems emerge with the conceptual framework of the national accounts. Not least is the issue of subsuming knowledge creation into a measurement system designed for traditional goods and services. (ibid., p. 29)
Peters (2003) characterises the Knowledge Economy in terms of 'the economics of abundance, the annihilation of distance, the de-territorialization (sic) of the State, and investment in human capital' (Peters, 2003, p.364) and asserts that its effect on education, driven largely by the OECD, has been to redefine 'the traditional relationships between education, learning and work, focusing on the need for a new coalition between education and industry' (ibid.). The twin strands of a move towards accountability and assessment, and an explicit link between educational performance and the economy, have proven to be ideal conditions for the fostering of an international comparative educational testing culture. The OECD, being primarily an economic organisation, with a longstanding interest in education, has been well-placed to capitalise on this culture, as well as, arguably, being one of the main drivers of it. The chapter begins with a brief history of the OECD, its historical involvement in education and its governance mechanisms. This leads into a critical exploration of PISA, and an interrogation of recent literature on the project, and on aspects of OECD governance. Interviews carried out with OECD staff working on PISA are also included.

**The OECD**

The OECD, formed as the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) in the wake of the Marshall Plan after World War II to help rebuild Europe, both economically and politically, has not always been active in the education sphere. Its original mandate was narrowly defined and focused on cooperation and free trade agreements within Europe, designed to revive Europe with American money after the decimation wrought by a prolonged war. After the Marshall Plan ended in 1952, the role of the organisation declined, though it subsequently played a role in the establishment of the European Nuclear Energy Agency and the
European Free Trade area and Common Market at the end of the 1950s. In 1961, the organisation was renamed the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development in order to reflect the addition of Canada and the United States to the original 18 European participant states. There are now 35 member states, and the aims of the organisation remain focused on economic concerns:

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

The ideology of the organisation is essentially one of market capitalism, with one of its key values being a 'shared commitment to market economies' (OECD, 2019a). The declaration which marked the inception of the OECD in 1961 is a necessary backdrop to this thesis, as in it are outlined the key aims of the organisation. It states:

Pursuant to Article 1 of the Convention signed in Paris on 14th December 1960, and which came into force on 30th September 1961, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) shall promote policies designed:

– 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;

– to contribute to sound economic expansion in Member as well as non-member countries in the process of economic development; and
– to contribute to the expansion of world trade on a multilateral, non-discriminatory basis in accordance with international obligations.

(OECD, 1999, pre-forward)

Nowadays the OECD is a large organisation with a complex internal structure. It employs around 2500 staff (OECD, 2019, online) and has 36 member countries. Each member country provides a delegation led by an ambassador, and each member state pays a budget contribution to the running of the organisation. The organisation is arranged into a Council, with standing committees on different areas of the OECD remit; substantive committees, again organised by area of the remit; and the Secretariat, which is organised into Directorates, of which that for Education and Skills is one. This is the area in which responsibility for PISA, as well as Education at a Glance (see below) and other assessments - Teacher and Learning International Assessment (TALIS) and the Survey of Adult skills (PIAAC) is situated (See Table 2.1).

Papadopoulos (1994) charts the history of the OECD's involvement in education, from the early initiatives aimed at increasing the numbers of scientists and engineers in member countries - for example, the OEEC's STP (Science and Technology Programme), established in 1948. This was later linked to individual country reviews, first seen in 1959, as a means of appraising the issues around scientific and technology training, with the input of independent experts. There was a 'conviction that the rate of growth of the economy would be increasingly determined by the provision of education in science' (p.32). Papadopoulos notes that the transformation of the OEEC into the OECD in 1961 changed the emphasis of the organisation so that it was more strongly focused on economic collaboration and growth. He observes that this change allowed education to shift to the centre of policy thinking, and to 'leave a permanent mark on the educational landscape of
OECD societies’ (Papadopoulos, 1994, p.37). However, throughout the periods of tenure of the first two Secretary-Generals of the organisation, Thorkil Kristensen (1961-69) and Emile von Lennep (1969-84), the OECD was better known for its work on international financial management, trade and development, and its involvement in the oil crisis of the 1970s, than for initiatives in the field of education. Nonetheless, one project undertaken at this time deserves mention here: the Mediterranean Regional Project (MRP), begun in 1961, marked the first experimental attempt by the OECD to produce algorithms to correlate education with economic output. The project broke down the requirements of the labour force, and attempted to apply a standard measure to determine the minimum educational level required to perform successfully at each level. Williams describes the MRP as ‘an interesting historical episode reflecting an enormous optimism about education and economic growth during the 1960s ’ (Williams, 1987, p.336), pointing out that not only is it useful for interpreting what he calls the ‘corporate memory’ of the organisations which later concerned themselves with using education to promote economic development, but also because many influential economists received their training on this essentially input-output model of economic growth. In 1964, in the wake of this project, a meeting of the European Ministers of Education took place, at which they called upon the OECD to identify ‘the various factors involved in effective educational planning, so that the countries represented may have a basis for comparable statistics’ (Papadopoulos, 1994, p. 50). At this stage, there was no effective way to collect and model educational data, and the mathematical experts tasked with producing the statistics were initially unable to progress the project in the fashion envisaged. Nonetheless, a handbook was produced, (known as the ‘Green Book’) and the project paved the way for a continued interest in using statistics to correlate economic growth with technical and financial investment in education systems.
Fundamental to the transition of the OECD from a purely economic organisation to one which, despite having no mandate to operate in educational spheres, is active on the global education scene, was the formation of the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) in 1968. Centeno (2017) gives a detailed and comprehensive account of the inception, development and workings of this branch of the OECD, which to this day operates as a notionally independent qualitative research body within the parent organisation, but whose activities were nonetheless, as Centeno points out, significantly influenced by the agendas of its founding sponsor, the Ford Foundation. The relationship between CERI and PISA is complex, and, as Centeno points out, like much research into the OECD, requires navigation through a 'maze of papers' (p.54). For the purposes of the background being described here, it is necessary only to point out that through CERI, the OECD has a means of legitimating and supporting its work in the education sphere, and of maintaining its position at the 'cutting edge' of what is seen as modern educational research; its creation was 'a deliberate act to give formal legitimisation to the educational role of the organisation' (Papadopoulos, 1994, p. 63). In the 1970s, CERI was beginning to direct some of its attention beyond the process indicators correlating attainment levels with workforce demands and towards what were called the 'learning sciences'. This initiative was not only unsuccessful, but also controversial, because of the difficulty in deciding which of the manifold educational theories amounted to a 'science' which could be applied to the methodologies needed to produce the necessary correlations. As Papadopoulos comments, 'at stake was the issue of who has authority over the knowledge base and who regulates the value structures in education' (p. 89) - an observation about the tensions 'between the goals of academic and development research' (ibid.) which has resonance in Biesta's later critiques, and in the positioning of my thesis.
Papadopoulos' account of the OECD's educational activities does not cover the rise of PISA, as it was published some 6 years before the first round of tests. He does note, however, that the work of the International Association for Educational Assessment (IEA) was instrumental in encouraging the OECD to move into the field of educational performance indicators, providing, as he puts it, 'additional inspiration' (p. 189) for relaunching the endeavours in that direction which had been begun and abandoned in the 1970s. Henry et al., in their exploration of the OECD's presence in global education space, point out that the move towards providing indicators marked a significant change in the positioning of the organisation, helping it to '[assume] the status of an international mediator of knowledge and global policy actor' (Henry et al., 2001, p. 84). The authors point out that there was initial reluctance in the organisation to go down this path, but that demand from member states, most particularly the US, led to CERI bowing to the pressure to undertake its first 'Education at a Glance' indicators and analysis. These indicators, as Henry et al. note, are an attempt to reconcile the contradictory aims of taking account of social and historical factors while comparing across countries, and at the same time carrying out 'comparison for the purposes of evaluation against common criteria' (Henry et al., 2001, p. 92). The history of the indicators demonstrates that reconciling these tensions was a matter of intense debate and disagreement at the time they were introduced, and that there was an awareness of the inherent problems in such an enterprise. The 'Education at a Glance' project is still active, and growing, and commands its own heavy presence on the OECD website as well as in individual reports and analyses in much the same way as PISA. It does not, however, tend to receive as much media coverage as its newer bedfellow, and its profile in public space is correspondingly lower. I do not speculate about why this might be, but it is notable that it eschews the easy 'league table' rankings characteristic of PISA, and does not command the constant presence of Andreas
Schleicher, which, as will be argued later in this thesis, is a factor in the success of the PISA programme.

The Rise of PISA

Andreas Schleicher, a theoretical physicist who had been working in the field of medical technology, and then, briefly, at the IEA, joined the OECD in 1994; and in 1995 proposed to senior officials the idea of using techniques of testing and validation which he had learned in his scientific career to try and evaluate education. The IEA had already pioneered large scale comparative testing with its TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study), and Schleicher describes Neville Poselthwaite, the driving force behind these studies, as ‘like a second father to me’, crediting him with the inspiration for starting PISA (Schleicher, 2018, p.17). Of his modestly termed ‘transformational idea’, he says:

When I proposed a global test that would allow countries to compare the achievements of their school systems with those of other countries, most said this couldn’t be done, shouldn’t be done, or wasn’t the business of international organisations (Schleicher, 2018, p. 18).

Nonetheless, Schleicher managed to persuade senior officials at the OECD to allow him to develop a pilot assessment, and the first round of PISA tests took place in 2000, with 32 countries taking part. Since then, participation has grown, and in the 2018 round of PISA tests, 80 countries and jurisdictions participated. In 2018, Schleicher wrote an autobiographical account of the rise of PISA which also serves as a history of the programme, albeit one imbued with the positive tones of the evangelist. The philosophy behind PISA was to 'apply the rigours of scientific
research to education policy’ (ibid., p.17) with a view to offering policy advice to education ministers looking to reform their education systems. Central to the PISA programme is the alignment of education with the economy, and the work of Hanushek and Woessman (see above) underpins the central assertions upon which PISA is founded. Schleicher expands upon this at some length in his book, extrapolating the work of Hanushek and Woessman to predict large economic gains, for both high and low-income countries, if PISA scores are raised; for example:

If Ghana could educate all of its students to at least the basic level of reading and mathematics skills [on PISA], it would see a gain over the lifetime of children born today that, in present value terms, is 38 times its current GDP. (Schleicher, 2018, p. 139)

...the economic gains that would accrue solely from eliminating extreme underperformance in high-income OECD countries by 2030 would more than pay for the primary and secondary education of all students. (ibid., p.143)

Such claims have been contested by scholars (e.g. Kamens and McNeely, 2009; Komatsu and Rappleye, 2017); it is notable, however, that if knowledge capital claims such as these appear in media coverage, they do so uncontested. This is a central point in my thesis.

What Schleicher calls ‘the end of complacency’ (ibid., p. 20) came after the results of the first round of PISA were published in 2001. This was the time of the now infamous 'PISA Schock" (see chapter 5) in Germany, where results did not match expectations, and Germany used its disappointing results to initiate a round of reform discussions, some of which led to, or were used to justify, actual policy
initiatives. Schleicher himself attributes the ongoing success and growth of PISA to several factors, one of which is the involvement of the media:

> Not surprisingly, PISA’s impact around the world has grown thanks to extensive media coverage. (Germany even created a television programme around PISA that became remarkably popular.) This has transformed a specialised debate about education into a public debate about the link between education, society and the economy. (Schleicher, 2018, p. 26).

Schleicher's own profile has risen in tandem with the increased participation and profile of the tests, and his name is now almost synonymous with the word 'PISA'. An in-depth analysis of Schleicher's role in the success of PISA appears in chapter 5 of this thesis, as does a detailed analysis of the material used to report the test results since the first round in 2000.

PISA is conducted every three years, and the main tests have focused on three 'domains of learning' - Reading Literacy, Mathematical Literacy and Scientific Literacy. Each round of tests focuses on one of the domains in more detail than the other two, and more recently, extra elements have been added to the tests as PISA expands its reach into less traditional areas - for example global citizenship and collaborative problem-solving. The administration of the tests is devolved to country-level assessment organisations - in some countries this may be a department or agency allied to the Ministry of Education and in others a private contractor, and may vary between rounds of PISA. In England, PISA 2012 was coordinated by NFER, the National Federation for Educational Research, and in Sweden, academics at Stockholm university were responsible for its administration.

A sample of schools in each participating country is chosen at random, and within those schools, a group of 15-year-old children is selected, also at random, to sit the
tests. There have been many criticisms levelled at the methodology of the tests, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore them now. Since PISA was introduced in 2000, there have been several changes to the way in which the tests have been structured, with the introduction of the ‘innovative domain’, focusing on 'soft skills', in 2012, and the addition of various questionnaires and optional ‘addons’, often focused on background and attitude factors (‘non-cognitive outcomes’, for example around what are called ‘dispositions’, self-belief and motivation) for countries wishing to participate (OECD, 2017, online).

The tests take the form of multiple choice questions which the OECD claims are 'designed to gauge how well the students master key subjects in order to be prepared for real-life situations in the adult world' (OECD, n.d., online). The OECD explicitly links the PISA tests with policy advocacy, stating that, 'PISA publishes the results of the test a year after the students are tested to help governments shape their education policy' (ibid.). The OECD website contains clear and detailed information about all aspects of PISA - anyone interested can find sample questions, data from every round of PISA, reports and analyses and more. Interestingly, the OECD is very clear about the aims of PISA, which are explicitly linked with the need to increase performance in order to facilitate future gains to the economy. The following paragraph is typical of the kind of language used on the website:

**Why compare school-level results internationally?** Given our global, knowledge-based economy, it has become more important than ever before to compare students not only to local or national standards, but also to the performance of the world’s top-performing school systems. There has been growing interest in comparing student performance to international benchmarks, both as a gauge of how prepared students are to participate in a globalised society and as a means of setting
targets above and beyond basic proficiency levels or local expectations.
(OECD, n.d., online)

This kind of rhetoric, which portrays the OECD as responding to the needs of the 'world' and distancing itself from agency ('Given our global, knowledge-based economy'; 'there has been growing interest in'), is a key strategy of the OECD in marketing PISA. The portrayal of itself as merely responding to, rather than being instrumental in helping to define, the 'demands' of the 'knowledge economy' is, I argue, not only a key element in explaining the success of PISA, but, crucially in the context of this thesis, one which slips unchallenged into public discourse.

Once the sample of 15-year old children has taken the tests, the national agencies are responsible for marking them in coordination with the OECD. Publication of the results takes place in December of the year following the administration of the tests, and is heralded by media events and interviews, fronted by Andreas Schleicher and other senior OECD figures. The press conferences associated with PISA are coordinated by OECD partner organisations, and recently have been preceded by embargoed press briefings which allow journalists to compose their main stories before the actual results are released. The PISA release has increased in media profile over the course of the 18 years since the inception of the tests in 2000, and is arguably now the biggest event in the international education calendar. It is given high-profile coverage by journalists in all the countries which take part in the tests, and often makes front-page news.

Politicians in many countries have become used to issuing statements around the PISA results, whether to bask in the glory their education systems are enjoying, or to reflect upon difficult messages which may be drawn from less than illustrious results. While it is true that some countries take rather less notice of PISA than
others (in the USA, for example, which has not enjoyed success on the PISA stage, there is relatively little mainstream media or political coverage of the results), in general most participants will devote some political and press time to a discussion of the results. It is certainly the case that in both England and Sweden, much was made of the 2012 results, and this will be explored in depth later in the study.

**Other OECD Educational Assessments**

PISA is not the only international comparative educational assessment carried out by the OECD. Space does not permit a detailed exploration of the other programmes, in addition to PISA, which the OECD now uses to assess not only children, but adults: in fact, there is scarcely a group not now targeted for assessment by the OECD. Teachers are involved in the TALIS (Teaching and Learning International Survey); individual schools can take part in the PISA for Schools programme; young children are now being targeted with the IELS (International Early Learning and Child Well-Being Study); and the PISA-D programme (PISA for Development) aims to take PISA into low and middle income countries. A summary of these tests is shown in table 2.1.

**21st century Skills**

PISA is not a static instrument. As well as the standard 3-yearly tests of Mathematical, Reading and Scientific Literacy, since 2012 an innovative domain has been tested; and self-assessment questionnaires have evaluated children’s home lives, happiness and confidence in specific curriculum areas, among other things. A more sustained initiative has been noted since 2015, focused on reflecting the move towards ‘21st century skills’.
A brief exploration of this concept is necessary at this point, as it is key to discussions of PISA which will emerge later in the thesis. The idea of a set of '21st century skills' being necessary for students can be traced back to economic developments in the USA in the early 1980s, and the publication of a landmark report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, entitled, 'A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform' (1983). This report used alarmist language imbued with nationalist overtones to warn Americans of the impending threats to their economic future unless a 'learning society', founded on the 'persistent and authentic American dream that superior performance can raise one's state in life and shape one's own future' be created. This learning society needed to be able to nurture the appropriate skills necessary to increase economic output and ensure that America's 'once unchallenged pre-eminence' across many spheres of commerce and business did not continue to be 'overtaken by competitors throughout the world' (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, online). Another report, produced in 1991 by a collaboration of American educational and business organisation - 'What Work Requires of Schools' (Secretary's Commission, 1991) and containing the seeds of much of the language now familiar to the audience of global organisations such as the World Bank, UNESCO and the OECD, sets out a clear vision of what work in the 21st century will look like, and details the 'competencies' which will be needed to ensure that the workforce is able to fulfil the economic needs of the nation in that global work environment.

By the early 2000s, these competencies, and their explicit linkage to the education system and the 'global knowledge economy', had been formally identified and labelled and in 2002, the Partnership for 21st Century learning (P21) was established in the United States.
to position 21st century readiness at the center (sic) of US K-12 education and to kick-start a national conversation on the importance of 21st century skills for all students (P21, 2006, online).

In 2006, the group issued a document entitled 'A State Leader's Action Guide to 21st century Skills'. Addressing the question, 'why, then, is America losing ground on measures of educational excellence, workforce competitiveness and economic innovation?', the report is clear as to where the answer lies:

...education is still, for the most part, stuck in the 20th century. By traditional metrics, American students are doing better in school...But these metrics aren’t sufficiently challenging students to meet the demands of the 21st century—especially in a world where international competitors are threatening US preeminence on multiple fronts (ibid).

Thus, a need was identified for metrics to measure the new skills needed to secure the economic future of the United States. By 2010, American corporate organisations from Apple to Walt Disney, from Crayola to Lego, had signed up to the P21 and were funding a 'common core toolkit' which would ensure that the newly identified 4 Cs - Communication, Creativity, Critical Thinking and Collaboration, now seen as the essential '21st century skills' (also known as 'transversal skills', UNESCO (2015)) - were 'embedded' alongside the '3 Rs' in the curricula of all American educational institutions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme/Start date</th>
<th>Who is assessed?</th>
<th>Subject Areas</th>
<th>Sources of context information</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| OECD PISA (2000) Programme of International Student Assessment | 15 year olds in FT education. | - Reading  
- Mathematics  
- Science  
- Global Competency (2016) | - Students  
- Parents (optional)  
- Teachers (optional)  
- School principals | Every three years since 2000 | OECD countries: 34  
Non-OECD participants: 38 (PISA 2015) |
| OECD PIAAC (2013) Programme for the International assessment of Adult Competencies. | 16-65 year olds | - Literacy  
- Numeracy  
- Reading components  
- Problem-solving in technology-rich environments | - The individuals who are assessed | Every 3 years | OECD countries: 24  
Non-OECD participants: 2 (PIAAC 2011) |
| OECD TALIS (2008) Teaching and Learning International Survey | Teachers of lower secondary education (Focuses on the learning environment and working conditions of teachers) | - Teachers  
- School principals | | Five years between first two cycles Since 2008 | OECD countries: 16  
Non-OECD participants: 7 (TALIS 2008) |
| OECD AHELO (2012) Assessment of Higher education learning Outcomes | University students at the end of B.A. programme | - Generic skills common to all university students (such as critical thinking)  
- Skills specific to economics and engineering | - Students  
- Faculties  
- Institutions | A feasibility study was carried out in 2012 | Institutions from 17 countries participated in the feasibility study in 2012 |
| PISA for Schools (2013) | Cohort of 15 year olds in a school – at least 42 students and 80% participation | Same assessment framework as PISA | As for PISA | Rolling programme, ‘on demand’, maximum of once per school year | Currently available in 11 countries and 10 languages |
- Reading  
- Science (in school only) | - Students  
- Teachers  
- School principals | Results of a pilot round in 9 countries to be released in Dec 2018, merging with PISA in 2021 | Low- and middle-income countries (9 pilot countries) |
- Emergent numeracy  
- Empathy and trust  
- Self-regulation | - Parents  
- Staff | 2017 field trial/Pilot 2018 Main Study | Pilot Study in USA, England & Estonia |

Table 2.1 Summary of OECD Educational Assessments (adapted from Auld and Morris, 2019a)
As well as materials sent to schools and colleges, a slick website began to offer advice and exemplar lessons to educators. The 'vision and mission' statement of the P21 and the core beliefs of the alliance are focused on equipping the young with the essential skills needed to thrive in a world which is constantly changing; to prepare all students for the challenges of work, life, and citizenship in the 21st century and beyond, as well as ensure ongoing innovation in our economy and the health of our democracy (ibid.).

The tenets of this organisation have demonstrated a remarkably powerful reach: the language and underlying premise of the P21 are now found in top level education policy documents of all the major global organisations as well as in local education policies in many countries. A 2015 UNESCO paper analysed the progress of transversal skills in the education system of ten countries in the Asia-Pacific region, based on a working definition of skills bearing considerable similarity to the P21 core competencies. The report acknowledges that 'At a glance, the economic discourse appears as the most powerful driver of this movement...' (UNESCO 2015, p.6) while at the same time stressing the social and individual benefits of incorporating 21st century competencies into school curricula.

There is a paucity of literature critiquing the 21st century skills movement; which perhaps demonstrates the exceptional penetration of the concept into hegemonic ideals of what constitutes a good education. The apparently uncritical acceptance of the need to develop students who can thrive in a ‘global economy’ is one major factor in the easy transfer of the messages of PISA into public space, which has facilitated its rise as a soft governing tool. Schleicher has used much of his recent media exposure to outline the need for students to leave behind the ‘old’ curriculum and move towards acquiring a set of skills more suited to life in the 21st century.
Critiques of PISA

In 2012, Ozga noted that:

> there are critiques of PISA that attempt to explore and debate its methodological claims...but there is relatively little research that adopts a perspective on PISA as a policy technology, and studies its role in the transnational and national governing of education (Ozga, 2012, p.18).

In the 7 years since Ozga wrote this, critical literature on PISA has grown markedly. However, much of the literature on PISA itself is concerned with either methodological and statistical issues (Prais, 2003; Jerrim, 2012, Jerrim, 2013), or with analyses of individual country performance (Gundlach (2003), Fertig (2003) on Germany; Chung (2010) on Finland; Alexander (2010) on England). Some authors have, however, attempted either bilateral or multilateral comparative studies. Bulle, for example, compares countries with differing educational traditions and their performance on PISA, using what she calls ‘ideal-typical’ educational models (2011, p.506). Her work uses the concepts of progressive and academic traditions to categorise participant countries into Latin, Northern, Anglo-Saxon, East-Asian and Germanic models, a typology which is useful to the comparative researcher and which was used to inform the early data analysis carried out for this thesis. The case countries selected include one from each of two of Bulle’s models - Anglo-Saxon and Northern, and much of the background work is based on the study of another - Germany, which forms the basis of Bulle’s Germanic model. Grek (2009) compares reception to PISA in three countries - Finland, Germany and the UK- describing the ways in which ‘PISA enters these national policy spaces and acts on them in ways that govern and shape education activity’ as ‘governing by numbers’ (p.23).

Studies of the influence of PISA on education discourse and local education agendas began to appear in the early 2000s. It is now widely acknowledged, often
uncritically, that PISA has contributed heavily to the rise of 'global educational governance', a term popularised in the mid-2000s. It is also noted that the OECD is well-placed to use its instruments to exert what is viewed as a non-ideologically based, but deep and often dramatic influence on education policy reform worldwide. Dale and Robertson observe that because of the special nature of education, which is 'deeply and distinctively national' (Dale and Robertson, 2007, p.5), influence by international organisations (IOs) could be problematic and meet resistance. They assert, however, that IOs are able to exert governance on national education systems because there is a lack of an agreed definition of ‘the ‘best’ way to do education’, which has led to the development of proxies in the form of indicators and benchmarks, to compare systems.

The development of such instruments has become fertile ground for IOs, indeed, their most productive and effective means of intervention in education. It enables them to effectively define what ‘education’ is, a goal that would be more difficult to achieve in any other area. (Dale and Robertson, 2007, p.6).

They also make the point that IOs ‘deliberately conceal their origins and purposes’, with claims to be non-political:

backed up by, indeed, apparently justified by, the fact that their prescriptions are decided by ‘anational’ experts and/or through a process of consensus, rather than by political representatives in a process of disputation.’ (Dale and Robertson, 2007, p.6)

These actors may also appear to be responding to demand for metrics, removing their own agency and visible responsibility - a strategy which was noted by Auld et al. (2018) in their study of the collaboration of the World Bank and the OECD on the 'PISA for Development' project in Cambodia. The authors concluded that while the
agencies claimed they were responding to 'demand' from Cambodia, there was in fact:

no evidence to indicate that Cambodia approached the OECD – an organisation it had no formal relationship with—to ask for a new PISA test (Auld, Rappleye and Morris, 2018, p. 200)

Gorur has also written extensively on the mechanisms by which PISA operates on discourse and policy. She calls PISA a ‘modern day Delphic Oracle’ with an ‘Apollonic voice’, issuing advice from a ‘lofty vantage point’ (Gorur, 2011, p. 77). She makes the very important point that ‘PISA is much more than a ‘representation’ of existing conditions, but is creating new conditions – in other words, it is not descriptive but performative’ (Gorur 2016, p. 598). She refers to the phenomenon as ‘seeing like PISA’: ‘the gaining of a reductionist, synoptic and largely economic view that has been facilitated by the development of international indicators and large-scale comparative assessments’, (Gorur, 2016, p. 599).

While also critiquing the instrument, Gorur does take some of the central assertions, contested above and later in this study, at face value; for example:

PISA was developed in the late 1990s by the OECD in response to a growing demand from member countries for reliable educational output data to supplement their extensive input data. (Gorur, 2014, p. 62).

Thus, while Gorur offers interesting critiques of the methodology (Gorur, 2008; Gorur, 2011, Gorur, 2014, Gorur and Wu, 2015), a limitation of her work in my view is the acceptance at face value of the assertion of the OECD that PISA is demand-led. I will show later that Schleicher, the Education Director of OECD, often refers to global developments in 'this age of changes' and suggests that PISA is merely developing the necessary metrics to respond to them. This shifting of agency helps
to deflect attention from the origins of the discourse around these 'new skills' and frame the OECD in a less instrumental, more responsive role. I carried out an in-depth analysis of the framing of a PISA creativity metric in this way (Grey and Morris, 2019, under review), the main points of which will be included in the discussion of my findings in chapter 9.

Grek et al. examined the role of transnational actors in constructing what they called the European Global Space, asserting that ‘comparison is highly visible as a tool of governing…indeed comparison events or ‘political spectacles’ (such as PISA) may be used because of their visibility’ (Grek et al., 2009, p. 5). The governance influence of PISA is, they argue, differentially received in different settings - they cite Sweden as an example of a country which resists external influences in the education sphere - but they note the universal ability of PISA to ‘shock’, to instigate ‘moral panic’ and give rise to a crisis, and then new policy (Grek et al., 2009, p.9-10).

The ability of PISA to create crisis and panic reactions is also discussed by Peyreyra, Kotthoff and Cowen, who begin a critique of the instrument with the observation that:

Rarely has educational information translated so fast into the word 'disaster' – and domestic political crisis. Rarely has educational information translated so fast into the word 'stardom' –, and sudden international attention being given to countries which hitherto were un-noted and uncelebrated’ (Peyreyra, Kotthoff and Cowen, 2011, p.1-2)

Several scholars have now offered critiques of both the underlying ideological premise of PISA, and of its use in policy discourse. Uljens explores the 'promotion of neoliberal policy by educational assessment' via what he calls ‘the hidden
curriculum of PISA’. He sees the influence of PISA in terms of a wider European and global shift towards:

- a discourse on excellence, effectivity, productivity, competition, internationalization, increased individual freedom and responsibility as well as deregulation on all societal areas (e.g. communication, health-care, infrastructure) including the educational sector (education law, curriculum planning and educational administration).’ (Uljens, 2007, p 3)

He suggests that the OECD’s core strategy in PISA, of cooperation combined with competition, operates on global educational space by simply providing the ‘evidence’ and allowing local actors - the media, governments, and ‘experts’, to draw their own policy conclusions based upon this evidence, albeit while not being averse to offering its (the OECD’s) own ‘interpretations’ of which policies would be helpful in particular contexts. While in some logical sense this leads to a movement towards homogenisation, at the same time, ‘promotion of a competition-oriented mentality’ (Uljens, 2007, p. 6) is another aim. This depends upon generating an anxiety among participants, which is fuelled by the impossibility of actually reaching one’s goal in a ‘never ending competition’ (Ibid., p.7). Uljens makes an interesting point about the corollary of PISA testing - the move towards lifelong learning:

Lifelong learning, that was first hailed as a deliberating policy, has quickly turned out to be more like a life sentence than something emancipating. The individual is not allowed to reach “heaven on earth”, but is rather expected to try to learn to live with the idea that a continuous learning process is the closest we can come to fulfilment in life. (Uljens, 2007, p. 7)
PISA and Reference Societies

Several authors have explored the ability of PISA to create ‘reference societies’ which either inspire others to emulate them, or reinforce negative stereotypes about them. Countries and jurisdictions which perform well on PISA are often held up by rival nations as examples of either what is good, or what is bad, about education. Sellar and Lingard (2013a) examine the framing of Shanghai as a reference society for western nations, noting that in 2009 it displaced Finland (Waldow, 2010) as the ‘poster boy’ of global education. Carvalho and Costa (2015) explore the use of PISA in the creation of reference societies in different European countries, using the idea of ‘othering’ to deconstruct the ways in which different societies select and frame ‘others’ as references. They suggest that forces such as competition or a history of conflict, as well as geographical proximity, may influence the choice of reference society, as might more obvious factors to do with success or dramatic improvement on PISA. They also suggest that a country’s response to PISA may lead to its being viewed as a reference society, and suggest that the seriousness with which Germany, Japan and Austria reacted to their ‘PISA shocks’ led to their framing as models by other countries, notably France and Hungary. Waldow et al. (2014) explore media discourses over the ‘Asian Tigers’ as reference societies, using Luhmann’s work on externalisation and examining the role of stereotyping in the creation of media discourses which feed into the creation of reference models. The authors argue that while ILSAs are exerting a globalising influence on education, how they are received into different national contexts will vary, and

local configurations, including local patterns of political controversy and problem perception, still considerably influence whether or not and in what ways countries become ‘reference societies’ (Waldow et al., 2014, p. 317)
Adamson et al. examine the transfer of policy between England and Hong Kong in the light of external policy referencing, likening it to a pantomime, and noting a key element of policy referencing, by which politicians ‘reworked the discourse and reality’ of the reference society ‘in order to script a narrative that justified their desired reforms’ (Adamson et al., 2017, p. 6). Thus, the process of becoming a reference society does not depend merely upon performance on ILSAs, but on the ability of the ‘receiving’ society to mould and re-form messages as they enter public discourse. Takayama explores not only the idea of reference societies, but also the related tendency towards stereotyping which can result from portrayals of PISA success or failure, especially in East Asian nations (e.g. Takayama, 2017, Takayama, 2018). This theme is one which characterises some media coverage of PISA and is briefly explored later in my thesis.

Ringarp and Rothland (2010) and Ringarp (2016) examined the referencing of Sweden by Germany; and of ‘envy towards Finland’ (Ringarp and Rothland, 2016, p. 423) in Sweden. In chapter 6 it is noted that Finland was used by the OECD, via Schleicher, to bolster the perceived need for policy action after the 2012 PISA results were released. Ringarp notes that references to PISA are used to lend legitimacy and support policy action ‘even when there is no true causal connection between reforms and improvements in results’ (Ringarp, 2016, p. 457) - though establishing causality is of course problematic or even impossible in such cases.

**Newer Critiques of PISA**

The increasing dominance of the discourse around 21st Century Skills has led to the OECD expanding its PISA testing into new domains in a strategy which seems to be designed to help it to retain its relevance. As outlined above, the OECD has begun developing metrics to assess these 'new' skills and position PISA as a necessary
metric for the new age. There appears to be little or no scholarly critique of the underlying logic behind the 21st Century Skills movement; the premise has had an easy passage into education discourse and remains largely unchallenged. Several scholars have, however, engaged critically with specific areas of PISA as it moves towards expanding its programme. Rutkowski (2015), and Lewis et al. (2016) have critiqued the ‘PISA for schools’ initiative; Bloem (2015) and Addey (2017) examine PISA for Development (PISA-D); Urban and Swadener (2016); Auld and Morris (2019a) and Sousa, Grey and Oxley (2019) write about the International Early Learning Study IELS (‘baby PISA’). I have also co-authored a critique of plans for a PISA test of creative thinking (Grey and Morris, under review), which developed themes around national stereotyping and the reframing of creativity to allow it to be amenable to OECD metrics. This critique is touched upon in Chapter 6, on Sweden, and expanded slightly in chapter 9. It is hoped that as PISA expands, so scholarship will continue to explore its increasing reach and the ready ‘shape shifting’ which allows it to travel into new areas of measurement. A discussion of some of the implications of PISA’s continued expansion into domains considered by some (e.g. Unterhalter, 2017) is undertaken in Chapter 9.

**OECD Governance**

Central to this thesis is the notion of the governance power of the OECD, and the ways in which it penetrates, and operates within, public space. The OECD has no elected mandate to define policy within member states, nor, self-evidently, outside them, and relies on what the organisation itself calls ‘soft methods of coordination’ (OECD, 2010, online), which ‘represent a slower, but not necessarily less effective method of disseminating best practice and supporting the timely adoption of reform initiatives’ (ibid.). These 'soft methods of coordination' are central to this thesis,
particularly as they are subject to the mediating, and mediatising, power of the mass media, upon which they rely.

The process of governing, whether by the state or other actors, is the means by which power is exercised in society. It has traditionally been considered to be the role of governments to govern nation states, and implicit in this concept is the creation of norms and laws, and of control and authority. Rhodes’ examination of governance proposes ‘at least six’ (Rhodes, 1996, p. 653) models of governance, and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to conduct a thorough investigation of all of them, or of the uses of the term in different social contexts. What is important here is to draw a distinction between the terms ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ governance, and to attempt a description of the kind of governance which the OECD is exercising through its PISA programme.

Moos offers a useful distinction between hard and soft governance in his 2009 article on educational governance. He notes that:

> The governance and leadership at transnational, national and school level seem to be converging into a number of isomorphic forms as we see a tendency towards substituting ‘hard’ forms of governance, that are legally binding, with ‘soft’ forms based on persuasion and advice. (Moos, 2009, p. 397).

‘Hard’ governance relies on the exercise of direct forms of power, most often invested in national governments and legislative authorities, which are, in democratic societies, usually elected to undertake governing responsibilities. ‘Soft’ governance, on the other hand, is usually exercised by those without a mandate to impose direct regulation upon a society - for example supranational and transnational agencies such as the OECD, which are ‘not commissioned to use direct forms of power like regulations and are therefore developing ‘soft forms of governance’ within very general trends of globalisation’ (ibid). Several authors have
noted the increasing use of the techniques of soft power by the OECD to exert a
governance role on education (Sellar and Lingard, 2013; Simons, 2015; Ball, 2015);
but the most comprehensive appraisal of the subject is that of Woodward (2009),
whose study concluded that the soft power exercised by the OECD consisted of 4
overlapping dimensions: cognitive, normative, legal and palliative. Sellar and
Lingard describe Woodward’s work as ‘an important contribution to understanding
the rescaling of contemporary politics and policy-making associated with the various
dimensions of the move from government to governance’ (Sellar and Lingard, 2013, p.715), which captures the essential premise of both the book and the process it
describes.

Space does not permit a thorough investigation of these four dimensions; but it is
worth mentioning two of them, cognitive and normative governance, in a little more
detail here, as they are particularly relevant to my later analysis.

Cognitive governance refers to the OECD’s capacity to engender and
reproduce a sense of identity and community among its members by
engineering and propagating a set of values, perspectives, expectations
and discourses about their place and that of the organisation in the
global polity’ (Woodward, 2009, p.63)

It is clear from the data analysis which appears later that the sense of identity and
community referred to here now extends beyond the core membership of the
OECD, and into the extended ‘PISA community’, which the OECD is constantly
attempting to expand. The use of logos, branding and distinctive language will be
shown to be strategies deployed by the organisation which seek to extend its
cognitive governance role. As Sellar and Lingard note, cognitive governance is:

a distinctive mode of influence of the OECD, as it does not have to
reconcile competing ideological positions across current and aspiring
members. Commitment to liberal democracy, market economics and
human rights are requirements for OECD membership (Sellar and
Lingard, 2013, p. 715)
In other words, the heavy-lifting, in ideological terms, has taken place before any 'actual' governance takes place, as the self-selecting community has signed up to the ideals of the organisation from the outset. This, however, does not explain the influence of PISA on non-OECD participant and would-be participant states; the appeal of PISA is wider than the organisation itself. This is where normative governance plays a key role.

Normative governance, described by Woodward as 'the most elusive but doubtless the most important element of the four-dimensional model' (Woodward, 2009, p. 64), refers to the knowledge and ideas which are generated and shared by the OECD. Woodward refers to 'hordes of data' (Woodward, 2009, p. 65) and the capacity of the OECD to ‘beget datasets for previously untouched issues and internationally standardised methodologies to render data more complete, reliable and internationally comparable’ (ibid). Woodward argues that the normative model of governance exercised by the OECD relies on three overlapping types of knowledge: 'informatory knowledge' (the data themselves); 'conceptual knowledge', which Woodward describes as:

the development of common prisms through which OECD policymakers peer upon certain problems and understand how the world works. This includes the evolution of shared benchmarks and tools for conceiving, checking and calculating the impact of specific policies, communal language and concepts, and agreement over causal relationships (Woodward, 2009, p.66).

Woodward's final category is that of 'analytical knowledge, which refers to the design of policies to tackle problems identified by the first two knowledge types. Woodward notes that the use of 'experts' to support the authority invested in the data is another key source of OECD power. He makes a key point which is central to my analysis and the conclusions which I draw from it later:
This deference to ‘experts’ contributes to another source of authority, namely the OECD's reputation as an impartial observer of global events. This is not to say that there is no such thing as an OECD view or that it does not peddle prescriptions permeated by specific ideologies, but that many view the organisation as an ‘authoritative source of independent data’ (ibid, p. 67).

This assertion, which is supported by my findings (see chapters 5-8) helps to explain the apparently easy passage of the messages of the OECD into public space, and thus, the influence of PISA on school systems worldwide. As my analysis shows, however, this is not a straightforward ‘transfer’ from OECD to nation states; the intermediary, and transformative, role played by the media must also be considered.

Wolfe (2008) notes that ‘the OECD has no regulatory responsibility, no independent source of funds, no money to lend, and no instruments within its control’ (p.3). Despite this lack of official mandate, and eschewing claims of overt policy influence, however, it is beyond doubt that the OECD is now a powerful influence on many aspects of policy throughout the developed and developing world. Mahon and McBride (2009), in their study of OECD governance, suggest that the ability of the OECD to ‘create, synthesise, legitimate and disseminate useful knowledge’ allows it to adopt a powerful position in the transnational networks which ‘constitute an uneven, incomplete and contested system of transnational governance’ (p.83). Data is at the very heart of the type of governance exercised by the OECD:

The OECD has strengthened its hand as a centre of technical expertise, data collection and data analysis, at a time when data have become central to the new governance at both global and national level. (Sellar and Lingard, 2013, p.716)

Morgan and Shahjahan (2014) describe three strategies of governance used by the OECD for legitimating and strengthening its power in educational governance.
Sharing many of Woodward’s 2009 features, these are, building on past OECD successes; assembling knowledge capacity: ‘producing knowledge that is perceived to be science-based and objective’ (Morgan and Shahjahan, 2014, p. 197); and deploying bureaucratic resources - they assert that ‘OECD officials leveraged the organisation’s administrative structure to bolster the OECD’s position as a think tank in global educational governance’ (Morgan and Shahjahan, 2014, p. 195).

Key to the governance power exerted by the OECD are the various strategies by which it shifts agency from itself to national actors. One such strategy is revealed by Schleicher’s assertion that, ‘Pisa does not presume to tell countries what they should do. Pisa’s strength lies in telling countries what everybody else is doing’ (Schleicher, 2018, online). Some commentators assert that it is precisely this strategy which ensures that PISA ‘slips into’ national territorial borders uncontested, and thus, importantly, remains unaccountable (Robertson, 2016; Lewis, 2017, cited in Gardinier, 2017).

**Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced the PISA programme and set it into the context of the educational work of the OECD. I have demonstrated that the inception of PISA followed a change in the character of the educational work of the OECD, from collaborating on common technical and manpower issues to policy advocacy. This change was accelerated by the arrival at the OECD of Andreas Schleicher, whose vision for education depended on creating metrics to compare system performance internationally, and on using data to inform targeted, evidence-based interventions aimed at improving that performance, and with it, the economic prospects of a country. I have outlined some of the scholarly critiques of PISA, and explored in some detail the literature on the governance mechanisms of the OECD which are
central to its core mission, while remaining largely unacknowledged in media
discourse, as later analysis will demonstrate.

In the following chapter I detail the literature which underpins the theoretical
framework of my thesis, that which is found in the field of media studies, particularly
media logic and mediatisation.
Chapter 3

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework:

The Use of Media Theory

This thesis is about PISA and the media. While the methods chosen for this thesis rely on the analysis of language, in its broadest sense, to understand the complex relationships between media actors and the OECD; and between both of these and policymaking space, a thorough understanding of media theory is necessary. The use of media theory as a lens through which to study a Comparative Education topic is novel, and the complexities of using this approach with the language and semiotic analysis techniques described in chapter 4 are not insignificant. However, to draw any meaningful hypotheses from data which includes much media material, a deep exploration of the forces governing media practice in democratic states is needed.

This chapter introduces the literature underlying media theory as it relates to my theoretical positioning and underlies my analysis. The key concepts I use to develop my theoretical framework are those of media logic, an established and multi-faceted lens for exploring the role of the media; and mediatisation, a new and less extensively theorised area of study focusing on the relationships between media and political actors. Mediatisation is central to my thesis; it is introduced towards the end of this chapter, after the principles of media logic, which underlie it, are explained.

The chapter contains a detailed introduction to the literature and theories in the field of media studies which are pertinent to the analysis which follows. The following
aspects of media theory will be dealt with in detail after short introductory sections on the media and media logic:

- The Quest for Objectivity
- News Values and Newsworthiness
- Agenda Setting and Priming
- Framing
- Headlines
- Mediatisation
- Media Capital

The Media

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a comprehensive description of what is meant by the term 'the media'. My work is confined to two nation states: Sweden and England, and to one aspect of social and public space in those states: the governance of education via the OECD. Since my focus is on the ways in which the operations of the mass media work on that governance, however, a brief examination of what I mean when I talk about the media, and particularly the political news media, which is where my thesis is situated, is needed here. It is important at the outset to clarify that the analysis in this thesis is focused on media operations in two western, democratic societies. The theories of media logic, upon which my analysis draws heavily, were conceptualised in western societies and have generally only been applied within democratic nation states. It is self-evident that in nations where the media is not considered to be 'free', for example where media are state-controlled or subject to state censorship, media theories devised and applied in democratic states may not apply, or may apply differently. While some of the more recent work on mediatisation undertaken by Esser and Strömbäck, Mazzoleni and Schultz, and Blumler, and which will be discussed in
detail in this chapter, has begun to take account of relative press freedoms, the analysis and conclusions I draw from the application of media logic to the governance messages of the OECD are based on work done in two countries which would be described as western democracies, albeit with very different interpretations of that term.

Within those parameters, then, McNair's description of the functionality of the media is as follows:

In democratic political systems media function both as transmitters of political communication which originates outside the media organisation itself, and as senders of political messages constructed by journalists. (McNair, 1999, p.11)

He elaborates on this basic statement by outlining 5 key functions of the media in what he calls 'ideal-type' democratic societies; namely, to inform citizens (the surveillance or monitoring role”; to educate by explaining the meaning and significance of ‘facts’; to provide a platform for political opinion, including the expression of dissent; to give publicity to governmental and political institutions (the ‘watchdog’ role”; and to provide an advocacy platform for political viewpoints - a persuasion role. His phrase 'senders of political messages constructed by journalists' lies at the core of my research - the ways in which political messages are shaped and transformed by the media is often under-acknowledged, particularly by audiences who may accept that what they are being told by 'trusted' and 'objective' news organisations is a form of 'truth' (see for example Avery, 2009; Tsfati, 2010). Allied to this, and central to my thesis, is a key value of news making in democratic societies: that of the ‘Fourth Estate’. This term was first used in the 18th century, possibly by the Anglo-Irish philosopher Edmund Burke, and relates to the key role of protecting the people from abuses of power, by holding to account on their behalf
those in whom that power is invested. This concept will be expanded and discussed further below, and is key to my conclusions on the role of the media throughout this thesis.

My analysis uses items of media text (see chapter 4 for a definition of text); and draws data from several platforms, or modes of communication (see also chapter 4). Particular attention is given in my work to the role of the media in its 'Fourth Estate' role, because it is in this key area, that of providing a 'watchdog' for the governed to hold the powerful to account, that governance issues may most naturally be critiqued. As mentioned earlier, the focus of my research is on the mainstream, mass media and particularly concerns the news media - for PISA is treated as 'news'. This will be elaborated further below. The ways in which the operations of these media have been theorised and conceptualised are outlined in the following sections.

**Media Logic**

Media logic is central to the analysis undertaken in this thesis, as much of the material analysed is in the form of media texts, and the voices in the thesis are largely those of journalists working in western media organisations. In this section, I will give a brief history of the field of mass media logic, which will lead into detailed explanations of those aspects of the field which have the greatest explanatory power in understanding my data, and casting light on how the OECD wields its soft power via the media.

The study of the western, particularly American, media is as old as the mass media themselves, and as early as the 1830s, with the advent of the 'penny press' in the USA, it was perceived that the general public was interested mainly in reading about
violence, mayhem and sensationalised accounts of a variety of human events' (Altheide and Snow, 1979, p. 63). At the same time as the press was becoming accessible to a wider audience, because of technological developments, so the ownership of the press was changing to reflect the business interests of editors, and thus the ability of wealthy businessmen to exert their influence over editorial content was increasing. This linkage between the financial interests of media owners and editorial content is still a strong, even defining, feature of media in democratic societies, and the tension it creates underlies much of the research into the field now known as media studies. This field relies heavily on the concept of Media Logic, a term coined by Altheide and Snow in 1973 to describe a set of norms and practices which will be explored in detail below. I do not interrogate in any detail the issues around press ownership and control in my selected countries. The point that the financial imperatives of the commercial media may drive editorial decisions and limit the extent to which stories may challenge dominant paradigms of social action and power needs to be made; but deconstructing this in terms of individual publications and broadcasters and relating this to content is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Landerer (2013) outlines the competing commercial and normative logics which govern media practices: the need to maximise audience for economic gain can be in tension with the ‘educational and social ideals’ which drive journalistic output at both individual and aggregated levels as the media aims to play an active role in democratic society. The motivation of journalists in writing stories is then seen as twofold: to increase sales and audience figures; and to ‘contribute to the democratic process’ (p. 245) by informing the public of not just what politicians decide they need to know, but what ‘as citizens they should know in order to rationally participate in a democracy’ (Brants and Van Praag 2006, in Landerer 2013).
The basis of media logic is constructivist - the idea that social life is constructed underlies almost all social theory. Media logic adds to this the notion that not only is social life constructed, it is also *mediated*, which means simply that ‘social action is shaped and informed by media technologies and the logics that orient behavior (sic) and perceptions’ (Altheide, 2013, p.225). Viewing the media not just as simple messengers but as agents in their own right - ‘mediators of social and cultural change’ (Hepp et al., 2010, p.223) is the starting point for applying theories of media logic to the analysis of media data.

The first point to make here is that intrinsically interesting events do not tend to occur spontaneously or package themselves into a format which is instantly appealing to audiences and consumers of media output. What is deemed interesting or ‘newsworthy’ is the product of social forces and interactions between actors, which have been developing over time, often for many decades. This ‘gatekeeping’ role of the media was first identified in the 1950s by David Manning White (Shoemaker, Vos and Reese, 2009) and is as pertinent today as then - media actors are key players in deciding what the public will know and what they will not. How, and in what format, events deemed ‘newsworthy’ then reach audiences involves another layer of media logic - this is where concepts like *Agenda Setting* and *Framing* come in. Media studies seeks to explore and deconstruct these forces and interactions and to inform analysis of media data with a view to understanding and critiquing the power relations which underpin it. A final aspect of the interrogation, for this thesis at least, involves the concept of *mediatisation*, which offers frameworks to understand the power balances between politicians and the media in democracies, and to offer insights into the ways in which power is invested in the media as a form of governance. In the sections which follow, I will explain these terms in more detail, to explore the ways in which media logic influences what is
considered to be ‘news’ and how this is transmitted into, and received within, the social sphere. Firstly, however, it is necessary to look in detail at a central idea in the field of news reporting - that of objectivity.

**The Quest for Objectivity; and Things Not Seen**

Underpinning the exploration of media logic is the crucial, but contested, concept of objectivity in journalism, which is especially important in the area of ‘news’. While a reader of a newspaper or a viewer of television news would perhaps hope that what they were hearing or reading was ‘objective’ and unbiased, the impossibility of attaining this ideal in practice is acknowledged by many. Journalists tend to use sources among the powerful, and the famous, as the basis for news stories, and these stories are a product of a negotiation between journalist and source (a ‘dance’ - Miller and Williams, 1993). Even the act of determining which events are reported as ‘news’ involves (selection) bias, as most things which happen in the world do not ever come to the attention of those not directly involved in them. If they do reach the public domain, the portrayal of these events is in itself socially constructed and mediated, and the ways in which this is done need to conform to a set of implicit rules - those determined by media logic - which will allow the public to access and understand them in ways which will be meaningful against a background of their own set of values and norms. The idea of the non-ideological framing of news has been problematised in the field of media studies, with commentators variously suggesting that it is an ideal (Soloski, 1997; Reese, 1990; Morris, 2007, Ryan, 2001); impossible to attain (Fulton et al., 2005, White, 2000); and ‘indefensible philosophically’, being eschewed by most journalists (Ward, 2015, p.4). White suggests that the public relies ‘more or less uncritically’ (2000, p.379) on the media for information about events, whilst at the same time often expressing scepticism and suspicion about the motives and professionalism of journalists and news
organisations. The media thus find themselves in the middle of a contested territory — on the one hand there is a perceived duty to offer objective portrayals of important events; and on the other, the media has a ‘Fourth Estate’ role, of challenging and holding to account the very people - those with power - on whom they rely for supplying those ‘facts’. How this role is enacted is central to my thesis. The ‘Fourth Estate’ has historically referred to a relationship within democracies whereby there is an expectation that the media will have ‘genuine political power’ by virtue of their role as ‘an agency of public discussion, in which rival ideas compete with each other’ until ‘truth’ is reached and understood (Hampton, 2009, pp 3-4).

While this role has been increasingly challenged by both the creeping commercial interests supporting the media, and by new forms of social and digital media, it is still felt that the media do retain their key responsibility of holding power to account on behalf of the less powerful.

The ideal is grounded in the notion that among the checks and balances that ensure that the powerful are held accountable, the media has an essential, and highly political, role to play. The process of finding, distilling and analysing the information that is the media's commodity also ensures its political role, the core of its self-definition as the Fourth Estate. (Schultz, 1998, p.2)

The critical tension at the heart of my thesis concerns this ‘Fourth Estate’ role and lies in the question ‘how is power defined?’. The OECD, as a global power acting in local policy arenas, ought, if the media are fulfilling their ‘Fourth Estate’ role, to be held to account in the same way as domestic governing powers. That the OECD does not have a mandate to exercise power at state level might logically imply, if anything, that its authority would be held to account more stringently, rather than less, than national governments. As the thesis progresses, I will suggest that this is
not the case, and that the OECD is able to exercise its soft governance power with little challenge from media exercising their 'Fourth Estate' role.

Journalists I interviewed for my research (see chapter 8) tended to equate objectivity with ‘balance’ - giving ‘both sides of a story’ - ‘there is an expectation of balance - giving both sides…stories are better if you have different voices in them,’ (UK journalist). This equation is problematic on several levels. Firstly, it implies that every ‘story’ has (at least) two sides and that it is feasible, desirable and justifiable to represent them both. This resonates with the features of narrative outlined in chapter 4; and it is easy to see that in many cases, the perception of ‘both sides’ will involve a polarity, often naturally portrayed in 'black and white' terms - opposites. It is reductive in the sense that nuance is lost, multiple voices may not be heard, and priority will be given to those who already have privileged access to the media; in other words, the powerful. Further, seeing objectivity in simple terms of ‘balance’ discounts counter-narratives which may not have been selected as ‘news’ in the first place, or may have been reported in another way, or from another point of view. Nonetheless, many scholars in the field of newspaper studies appear to accept the simple ‘balance’ equation and to ask only whether or not coverage fulfils this criterion when addressing the question of bias. For example, Fico and Drager (2001) conclude that a sample of 615 stories on conflict which they studied were ‘generally balanced’, and therefore ‘fair’. Rouner, Slater and Buddenbaum suggest that

> Journalists, in most reporting contexts, finesse this problem [of objectivity] through the convention of story balance. This practice may often mean purposefully seeking out biased sources to present one side's view and the other side's view (1999, p.43).
Weber acknowledges the complexities around the issue, reporting a study in which despite an intervention aimed at increasing ‘fairness’, journalism students did not manage to remove bias from their reporting even when taught specific strategies to do so. Again though, even while looking to remove bias, the methodology of the study Weber cites reinforces hegemonic perceptions that bias and fairness hinge on factors such as using neutral language, giving all relevant sides of a story and striving for that balance (Weber, 2016, p. 168).

Some critics, however, acknowledge the difficulties encountered in this area (Boudana, 2016; Friedman, 1998). In his important study into bias and objectivity in the news media, Hackett observes the potential incompatibility between achieving balance and retaining accuracy, suggesting that journalists may not be able to do both, and noting, significantly, that:

"there is a tension between impartially reporting contradictory truth-claims by high-status sources, on the one hand, and independently determining the validity of such truth-claims, on the other (Hackett, 1984, p. 231)."

Boudana proposes alternative typologies for evaluating bias, acknowledging that the binary nature of balance renders it too reductive, as well as inaccurate, when aiming to represent a story ‘fairly’ - ‘balance can introduce bias when artificially imposed on the narrative’ (2016, p. 604). She proposes a description of fairness as ‘the ability to make judgments free from discrimination’ (p.605). This is an appealing ideal, but the unanswered problem of selection bias, which stories are privileged for coverage and which are not, remains. My analysis of media coverage of PISA will help to address this question of the omitted narrative, recognising that what has not been said may be of equal importance to what is reported.
The struggle for objectivity is so central to the analysis of media texts because media logic, which helps to explain the ways in which the media operate, acknowledges the influence of the media on the material being transmitted into the public domain. Analysis of media texts, such as those mentioned above, for evidence of media logic tends to presuppose that there is a 'neutral' version of events and that the media somehow acts upon this and renders it less neutral. Neutrality is then notionally attained through the presentation of competing voices in a story, in the interests of 'balance'. What this argument overlooks is that the very act of selection can never be neutral. Understanding the devices which I will discuss below (newsworthiness, news values, agenda setting and framing) is useful only in so far as they help to illuminate what the media does with events already within its sights. Seeing the world objectively would involve accepting that we will never have access to most of it. Once a phenomenon or happening is identified as an 'event' by the media, it has already been essentially and irreversibly changed. While journalists may be able to acknowledge, and attempt to mitigate overt 'bias' in their reporting, the impossibility of transmitting 'real life' into the public domain via the media is less likely to feature in discussions about fairness and objectivity. Several journalists I interviewed in both England and Sweden spoke of trying to report 'the truth' about an event, one UK reporter for example acknowledging 'there is a balance to be struck between making something interesting and misrepresented the truth'. In both England and Sweden, journalists claimed primarily to be 'reporters of facts' – 'I am not paid to give my opinion' (Swedish journalist C, see chapter 8) – although one did see that his role necessarily presupposed a more complex relationship with the material:

I think facts is not a very helpful term to use here. I would say events... there is some question over what a fact is...you know, if God handed down facts...
I don't take a naive position that I am just transparently delivering these… ‘facts’ to people - I select the things that I think are the most important and the most newsworthy’ (UK journalist E, see chapter 8).

Another Swedish newspaper reporter drew a distinction between opinion and commentary: commentary - interpreting ‘what this might mean’, and echoing the role of the narrator described in chapter 4, was seen as distinct from opinion - ‘whether I am a Social Democrat or if I vote for the moderatamer’, which should not be discernible from the reporting. Thus, again, bias was seen in terms of avoiding partisan comment, of not allowing personal opinion to seep into ‘factual’ reporting. Journalists in both England and Sweden felt that primarily their job was to report the ‘facts’, and that so long as ‘non-facts’ (my word) were labelled as such, then a story could be considered unbiased and ‘fair’:

…because I am writing news stories, the convention is that one doesn't interject, one doesn't inject explicitly one’s own views’ (UK Journalist D, see chapter 8).

Journalists I spoke to tended to feel that while commentary (‘narration’) was acceptable, opinion was not, and that as long as comment was kept separate from ‘fact’, the story remained objective:

[I see myself] very much as a reporter, and commentary ought to be branded separately… (UK reporter F).

In summary, the concept of objectivity, and journalists’ search for and belief in it, is in my view problematic - it is both the strength and limitation of the same framework that acknowledging the influence of the media on reported material cannot take account of things not seen by the media. It could even be that these things not seen are closer to the ‘truth’ which the journalists I spoke to claimed to be seeking to
represent. PISA represents several levels of things not seen; the media are only one means by which ‘truths’ may be obscured by the production and dissemination of data of this kind. This will be returned to later. The following sections analyse the specific ways in which media logic operates, and which will be used as the theoretical basis for my analysis in chapters 5-8.

**News Values and Newsworthiness**

PISA is treated by the media as a news story. This simple statement carries a meaning which might not be instantly obvious; but an education event, like any other, is only news if it can satisfy the criteria defined in media logic as rendering it ‘newsworthy’. Later in the thesis I will explain that PISA has become a political news story, which then allows the specific norms of political news reporting also to influence the ways in which it appears in media texts.

Galtung and Ruge are credited with defining the idea of news values in an article written in 1965. They tried to define how ‘events’ become ‘news’ and drew up a list of 12 factors which determined which events would subsequently be reported as news. This list was updated by Harcup and O’Neill in 2001. Their list of factors, which, they state, generally determine what will be selected as a news story, is as follows:

1. *The Power Elite*. Stories concerning powerful individuals, organisations or institutions.
2. *Celebrity*. Stories concerning people who are already famous.
3. *Entertainment*. Stories concerning sex, show business, human interest, animals, an unfolding drama, or offering opportunities for humorous treatment, entertaining photographs or witty headlines.
4. *Surprise*. Stories that have an element of surprise and/or contrast.
5. **Bad News.** Stories with particularly negative overtones, such as conflict or tragedy.

6. **Good News.** Stories with particularly positive overtones such as rescues and cures.

7. **Magnitude.** Stories that are perceived as sufficiently significant either in the numbers of people involved or in potential impact.

8. **Relevance.** Stories about issues, groups and nations perceived to be relevant to the audience.

9. **Follow-up.** Stories about subjects already in the news.

10. **Newspaper Agenda.** Stories that set or fit the news organisation’s own agenda.

(Harcup and O’Neill, 2001, pp.278-9)

This list does risk stating the obvious, as well as identifying virtually any human event as potentially newsworthy. However, there are important strengths too, in that, as Galtung and Ruge observed, the more such factors feature in an event, the more likely it is to be selected as news. Coverage of education stories such as those arising from PISA involves many of the factors listed above: particularly, the power elite (the OECD has an increasing role in governance, see chapter 2) surprise; bad news (see below); relevance and follow-up. My analysis of the responses to PISA data will include a more detailed discussion of how these concepts relate to its portrayal in the media.

In addition to this list, many commentators (e.g. Lengauer, Esser and Beganza, 2012; Soroka and McAdams, 2015) have noted that negative stories are given greater prominence than positive ones, and that humans have an ‘asymmetry bias’ (Soroka and McAdams, 2015, p.1) which makes them pay more attention to negative than positive events. Interestingly, this negativity bias may have its origins in human psychology, as it has been observed that negative events have a greater impact on human behaviour, even from infancy, than positive ones (Rozin and
Royzman, 2001; Kiley, Wynn and Bloom, 2010; Vaish, Grossmann and Woodward, 2008). It is postulated that this serves an adaptive evolutionary purpose by engendering a healthy fear of dangerous or harmful situations. For example, Lengauer, Esser and Berganza explain that:

As an outcome of the evolutionary process, people are genetically wired to pay close attention to negative news and acquire a news-consuming habit to deviant individuals, ideas, and events. To the extent that deviant events represent threats to the status quo, the media may function as agents of social control when they publicize negative events (2012, p. 181).

Thus, the narrative device identified by White, ‘social order disruption’ (see above), is used by journalists to draw readers into stories which are perceived at some level as threats. In stories of educational ‘crisis’, these threats are now framed not only in individual terms, but, through the explicit linkage between education and human capital, as threats to the future economic stability of entire nations.

**Agenda Setting and Priming**

McCombs and Shaw first conceptualised the agenda-setting role of the mass media during the 1968 US Presidential election, building on Cohen’s famous assertion that the media may not be successful in telling people what to think, but they are ‘stunningly successful in telling [readers] what to think about’ (Cohen, 1963, in McCombs and Shaw, 1972, p.177). Agenda setting acknowledges both the tendency to mix ‘news’ with commentary, and, importantly, the media role in the promotion of social consensus on what the agenda is …The media, by providing an agenda that everyone, to a considerable degree, can share, create a sense of community (McCombs and Shaw, 1993, p.64)
The media emphasis on selected events is seen to correlate strongly with the importance attached to these events by members of a mass audience. Agenda setting theory acknowledges a ‘cognitive media effect’ - a way of theorising what happens in the brains of an audience when they come into contact with mediated material, and has been recognised as important in political communication in particular (Weaver, McCombs and Shaw 1998; Weaver, 2007, Scheufele, 2000). It is regarded as a distinct model in its own right, and differs from framing (see below) in terms of the way it attributes agency and in terms of its reliance on psychological theories of cognition. Agenda setting relies on the activation of existing ‘memory traces’ which an audience will subconsciously recognise and which help to consolidate opinions and judgements - what is known as ‘attitude accessibility’ (Scheufele, 2000, p.300). International news is especially accessible to agenda setting, given the huge volume of potential ‘foreign’ news items and the impossibility of covering all of them. The gatekeeping role of the media is at its sharpest when filtering out the mass of material not occurring within domestic borders. Its agenda-setting role is key to the creation of perceptions around the importance or otherwise of ‘other’ nations, helping audiences to decide which countries ‘matter’ and which do not. As Wanta et al. explain, ‘Coverage of a nation will lead to more concern with a nation’, (Wanta, Golan and Lee, 2004, p.369).

A related concept in the field of media cognitive effects is priming, which in its broadest sense means that the brain responds differently to a stimulus if it has previously encountered a similar stimulus. Specifically, in the field of media studies, priming ‘occurs when news content suggests to news audiences that they ought to use specific issues as benchmarks for evaluating the performance of leaders and governments’ (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2006, p. 11). Priming helps to set agendas by highlighting which aspects of a story, or a personality (e.g. a politician)
are worthy of consideration when forming an opinion. These areas are reinforced over time as being salient in the creation of opinions, and also of stereotypes (Roskos-Ewoldsen et al., 2002). Priming and agenda-setting are aspects of a key area for new research in media studies - that of persuasion theory. This aims to explain how an audience is persuaded by a news item - whether new information or established agendas are more likely to lead to someone changing their mind about an event or news item. This concept is explored in more detail in chapter 9, when I evaluate the contribution of this thesis to the field of media studies. I argue there that PISA data not only provides ‘new’ information, but that it speaks to an established audience agenda, thus increasing its potential potency to persuade.

**Framing**

Framing is a different way of looking at media effects, and scholars are at pains to distinguish framing from agenda-setting (although recent work in second level agenda setting does sometimes make the concepts difficult for the non-expert to tell apart!). Framing looks at news items from the media point of view rather than in terms of the psychological processes occurring in the audience - it looks at the provider rather than the consumer of media. Framing involves ‘selection and salience’ (Entman, 1993) and is concerned with which aspects of an event or news item journalists choose to highlight or suppress, and how they present the chosen features of their stories. The purpose of framing is to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. Typically frames diagnose, evaluate, and prescribe…’ (Ibid., p.52).

While agenda setting is concerned with what is reported, and priming with which salient aspects are dominant in forming priorities in audience minds, framing is
concerned with how items are reported. The ‘locus of cognitive effect’ moves from the heightened accessibility criteria of agenda setting (what is in the news) to the ‘description of an issue or the label used in news coverage about the issue’ (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2006, p.14).

What journalists call the ‘angle’ of a story helps to define who will read it and, importantly what they will understand. There is a clear overlap between the issues raised by looking at framing, and those of news values and newsworthiness - frames help to determine what is newsworthy, or to turn events and objects into newsworthy items. Various authors (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000; De Vreese, 2005;) have suggested that five frames dominate news coverage: attribution of responsibility, conflict, human interest, economic consequences and morality. All but the last seem to be important in the framing of PISA and help to explain why it makes headlines and is covered extensively. Baroutsis and Lingard (2017) use framing theory to analyse the media coverage of the PISA results in Australia and identify three frames; namely: counts and comparisons, criticisms, and contextual considerations. Most coverage in their analysis uses the first frame - which clearly encompasses elements of conflict, responsibility, human interest and economic consequences. Framing is an integral concept in the work of journalists, who, while looking for novel ways to present news items, also seek to maximise revenue by ensuring that stories are eye-catching and appealing to their audience. The frames which appear in texts are the product of a synergistic process between journalists, elites and social forces (De Vreese, 2005), and clearly there is a relationship between the framing of an event and the ways in which the audience perceives and understands that event. Thus, the scope for influencing opinion is immediate and represents a power relationship which invests power in the media and their sources, and reduces the ability of the public to discriminate or explore alternative frames.
However, framing is ‘a necessary tool to reduce the complexity of an issue’ (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2006), given constraints of space and time. It is also a way of limiting or closing down discourses which are either outside the agenda of the journalist, or not seen by them. Implicit in the concept is a tendency to reduce complex ideas to readily understood and simplified stories, and the question of the ‘dumbing down’ or ‘tabloidisation’ of the media has attracted some scholarly attention. Some argue that it extends opportunities for political engagement to those who would otherwise not participate (Temple, 2008) while others (Ursell, 2001, Barnett, 1998) attempt to problematise and deconstruct the concept, asking questions around quality, cultural degradation and lowering of previously high standards redolent of a ‘golden age’, which are beyond the scope of this thesis. It is important to note, however, that the reductive tendency of many news stories to highlight only ‘the important facts’ (with all the problematic values implicit in that short phrase) does, when faced with a large and complex phenomenon like PISA, lead to a necessary reduction in the scope for nuanced and subtle interpretations. Later I will argue that the media has tended to frame education stories in England in terms of a crisis and external threat, with blame being apportioned, and that PISA fits comfortably into this frame. I will also demonstrate that in Sweden there is more of a critical engagement with the data supplied by PISA, but that even while working in a different media environment, journalists display the same tendencies, particularly in headlines, to favour crisis rhetoric and an interest in apportioning political blame. Before moving on to other media-related concepts, I will briefly explore something which I see as a subset of framing: the sub-genre of the headline.
Headlines

Headlines are not the same as news stories. In both the print and the online media, stories are written by journalists with varying levels of expertise in their subject. Headlines are written by editors, and they are written with one purpose: to draw in the reader or the viewer - ‘to grab the audience’s attention to persuade them to stay with the story’ (BBC Academy, online). As this thesis is largely concerned with the written media, in both online and in print format, it is necessary to look briefly at what headlines are, the functions they perform and how they differ from the bulk of text involved in a news item. The tendency of journalists to ‘customize news through selectivity or enhancement, generalization or simplification, emotionalism or sensationalism’ (Molek-Kozakowska, 2013), is at its most marked in the production of headlines. In the ‘inverted pyramid’ of news, the headline is seen first, and determines whether a story is read or not. In the commercial environment of the mass media, this is the driving imperative, and may underlie the observation that in some cases, the headline and the story may not be entirely congruent (Andrew, 2007). This has implications for issues around democracy and public access to information about the powerful, as, as is well documented (Bubela and Caulfield, 2004; Bleich et al., 2015), ‘…it’s the headlines that set the tone and do the damage. It’s the headlines that sell newspapers.’ (Alexander, 2010a, p.4). Headlines are clearly designed to maximise the appeal of a story to an audience. They are ‘relevance optimisers’ (Dor, 2003), designed to communicate the relevance of an article to a potential audience in the most effective way. In this sense, they are likely to express, in condensed and essentialised form, the news values identified above. Thus, as demonstrated later, stories of mediocre or declining performance on PISA were led with headlines alluding to threat or disaster which would lead to maximum audience attention.
Advice websites (e.g. at journalism.co.uk; wordstream.com) for journalists seeking guidance on writing headlines advocate: conciseness, disregard for grammar rules, bold statements, powerful verbs ('let the verbs do the talking'), focus on numbers and lists, and surprise. An additional factor now that much news content is accessed online is the ‘clickability’ - the need for certain key words to feature in headlines, in order that internet users might feel motivated to ‘click’ and read it further. As Szymanski (2017) comments:

Indeed, arguably, the headline is now more important than ever, as it becomes the only visible part of the article in microblog posts, social media feeds and listings on news-aggregation sites. These multiple requirements on the news headline have complicated the composition task facing news editors, as they attempt to ensure that each headline is crafted as perfectly as possible. (Szymanski, 2017,online)

It has been alleged (e.g. Dewey, 2016), that most readers access their news solely through headlines, either online or through glancing at printed headlines. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the news consumption habits of audiences in the UK and Sweden, but it is uncontentious to assert that a greater number of readers now access news online, and that consuming news in this way is likely to reduce the time spent reading any particular item (American press institute study, 2014; Gabielkov et al., 2016). Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have newsfeeds which usually draw on mainstream news providers; these newsfeeds are headline-heavy and research into the ‘click’ to main-story conversion-ratio indicates that most people do not read beyond the headline, or the 'hit,' after a search engine result is generated (Trielli and Diakopoulos, 2019). Headlines therefore act as another layer of framing, in the sense that they determine what a reader is shown of a story: what is prioritised within that story will be distilled into a few words. Valkenburg et al. conducted a study (1999) to determine the
effects of framing, with emphasis on headlines and titles, on the recall ability of subjects exposed to news stories framed in terms of one of four known news frames - conflict, human interest, economic consequences and responsibility (see news values, above). They found that how a story was framed influenced both the values which respondents placed on the story while recalling it, and the extent to which the story itself was recalled. While items framed in human interest terms were less well recalled than others, details of identical stories framed in one of two different ways - in either conflict or human interest terms, for example - were recalled differently by subjects. In this way, the priorities of the journalist writing the story become the priorities of the reader: there is a direct link between the pen of the journalist and the mind of the reader. If a critical stance to a story is taken, it is likely to be seen within the frame offered, rather than against the frame or the story itself. The possibilities for alternative interpretations and understandings are thus limited or closed by the frame chosen.

The implications of this for my research are that, despite the assertion of the Education Director of the OECD that ‘after a few days the fuss dies down’ and people see beyond the ‘sensational, league-table headlines’ (personal interview, 2016, see chapter 8), in fact it is likely that most of what the public understands of PISA comes via the media in the form of headlines. Accordingly, my analysis will include a focus on such headlines.

**Mediatisation**

A concept which is fundamental to my thesis is that of mediatisation, which has been studied almost exclusively in terms of the mediatisation of politics. Mediatisation is a relatively new concept, and as Couldry and Hepp (2013) state, despite its use for around a decade, it still does not have a clear definition. It may
be based on the German word *Mediatisierung*, which has a ‘long and respectable history in German-speaking countries’ (p. 191), but essentially, as the authors point out,

…it has emerged as the most likely “winner” in a race between many terms, all cumbersome or ambiguous to varying degrees—mediazation, medialization, mediation—that have been coined to capture somehow the broad consequences for everyday life and practical organization (social, political, cultural, economic) of media, and more particularly of the pervasive spread of media contents and platforms through all types of context and practice (ibid.).

Hepp, Hjarvard and Lundby (2010) see mediatisation theory as an attempt to overcome what they see as shortcomings in the field of media studies, which has either, in their view, focused too heavily on socio-cultural influences, or on the effects of specific media content on an audience. Mediatisation theory, they assert, aims to reflect the fact that 'media are inside society, part of the very fabric of culture; they have become ‘the cultural air we breathe”'(Hepp, Hjarvard and Lundby, 2010, pp 223-4). Deacon and Stanyer are critical of the apparent widespread adoption of the concept of mediatisation, suggesting that it lacks rigorous interrogation of causality, historical pathways, and what they call 'concept design' - suggesting that it is too poorly defined to offer explanatory (by which they mean, causal) power to observed social phenomena (Deacon and Stanyer, 2014, p. 13). They suggest that media scholars ought to 'leave mediatisation as a universal concept but develop a series of additional concepts at lower levels of abstraction' (ibid., p.9). The authors on whose work I draw most heavily to provide the theoretical underpinnings for my work on mediatisation are Strömback and Esser; and they do indeed, as Deacon and Stanyer acknowledge, 'climb down the ladder of
abstraction’ (ibid.) and offer a more precise framework upon which to conceptualise the processes of mediatisation.

Esser and Strömback have been highly active in the field of research into the mediatisation of politics, claiming that it is ‘key to understanding the transformation of western democracies’ (2014, p. 5) with strong contributions to the field from Mazzoleni and Schulz (2010), Blumler (2014) and others. This exciting area of research focuses on the implications for democracy of the increasingly close relationship between the news media and politicians. Landerer (2013) and Esser and Strömback (2013) have devised separate conceptual frameworks for evaluating the mediatisation of politics. Landerer argues that the term ‘media logic’ is too wide and proposes a model based instead on ‘normatively oriented public logic’ (p. 245) conceptualised around the ideals of ‘the media’s ideal role in a well-functioning democratic society’ (p.244); and ‘market logic’ – a commercial logic based on the audience as consumers. His model, he says, acknowledges that the mediatisation process ‘cannot be understood without considering the larger context of a world in the process of being integrated technologically, economically, and culturally’ (p. 240). While this is undoubtedly true, his model lacks the immediacy and easy applicability of that of Esser and Strömback, which I have summarised in table 3.1 below.
Table 3.1 Esser and Strömback’s conceptualisation of the mediatisation of politics (2014)

The process of mediatisation is seen as dynamic, with the left-hand columns showing a situation in which the media has little power compared with politicians and central institutions. The far right illustrates another (theoretical) situation in which all power is invested in the hands of media organisations. In practice the situation in most societies is somewhere in the middle, and the authors argue that in western cultures, power is increasingly moving to the right, resulting in increased power for the media. This conceptualisation provides a useful starting point for a formal analysis of the power of media logic in explaining the activities of the OECD around PISA.

There are two variables shown in table 3.1 which are helpful in conceptualising mediatisation; the first is political actors, and the extent to which their actions are designed to fit into the norms and demands of the media. This includes the extent to which ‘political communicators are forced to respond to media rules, aims, production logics and constraints’ (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 2010, p.249). For
example, press releases and press conferences may be used to launch a new policy initiative which has previously been announced in Parliament ('policy as soundbite' - Lingard and Rawolle, 2004, p. 361). Politicians may be trained in giving television or radio interviews, or in the ways of social media, in order to reach an audience directly. They may even dress, have their hair styled or speak in a particular way to maximise appeal to a television audience. More systemically, policy is now made in response to publicly visible events, constructed and pursued by the media. 'Public campaigns', calling for policy change, take place on social media and are reported by the media: these are often the catalyst for policy talk, if not actual legislation. Public enquiries, whereby aspects of policy are retrospectively investigated in relation to a tragedy or perceived failing of public office, are carried out in the glare of media scrutiny and the results, often in the form of a 'heads will roll' report, heralded with widespread media coverage, especially in England. The concept of 'forced choice', defined as 'the condition of having to respond to an immediate or anticipated crisis’ (Lodge and Hood, 2002, p.1), is comfortably promulgated by a media which sees crisis in terms of newsworthiness, and operates with the binary - presenting 'both sides' of a story while at the same time polarising them and ensuring that the public understand 'which side' they ought to support. The turning of disaster (an 'event') into a crisis (a disruption of the social order which may arise as the result of a disaster) inevitably involves the media. In countries where the state controls the media (the far left in table 3.1), the media may be required to ignore or downplay the severity of any disaster or crisis in order to limit disruptions to the social order (Ma, 2005). Conversely, in societies which are heavily mediatised, the media has freedom to report a crisis as it chooses, and may frame it in terms which serve to define it in the first place as a crisis, and to determine which (usually two) key protagonists are portrayed, and in what terms. Equally, in a highly-mediatised society, political actors may choose to frame events as crises in order to
ensure media attention. This symbiotic relationship is, arguably, an aspect of PISA which has helped its ascent as the key global metric for evaluating education quality. Its framing in terms of a political crisis ensures that the ‘right’ political players are called upon to comment, and to offer solutions in accordance with their own policy agendas.

Later in the thesis I will offer the concept of ‘mediatised global governance’ to help explain the second and third prisms through which PISA data is transmitted into public space (the first having taken place at the OECD level, and outside media logic). The second prism is applied when the PISA material is released, and explained, by the OECD. I will argue that at this stage, the appeals to media logic strongly influence the ways in which data is presented. The third and final prism, that of media logic acting on the material after transmission, is, I argue, an example of the mediatisation of political material which helps to explain its penetration and governance potential.

Media Capital

Bourdieu (1996) describes four forms of capital: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic. For him, the first two were the most important, with the last, symbolic capital, being poorly and ambiguously defined. Couldry (2004) argues for ‘media metacapital’ to be seen as an extension to Bourdieu’s work on symbolic capital, focusing especially on the power of the media to act on the social world; but Davis and Seymour (2010) offer one aspect of the definition ‘media capital’ to describe the ability of political actors to appeal to the media. They suggest that the positioning of the media between the political field and the wider citizenry makes it necessary for political actors to accrue ‘media capital’ which will ensure their appeal to the media, on whose actions their positions depend. They see media capital as a necessary
step in accruing the social and symbolic capital needed to succeed in the exercise of power. Thus, actors who ensure that they are attractive to the media - either through media capital accrued professionally, because of their office, or personally, through individual traits and characteristics - will be positioned to exercise power more effectively than those with little media capital. Repeated media exposure is the most assured and necessary way of gaining media capital, particularly if that exposure is to an audience seen as accruing high symbolic power in its own terms. Clearly, those who can cultivate journalistic contacts will be at an advantage when accruing media capital. Michael Gove, some of whose speeches and statements are analysed later in this thesis, is an example of a political actor with high media capital. As well as being a government minister, he has worked as a newspaper columnist for much of his career, is married to another newspaper columnist and understands how the media operate. Schleicher, Education Director at the OECD, has cultivated a media presence deliberately since 2000. Schleicher may even be described as having accrued what van Krieken (2012) calls ‘celebrity capital’ and which Rojek (2014), writing about the same thing, calls ‘attention capital’. McNair speaks of ‘performance politics’ (McNair, 1999), by which all stages of the political process are carried out under the gaze, and the influence, of the media, who are thus accorded the role of political actors in their own right. The relations between political actors and the media, whose role is supposed, by those in the audience, to lie predominantly in communicating the messages of the powerful without bias, are made more complex by the increasing ability of politicians to behave as celebrities, with the additional cultural and media capital that status endows. The idea of celebrity politicians is not new - ‘political power has always been expressed through the embodiment of a political self and its presentation through acts of spectacle’ (Craig, 2014, p.3), but the involvement of a fast-paced modern mass media facilitates the easy projection of the self into the public sphere by those with the
capital - however defined - to access it. Celebrity politicians are adept at projecting their personalities via media performance, and as I will demonstrate later, Schleicher has cultivated a persona of scientist, expert, educationalist and adviser, all of which he projects through regular media appearances. There is an apparently limitless appetite for the data produced by the OECD on education, but it is always Schleicher who presents it to the media, in a standard format of animated slides, graphs and phrases ('soundbites') as well as question-and-answer sessions, webinars and broadcasts which always showcase Schleicher in the role of ‘the world’s schoolmaster’ (Ripley, 2011). There are clear links with the idea of the ‘expertocracy’ referred to in chapter 1: Schleicher’s success in projecting the messages of PISA reflects and enhances the credibility he has accrued in offering expert opinions. His media capital thus derives not only from his position as a high-ranking OECD official, but also from his own personal image, cultivated and refined over years of media appearances. He is held in high esteem by policy makers and senior journalists in both England and Sweden, and this has helped to ensure the easy passage of his chosen PISA messages into the public domain.

In my research, these concepts are important as the rise to prominence of PISA as a ‘news story’ has occurred, I will argue, largely because of the ways in which its messages can have been tailored for use by the media to fit into both predefined agendas and to help create new ones.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have outlined the main concepts in the field of media logic which underpin my research. My analysis, both of materials issued by the OECD, and of media and policymakers' texts, uses the theories outlined to form the theoretical framework: newsworthiness, agenda-setting and framing, the role of the 'Fourth
Estate’ and mediatisation are the key concepts which I use to interrogate the data collected, including that gained via interview with OECD and media actors.

The following chapter outlines the methods used to collect my data, to define and bound it, and addresses issues around its analysis. This includes a detailed rationale for, and description of, the language analysis approaches used to carry out work on the texts collected, which is then described in the following four chapters.
Chapter 4

Approaches to Analysis

Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed description of the methods used to collect and interrogate the data which forms the basis for the four analysis chapters which follow. It does not contain an elaboration of my methodological position, which is by necessity interpretivist, as the research questions underlying the thesis demonstrate. My methodological standpoint is both interpretivist and critical: the methods I use and the critical perspective I employ support this stance. My methodology goes beyond both these approaches in the sense that I am examining not only a constructed world, but a mediated one. The material I call my data is not only socially constructed but also mediated, in the sense that it passes through an intermediary set of prisms before arriving in social space.

Documents and Online Texts

The data gathered for this thesis comes from multiple sources, which are detailed in the following section. My initial intention, upon beginning this study, was to bound my research closely in a timeframe: beginning with the release of, and immediate response to, the 2012 PISA results in December 2013, and ending after the initial coverage had disappeared from the media; as well as in space - the media and policymaking spaces in England and Sweden during this tightly-defined time frame. It soon became clear, however, that this would not be possible as too much potentially valuable material would have been excluded, and that the boundaries
around the data selected for analysis would need to be changed. Firstly, the material produced by the OECD to release the PISA results is not only large in volume, but also wide-ranging. Initial analysis showed that this material had changed much over time, and a historical analysis of the type of material used to engage with OECD audiences was necessary to demonstrate its development and progression. Thus, more OECD material was analysed than I had initially anticipated, and a historical analysis of PISA reports was included, with emphasis on their presentation, as this was felt to be key in the development of media strategies. Secondly, the delimiting of material by the original strict timeframe was not realistic, as, in both countries chosen for analysis, PISA 'stories' ran long after the publication of the results. In Sweden, OECD initiatives around the 2012 results were still ongoing well into 2015; and in England, a prominent story around the introduction of Chinese Maths teachers was still being reported in 2018. It was necessary, in order to gain a more complete picture of the interactions between the OECD and the media, to follow these stories for longer time periods - and an analysis of both appears in chapters 6 and 7.

It was also necessary to move beyond the space I had initially anticipated for the thesis, as an account of media operations around PISA necessitated the use of material which appeared in some other national media: for example, those in the US, Canada, and Germany. Comparison with media systems, and PISA messages, outside of the two countries studied in the thesis, was not possible in terms of scale, so such material is only introduced where it elucidates or helps to explain key points made - for example, about the pervasiveness of the rhetoric of 'World Class' schooling, or of the 'global education race'.
The type of material included was limited in the sense that I only included written and online materials, video conferences and presentations, but for reasons of scale did not examine television or radio broadcasts.

Finally, the interviews which took place with journalists did not focus solely on the PISA 2012 materials but also incorporated questions on a more general understanding of how PISA was reported as a news story. Interviews with OECD staff working on PISA were also more generally framed and helped to contextualise the later analysis.

The material analysed for the thesis, therefore, offers a more complete, contextualised and rounded insight into the logics applied to PISA data as it enters public space, than a tighter bounding would have offered. In the detailed outlines of data collected below, I explain in more depth what was collected, how it was collected and how it was then subjected to analysis.

While the material used comes from different sources: documents, videos, photographs and interviews, the approaches to its analysis, and which are detailed in this chapter, are the same, and treat all my data as text. The use of this term in Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MMDA) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is wider than that in general usage, and presupposes that all communicative acts are a type of text. It moves beyond the linguistic terms of 'speech and writing' to consider text as 'any semiotic entity which the ordinary man and woman in the street encounters constantly, and treats as usual’ (Adami and Kress, 2014, p. 234). In the field of analysis used in this thesis, 'text' includes talk, image, colour, signs, and other multimodal entities involved in making meaning. Bezemer and Kress, describe a text as:
a complex of signs which is designed to be internally cohesive and coherent, and which is coherent with relevant other semiotic entities in the context of use; and which its maker treats as complete, in terms of its social use. (Bezemer and Kress, 2017, p. 513).

A text is the entity around which a provider and an audience interact and upon which they engage. It is not a one-way, unilateral entity - communication can only be said to have occurred when there has been a ‘translation’ of the intention of the producer of the text by the recipient, or the audience. Thus, representations in text are ‘remade’ by interaction with the audience, and any study of items of text needs not only to consider the intentions of the producer of the text, but the meaning made of that text by those who engage with it. 'Representation is never neutral' (Kress and Mavers, 20 p.173), and recognising that text is altered in transmission is a strong basis for examining material which has not only been transmitted, but also mediated. Advocates of MMDA and CDA do not prescribe a 'method', or rigid techniques, but encourage the researcher to engage critically with all aspects of text use, seeing every linguistic or semiotic choice as potentially significant and potentially being a manifestation of power or knowledge relationships. Several authors, most notably Kress (e.g. 2003, 2009, 2013), Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2002) and O'Halloran and Smith (2012) have offered frameworks for carrying out MMDA, as well as detailed analytical work which demonstrates and models possible techniques for analysing a range of semiotic materials. The practice of MMDA was suitable for my analysis as a way of understanding the messages in PISA materials, as well as their reception and interpretation by other actors in the media and policymaking arenas. The approaches applied to data in my thesis have already been used to explore YouTube video (Adami, 2009), PowerPoint presentations (Zhao, Djonov and Van Leeuwen, 2014), teachers' gestures (Arzerello et al., 2009) and televised interviews (O'Halloran et al., 2013). I chose to subject all
my data, whatever mode (see below) of text it constituted, to the same type of analysis, as only by doing this could I look for themes and discourses which were common across different documents, articles or interviews. Interview transcripts were analysed in the same way as PowerPoint materials, with the obvious point that colour and image did not feature in the former: the emphasis in the analysis of my interviews was to critique and consolidate findings drawn from the text material, and to identify and challenge the common themes. I was fortunate to spend several hours with the late Professor Gunther Kress, who helped me to understand the approaches outlined below, and to apply them to some of the data which forms my analysis. As I did not video my interviews (something which Kress suggested would represent the ideal in social science research, while generally also being practically and logistically almost impossible!) the body language of journalists could not be included in the analysis in the same way as that carried out in video analysis. There is also an acknowledgement that words spoken in an interview situation will not have been as carefully chosen and crafted as materials designed to persuade, or to sell a message or a newspaper. Therefore, analysis of interview data did not focus on the exact spoken linguistic choices of the interviewees, in the way that such choices were interrogated in the written and printed material.

The techniques used for collecting and analysing material will be explained in detail in the sections below. This chapter begins with an introduction to the types of data used in the thesis and a description of how it was identified and collected. This includes: PISA materials from the OECD; videos of press conferences and briefings; speeches and statements made by politicians; white paper policy documents, accessed online; the mainstream print and online media, and, finally, interviews with PISA staff at the OECD, and with journalists in England and Sweden.
The second part of the chapter describes how I chose to analyse the data. Because of the wide array of possible approaches to text analysis, and the large volume of material collected, a combination of several approaches was needed, and this section of the chapter begins with an introduction to both narrative and discourse, which are essential concepts for understanding data which is founded upon both. I then explain the choices I made around analysing the data using approaches not only of narrative and discourse analysis, but also of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and its newer and more wide-ranging analytical partner, Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MMDA). Additionally, I explain my approach to translating non-mother tongue material, before summarising the chapter and explaining the limitations of my choices.

Types of Data and Their Collection
As mentioned above, several types of data were collected for analysis. These are: documents, including print and online documents, from OECD and media sources; video, of press conferences and of events involving Andreas Schleicher, including YouTube video presentations; PowerPoint slides; interviews with OECD staff and journalists. In this section, I outline, by source, how these materials were collected, before moving on to look at techniques for analysis which were applied to all the data, including the interview transcripts.

The OECD
A large part of the data collected for my thesis originated at the OECD, and is analysed in chapter 5. Collecting material from this source is straightforward, as the OECD makes much of its PISA material public; an active OECD website, with pages in English and French, as well as other languages as individually relevant for
specific reports, contains a discreet section devoted entirely to PISA. The website is easy to access with simple search terms, and easy to navigate (see figure 4.1). As well as the website, the OECD is a prolific user of social media, with blogs, Facebook and Twitter feeds regularly updated by OECD staff. In terms of the PISA programme, the OECD website contains up-to-date and archive material on all the PISA rounds from its inception to the most recent - this includes details of the tests themselves, national scores and reports, as well as a series of regular updates - 'Pisa in Focus', which reflects and offers monthly advice on selected educational topics in turn. All these materials have regular feeds into social media accounts, and in addition regular 'webinars' - live online semi-interactive seminars - give further coverage to the data.

![Figure 4.1 PISA Landing page on OECD website](image)

The data from these sources - the OECD website and social media feeds - was easy to collect as it required only simple search engine terms and collation into designated desktop folders, often in PDF format for ease of analysis. Ensuring completeness of the dataset was slightly more problematic, as there is a constant and increasing supply of PISA materials available on social media (see 'Limitations'...
Boundary-setting was a potential issue which was overcome by maintaining the focus on PISA 2012, and using older or newer materials only in supplementary form, or, in more depth, to indicate historical developments. The OECD was generous in providing additional materials for my study, and I was sent a full set of Andreas Schleicher's PISA 2012 launch slides, which I draw on for analysis in chapter 5.

**Political Speeches and Statements**

My analysis of English material includes reference to several political texts - speeches and statements, as well as policy documents, which were accessed online. Statements and speeches by politicians which are made to the UK Parliament are available through the national online record of Parliamentary activity, Hansard. Other speeches are made available at the government website gov.uk, where White Papers, which set out new policy proposals, can also be found. This material was accessed either by entering specific dates into Hansard records, where I already knew when speeches had been made (for example, the statement to the UK Parliament made by Michael Gove, referred to in chapter 7), or were accessed using search facilities on the gov.uk website. Because of the different type of materials analysed in Sweden and England, I did not use equivalent sites for Swedish material. The speeches by Swedish politicians which are used in this thesis were either made at the press conferences analysed, or at individual press conferences which were then reported in the media.

**Media Reports**

Using 'Google' searches in both English and Swedish, I collected data from online media organisations, roughly spanning the period between the release of the PISA
2012 results in December 2013 and the release of the 2015 results in December 2016. As explained above, the original intention had been to collect less material and to bound it more closely by time; however, to add contextual anchors as well as to follow stories through, this tight delimiting was not possible and the search for relevant items remained ongoing, with material being added to the thesis as late as 2018, albeit that the bulk of data was collected in 2013. As well as online items, I also purchased daily print newspapers from both Sweden and England on the day PISA 2012 results were released, to help gain insight into the space devoted to the PISA story and the type of images and layout which were used. Finally, I watched a selection of televsual material and listened to some mainstream UK radio. I decided at an early stage, however, that analysis of this material would be beyond the scope of my study because of the time and techniques involved in its analysis. My searches led to my downloading 87 reports from English media and 83 from Swedish media. Additionally, I downloaded videos of two press conferences held in Sweden (see above), and attended two press conferences in England and one in Sweden, which I made notes on and partially audio-recorded. I also downloaded some 57 media items from other countries, covering aspects of PISA 2012 and PISA in general.

**Video**

Several items used in my analysis are in the form of video. I downloaded two videos from the Swedish Schools Ministry *Skolverket*, which were made freely available online for a short period after they took place. These videos are of a press conference and a press briefing which took place in Stockholm at key points after the PISA 2012 results release. I was able to study video frame-by-frame using iMovie software on my home computer. This enabled me to carry out a deep analysis of the material, using techniques of MMDA. Additional video material
included several appearances by Andreas Schleicher, which are easily searchable via the video platform YouTube. These included TED talks and a televised ‘Meet the Mentor’ session which took place in the US in 2014.

Interviews

I interviewed seven journalists for my research: four in England and three in Sweden. Details of the interviewees and analysis of the material can be found in chapter 8. Interviews were carried out in June 2016 in England and November 2016 in Sweden. The timing was chosen to ensure that preliminary analysis of media reports had been completed before interviews took place. All the journalists were given the opportunity to see questions in advance and all were asked the same initial questions. Swedish interviewees were given the opportunity to answer questions in Swedish or English - all three chose to answer in a mix of both languages. Voice recordings were made of all interviews with the consent of participants. The recordings were transcribed after the interviews had taken place.

Towards the end of my study period, I undertook additional interviews in the UK with two of the journalists I had interviewed initially. This was done with the intention of clarifying and triangulating my findings by taking them back to a sample of the original participants. Slightly different initial questions were asked, depending upon the information given at the first interviews. These second interviews were more informal than the first, more akin to structured conversations. Again, full voice recordings were made and material transcribed later. Second interviews did not take place in Sweden for practical reasons.

As well as interviews with journalists, I undertook an interview with an academic at Stockholm university who had been heavily involved in the research design and
implementation of PISA 2012. This interview was used largely to gain background material to help me understand the Swedish context of my research. At the same time, I interviewed a UK professor who was working at Stockholm University - this also offered the opportunity to learn more about how PISA was received in Sweden, as well as providing some comparative material with England.

In 2016, between interviewing journalists in the UK and Sweden, I visited the OECD in Paris and interviewed five key PISA staff there. The aims of these interviews were to discover how staff saw their role within the OECD; to gain an insight into the extent of the PISA operation, and to gain an understanding of how relations with the media were conducted. Details of these interviews appear in chapter 5.

Several authors, notably Walford (1994; 2012), but also, for example, Cookson (1994) and Fitz and Halpin (2013) have written about the issues of power imbalances in interviews between researchers and the powerful, or elite, in education and other settings. Walford suggests that

> powerful people may be resistant to answer questions fully even when they have allowed access, and may need to be persuaded to collaborate fully (2012, p. 113)

Walford notes the advice to researchers not to be intimidated by powerful interviewees, and suggests that interviewers need to be aware of the tendency to be 'fobbed off' with 'bland answers' (ibid.). Cookson notes that 'elites create a public conversation that sets the legitimate boundaries of discourse' (1994, p.116), which affects the type of questioning which can take place in a research interview. Penetrating large organisations which are responsible for setting these boundaries requires the interviewer to navigate potentially complex and unequal power
relationships; these can influence, for example, 'how explicit a researcher needs to be in terms of the perspective adopted for the research' (ibid., p.184). This is an aspect of my interviewing which was indeed potentially problematic, both within the OECD and in interviews with journalists. The identification of power, and who holds it and is able to exercise it, is not straightforward, however. Smith (2006) suggests that defining 'elites' and identifying those who hold power is neither unproblematic nor easy. She also points out that the assumption that

the power associated with people through their professional positions will transfer directly onto the interview space (i.e. that it is transferable across contexts because it is inscribed in particular individuals) (Smith, 2006, p.645)

is often misapplied, and understanding power within interview situations may not be a simple matter of taking for granted that a 'powerful' interviewee is exercising 'elite' power during a research interview. She calls for an understanding that each interview is different, context-specific, and 'cannot be generalised by labelling interviewees 'elites' (or not)' (p. 648). Walford also acknowledges that

Interestingly, throughout the literature, on researching the powerful in education, there are indications that the differences between it and many other forms of research are not substantial (Walford, 2012, p. 115).

He notes that often, less powerful interviewees present just as many problems of access or willingness to participate as those deemed to be 'elite'. Access did, however, prove to be an issue when I attempted to interview two powerful actors, Michael Gove and Andreas Schleicher (see below); but the power dynamics did not strongly affect interview situations once they took place, apart from with one UK journalist whom I interviewed, and one member of OECD staff who subsequently
withdrew permission for me to use material gained at interview. On the contrary, several of the journalists I spoke to commented that they admired (one used the term 'in awe of') the undertaking of such research, and two suggested to me that they were nervous, as it was usually they who carried out the interviews. One expressed concern that I would 'know more than I do about PISA'. Another journalist clearly had a negative view of both academics in general, and specifically of the institution I was studying at, and made these views clear at several points during the interview, which did make the atmosphere a little uncomfortable. Whether his desire to speak about his views in an unrelated interview was a manifestation of feelings of power was not clear; it affected the interview only in the sense that no real rapport was established, unlike in the other interviews I carried out. The material obtained was still valuable in helping to inform the analysis undertaken in chapter 8. The other interview which was undoubtedly affected by power dynamics was that undertaken with Andreas Schleicher. Walford's point that 'their familiarity with being listened to means that some may 'just talk' and not answer the questions asked'(2012, p. 113) was at play, and I did have to press Schleicher for answers beyond the familiar 'soundbites'. The main issue with Schleicher proved more to be one of access, as several arrangements to meet were cancelled or failed to take place because of other, higher profile and more pressing, engagements. An attempt to interview Michael Gove, then UK Secretary of State for Education, was also unsuccessful despite his shaking hands in person on an agreement to allow me to interview him. This latter event directly supports Walford's assertion that:

Almost by definition, those who are powerful have considerable ability to stop research being conducted on their activities. Access to any research site is rarely easy, but it is argued that trying to gain an interview with the Secretary of State for Education, for example, presents particular problems (2012, p. 112).
The refusal to be interviewed came in the form of an email from Gove's Personal Secretary, and is reproduced here to illustrate the issues around power which it illustrates:

Dear Ms. Grey,

Michael Gove has asked me to thank you for your emails and to apologise for the delay in replying to you. Unfortunately, owing to the huge pressures on his diary, he is unable to take up your kind offer after all.

He is very sorry and sends his sincere apologies and thanks and hopes you will understand.

Kind regards,

Firstly, the email was sent by a member of staff, despite Gove having given me (in person) an email address which he assured me was personal. Secondly, my request to interview him was re-worked into 'your kind offer', which suggests a 'cut and paste' response, or a deliberate attempt to frame the interview as something else. The word 'thanks' in the following line suggests the first, namely, that a reply to anyone inviting Gove to an event he was unable to attend would receive a version of this email. It is notable that I had sent several unanswered emails before receiving this response, after meeting Gove serendipitously at an event where he was speaking about, ironically perhaps, the decline in manners in modern society (Cheltenham Literature Festival, 2016). From my own experience, therefore, I would tentatively suggest that my interviews themselves were no more affected by unequal or difficult power relationships than any other set of interviews carried out for social research purposes (which is not to say that they were unaffected). The two more powerful individuals in my sample presented access problems, with one, arguably
the most powerful, shutting down the possibility of interviewing him. A member of OECD staff who initially agreed to interview before withdrawing support and asking for all material to be deleted had, it transpired, personal historical reasons for being unwilling to have their words recorded in any form, and which go beyond the remit of this thesis.

Analysis

Approaches to Analysis

As mentioned above, the approaches to analysing the material collected were common to all the data, regardless of type. Scholars in the fields of MMDA and CDA (see below) prefer to use the term 'approach' rather than 'method' or 'technique' in recognition of the fact that the understanding of language cannot be reduced to applying methods which will offer reliable and universal explanations as to what an item of text 'means'. Two assumptions underlie all the analysis undertaken in the thesis, and are common to the approaches I have used to interrogate my data. The first is that language is more than just words, and this explains my choice of the word 'text' to describe my data; and it also casts light on the decisions I took regarding the best ways to seek meaning in my data. This section outlines those decisions and the logic behind them. The second assumption is that language is an expression of ideology. 'Ideology involves a systematically organised presentation of reality' (Hodge and Kress, 1993, p.15), the means for the operationalisation of which are provided by linguistic and semiotic tools. Kuo and Nakamura state that:

there is a determinant relation between ideological processes and linguistic processes, and more specifically, that the linguistic choices that are made in texts can carry ideological meaning (2004, p.393)
Kress is explicit on the inter-relationship between text and ideology:

That leaves a question about two other terms: ideology and text. I use the former as the name for the specific configuration of discourses present in any one text. Text, in my approach, is the material site of emergence of immaterial discourse(s). (Kress, 2013, p. 36)

In any social interaction, there are transformations performed by linguistic or semiotic tools, for example, by using passive rather than active verbs, which remove agency; by rhetorical devices, such as direct appeals to a reader; by semiotic tools such as colour or moving image; by body language; and by what Williams (1986) and Holborow (2012) call 'keywords' which see meanings as ideologically constructed, and certain keywords as shaping ideological discourses. For example, one such 'keyword' explored by Holborow in her study into neoliberal keywords is 'human capital'; which, she states, involves 'a compact re-semanticisation which achieves an ideological leap from the social to the individual' (Holborow, 2012, p.49). These tools and devices are explored, with others, in the analysis undertaken in chapters 5-8.

**Analysing Language: Approaches Used in Thesis**

Determining the way a phenomenon is linguistically represented has repercussions for politically essential questions such as Who is responsible? What can be done? What should be done? (Hajer, 1993 p.45)

The study of language use is a huge and diverse field, and the social researcher has a bewildering array of linguistic theories and methods from which to choose
when undertaking an analysis based on language use. The range and variety of data collected for my study required me to gain a deep understanding of the tools at my disposal to enable me to make the best use of my data and ensure that I was not misunderstanding or misrepresenting it. A section on multimodal discourse analysis (MMDA), which forms the main approach to the interrogation of my data, appears in this section. MMDA is concerned with the expressions of power and knowledge which are expressed through language. At the heart of MMDA is the term 'mode', from which the 'multimodal' is derived. 'Mode' refers to types of linguistic or semiotic text: for example, speech, writing, video, image, gesture. An understanding of modes of text is fundamental to the decisions taken around analysis as it allows a range of critical techniques to be used. Before this, however, it is necessary to outline clearly what is meant by both 'narrative' and 'discourse' as these are key concepts in the deconstruction of text which follows in the analysis chapters of the thesis.

**Narrative**

Taking as a starting point the distinction between narrative and discourse is helpful when arriving at an appropriate way of approaching the study of text. Chatman distinguishes narrative and discourse in terms of 'a what and a way. The what of narrative I call its “story”, the way I call its discourse' (1980, p.9). There is an emphasis on the content of the text, what is said, the “told' rather than the ‘telling” (Riessman, 1993, p.2). Kress, however (personal discussion) believes that the discourse is the 'what' and the narrative the 'how' of a story, or a text. For the purposes of my thesis, I tend towards Kress's interpretation, because it lends itself easily to the idea of discourse as ideology, or as an expression of ideology, as Van Dijk asserts:
among the many forms of reproduction and interaction, discourse plays a prominent role as the preferential site for the explicit, verbal formulation and the persuasive communication of ideological propositions. (2005, p.58)

Narrative, however, is also hugely important in my thesis, and regardless of whether it is considered to be the 'what' or the 'how', an understanding of narrative, of the stories told around PISA, is central to the analysis of my data. News stories, which form much of the material selected for analysis, are essentially narratives, and there is a strong link between the features of a news story and the traditional features of narrative. This section, therefore, deals in detail with the analysis of narrative.

The term 'narrative' is derived from the Latin narrare, meaning 'to tell'; the primary function of narrative is to convey information. Narrative is far more than this, however; it is a way of presenting information in terms of a sequence of events, with a beginning, a middle and an end. This does not necessarily imply linearity - though many narratives are structured this way - but it does imply a relationship between the events and between the characters involved in those events. Narrative analysis arises from the apparently universal human tendency to recount events in the form of 'stories' - usually told in the past tense, often in sequential or chronological order and tending to include common elements (opening, plot, characterisation, themes, 'moral'). Central to narrative theory is the concept of diegesis, which is a way of separating the 'narrative world' from material outside the text. The term originates in Ancient Greek (diegeisthai - literally “to lead or guide through”) and is found in the works of both Plato and Aristotle to describe plots which rely on the explanation of a story to an audience or reader. This explanation most often takes place via a narrator, either actual or implied, who guides the audience through the events depicted in the work. Nowadays the term is perhaps most often applied to film.
Diegesis uses techniques which help to establish and maintain a relationship between the narrative and the audience; simply put, characters within a narrative are able only to access diegetic material ('inside' the world created) while the audience is able to 'stand outside' the narrative, via the standpoint of the narrator, and understand more of its events and messages than those within. Closely allied to diegesis is the idea of a narrative voice - of someone 'telling' the events, either overtly or as an underlying voice within a text. The narrative voice may provide a 'commentary' on events occurring within the work, offering insights into the motivations and thoughts of those directly involved in the action. Other devices, either temporal or stylistic, help to maintain a relationship between those inside a narrative and those who are receiving it (the audience). Modern methods of narrative analysis recognise the concept of diegesis and can be helpful in helping to understand the construction of stories seen in the media, where journalists assume the role of narrator: seeing events from 'outside', guiding an audience through them, offering commentary and helping the audience to understand 'what this means'. The role of journalist as storyteller, or commentator, not only reporting what might be termed 'facts', but also explaining the significance of those 'facts' to audiences, is an important one which imposes responsibilities as well as restrictions on those media actors who report 'news'.

Conflict and resolution are common themes in many narratives and the work of prominent scholars in the field of narrative analysis has focused on these elements, seeking to theorise and explain the role of binary tension in narrative. Todorov (1969) proposed a theory of structural analysis based on conflict/dispute and resolution/punishment and Levi-Strauss (Burridge, 1968), using myth as a basis for analysis, was one of the first to use binary oppositions to consider themes within a narrative. At the basic level, good versus evil, hero versus villain and rescue versus
endanger, for example, form the heart of many traditional narratives, and many of these polarities are still prominent today, both in fiction and non-fiction texts. In media studies, the portrayal of good and evil tends to be centred around ideological lines, while heroes and villains come from opposing sides of an argument and are defined according to a set of constructs already internalised by both author and audience. It will be seen later in my thesis that such simple distinctions form the basis for many of the concepts in media logic (see chapter 3), and which clearly appeal to the atavistic expectation of an audience to understand a narrative in familiar terms in order to understand their own position within it. Jones and McBeth argue that narrative is an essential tool by which individuals understand and interpret their world, even being ‘fundamental to a meaningful human existence’ (Jones and McBeth, 2010, p. 330). Neuroscientific studies have noted that brain injured persons who lose the ability to use narrative are robbed of their ability to make sense of the world, and the ability to organise narrative is increasingly used as a predictor of deficit after brain injury, surgery or because of dementia and other degenerative conditions (Biddle et al., 1996; Ash et al., 2011; Ash et al., 2014). It has been said that brain injured persons who have ‘lost the ability to construct narrative…have lost their selves’ (Young and Saver, 2001, p.72). Narrative is key to identity, and as such, its potential for exerting a powerful and literal influence on the hearts and minds of individuals is hard to overestimate.

While there are differences in the way researchers interpret the idea, the focus of narrative analysis is always on the content. As Feldman et al. (2004) point out, the terms ‘story’ and ‘narrative’ are often used interchangeably, invoking as they do common features like plot, chronological sequencing and thematic ordering of events. This apparent interchangeability may lead to inaccuracies, however, and is not helpful when carrying out detailed narrative analysis. There are
narratives that are not stories but are more encompassing. We understand the encompassing narrative to be the grand conception that entertains several themes over a period of time (Feldman et al., 2004, p.149).

Lacey (2000), sees story in terms of plot, or rather, in terms of what plot is not. Plot may be the series of events conveyed in a film or book, for example; while story may encompass elements which predate or postdate the plot, or which are needed to reach a full understanding of the plot. The story is a more rounded and complete version of events than simply the plot. It contains elements which can be inferred or deduced from the unfolding of the plot, and without which the plot might not make sense. Stories must always be chronologically constructed otherwise they would be judged to violate the rules of our universe; they would destroy the rules of logical causality which define narrative. (Lacey, 2000, p.18).

A plot may not be chronologically arranged as there may be other elements - to do with narrative conventions of style, for example, or character, or theme, which dictate that a plot will not unfold in a temporally linear manner. So, while the term 'story' is a key one in the field of narrative analysis, it is also centrally important in a thesis about the media, as the word has its own meaning in media logic, and in the definition of 'news' stories.

Narrative theory is relevant to my thesis in two areas: in the policy arena and in the media. In the policy field, there is a literature on policy narratives which use storytelling strategies to attempt to further policy agendas in public space. Resonating as it does in human history, through myth, religious scripture and folklore, as well as within the human brain itself, narrative has the tools to be powerfully
persuasive in social and political arenas. Stone (1989) recognised the potential of narrative to help construct policy agendas by transforming events from accidents or acts of fate into problems which are amenable to human intervention. The creation of causal stories allows political actors to apportion blame, propose solutions and maintain their positions of power, often by shifting responsibility to others ('villains') and weakening the position of those who may be portrayed as 'victims' and who thus lack power to assert their rights.

Much of the work on policy narratives has been qualitative, poststructuralist and critical of modern 'evidence-based' policymaking. Examples include Hajer's (1993) work on discourse coalitions, and the work of Dodge et al. (2005) on narrative in public policy administration. Jones and McBeth (2010), however, attempted to devise a framework for analysing policy narratives, at its heart acknowledging the fundamental tension between positivist/structuralist policy initiatives based on 'evidence' and post-positivist/poststructuralist critiques of that approach. Their approach to narrative analysis is essentially positivistic, seeking to produce testable hypotheses against which the likelihood of an individual being persuaded by a narrative can be measured using four discrete variables. These variables include the trustworthiness of the narrator, perceptions of who is ‘winning’ or ‘losing’ a policy narrative and congruence with an individual’s life experiences.

Narrative theory has also been a recognised approach to the analysis of media texts (including broadcast media). ‘Journalists do not write articles. They write stories…[they] are the professional storytellers of our age’, (Bell, 2005, p.397). The work of journalists is ‘an entanglement of narrative, authority, and rhetorical legitimation’ (Zelizer, 1990, p.367) and decisions taken by journalists - who to speak to, which sources to use, as well as how to write the material - form the basis for
creating ‘stories’ in the media. Coverage of political and education issues tends to fall into the realm of ‘news’ (rather than light entertainment, say, or sport), where the term ‘story’ is the default one to describe items of media text, be they printed or broadcast. The interaction of journalists and information using narrative strategies creates ‘news’ (Fulton et al., 2005), and helps to position material within the realm of ‘common sense’, thereby reinforcing dominant ideological and power structures within a society, while at the same time appearing to be ‘neutral’ and ‘objective’. News stories have a structure which is not typical of other types of narrative, for example folk tales, myths and novels, but which retains many of their features. The ‘inverted pyramid’ of news, which allows the resolution of the story to be stated at the beginning, with details following in inverse order to their relevance to the ‘plot’, was initially an editorial tool, allowing stories to be ‘cropped’ from the bottom, if space did not permit (Pöttker, 2003). This structure has now, however, come to be a defining feature of news narrative, with a headline, a standfirst, and details below. Study of media items for their narrative content acknowledges the primary importance of the headline in speaking to an audience, some of whom will not read any further into the inverted pyramid and thus will miss more subtle or nuanced details of a story.

White (1997) speaks of the ‘narrative impulse’, based on ‘social order disruption’ (p. 3) driving news stories by helping to define newsworthiness. Thus, a narrative around falling standards in schools is a ‘normative breach’, or ‘moral breach’, ‘which [is] seen to threaten society’s sense of duty or propriety’ (p.4). There is a close relationship between policy and media narratives, to the extent that they may become indistinguishable, helping to form an ‘Advocacy Coalition’, (Sabatier,1988; Shanahan, McBeth and Hathaway, 2011) through the use of narrative strategies aimed at influencing public opinion. Viewing narrative in this way also opens up the
possibilities for the study of counter-narratives – ‘alternatives that run counter to hegemonic ideologies’ (Bamberg, 2004, p.352), something which is closely allied to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA - see below).

As well as the narrative features found in the structure of a news item, other aspects of narrative theory can be employed to analyse news stories. Key to this is the idea of angle, by which the ‘plot’ is ordered and certain aspects of a story are privileged to make it appeal to an audience. Here there is an overlap between the study of narrative, discourse and media logic, a key term which has come to embody the set of values and norms by which the media operate within a democratic society.

**Discourse**

As mentioned above, the term ‘discourse’ is less easy to define than its partner term, narrative, and in the field of social sciences this term has been used and defined in many ways – from the simple ‘anything…you read or hear’ (Young and Fitzgerald, 2006, p.7) to the almost completely impenetrable – ‘Discourse is a never-completed fixation process that takes place through articulation within a field of discursivity with drifting relations’ (Laclau, quote in Andersen, 2003, p.vi). Bryman’s definition is perhaps the most accessible, while at the same time capturing the essence of discourse as:

…an interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception, that brings an object into being…In other words, social reality is produced and made real through discourses, and social interactions cannot be fully understood without reference to the discourses that give them meaning. (Bryman, 2012, p.536)
Kress's words are also helpful in understanding the relationship of discourse to the social world:

Discourse' refers to ‘institutions’ and the knowledge they produce about the world…Discourse shapes and names the routes through which we (have come to) know the socially shaped world as one kind of knowledge. (Kress, 2011, p.110)

A distinction can be made between discourse as an abstract noun and discourses as what Zotzmann and O'Regan (2015) call ‘a countable noun’. Discourse, they say, consists of the ‘variety of existing linguistic and other semiotic resources’ (p.4) which actors use to make meaning (the discourse), while discourses involve the ‘use of language in particular domains or from different perspectives (e.g. ‘media discourse’, ‘neoliberal discourse’)’ (p.4). Discourse is an important concept in my thesis - the policy, media, public and OECD discourses around PISA have come to form a type of governance mechanism which is enacted in very 'real' ways on the social sphere of many nations. My methods draw on aspects of both the discourse and the narrative, or rather, the discourses and the narratives, around PISA. Stories created from PISA take many shapes, depending on who is telling them, when and where. But the how is of central importance here too - the ways of presenting and interpreting those stories are at least as relevant to my thesis as the stories themselves.

Fundamental to the application of discourse analysis to my work is the constructivist nature of ‘news’, which assumes that there are no ‘facts’ to be conveyed, by any of the protagonists I am studying: the OECD, politicians and the media. In a parallel with the 1952 Japanese film ‘Rashomon’, there is a disjuncture between the narratives offered by these three actors describing the same event - the release of PISA data (Grey and Morris, 2018). They all apply a distorting, or transforming,
prism to the body of data, which affects how it is seen in social space. While all three are creating their own narratives in line with their own agendas, the means of doing so, the discourse, is critically important and fundamentally bound with the power relationships expressed through the data and its portrayal. Thus, the rest of this section will focus on methods for analysing discourse, with special emphasis on those which I employ.

**Discourse Analysis**

Silverman (2006) describes discourse analysis (DA) as ‘the study of the rhetorical and argumentative organisation of talk and texts’ (2006, p.401). Carvalho expands this:

The main assumption of discourse analysis is that the work of deconstruction and reconstruction of texts can give important indications about issues like the intentions of the author of a text or utterance, politically dominant ideologies, or the potential impact of an advertisement on a certain audience. (Carvalho, 2000, p.3).

DA concentrates on the use of language to help define and frame the way an object or idea is seen; ‘the ways of depicting it frame the way we comprehend that object. The discourse forms a version of it’ (Silverman, 2006, p.528). The dominant model of DA in social science research, following the work of Gilbert and Mulkay (1990) in the field of scientific writing, and Potter and Wetherell, whose focus shifted towards the ideas of what they call ‘continental social philosophy and cultural analysis’ (1994, p.47), is of seeing language as a form of social practice: ‘...the discourse analyst is after the answers to social or sociological questions rather than to linguistic ones’ (ibid., p.48). Bryman describes DA as anti-realist and constructionist, in that it ‘denies that there is an external reality awaiting portrayal’ and that it ‘implies
a recognition that discourse entails a selection from many viable renditions and that in the process a particular depiction of reality is built up’ (Bryman, 2012, p.529). DA techniques require that the order of the words, the use of individual words and the themes chosen for mention and emphasis are analysed in what is often called ‘constructionism’ - a way of seeing language as a means of ‘constructing’ phenomena rather than merely describing or interpreting them. Gill (2000) suggests four ‘key features’ of DA; ‘a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge’; an insight into the ways in which we understand the world relative to our cultural and historic heritage; ‘a conviction that knowledge is socially constructed’ (p. 173) and a commitment to exploring language as a social construction, which is the starting point for the related field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Recognising the key role of language in framing discourse, as opposed to seeing language merely as a ‘vehicle’ for conveying meaning, is the first step in finding an appropriate method for analysing text.

Discourse analysis has resonances in the philosophical field of hermeneutics, particularly those developed by Dilthey (1976), whose work helped to raise classical hermeneutic theory to the status of a general epistemology which could be used in the social sciences not just to explain phenomena, but to understand them. Later hermeneutical developments placed less emphasis on the intention of the author and more on the interplay between the author and the reader – the work of Heidegger, and later Gadamer, develops this concept of interpretation.

The goal of a hermeneutic approach is to seek understanding, rather than to offer explanation or to provide an authoritative reading or conceptual analysis of a text…the task of hermeneutics is not to develop a procedure of understanding, but rather to clarify the interpretive conditions in which understanding takes place. (Kinsella, 2006, p. 4)
For hermeneutics, however, there is less emphasis on language than in discourse analysis, and language is seen as ‘both a condition and a limitation’ (ibid., p.6) of interpretation. Gadamer, for example, argued that for interpretation to take place, texts must be translated into the mother tongue of the researcher (Piecychna, 2012). As I will explain later, I take a different view and will analyse the Swedish material I use in its original form.

**Critical Discourse Analysis**

An approach I draw on for my data analysis is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In common with other forms of critical social research, CDA looks to ‘challenge taken-for-granted norms and aims to expose structures of power and domination’ (University of Strathclyde website, 2015). Critical theory, originally conceptualised by the Frankfurt School and founded in Marxist theory, is aimed at critiquing and changing society by challenging the underlying assumptions upon which social life is founded. Fairclough, a leading figure in the field, explains that CDA is rooted in:

…a tradition of critical social research which is focused on better understanding of how and why contemporary capitalism prevents or limits, as well as in certain respects facilitating, human well-being and flourishing. Such understanding may, in favourable circumstances, contribute to overcoming or at least mitigating these obstacles and limits (2010, p.2)

CDA ‘s aim is to deconstruct and challenge ‘opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language’ (Wodak and Meyer, 2009). While there are several different ‘strands’ in the field (the discourse-historical (Wodak); the dialectical-relational (Fairclough) and the social semiotic / multimodal (Kress), there is a shared assumption that a
A combination of textual analysis (grammar, vocabulary etc.) combined with a socio-political critical angle, will be applied to material for analysis. Weiss and Wodak (2003) stress the importance of developing:

conceptual tools capable of connecting the level of text or discourse analysis with sociological positions on institutions, actions and social structures (p.8).

Zotzmann and O'Regan (2015) claim CDA is ‘neither constituted by a homogeneous theoretical framework, nor by a set of fixed methodological tools’ (p.3) and that a researcher must tailor the conceptual framework as well as the precise methodology to the individual project. This flexibility to operate within a broad critical field while retaining academic rigour is particularly suitable for this study, which is entering relatively uncharted territory in attempting to critique the discourses of several powerful actors around one form of educational governance. The observations I make about my data take a critical view in that I focus on issues of power: how it is exercised by the actors in the thesis - PISA, journalists, policymakers. This involves not only looking at what is said, but how it is said, by whom and to whom. This type of analysis does not just look at the words used in a text, but at the intentions of the speaker or writer in selecting those words, and the (likely and actual) response of those receiving the text. Seeing all acts of communication as manifestations of dominant power relationships, as Fairclough does, helps to explain why CDA analysts believe that the way language is used ‘merits the attention of all citizens’ (Fairclough, 1989, p. 3). The OECD is a capitalist organisation, first and foremost, and developing an understanding of how it exercises its power through language is an essential basis for attempting an understanding of its governance role. Kress and Van Leeuwen explain that CDA:
seeks to show how language is used to convey power and status in contemporary social interaction, and how the apparently neutral, purely informative (linguistic) texts which emerge in newspaper reporting, government publications, social science reports, and so on, realize, articulate and disseminate ‘discourses’ as ideological positions just as much as do texts which more explicitly editorialize or propagandize (1996, p. 14).

**Multimodal Discourse Analysis**

Multimodal discourse analysis (MMDA) is the term for a range of analytical approaches allied to CDA, and which go beyond the linguistic analysis of text to look also at image, body language, music, gesture, colour - ‘signs’, which make meaning. It retains the ‘critical’ aspect of CDA and offers the researcher tools to analyse social interactions beyond the words used. Kress charts what he calls ‘the explosive interest in multimodality over the last decade or so’ (2011, p.5), citing both globalisation and technological changes as important factors in the study of language beyond script. He sees the study of semiotic messages across many domains of media as integrally connected with political and cultural issues and relations of power and dominance: ‘…current social and economic conditions are paralleled by and characteristic of features of the contemporary media landscape’ (ibid., p.21). Underlying MMDA is the idea that:

Visual communication is always coded. It seems transparent only because we know the code already, at least implicitly – but without knowing what it is we know, without having the means for talking about what it is we do when we read an image (Kress and Leeuwen, 1996, p. 32-3)

MMDA seeks to ‘decode’ signs and symbols, to help unpick the underlying messages within them, and the 'transactional relationships' (ibid, p. 49) which
determine 'meaning' in a social interaction. Like CDA, it is a critical approach which aims to understand and critique the power dynamics which are at play in communication events.

MMDA looks at 'modes' of communication through which meaning can be communicated and construed. As Iedema (2003) explains, not only do these modes compliment language use, they are increasingly coming to replace it, or, as he asserts, displace it, as tasks traditionally performed by written language are subsumed by sound and image. Examples of modes of communication are 'image, writing, layout, music, gesture, speech, moving image, soundtrack and 3D objects' (Kress, 2009, p. 79). All these modes have the potential for making meaning; and the ways in which they do this rely both on those who produce the texts (Kress uses the word 'make') and those who receive, or 'use' them:

modes are the product jointly of the potentials inherent in the material and of a culture’s selection from the bundle of aspects of these potentials and the shaping over time by (members of) a society of the features selected. (ibid, p.80-81)

The analysis of modes is combined with an analysis of grammar, which is seen in terms of something 'which can be contravened' (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2002, p.346). Looking at the grammar of a social interaction is fundamental to understanding the relationships within that interaction. A key example of this approach is the analysis of transitivity, a grammatical concept which ascribes agency to a verb, in its most basic form, but later to be developed by Halliday (2009) as a way of critiquing social interactions:

… it creates specific relations between 'participants', that is, between represented people, places, things and ideas; for instance, by
representing one participant as the actor of an action and another as one to whom or which the action is done. (ibid, p.346).

Analysis of grammar is only one aspect of MMDA, and signs such as pictures, colour, gesture and moving image are also subject to analysis. This reflects the simple fact that ‘discourse is inherently multimodal, not monomodal’ (Scollon and LeVine, 2004, p.3). Van Leeuwen (2005) implores researchers to pay attention to visual, as well as verbal communication – ‘perhaps speech acts should be renamed communicative acts and understood as multimodal microevents in which all the signs present combine to determine its communicative intent’ (p.121). Bateman talks of ‘discourse moves’, which ‘serve to advance the communicative goals pursued by a speaker or writer’ (2014, p.205). Multimodal accounts, he asserts, ‘consider whether particular proposals for discourse organisation can be extended by images taking on some of the roles of discourse moves’ (ibid.). Bateman outlines two frameworks for multimodal analysis, one of which, based on Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST) – a way of analysing communicative ‘effectiveness’ which uses a hierarchical analysis of 25 rhetorical relations - for example justification, motivation, elaboration, to assess communicative effect – helps to inform the techniques I use in my analysis.

As well as text and image, the role of gesture and the body in general also has a place in MMDA. This is particularly relevant in my analysis of press conferences and other video material. Ruthrof (2015) boldly states that ‘there is no meaning in language’ (p.22). There has been, he says, ‘a tendency to overestimate the role of ‘linguistic definition’ in language’ (p.6) and calls for a ‘corporeal turn’ to recognise ‘the linkage between language and our nonverbal construals [which] is at the heart of meaning’ (p.21). Closely allied to this is the premise that language, including body language, is culturally and socially constructed, and that without foundation in
'community', language is nothing more than 'empty signifiers' (p.25). This aspect adds to the complexity of the type of analysis I undertake, especially when dealing with material not in my own mother tongue, nor indeed what might be termed my 'mother community' in this context. My approach for using translated material is described below.

MMDA, as Kress pointed out (personal meeting) depends on understanding linguistic and semiotic interactions in terms of the *remaking* of text. Text is the entity around which the producer and the audience engage - and this engagement is what transforms it. Communication occurs when this transformation has taken place. The PISA data analysed in the coming chapters is remade, *transformed*, by the interactions which occur between the producers of that data, whether we are talking about the *primary* producers (the OECD) or the *secondary* producers in the media. The prisms which shape the data as it enters social space are essentially the transforming agents which are applied at the moment of engagement. The essential appeal of MMDA for my work is that it allows all my data to be treated as equivalent, and to be analysed using the same theoretical approaches. As Kress states:

The point of a multimodal approach is to get beyond approaches where mode was integrally linked, often in a mutually defining way, with a theory and a discipline. In such approaches writing was dealt with by linguistics; image by art history; and so on. In a multimodal approach, all modes are framed as one field, as one domain. Jointly they are treated as one connected cultural resource for (representation as) meaning-making by members of a social group at a particular moment (Kress, 2013, p. 38).

Thus, the analysis of data in the following chapters assumes that all material is text; that through it there may be expressions of ideology; and that a critical analysis of tools such as grammar, word choice, image and gesture helps to reveal the
transmission and transformation of text between producer and recipient (audience) at the moment of communication.

Translation

At this stage I feel it necessary to make explicit my approach to using material which is in Swedish. While I am a reasonably fluent reader of Swedish, it is not my mother tongue. Birbili (2000), states that decisions taken with regard to translating material ‘have a direct impact upon the validity of the research and its report’ (p.1) and calls for researchers to describe their ‘choices and decisions, translation procedures and the resources used’ (ibid.). Temple and Young (2004) suggest that ‘centring’ translation, or making its techniques and agents explicit, is important in cross-language research and that issues of representation should be openly addressed. On the positive side, they suggest that ‘the situation where the researcher is fluent in the language of communities she is working with is rare. It offers opportunities in terms of research methods which are not open to other researchers in cross language research’ (p.168). The difficulties of representing in my research ideas and values which originate in Swedish are twofold: firstly there is the purely linguistic aspect – for example, as Filep explains:

Many words and phrases that exist in one language do not have an exact equivalent in another. Therefore we have to find a solution for translating these expressions and concepts in a way that their meanings do not get “lost by translation” (Filep, 2009, p.59).

Secondly, there is the potentially more complex issue of culture – a shared set of values, traditions and even feelings, which impact on the structure of a language and its use by those to whom its use is instinctive rather than learned. Al-Saadi (2015) notes:
…the words and expressions we use carry within them a set of assumptions, feelings, values and connotations which are unique to our culture and may either not exist in the target language and culture or several meanings can be assigned to them... (p.2).

Al-Saadi describes finding a ‘conceptual equivalence’ in the target language, in order to capture the ‘essential meaning of the source language’ (p.3). Translation, then, does not simply require the researcher to use a dictionary and render words from one language into another. Awareness of, and attempts to convey, the cultural assumptions implicit in a text or conversation, are central factors in undertaking qualitative social research using data in a ‘foreign’ language. The role of translator as cultural mediator is recognised (Petcu, 2009; Bedeker and Feinauer, 2006), and those engaged in translation need to be aware of their role not only in terms of trying to represent words in the target language, but also of trying to convey the meaning of those words to those who speak or write them, with all the cultural and social connotations which that implies. To ‘produce texts that function as communicative instruments in the target cultures’ (Bedeker and Feinauer, 2006, p. 133), the translator needs to be aware of her role as a potential agent of power (Fawcett, 1995; Tymoczko and Gentzler, 2002; Petcu, 2007).

In my analysis of Swedish data (and in this, I include material in which Swedish native speakers are using English), I am aware of issues around national identity, as well as the more obvious linguistic and semantic ones. As well as making explicit these difficulties, I supported my findings by discussing them with Swedish native speakers. For example, I discussed in some detail the use of the Swedish word ‘katastrof’ (catastrophe) with two Swedish participants in my research. This is especially vital when the study of language and its use forms such a fundamental part of my work.
Limitations and Omissions

A limitation of my study is that I have chosen to base my analysis in the world of the mass media, rather than the newer, more fluid and dynamic digital environment of social media. This decision was taken for several reasons, which I attempt to explain in this section.

The rise of social media, and the ‘new world order’ arising from it, have reduced linearity in news production and allowed ‘us all to be journalists now’ (multiple sources). With the explosive rise in access to online platforms, it is easy for non-media actors to make news texts; for non-policy actors to make policy proposals; and for stories to be deleted, modified, shared and corrupted an infinite number of times across platforms and across national boundaries. I took the decision early in the research process not to engage with social media beyond that which is used by journalists and the OECD, the key actors in my research. This is not only for practical reasons: engaging with the world of social media to detect messages and ‘trends’ about PISA would have been logistically impossible for a single researcher. Moreover, through my engagement with social media platforms (Twitter and Facebook), on which I followed journalists and key policy and OECD actors for the course of my research, it became clear that a type of linearity was indeed preserved, in that the origin of social media posts about PISA was almost universally the mass media or the OECD itself. Journalists ‘tweeted’ their own stories, or retweeted those of other journalists; and those who commented on posts generally based their comments on mainstream media items. It has been observed that top users by the number of followers in Twitter are mostly celebrities and mass media and most of them do not follow their followers back (Kwak et al., 2010, p.594). There is a lack of reciprocity on Twitter, and in the following of ‘celebrities’
and other high profile figures on Facebook. The BBC Education Facebook page has 332 000 followers but follows no-one itself; the education editor of the Guardian has 15 900 followers on Twitter but follows only 2100 others (data as of 6 June 2018). In other words, stories about PISA are unlikely to originate from ‘ordinary’ users of social media; so, while the dominance and unilateral nature of the mass media is disrupted in many settings by new media, in the case of my own study, such social media interaction as took place was largely initiated by ‘conventional’ media and policy actors. Comments were made by followers, but these were rarely answered or reciprocated by the original posters (i.e. the journalists and the OECD). In this sense, no ‘conversation’ took place, and the direction of communication was largely unilateral, rather like the way in which newspapers have ‘letters to the editor’ pages in which readers can comment on articles; but these are rarely, if ever, followed up by the journalists. That is not to say that ‘unseen’ discourses might have been being played out in non-mainstream media settings, but it is my view that the dominant discourses, with which my thesis is concerned, were visible to the methods I employed. Thus, as well as the time and physical/spatial boundaries applied when collating my data, and which are detailed above, an additional boundary was seen in terms of limiting engagement with the social media world.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the decisions I took about which data would be used in my analysis, and the approaches I used to inform that analysis. I have given an account of the sampling strategies used to delimit the data, and explained that all sources of data were subject to the same kind of analysis - rooted in CDA and MMDA - to preserve the integrity of conclusions drawn from, for example, the use of key terms, or of branding strategies observed across several modes of text. I have attempted to distinguish between narrative and discourse, using theory from both
fields, so that the construction of media stories can be seen in terms of narrative features, as well as the discourses which they help to create. The combination of close linguistic and semiotic analysis to understand the narrative and discourse features of the texts I studied complimented my theoretical media framework, allowing me to draw out the features.

In the following four chapters, the approaches outlined here are applied to a range of OECD and media texts (see above). A summary of the findings of my analysis, and its contributions to the literature, appears in the final chapter.
Chapter 5

PISA and the Media I: OECD Strategies

This chapter explores the relationship of the OECD with the media, and concentrates on the historical and current strategies used by the OECD to engage with the media on several levels. The aim of the chapter is to address RQ1: how has the OECD interacted with the media to project its PISA messages into public and policy spaces? The focus is on the operations of the OECD around PISA: what kind of messages are produced, and how are they projected into public space by the media? The chapter begins with an introduction to the involvement of the media in PISA, which dates to the now famous ‘PISA Schock’ in Germany in 2001. A detailed analysis of the materials used by PISA, including online and social media, print and online printed documents, broadcasts, videos and press conferences, then follows. Analysis of interview data collated during a visit to the OECD headquarters in Paris (see chapter 2) is also included in this chapter.

The methods used for the analysis sections use the framework of media theory outlined in chapter 3 to draw on elements of narrative and discourse theory and multimodal discourse analysis as a means of critiquing the influence of media logic on PISA data.

The theoretical framework for the analysis carried out in chapters 5-8 was outlined in chapter 3. The use of media theory, especially around media logic and mediatisation, underpins the analysis of both OECD and media texts. This analysis draws on elements of narrative and discourse theory, Multimodal Discourse Analysis and media logic, which were outlined in detail in chapter 4. The responses

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of media and policy actors are explored in chapters 6-8. The focus of this chapter is on the gradual mediatisation of the messages of PISA, especially on an organisational and visual level, and serves to demonstrate that PISA is now possesses the key attributes of a 'brand', sharing key features with commercially marketed brands. It explores the strategies adopted by the OECD to ensure the ongoing attention of the media, both by its interactions with media organisations and actors, and by the type of material produced.

Background to the Involvement of the Media in PISA

It is now taken for granted that the PISA results will be widely covered in the media in many nations, and this is true of both the countries in my study. The scope and nature of the media coverage has evolved over the two decades since PISA was first conceived, and represents a synergy between the material which the OECD releases around the programme, and the media responses to it in participating countries. To understand this action, it is necessary to look at a little of the history of media involvement in the early stages of PISA.

The PISA Schock

The 2000 PISA tests are most remembered now for the ‘PISA Schock’ felt in Germany when it performed poorly, challenging widely-held perceptions that it had an exemplary education system which others would be likely to want to emulate. The PISA Schock and the media reaction to it, and the response from Schleicher, have been key to shaping the interactions between the OECD and the media in the ensuing 17 years. Germany had declined to participate in ILSAs on ideological grounds until the TIMSS study of 1997; and the first OECD PISA study in 2000. Partly because of the long abstention, Germany was unprepared for the results of
the tests, which were disappointing. German schoolchildren performed slightly worse in literacy tests than the average, many did not demonstrate even basic competence in reading, Mathematics and science, and there were enormously unequal outcomes between both high and low attainers, and between social groups, with those from migrant backgrounds performing especially poorly. An extension study, PISA-E (Baumert, 2001), was commissioned after the results of the main study became known to policy-makers - this not only highlighted the poor overall performance identified by PISA, it also revealed wide disparities between performance in the federated Länder of the country. Reaction to the publication of the results was swift and intense:

Mit einem Paukenschlag wurde die bildungspolitische Debatte in Deutschland aus dem Dornrösenschlaf geweckt, in den sie Mitte der siebziger Jahre gefallen war. (Seitz, 2003, p. 2)

(With a thunderbolt the political debate around education was awoken from the Sleeping Beauty sleep into which it had fallen in the middle of the 1970s.)

Upon publication of the results in 2001, the press appeared quick to react to the poor performance, with a series of sensational and alarmist headlines and reports. The popular magazine *Spiegel* led with the headline ‘Sind deutsche Schüler doof?’ (Are German schoolchildren stupid?); The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reported that ‘ein katastrophales Zeugnis’ (a catastrophic [school] report) had been issued to the country’s young students; the President of the German Chamber of Industry and Commerce was quoted as saying ‘Schlimmer hätte es nicht kommen können’ (it could not have been worse). Television, radio and the online media devoted much

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1 Translations from German are the author’s own
time and effort to discussing, in varying degrees of depth, the reasons for such a ‘catastrophe’ and the potential solutions to the report that had left ‘das Volk der Dichter und Denker’ (the land of poets and thinkers) trailing behind less well-regarded rivals.

This media reaction did not arise spontaneously, however. Before the results were released, Andreas Schleicher had sought meetings with education ministers and officials in the various federated Länder of Germany, to try to forewarn them of the poor forthcoming results and advise them on improvements he felt were necessary. These meetings were apparently disappointing for Schleicher, and led him to an important decision:

I realised this is really the wrong strategy...going top down, going to the people in charge isn’t going to change the system. And I actually changed strategy and thought, I’m going to go to work with the media, go to work with other people, and that has created a public demand for better education... (Schleicher, 2015).

Schleicher calls this moment ‘the end of complacency’ (Schleicher, 2018 p.20), which ‘dominated the news’ for months (ibid., p.21). Once the media became involved, the profile of PISA in the public domain was sufficient to generate immediate action from the federated states of Germany and led to a series of central initiatives aimed at addressing weaknesses identified by the assessments. The Standing Conference of Education Ministers of the federal states in Germany (Kultusministerkonferenz [KMK]) issued a list of seven target areas for reform on the day the results were published (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, 2003). These were to focus on a wide range of issues, from improvements in language capabilities, better primary education and the dovetailing of primary and secondary schooling, to the very new (for Germany) Qualitätssicherung durch
verbindliche Standards und Evaluation (Quality assurance through compulsory standards and evaluation). Further reforms followed, after the commissioning of a state committee and while critics are divided as to what extent PISA was a catalyst for effective reform (Waldow, 2009; Tillmann et al., 2008), the reaction encouraged Schleicher to further pursue the strategy of engagement with the media. This heralded a change in the way that the OECD chose to present its PISA messages to the global education community, and it can be clearly seen in the development of materials by the OECD press department that speaking to and working with the media is now the top priority for representatives of the programme. The following sections will firstly introduce the increasing range of materials developed by the OECD to project the messages of PISA into the public domain, and then explore the ways in which PISA publicity materials have changed over time, increasing their similarity with, and appeal to, other media publications. The increased sophistication of PISA reports is reflected in use of colour and design, making them visually more appealing to a wider audience and allowing the development of a distinctive PISA ‘brand’ which is now instantly recognisable. The sections below begin with an outline of the printed and online materials used in every round of PISA, and then focus on the differences and developments seen over time, to the present day. The analysis focuses heavily on the presentation and style of the reports, with particular emphasis on how they demonstrate an increasing engagement with the rules and norms of the media. Because of the vast amount of material included in the documents and presentations, there is less emphasis on the contents of the texts, though the analysis highlights the key areas privileged in media interactions.
Getting the message across

The early rounds of PISA: 2000-2006

The first round of PISA took place in 2000, with 32 countries, 28 of them OECD members, participating. The results were reported in a single, 317-page report with a 5-page annex, which was available in 5 languages: English, French, German, Portuguese and Spanish. This report, in print format, was the main publication attached to the first round of results, though it is now easily available online at the OECD website. A second publication, the Executive summary, was issued in 2003 as a joint venture with the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. This was in response to the late administration of PISA 2000 to a further 15 participant countries, which had apparently been drawn to participate by the response to the first report. Both reports consist mainly of text, with some diagrams and figures, but lacking in colour, and, notably, without the now customary 'league table' format which has become familiar to later readers of PISA materials. Figure 5.1 shows a typical page from each report.

The dry and descriptive language seen in these early reports, along with the use of long paragraphs of text, suggests that the target audience was unlikely to be found in the media. While the 'flagging' of key points in margins alongside the text in the first report is designed to facilitate ease of reading, it is likely to have been inserted for use by politicians and policymakers rather than journalists. Several other publications, however, may have been designed to appeal more to a media audience and appeared in the years after PISA 2000 took place. A 74-page illustrated document entitled 'Messages from PISA 2000', published at the same time as the results, and similar in format to a school text book, contained country profile information for several participants, as well as more general and slightly more
'glossy' messages (figure 5.2 below). Much of this material would in later PISA rounds feature in publications and press releases designed to coincide with the issuing of the main results. Its design and layout show an awareness of an audience outside policymaking and academic circles, and may have been designed to appeal not only to the media, but to teacher organisations and perhaps even to parents.
thinking is required by citizens, not just scientists. The inclusion of scientific literacy as a general competency for life requires the growing centrality of scientific and technological questions. The definition used in PISA does not imply that tomorrow’s adults will need large reserves of scientific knowledge. The key is to be able to think scientifically about the evidence that they will encounter. PISA 2000 was developed around three dimensions of scientific literacy:

1. **Scientific concepts:** Students need to grasp a number of key concepts in order to understand certain phenomena of the natural world and the changes made to it through human activity. These are the broad integrating ideas that help to explain aspects of the physical environment. PISA asks questions that bring together concepts drawn from physics, chemistry, the biological sciences, and earth and space sciences. More specifically, concepts are drawn from a number of themes including biodiversity, forces and movement, and physiological change.

2. **Scientific processes:** PISA assesses the ability to use scientific knowledge and understanding, namely students’ ability to acquire, interpret and act on evidence. PISA examines five such processes: the recognition of scientific questions; the identification of evidence; the drawing of conclusions; the communication of these conclusions; and the demonstration of understanding of scientific concepts.

3. **Scientific situations and uses of application:** The context of scientific literacy in PISA is principally everyday life rather than the classroom or laboratory. As with the other forms of literacy, the context thus includes issues that have a bearing on life in general as well as matters of direct personal concern. Questions in PISA 2000 were grouped in three areas in which science is applied: science in life and health, science in earth and the environment, and science in technology.

**How PISA assesses students and collects information**

PISA 2000 was carefully designed by an international network of leading organizations and experts to serve the purposes described above. Each student participated, in his or her own school, in a written assessment session of two hours, and spent about half an hour responding to a questionnaire about himself or herself. School principals were asked to give further information on school characteristics in another 10-minute questionnaire. The student assessments followed the same principles in each of the three domains and will do so from one survey to the next, although the amount of assessment material in each domain will differ in each three-year cycle. In PISA 2000, where the main focus was reading literacy, PISA was implemented in the following ways (for details, see the PISA 2000 Technical Report).

Figure 5.1 Extracts from PISA 2000 results report (left) and Joint UNESCO/OECD supplementary results report, 2003 (right)
Figure 5.2 extract from 'Messages from PISA 2000, OECD, 2004'
As early as 2003, the second round of PISA, it was clear that the OECD was far more keenly aware of its media audiences, and seems to have taken steps to align the presentation of its reports with the demands of media actors. The 'Executive Summary' appeared for the first time in 2004, when the results were issued, and is clearly designed to be visually appealing, with a glossy cover and the first appearance on PISA material of the OECD logo (figure 5.3).

The summary document also contains easy-to-read bullet points, as well as the now familiar league table type rankings, in tabular form. There is still an emphasis on technical material, however, with sample questions on each curricular domain, breakdowns of exactly what the results 'mean' for students and teachers, and their 'policy implications'. The summary carries many links to the main results document, and to the OECD website. A PISA newsletter was published for the first time in around 2001, though the first iteration still accessible is issue 8, published in 2002 (see figure 5.4). It is difficult to argue that any of these publications are tailored in any targeted way towards the requirements of the media - mere proliferation does not imply this. However, it is clear that even by 2003, the OECD had begun to diversify its PISA materials, presumably in order to attract different audiences. As will be shown more clearly in chapters 6 and 7, the relationship between the media and PISA is a symbiotic one - as PISA began to feature more regularly in the media, so the more obvious strategies designed to maintain its prominence were refined and professionalised.
Figure 5.3 cover page (left) and sample page from PISA 2003 Executive Summary
In 2007, ahead of the release of the 2006 results, the OECD issued a press release in advance. In a pattern which was to become typical, this was embargoed until the 'official launch' of the results two days later. The brief document contained not only the key points of the report, but also the 'league table' of attainment. This development is significant on two levels. Firstly, there is an air of assumed importance and significance attached to the embargo, and the statement, mimicking political or state-level announcements, that 'this analysis will be released by the OECD at 10.00 a.m. Paris time on Tuesday 4 December 2007' (OECD, 2007, online). This is an overt example of media logic dictating the form and tone of the transmission into public space of the PISA results. Secondly, the briefing sheet was...
sent to journalists, and contained the information which the OECD considered would be essential for them to produce the first reports on the PISA results. Additionally, and importantly, the results were, for the first time, launched with a series of 7 co-ordinated press conferences taking place across the world. This marks an intensification of the OECD's engagement with the media, and clearly demonstrates a developing understanding of the need to use the media's own rules in order to ensure that messages are transmitted.

**Later PISA rounds: 2009-2015**

By 2009, the success of PISA in attracting more participants, and thus penetrating a wider global audience, was beginning to take shape. 65 countries took part; and the increased participation was reflected in an increase in both the materials which accompanied the launch of the results in 2010 and the ways they were delivered. The 'key findings' now ran to 6 volumes, available online and in print format in several languages; additionally, there were two videos, a 'reader-friendly' executive summary, individual country notes for 8 countries, online comparison tools, a PowerPoint presentation available online and, again, an advance press release. The appeals to media logic are beginning to become clearer at this stage. The materials now embody features which allow ready usage by the media, for example, the press release, the 'easy to read' summaries and the country-specific notes. Of specific interest is the release of a rankings table separately from other material. Interviews with journalists (see chapter 8) indicate that the presentation of results in this format is instantly appealing to those writing a story; framing and agenda setting theories (chapter 3) explain the easy translation of this material into 'crisis' and 'blame' stories with high news value. At this stage, some of the materials, for example the press release and the country notes, do not carry logos or other brand markers, and are simple documents in plain text. The UK note, for example, is 21
pages long and is broken only by numbered paragraphs. A detailed analysis of the branding strategies shown in the covers of the main report is carried out later in this chapter; it is notable that 2009 showed the first signs of the now familiar branding (colours, logos) which have developed in sophistication since then. The focus of the analysis of this thesis is on the 2012 PISA round. By the release of the results of this cycle, in 2013, the OECD had refined its online, print and social and broadcast media profiles and was beginning to produce an almost constant output of branded PISA materials.

**Results Release: 3 December 2013**

As in 2010, an embargoed press release was sent to journalists ahead of the formal release of PISA 2012 results. For UK journalists, this consisted of an 8-page 'country note' detailing the key findings of PISA with a focus on the four constituent nations of the UK but with plenty of comparison material, as well as the by now ubiquitous league table. Journalists were also sent an advance copy of the summary of 'Results in Focus' - 32 pages of more general material leading with four separate league tables interspersed with textual commentaries and moving to many complex charts and diagrams, as well as text, demonstrating aspects of individual country performance. The examples in figure 5.5 are typical of the type of material in the report - it is presented in scientific and shows complex relationships and correlations in diagram and graph form. The press release itself begins by stating that 'the UK performs around the average in Mathematics and reading and above the average in science'; and that 'when compared with PISA 2006 and PISA 2009 there has been no change in performance in any of the subjects tested' (OECD, 2013, p.1). A comparison of this message with the media reporting around the PISA results in England is undertaken in chapter 7.
Figure 5.5 Diagrams from PISA 2012 ‘Results in Focus’ pre-release for journalists
The launch of PISA 2012 was carried out on a wide scale: press conferences were held over 3 days in a total of 12 cities worldwide. The results were initially released to invited journalists only on 2 December 2013 at embargoed press conferences in London, Mexico City and Tokyo - the latter was a video conference with Schleicher, who appeared in person at the London event. Following the official release of the results on 3 December, the remaining press conferences took over the next few days in places as far afield as Sao Paolo (which Schleicher attended in person), Rome and Washington DC. On Wednesday 4 December, a public webinar was chaired by Schleicher and which took questions from around the world, including one from the author of this thesis. The launch of the results in Sweden took place at a press conference with the Education Minister Anna Ekström, which took place simultaneously with the London event on 3 December.

The slides used to present the results were produced by Schleicher himself, and kindly provided to the author by the OECD. There is a total of 148; interview data from staff at the OECD confirms that Schleicher decides as he presents which slides to show to which audiences, and in the weeks following the PISA results launch, he gave many interviews and briefings which utilised some of the slides he produced for the launch events. The slides fall broadly into two formats: those which rely heavily on the use of colour, and of statistical data presented in chart form, often with moving variables; and those showing small amounts of text in 'soundbite' form against a plain background. Examples of each are shown in figure 5.6 below.
Figure 5.6 Slides showing statistical data (top) and ‘soundbite’ messages (bottom)

It is not just about poor kids in poor neighbourhoods...
...but about many kids in many neighbourhoods

Money makes a difference...
...but only up to a point
Given that the audience for the slides consisted entirely of invited journalists, it is interesting to see the two different types of material used to convey the results. The scientific-style graphs and charts which comprise 125 of the 148 slides are crowded with information and often brightly coloured. On the day of the results launch, many of Schleicher's slides were not used - the presentation showed only 46 of his 148 slides. The material is difficult to interpret at first glance, and Schleicher's presentations focus on explaining his statistics to the audience in the manner of a university lecturer, pointing out what he sees to be the important messages demonstrated by the slides (figure 5.7).

Schleicher typically adopts the persona of scientific expert while giving his presentations, and the bulk of his slides are presented in statistical, often graphical form. The 'soundbite' slides are clearly aimed at headline-writers and journalists looking to organise their stories into easily identifiable themes, while the speed of presentation and the complexity of the information shown on many of the statistical slides (which on the day included moving variables which were propelled across the screen) would have been difficult to construct a news story around. In terms of content, much of the material is concerned with factors affecting performance and
policy messages arising from these (see table 6.1). His emphasis in 2013 was initially on Mathematics, which was the key domain assessed in the 2012 tests. His emphasis in 2013 was initially on Mathematics, which was the key domain assessed in the 2012 tests. His first four slides focused on Maths results, but the emphasis quickly moved to the messages of equity, gender and equality which were said to have been demonstrated by the tests. Six slides were concerned with the socio-economic factors which affected student performance; the bulk of the presentation, however, was focused on the policy messages which Schleicher felt should be drawn from the mass of data presented in detail in the written reports. The analysis I carried out to answer RQ2, which looks at the way Schleicher's messages were covered in the media in Sweden and England, appears in chapters 6 and 7 of this thesis. This analysis demonstrates that while Schleicher highlights the points he feels are those most important to policymakers, these are not generally the messages which later appear in media coverage, especially in England.

In 2016, when the PISA 2015 results were released, the interaction between the OECD and the media was showing signs of greater sophistication. The 2016 global results release in London on 6 December 2017 was coordinated by the newly formed Education Policy Institute (EPI), an offshoot organisation from a previous semi-political think tank funded by the Liberal Democrat party and chaired by a former Liberal Democrat Education Minister under the 2010 Coalition Government, David Laws. The organisation's mission statement calls it 'an independent, evidence-based research institute that aims to promote high quality educational outcomes for young people' (EPI website, 2019).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PISA messages - ‘what works’?</th>
<th>Policy Messages Linked by Schleicher to ‘what works’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 A commitment to education and the belief that competencies can be learned and therefore all children can achieve</td>
<td>• Universal standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lack of stratification and tracking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Clear responsibility assigned for student performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Clear ambitious goals that are shared across the system and aligned with high stakes gateways and instructional systems</td>
<td>• Well established delivery chain through which curricular goals translate into instructional systems, instructional practices and student learning (intended, implemented and achieved)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• High level of metacognitive content of instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Capacity at the point of delivery</td>
<td>• Attracting, developing and retaining high quality teachers and school leaders and a work organisation in which they can use their potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Instructional leadership and human resource management in schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Keeping teaching an attractive profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• System-wide career development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 • A balance between vertical and lateral accountability</td>
<td>• Opportunities for teachers to innovate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Effective instruments to manage and share knowledge and spread innovation</td>
<td>• Colesial support for teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Communication within the system and with stakeholders around it</td>
<td>• Strong professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A capable centre with authority and legitimacy to act</td>
<td>• A balance between vertical and lateral accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A capable centre with legitimacy to act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Governance: Schools with more autonomy over curricula and assessments tend to perform better than schools with less autonomy where they are part of school systems with more accountability arrangements and greater teacher-principal collaboration in school management</td>
<td>Increase autonomy for teachers, especially in areas of pedagogy, curriculum and assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Investing resources where they can make most difference. Spending alone will not improve results</td>
<td>• Alignment of resources with key challenges (e.g. attracting the most talented teachers to the most challenging classrooms)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Effective spending choices that prioritise high quality teachers over smaller classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 A learning system’</td>
<td>• An outward orientation to keep the system learning, technology, international benchmarks as the ‘eyes’ and ‘ears’ of the system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Recognising challenges and potential future threats to current success, learning from them, designing responses and implementing these</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Coherence of Policies and Practices</td>
<td>• Alignment of policies across all aspects of the system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Coherence of policies over sustained periods of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Consistency of implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fidelity of implementation (without excessive control)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1 Schleicher’s Policy Messages, PISA 2012
Attendance at the launch event was by ticket only, and a third-party ticketing company, Eventbrite, coordinated ticket locations; unlike the 2013 event, the conference was not embargoed. Quite the reverse: it was livestreamed on the OECD website, and a panel with the representatives of domestic UK education organisations including the head of a teaching union, the chief inspector of schools, and the director of the UK National STEM centre took audience questions which were also livestreamed. A simultaneous launch took place in Paris, but Schleicher and the OECD Secretary General Ángel Gurría were both at the London event. The following day, Schleicher presented the results in the US, appearing through the Alliance for Excellent Education, an organisation aimed at promoting equal access for all at an event entitled ‘Every Child a Graduate: Global Lessons for the US Education System and Economy’; and the results were also presented to an alliance of Asian educationalists in New York on 8 December, with Schleicher also leading. In Sweden, the results were presented by the incumbent Education Minister, Gustav Fridolin, along with his predecessor, Jan Björklund. The material used to present the results is very similar visually to that used in 2012 and will not be analysed in detail again here; the significance of the 2016 launch is the more open and technologically sophisticated interface used, while the physical presence of Schleicher is retained at key events to present the material in person, and the link with policy advocacy bodies is strengthened and given a central profile.

The Building of a Brand: Summary of developments in presentation of reports and associated materials over time
The changing appearance of the PISA materials over time is, I argue, consistent with many features of the development of a brand. Brands have become a central marketing strategy in commercial sectors over recent decades, and while the term is contested in academic marketing literature, with subtleties and nuances of definition being debated (e.g. Stern, 2006; Maurya and Mishra, 2012) critics generally agree that a brand will have both distinct features ('brand identity') and clear objectives. Central to a brand are its core values, its image and its positioning (Nandan, 2005), all of which must be targeted towards maintaining 'brand concept consistency' within an evolving media environment. Key external features of a brand are based around visual distinctiveness, including name, colours, a symbol or logo, with the name being the most important (Blackett, 2004). A successful brand will have 'cultural power, economic clout, global reach' (Hilton, 2003, p. 47) and stand for a set of values, which are those at the core of the organisation which defines the brand. Brands also rely on a 'brand story' which will contain characters and a plot, as well as the ability to transport consumers into the 'world' of the brand, crucially allowing them to 'integrate their own brand-related experiences and thoughts into the brand story' (Gensler et al., 2013, p. 2). For the OECD, this brand story is closely related to its corporate identity, and I argue that PISA has now attained its own identity which is linked to, but also distinct from, that of the parent organisation. The way a brand identity is developed and maintained relies on its communication to the target audience, and this communication is almost always undertaken via the media. The media is integral to the success of brands - without media exposure, a brand would not be visible and would have no power to attract customers. Both mainstream and social media are targeted by marketers to gain exposure to a target audience and retain market share.
The influence of mainstream media has been modified and influenced by social and internet media (Perrin, 2015), such that the internet is becoming the dominant form of news consumption (Schrøder, 2015). As Kress points out, the process of moving text to social media brings with it a twofold shift in modality, comprising:

- on the one hand, the broad move from the now centuries-long dominance of writing to the new dominance of the image and, on the other hand, the move from the dominance of the medium of the book to the dominance of the medium of the screen. (Kress, 2003, p. 1).

Thus, the image, which forms the initial interface with the communicator and the consumer, assumes a central importance in social media which is absent, or at least not dominant, in traditional, mainstream media. This helps to explain why the OECD has begun to focus on the visual appearance of its PISA products, and its use in releasing the results, which increasingly appear on online platforms such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook (see below). It is interesting to note that many of the branding strategies used by the OECD to appeal to the media, and ensure constant exposure, are easily relatable to brand advertising techniques and marketing principles, which have traditionally formed the interface between a product and the media. Clearly, an exploration of this concept is beyond the scope of this thesis, and in any case only marginally relevant to an exploration of OECD governance. While branding is widely, if not universally, used in business and commerce, the use of branding in public and global organisations is a newer concept, not least perhaps because there are no real competitors for global organisations whose 'product' is essentially governance. The motivations for producing a readily identifiable brand, with its own values and identity, are perhaps less obvious than they might be in consumer markets focused on purchasing goods and services. I will argue later, however, that brand positioning is vital for the OECD in maintaining a high profile in
global space, and in the need to encourage new customers for its PISA products, which are constantly being changed in order to be seen as relevant and responsive. Below I use an analysis of the main covers of the PISA reports from their inception to the most recent report in 2016 to demonstrate the development of a brand identity for PISA. See figure 5.8 for illustrations.
Figure 5.8 PISA Main Results cover pages, top l-r 2000, 2003, 2006; bottom l-r, 2009, 2012, 2015
Visually, the covers have changed markedly over time. While the first two covers are devoid of colour, graphics or any kind of visual image, by 2006 a marked change in cover design has occurred. The 2006 cover is the first to use colour, and a large photograph-dominated graphic is the key feature of the design. Elements of this colour and design are carried from one report to the next – for example, the red/green/mustard yellow graphic is preserved in 2003, 2009 and 2012 reports, and echoed in the dominant colours of the 2015 one. The use of distinctive and consistent colours is one key feature of brand strategy and is underlined by this advice offered by a leading popular business website:

‘Consistent use of your logo, brand colours and key messaging across all communication channels is important and will help to strengthen your brand identity.

This doesn't mean that all of your communications have to look exactly the same, far from it, but it does mean that you should strive for visual cohesion. Make sure you stick to a number of standards, such as your colour palette, visual style, font and size and spacing of your logo.’
(Robshaw-Bryan, 2013, online)

The word ‘PISA’, almost incidentally mentioned in parenthesis on the cover of the 2000 report, increases in prominence over the course of the 6 documents shown, until in 2015 it has displaced the images of the young people altogether to become the dominant feature of the cover. The development of PISA as a brand is evident in these later covers, and the removal of photographs of young people from the latest one in favour of computer-generated graphics is also a noticeable change. Similarly, the acronym ‘OECD’ is almost invisible on the first two covers; by 2006 it appears with a small logo, and the font size is gradually increased until in 2012 and
2015 there is no doubt who the authors of the report are. Superfluous words in subtitle format have been removed by 2015 – all that is stated is ‘PISA 2015: Results in Focus’. This suggests a confidence in the brand – it speaks for itself and there is no need to add extra words to the title. These changes demonstrate an increased profile for PISA which has been accepted into public space – the greater the use of logos and graphics, the more one assumes that PISA ‘speaks for itself’ and does not require further explanation for the audience to understand what it is they are about to read.

Once inside the reports, there is further evidence of the extensive steps which have been taken to appeal to the media, and to be accessible and readable online. The two earliest reports have similar formats, albeit that the length of the 2003 report is some 150 pages longer than the 2000 one (471 vs 320 pages). The contrast with later reports, however, is stark. While the first two reports are printed in black, white, grey and brown, with photographs being black and white, the later reports are full of colour (see figure 5.9). In 2006, the results release documents moved to two volumes for the first time. By 2015 there were 5 volumes of the initial results publication, covering different aspects of the study – the main results volume runs to 492 pages, with the supplementary volumes II-IV ranging from 268-528 pages each. These developments reflect not only the increased presence of PISA in global education space, but, moreover, the increased scope and reach of the study, which as well as including the three core domains mentioned above, in 2015 included assessments in collaborative problem-solving, financial literacy and student well-being.

Central to brand management is the premise that the consumer does not feel compelled or forced to act in a certain way; rather, that the consumer feels
**Figure 5.9 Introductory page from PISA results documents 2000 (l) and 2012 (r)**
empowered to choose how to act in the face of compelling evidence that the brand offers the best choice:

...brand management works by enabling or empowering the freedom of consumers so that it is likely to evolve in particular directions...[it] recognizes the autonomy of consumers. It aims at providing an environment, an ambience, which anticipates and programs the agency of consumers. Brand management says not ‘You Must!’ It says ‘You May!’ (Arvidsson, 2005, p. 244-5)

This resonates with many of the assertions of the OECD director of education, Schleicher, and clearly has implications for the power of the brand to act as a form of soft, coercive governance. In 2018, Schleicher asserted that ‘the beauty of PISA is its voluntary nature. It’s a choice each country must make for itself, and their reasons will vary’ (interview with ‘Primary Leaders’ journal 2018, online). He often states that the power of PISA lies in its ability to demonstrate what is possible, a range of tools for policymakers to choose from:

PISA can show what is possible in education in terms of quality, equity and efficiency in educational services and it can foster better understanding of how different education systems address similar problems (Schleicher, 2017, p. 129).

Thus, the positioning of PISA as a ‘brand’ which, instantly recognisable, also ‘stands for’ certain values in the context of education, enables the OECD to access online and mainstream media forums in a readily packaged and easily understandable form. Features of its brand act as a kind of shorthand which facilitate the easy passage of its messages into public space. The use of logos, colour, and attempts to position the brand in the minds of the target audience by clearly stated brand values and what is called ‘brand voice’ (Movahhed, 2016, B2B Digital Commerce online,) are all clearly seen in an analysis of PISA materials and have arguably helped to allow the building of an easy relationship with a mainstream media comfortable with brand advertising.
Advice from online business strategists is aimed at encouraging the establishment of a consistent brand identity because it helps to project professionalism, authenticity and clarity, as well as building trust and providing a simplified template for future campaigns. So, while an analysis of PISA materials shows changes over time, there is also a consistency in elements of the materials, which helps to ensure that PISA is seen as projecting a ‘core identity’ which is aligned with a defined brand image (Perilli, 2016, online).

It is not only in the main PISA reports that the move towards a distinctive brand, and the increasing dominance of image and colour, are seen. The OECD has been diversifying and increasing the volume of materials associated with the brand so that there is now not only a regular newsletter which appears quarterly, but online bulletins and interim findings which are published on an ad hoc basis, but often about weekly or fortnightly. These materials are not only sent to key stakeholders, like teaching unions, policy think tanks and online followers of the OECD websites, but to journalists of mainstream organisations, who will often disseminate them more widely by sharing them with their own subscribers and followers.

Supplementary to the main PISA results reports, in 2011 a monthly series of bulletins, ‘PISA in Focus’, was launched. These short (4-6 page) notes are often framed around a question (‘In which countries do the most highly qualified and experienced teachers teach in the most difficult schools?’; ‘Does Homework perpetuate Inequities in Education?’) and, again, are freely available online (in English and French) and in hard copy if requested. ‘PISA in Focus’ mirrors the format of the main PISA results, with similar photographs, images and logos which reinforce the ‘brand’ familiar to anyone who studies the OECD. An example is shown in figure 5.10.
Who are the strong performers and successful reformers in education?

- Strong performers and successful reformers in education share some key characteristics, including the potential of all their students, strong political will, and the capacity of all stakeholders to make collective and focused efforts towards improvement.

- Countries/territories that have improved their reading performance over the past decade do so by reducing the proportion of poor-performing students, increasing the share of high-performing students, and/or lowering the impact of students’ socioeconomic status on their performance.

The release of these results marks a milestone in the work of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in its efforts to improve the quality of education systems worldwide. The PISA assessments, conducted every three years, provide an international benchmarking tool for educational systems and help countries identify areas for improvement. The findings from these assessments are crucial for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders in the field of education, as they offer insights into the factors that contribute to successful educational outcomes.

The results from the PISA assessments are compiled in a comprehensive report, which includes detailed analyses of student performance across various indicators, such as reading, mathematics, and science. These reports are published annually, and the most recent one was released in November 2013. The findings from this report highlight the importance of investing in education and the need for continuous improvement in educational policies and practices.
The use of social media is key to the success of any modern brand, and its use by global organisations to promulgate their messages is a relatively new phenomenon. Between 2008-11 key international organisations the World Bank, UNESCO, the WEF and the UN, as well as the OECD, created Twitter accounts; in 2010 OECD Education created its own account distinct from the main OECD one. Andreas Schleicher also has his own Twitter account devoted almost entirely to PISA; on top of this his Linkedin account carries a regular (average 3 articles a month) blog in which he writes at length about what he deems to be current issues arising from the PISA data and education issues in general. PISA also has a presence on another 'microblogging' site - Instagram- on which images of recent key messages are posted, albeit somewhat infrequently and with little apparent take up by ‘followers’. In terms of output, the Twitter account is very active: as of April 2019, it had 92.6K followers, and was tweeting at least once a day. Its reach is less easy to quantify: an analysis of tweets over a one week period (March 1-8, 2019) showed that the account tweeted 22 times; and the average number of 'likes' per tweet was 14. The average number of re-tweets was 11.3. Interestingly though, most tweets did not attract many comments from users - only 4 of the 23 tweets had attracted an audience comment. There is no recognised methodology for assessing Twitter use or penetration, but these figures would be considered low, demonstrating perhaps that while there is a high number of followers, most of them do not engage actively with the feed, and of those who do, most do not attempt to interact with the material in a two-way conversation, which is supported by the Twitter format. This supports the rationale for the analysis methods and type of data used in this thesis - it is argued that the main means by which PISA data enters public space, at least initially, is via the mainstream print and broadcast media - albeit often accessed online. Journalists with their own social media accounts will then in many cases further disseminate the same material, often linking to their own print reports or
opinion columns. From the analysis carried out for this thesis, I would draw the tentative conclusion that the PISA brand has yet to make a significant impact on, or via, social media, but that the OECD is continuing to develop strategies which will enable it to do so in time. Examples of the OECD PISA social media pages are shown in figure 5.11.

**Schleicher: The World’s ‘Headmaster’**

An analysis of the strategies used by the OECD to disseminate its PISA messages would be incomplete without an exploration of the role of its education director, Andreas Schleicher. His ‘catchphrase’, ‘your school system today is your economy tomorrow’ (e.g. BBC, 2017, online), encapsulates the underlying principle of PISA: that direct correlation can be made between educational attainment of 15-year olds and the future economic performance of a nation. This phrase, regularly reproduced by the world's media over almost a decade, yet, it seems, so rarely challenged, has come to symbolise the power of PISA, expressed through its figurehead and apparently accepted by education ministers the world over as holding the key to future success. In this section, I describe Schleicher's career, and his rise to prominence as the 'world school ranking boss' (ibid.). PISA was Schleicher's brainchild (see chapter 2), and the engagement of the programme with the international media can also largely be credited to his own activity. While the OECD now has a press office, Schleicher still produces his own materials for presentations, as well as writing articles for mainstream and academic journals, newspapers and magazines, giving interviews and appearing at educational events throughout the world. His tireless devotion to the PISA brand is characterised above all by a constant round of personal appearances at conferences, both in educational settings and for the media; interviews and online video presentations, as well as blogs and articles written for teaching and mainstream magazines and journals.
Figure 5.11 Top left: OECD Education and Skills Facebook page; right: OECD Instagram page; Bottom left: OECD Education Twitter page; right: Andreas Schleicher’s Twitter page
Michael Gove, English Education Minister at the time of the 2012 PISA tests, called Schleicher ‘the most important man in the British education system - but he could equally be the most important man in world education …’ (Gove, 2011). Denise Galluci, CEO of The Education Partners in the US, told Schleicher, ‘we do know the brilliance that you represent, you are an incredibly brilliant man who I think has changed the world and the way we look at education…’ (Schleicher, 2015, online).

Schleicher’s media strategy is based on the experience after the PISA Schock in Germany, when he noted that ‘the real changes in education started when the media picked the message up, when the media said, ‘why are we not as good as Finland?’’. This led him to ‘create products, publications, that speak to the media’ (personal interview, 2016). Schleicher has a personal schedule which involves media appearances in many countries worldwide, often in more than one country in a day. He is well-known to journalists, and appears at press conferences and staged events sponsored by educational organisations – for example the American ‘Meet the mentor’ series of events has featured Schleicher twice, in 2015 and 2017; the English Education Policy Institute has hosted him on several occasions to speak to invited journalists and academics. In 2018, he visited, among others, New Zealand to address a government-sponsored agency conference on Global Competence in Education, Washington DC to address the US national summit on education reform; and Saudi Arabia to attend a meeting of the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States. He has made countless appearances at debates, education events and conferences worldwide, where his name has become instantly recognisable and synonymous with the brand he has developed. Schleicher’s media capital (see chapter 4) is high, and his personal connection with PISA is such that public comments by other OECD staff on the programme are rare, or at least appear rarely in the media. He is, as one German magazine termed him, ‘Mr PISA International’ (Mohr, 2007, online). Not quite a celebrity, (he is not ‘famous for being famous’) his
media presence and the demand for him to appear at conferences and events ensure that his messages are never far from the education pages of newspapers and online news outlets. In short, his expertise and authority are accepted the world over, and he is the 'go to' education expert for governments and education policy officials across many cultures. Schleicher has recently published a semi-autobiographical work, 'World Class: How to Build a 21st Century School System' (Schleicher, 2018), in which he describes his rise to prominence at the OECD as well as describing in some detail his education philosophies and beliefs. This book represents a departure from usual career trajectories for officials in global organisations, and perhaps is an acknowledgement by Schleicher of his own personal importance in the PISA profile. It is significant that Schleicher attributes the idea for writing the book to Sean Coughlan, the BBC education correspondent, who also helped by producing several chapters of the work. The book is dedicated to 'the teachers of the world', and the front pages consist of glowing testimonials from figures as diverse as the former Head of the UK Prime Minister's Delivery Unit, Sir Michael Barber, the Singapore Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat and the 43rd Governor of Florida Jeb Bush. In the book, Schleicher describes his early career in medical physics and suggests that the 'attention to testing and validating every development and piece of equipment' (p.16) in that setting helped him to think creatively about improving education, where reforms took place 'with little experimentation or quality assurance, and little public accountability' (p.17). Having honed his statistical skills at the IEA, Schleicher then set about transforming education into 'more of a science', in order to 'apply the rigours of scientific research to education policy' (p.17). Throughout his career at the OECD, Schleicher's profile and international credibility, which appears beyond question, have grown, and he is regularly consulted by education ministries from England to Singapore on policy matters. It is difficult to think of an individual, in any sphere, who has attained so
much international exposure and credibility and managed to influence policy on such a global scale. Most recently, PISA has ventured into the world of ‘21st Century Skills’, and Schleicher has been seen skilfully marketing the changed instrument, which will explore previously unmeasurable traits like tolerance and resilience, to audiences throughout the world. His media skills and presence ensure that his words are covered in online news, blogs, social media and mainstream media with regularity.

**The First Reframing: What OECD staff say about PISA**

In chapter 1, I asserted that the PISA data is subject to transmission through several prisms before it reaches public space, and that the first of these prisms was applied even before the data leaves the OECD. In that sense, the views of staff responsible for PISA at the OECD offer an interesting contextual anchor to this thesis. The Education Directorate at the OECD Headquarters in Paris houses not only an impressive suite of offices for senior officials, but also employs staff to award and coordinate contracts in member countries and beyond; to design and publish the PISA materials, to interact with the media and advise on strategy, and to act on behalf of, and with, Andreas Schleicher on his many visits abroad. As well as interviewing Schleicher himself (see Chapter 8), I interviewed five senior staff from the Education Directorate of the OECD in Paris, all but one of whom had been working on PISA for at least 10 years. The nature of the interviews and the ways in which material collected was analysed are described in chapter 4. Their roles included two senior communications officers, the media director and two design and contract liaison staff. The purpose of these interviews was to try to gain an understanding of how they saw their own role and the role of PISA, as well as how they viewed the relationship between PISA and the media. Some of their comments appear in this chapter, as I feel they are necessary to give some background to the
analysis which follows. To preserve anonymity, the comments made by these individuals will not be further attributed below - all speak with experience and expertise about PISA. An additional and lengthy interview was carried out with a senior official at the OECD, and indeed a follow-up meeting was arranged as this individual had in-depth knowledge which they were initially very keen to share in an intensive initial interview. However, shortly after the interview, they contacted me to ask me to destroy all the material collected, and to cancel the follow up meeting. This event was instrumental in my decision to anonymise the data collected during interviews at the OECD, though all but two of my interviewees had said they were happy to be 'broadly identified' in my thesis. I defend this decision on the grounds that the staff all answered my questions in very similar fashion, and that I have represented all the key themes in the section below. The interview carried out with Andreas Schleicher is not anonymised as firstly, he was very happy to be quoted, and secondly, his views as Education Director offer a unique and distinctive view which could not be obtained from anyone else. The interview with Schleicher appears later in the thesis as the themes covered fit more comfortably there. In chapter 4, I briefly discuss some of the issues around interviewing powerful figures such as Schleicher.

When asked about the overarching role of the OECD, all the interviewees mentioned first and foremost the core mission. The economic underpinnings of the organisation were alluded to, but only in terms of their relationship with what several staff referred to as 'quality of life'. The comment below is typical:

Well, it's about better policies for better lives - that's the slogan, the mission statement. For me, it's about trying to get countries together to communicate how they put together policies in various fields relating to economics...so that they can compare what's going on in each of their countries and improve policies in their countries...
Another interviewee, having also cited the mission statement initially, mentioned the key role of data:

Better policies for better lives, which I guess is about trying to analyse data and government policies to work out how, well, mostly governments, can help improve people's lives.

This staff member also pointed out that, with the exception of one specific item on bribery, the advice of the OECD was just that - advice; it was not legally-binding or mandated. This point is important in my thesis as I try to unpick the relationships which have led to PISA becoming such a powerful policy tool across several countries.

The staff saw the organisation as non-political and non-ideological; these views are from four of my five interviewees:

One of our strengths is that we provide a neutral platform for ministers and high level policymakers to get together and talk about issues in confidentiality and get recommendations from the OECD.

We're not partisan, we're giving frank policy advice you know, especially from the PISA results, we're not tailoring the messages to different countries, we are giving, you know, what our data finds.

The idea is we're trying to work towards fairer societies.

I don't know if you could label it [an ideology]... we are labelled as, what is it? Neoliberal? Yeah...I think it's a bit unfair, I would think over the past 10 years, the OECD's started looking at more sort of, people issues than before. I mean I've only been here 12 years so it's difficult to judge but certainly the image I had of the OECD as just looking at economics from a sort of really technocratic perspective has changed, you know, like the work they do in education and increasingly on inequality and stuff is looking at it more from a human perspective than before...I don't know if
you could label it 'capitalist', I mean you can argue that anything in the west is capitalist.

[Promted by me - humanitarian?] - there is some of that, yes, especially when it comes to education, because what we are trying to do is to reduce the gap of the rich and the poor... for a child to have equal chance of succeeding, regardless of his or her background, for us that's the ideal education system and that's what we try to promote, for us that's the ideal, and for me that's humanitarian

In terms of PISA itself, one member of staff pointed out that the OECD was more interested in improving outcomes than other organisations which focused on the UN Strategic Development Goals (SDGs) of 'trying to get kids into school' - the OECD preferred to 'go a step further' and help to define 'what is quality education? And what other countries can learn from strong-performing systems'. Another interviewee pointed out that this approach comes from the fact that originally PISA was working with OECD member countries, 'rich countries, if you like', and such countries could be seen in terms of 'pulling the others up' (my words, agreed with by 2 interviewees). A third interviewee, heavily involved with the media side of PISA, stated that:

I guess, intentionally or otherwise, [PISA] is probably the thing that most people in the outside world associate with the OECD, so in terms of brand awareness, it's quite good.

If you said, 'I work at the OECD' - and in France people tend to know what the OECD is actually - but if you said that in the UK people would have no idea, but if you say they do things like the PISA, the education thing, they say oh yeah yeah, I know that.
This interviewee also suggested that over the last few years there had been an effort to brand the assessments as ‘OECD PISA, rather than just PISA’, because it was a ‘wasted opportunity’ not to ‘remind people who has produced it.’

The main messages of PISA, the staff felt, were those on equity and gender; as well as, in 2012, on Maths, and the merits or otherwise of investing heavily in classroom technology. This is interesting in terms of my data, as these messages, as will be demonstrated throughout the thesis, are not those privileged by the media in their reporting of the assessments or their results. Asked about this, and the relatively high engagement of the media with the 'league tables' at the expense, perhaps, of the equity messages, one member of staff said, 'at the OECD, we don't like to focus on the ranking', pointing out also the confidence intervals in the scores, which 'the media never take into account'. The topics which the media do choose to highlight are explored in detail in this thesis, especially in chapters 6-8. It is noted that what the OECD sees as its 'key messages' are not necessarily those which reach public and policy discourse. The implications for governance and the reach of OECD power of this disconnect, or reframing, are discussed in chapter 9.

At this stage, it is important to point out that the staff I spoke to all felt that PISA was contributing a 'neutral', non-ideological 'good' to world education, and that its findings would genuinely help children to gain access to a fairer, more equitable education. The economic agenda of the OECD was not mentioned, and when I asked about it, the answers were framed in terms of fairness and equality, which would allow children across the world to access the same life chances as those in the most highly developed nations with the highest-performing school systems. Thus, at the earliest stages of the PISA process, among the very staff working on it, the framing of the project is seen largely in humanitarian terms, of 'improving lives'.
This is an important point in helping to understand the ways in which PISA is portrayed in the media, and, more importantly, is able to act as a governing technology in education systems. This theme will be returned to throughout my thesis.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that the success of PISA is heavily dependent upon its development, over time, as a brand, which is instantly recognisable and carries an appeal to media logic, with features making it easy to turn into a news story. Analysis of materials used to launch PISA into public space, via the media, found a sophisticated array of visual and linguistic devices which appear designed to ensure easy media take-up and reproduction. I have argued that the data is reframed, firstly by the perceptions of the staff working on PISA themselves, and then by the ways in which the materials are launched into public space via presentations, online and hardcopy texts and press briefings. I have demonstrated the key role of Andreas Schleicher in promoting and maintaining the profile of the brand, and in determining which messages are privileged in interactions between PISA and the mediated space into which they are launched. This point of interaction can be seen as the second prism applied to the data, which shapes and alters it, arguably distorting the global messages it contains and allowing them to be concentrated and essentialised for local recontextualisation.

Interviews with PISA staff reveal a belief in the OECD as an almost humanitarian organisation, whose data is used in non-ideological fashion to help governments introduce policies to improve the lives of their citizens. Staff also see the profile of the organisation as important, and PISA is recognised as a useful tool in maintaining the image of the OECD on the international stage.
In short then, the success of PISA as a brand can be attributed in large part to its media presence. Its success in [managing] to ‘occupy the public educational space like no other type of report or survey’ ‘is due, without doubt, to the design of the instrument itself’ (Bolivar, 2011p.64).

In the following two chapters, I will explore the other side of the story, with an analysis of how the PISA 2012 results were released, and, importantly, received, in both Sweden (chapter 6) and England (chapter 7).
Chapter 6

PISA and the Media II: PISA 2012 in Sweden

The ways in which messages from the OECD are projected into public space by, and through, the media forms the bulk of the analysis contained in this thesis. In the following two chapters I will explore in detail how the results of PISA 2012 were reported in Sweden and England, addressing RQ2: How have local media in Sweden and England responded to, and worked in synergy with, the messages of PISA? The analysis focuses mainly on reporting of the results in the immediate period after they were released, in December 2013, and in the following weeks and months. Using the language analysis techniques outlined in chapter 4 and the media logic described in chapter 3, I will demonstrate how the messages of PISA were transmitted into public space during this key period: which messages are privileged by policymakers and in media coverage; to what extent the selected material conforms to known patterns of media logic and mediatisation; what is ignored; and how the mediated material differs from the original PISA materials. As explained in chapter 1, the purpose of using two countries is to demonstrate a range of media techniques across two western democracies, while acknowledging societal and cultural differences which influence the operation of the media, and the acceptance of PISA messages into public space - therefore, a classical two-country comparative analysis which focusses on identifying commonalities and differences across nations will not be undertaken. This chapter will focus on an account of how PISA 2012 was reported in Sweden, both via official, policy-making and political channels and through the media.
The PISA results released in 2013 brought unwelcome news for Sweden. The country suffered the biggest fall in overall rank position of any OECD member, from 22nd to 28th place, and was under the OECD average in all 3 domains. Results in reading were particularly poor, with a fall of 12 places, from 15th to 27th place, and well under the OECD average.

In Sweden, the main vehicle for transmitting the news into the public domain in 2013 was not the OECD. The schools' ministry, Skolverket, produced a report in conjunction with the University of Stockholm, which had been responsible for coordinating the PISA tests in Sweden in 2012. These two actors - the ministry and the university - knew of the results in April 2013, but, according to an academic I interviewed at Stockholm university, the Education Minister, Jan Björklund, was only told on 2 December, the day before the official results release (Swedish Academic, Interview, 2014). The Skolverket report is 160 pages long and focuses on Sweden's performance in comparison with other PISA participants. It is noticeably different from the OECD PISA reports also released that year - there is less use of colour, the text is denser and the language clearly aimed at a professional audience, rather than a media one (see figure 6.1). This report did not form the basis of any interactions with the media - these took place on 3 December and were coordinated by the main political parties, with press conferences being given by several of the leading ones.

**PISA-Day**

The immediate reaction to the results was one of palpable shock. The Education Minister Jan Björklund published a statement on the home page of his party’s website to speak of a ‘PISA catastrophe’ which was ‘very serious, but expected’ (Björklund, 2013, multiple sources), and gave a press conference on the same day.
at which he reiterated his displeasure at the outcome. He called it 'serious for young
people, for schools, and for Sweden', and laid the blame at the door of his political
predecessors, the Social Democratic party, for reforms carried out during the
previous administration. The leader of that party called the results a national crisis;
the director of Skolverket, Anna Ekström, spoke of the 'bleak picture' painted by the
results, and the head of the country's teaching union, Lärarförbundet, Eva-LisSirén,
proclaimed herself to be 'deeply concerned' about the results, which left Sweden in
a 'serious situation' (Lärarnastidning (LT), 2013, online). Media outlets based their
reporting on a press release issued by the central press agency Tidningarnas
Telegrambyrå (TT), which supplies most of the national and regional newspapers in
Sweden with breaking news. This release quoted the voices of the actors mentioned
above, and was adapted by the country's main broadcasters and print media for
immediate release. Unlike in England (see chapter 7), the OECD's own materials
did not appear to inform the initial media coverage in Sweden - domestic actors,
including voices representing teacher unions and education officials, were all given
space to express their disquiet about the matter, and to apportion blame as they
saw fit. Coding of the media reports published on 'PISA day' elicited several key
themes, namely: shock; crisis and catastrophe; blame; reference to competitor
countries; plans for action. The dominant narrative immediately after the results
centred on a combination of the first two, reflecting the shock of Björklund himself,
who had hoped that Sweden would feature in the top ten of the rankings, and was
surprised when it did not (Swedish Academic, Interview, 2014). The teachers'
publication LT called the PISA results 'a cold shower for the whole Swedish school
system' (LT, 2013, online). The shock of the results caused the government and
opposition parties to hold press conferences, at which all expressed their deep
dissatisfaction with the outcome of the tests, and 'tensions were high' (LT, 2013) at
all these events.
1. Bakgrund

Figur 6.1 Skolverket report, PISA 2012
Sweden's system of government is based on proportional representation via public vote every 4 years, and typically this leaves 8 parties with a voice in the country's parliament, the Riksdag. For much of the period since the 1970s, Sweden has been ruled by an alliance of social democratic parties, but in 1991 a non-socialist minority government was formed which implemented many neoliberal reforms in Sweden, the effects of which are still felt today. Between 1994 and 2006, the Social Democrats once again had the dominant share of seats in the Riksdag, but in 2006 a centre-right coalition called The Alliance took power, and in 2010 this Alliance was re-elected, albeit without an outright majority. At the time of PISA 2012, this Alliance was in power, and Jan Björklund, a Liberal politician, was education minister between 2007 and 2014. Predictably, representatives of the left-leaning opposition parties who had been ousted from power in 2006 and were not represented in the coalition, were vocal in their condemnation of policies which they felt were responsible for the poor PISA results. As in England, none of the parties, in government or opposition, questioned the underlying validity of the tests or the veracity of the results. The Environment party spokesman Gustav Fridolin, who would later become education minister under a new administration, expressed his hope that the poor results would lead to Sweden having its own 'PISA shock', saying he was very angry that children were paying the price for policies which left teachers with too little time to do their jobs properly.

The mass media in Sweden is ranked third on the World Press Freedom Index (Reporters without Borders, 2019, online). Traditionally, the media has operated on a democratic corporatist model with strong state links, but over recent decades it has moved towards a more liberal model, with high degrees of journalistic
professionalism. Print news consumption rates are unusually high, and most national newspapers now also have an online presence. This recent development has led to a class differentiation in news consumption, but there is less overtly partisan or political influence on newspapers than is seen in England. This does not appear to reduce the prominence of tabloid-style headlines and sensational reporting, but it does seem to lead to less differentiation in emphasis than might be noted among English coverage of political news stories.

Headlines on the day of the PISA results release almost all used the word rasar (to tumble or plummet) of Sweden's performance; many also echoed Björklund's use of katastrof, and most spoke of a kris (crisis). Notably, the media coverage in Sweden gave space to all the political actors who expressed a view on what had gone wrong and led to the difficult results. All media outlets echoed the sentiment that it was a dark day for Sweden, and Björklund's words ('Mycket al.lvarligt' - very serious) served as the headline for several newspapers, underlining the seriousness of the situation.

Unlike in England, voices from the OECD, or citing the OECD, were absent in the initial period after the results were released, and media reports at this time made only passing references to the parent organisation of PISA. While most of the reporting focused entirely on the poor domestic results, there were some media items about competitor nations and reference societies. The national broadcaster Sveriges Television (SVT) used a headline about Asia to cover the story on its online platform - 'PISA-study: this is how Asia Succeeds', with 'the recipe for success is hard work and discipline' (Liebermann, 2013, online) as the standfirst. This report makes no reference to Sweden's own performance; nor does the report in the centre-right Dagens Nyheter, the newspaper with the widest print and online
circulation in Sweden (266,000 copies/day in 2014), which references Germany's recovery from its PISA-Schock in 2001 (Lewendagen, 2013, online). The teachers' newspaper *Skolvärlden* leads with the headline, 'It isn't your fault that the results are falling', referring to a comment by Fridolin, the Environment Party spokesman, that teachers 'should feel proud of all [they] do' (*Skolvärlden*, 2013, online). In this article, Fridolin's view that Björklund's reforms, which he said increased central control and cut spending, were responsible for the poor results, was given unopposed coverage, perhaps because of his emphasis on praising teachers.

What happened in Sweden in the months after the PISA results were released is perhaps more interesting than the immediate reaction to the results, and for this reason the next section will explore media and political responses to the crisis which PISA 2012 appeared to precipitate in the country.

**Early 2014**

Björklund commissioned the OECD to produce an in-depth analysis of Sweden's PISA results, presumably as soon as he heard about them, because in February 2014, a press conference was called to present the results of their report. Journalists attending the conference received a copy of the report, entitled 'Resources, Policies and Practices in Sweden's Schooling System: An In-depth analysis of PISA 2012 results' (OECD, 2014, private copy provided to author); and both Schleicher and Björklund were in attendance. The latter gave a brief introduction while Schleicher presented the main points of the report in a PowerPoint, and then took questions from the journalists present.

The report itself is striking for the lack of distinctive colour or branding features which characterise PISA materials generally. It is entirely printed in black and white.
and contains few diagrams or graphs. There is scant attempt to appeal to any journalist with a short attention span or poor eyesight (see figure 6.2 below), and its 25 pages are not indexed, with headings bounded by simple line boxes.

Figure 6.2 Title page and extract from interim OECD report on education in Sweden, 2013

The findings of the report were the result of an analysis carried out by unspecified OECD ‘experts’, and consist of a more in-depth explanation of the results issued in the Skolverket document discussed in the previous chapter. The findings will not be analysed in detail, but the section below outlines the notable points from the study, with particular focus on those which Schleicher chose to draw attention to in the press briefing which launched the report.

The Press Briefing: How it was done

Björklund opened the conference by introducing Schleicher and his role in PISA: ‘he is not only responsible for it, he has created it’ (Skolverket press conference, 18 February 2014).
author's copy), establishing Schleicher’s credentials as an expert in the field, the ‘top man’ - which is likely to be important for a Swedish audience who might be sceptical of large scale quantitative assessments of a system which has traditionally eschewed summative testing. Björklund spoke only briefly, explaining what the Government had asked for and referring to a team of ‘international experts’ who had been tasked to carry out a further ‘deep’ analysis of the Swedish education system. Björklund was keen to draw attention to the ‘expert’ nature of those entrusted with the task of researching and commenting on something very dear to the hearts of Swedish people - it is likely against a background of Swedish culture that the very idea of bringing in foreign help would invite some criticism among those who believe that Sweden can offer an example of good education to the world.

A somberly-dressed Schleicher launched straight into the use of graphs with multiple moving points, to demonstrate the position of Sweden relative to other countries in PISA. His tone was business-like and the presentation was given in the manner of an authoritative and informed academic lecture, using many of the same slides as were analysed in chapter 5. This contrasts with some of Schleicher’s other performances, for example a 2013 TED talk (Use Data to Build Better Schools, 2013) on PISA, in which Schleicher wears a head microphone and uses an iPad to prompt him as he strides around a stage wearing a purple shirt without a tie. Clearly the audience was different; the content less so. Schleicher may have felt that his audience was likely to be less than openly welcoming of his message, so gave a technically tight and professional presentation in the manner of a scientific expert. This persona is one which has been increasingly cultivated and presented in the media and undoubtedly contributes to the ‘seriousness’ of the PISA message. As with the presentation described in chapter 5, many graphs and tables, delivered at
high speed and each illustrating a different aspect of the statistical data generated by PISA, were interspersed with a few slides containing punchy ‘soundbites’. 

The Press Briefing: What it said

The first point in the report, and which Schleicher chose to highlight in his briefing, is that Sweden spends around the OECD average on education per student, but that expenditure is not correlated with performance beyond a certain level, which almost all OECD countries attain anyway. In explaining the complexities around investment and outcome, Schleicher drew attention to Korea as a contrast to Sweden, highlighting the use of money to attract the most highly qualified individuals to the teaching profession, to allow them time for curriculum and professional development, and to longer school days. Comparing Sweden and Finland, he drew attention to the latter's similarity with Korea in prioritising the quality of teachers over small class sizes, which, he implied, was an error made in Sweden. Linking teacher quality with both remuneration and professional development, and pointing out that high-performing systems tend to prioritise this over small classes, he suggested that Sweden, which did the reverse, should consider looking at the role of teachers. Importantly, he emphasised Sweden's continued status as an equitable country, but noted that performance had been compromised by this - it was equitable, but equitably poor-performing in that almost all pupils were performing at a lower level than expected. Other countries, for example Poland and Switzerland, had managed to improve both equity and performance.

Schleicher gave an in-depth analysis of Mathematics teaching in Sweden and contrasted the emphasis on word problems with the 'purer' form of Mathematics
teaching noted in high performing Asian countries, where mathematical problems are not dressed up in words, but are based on teaching concepts and 'deep conceptual understanding' (Skolverket, 2014). He also drew attention to the low percentage of top performers in Sweden - those reaching level 5 and 6 - which he termed a 'loss of excellence' (ibid.).

Schleicher's concluding slides looked at what Sweden could do to improve its scores, and the topics focused on here included universal high expectations of students (again, Finland was mentioned as a contrast to Sweden); this was linked to self-belief and self-motivation among students. Another factor was the need to attract the best teachers into the most challenging classrooms, something which he said was the reverse of what was seen in Sweden, where the better teachers tended to work in the easier, and better, schools. Another factor mentioned at this point was devolution of the Swedish system to transfer education governance to local authorities, which Schleicher suggested was weakly supported by other agencies and lacking in monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. He also pointed out that 'the stronger the responsibility at local level, the more you do need that central capacity' to oversee education (ibid.). Discussing teachers Schleicher repeated an oft-heard phrase that 'an education system can never exceed the quality of its teachers', elaborating that there was 'something about salary incentives', as well as career structures, as 'ways to go for teachers'. He understood this career structure was something already being addressed in Sweden.

The more interesting part of the briefing came when Schleicher invited questions from the audience. It is through these that the tension between the message of the OECD and the traditional Swedish emphasis on human and democratic values in education is seen, and the questions asked by Swedish journalists show the deeply-
held pride which the participants felt for their democracy and their education system, and which were being challenged by the OECD’s findings. For example, an education journalist asks:

In Sweden, we don’t like this of course because it is very sad but we always say that Swedish pupils are so creative, and that’s not something you show in the report. What’s your reaction to that comment? (Skolverket press conference video, author’s copy)

I have emphasised personal pronouns in this question as they illustrate personal deixis, a positioning with respect to identity. Throughout the question and answer session, this is one of the most interesting discursive features, as the Swedish questioners almost all seem to draw on this semiotic creation of identities, which serves to distance them from the ‘you’ of Schleicher.¹ This is reflected also in some non-verbal signs in the questioner – gestures indicating ‘us’ (touching the body, using the hands to indicate the audience, for example), as well as ‘distancing’ – sitting back in the chair, and assertiveness – moving forward to reduce distance.

Schleicher’s response to the question is interesting - he defines creativity in terms of reaching levels five and six in PISA tests. He references both Finland and Shanghai as examples, before stating that:

What I can say though is that when it comes to areas like Mathematics and Science, Swedish students do not show a high level of creativity in the classroom

¹ The participants in the press conference are all speaking in English, which is not their mother tongue, though all are fluent. Any conclusions drawn from their use of particular words need to be viewed in this light.
This is a clever rhetorical shift, in that it redefines creativity in terms that many would not necessarily recognise but which supports the idea that PISA can measure it. Only towards the end of the answer does he concede that there are ‘other dimensions of creativity, you know, music and the Arts, that we haven’t captured…’, admitting, ‘but again, it’s a limit…’ He ‘tails off’ at this point, with a slight nod of the head, indicating that the subject is now closed. This exchange is important in that it demonstrates a reframing of a key concept - creativity - which has traditionally been viewed as unmeasurable, and for Swedes is strongly linked with the identity of a child. Schleicher is positioning creativity into the PISA framework, claiming that high-level performance on the cognitive skills assessed by the tests is a sign of creativity. Dealing with criticism of PISA in this way dispenses with potentially difficult and paradoxical arguments around the usefulness of the instrument in defining and measuring human traits which are not only important to many teachers and parents, but also lie at the heart of the '21st Century skills' rhetoric. This will be discussed again in chapter 9.

Another question asks what changes Schleicher considers most important for the Swedish education system - ‘except for the teaching careers’. He refers to an as yet not completed deeper study, which he is confident will yield more answers, but says that

...the whole issue of the teaching profession, to me, looks really in need of rethinking…

reinforcing his right to comment in an expert capacity on what ‘must be done’ to improve things for Sweden.

The final questions again draw on references to Swedish culture and traditions:
...that's another thing we say, that our students don't spend at all as much time in the classroom as students in Korea for example.

and:

when we look at these countries with our eyes, we tend to view them as very traditional...and it surprises us a lot that they are high performers and that this is sustainable in the long run.

As with the earlier questions, the use of ‘we/us/our’, emphasising Swedishness, serves to set the questioners’ identity apart from the ‘you’ of the OECD and the ‘they’ of other, higher-performing nations; thereby highlighting the challenge to traditional Swedish values which the audience may see in PISA. Schleicher’s answers to these questions emphasise his belief in scientifically-based 'evidence':

Outcomes are the product of quality and quantity...what we call modern may not be actually not necessarily be modern in terms of being aligned with what brain research and learning science tell us.

Quite where Schleicher's expertise in 'brain research and learning science' comes from is not made clear; and the power relationships enacted at the press briefing were not such that any of the participating journalists would necessarily have sought clarification on this point. Nonetheless, the questions of audience members at the conference illustrate that the OECD message is not uncritically accepted by everyone in Sweden - there is a clear tension between what might be called 'traditional Swedish values' of democracy, freedom, creativity, and in particular a view of childhood - that 'children should be children for as long as they need to' (Kristjansson, 2006 p.21) and the calm empiricism of PISA and its focus on measured outcomes. Swedish culture values children very deeply, and the idea, as one of the questioners implied, of children sitting in rows being instructed in
knowledge, would be very hard to take for many Swedes. Schleicher frames all his answers in scientific terms, demonstrating again a reliance on expert knowledge and ‘what works’ in terms of improving school outcomes. There appears to be a fundamental semantic and relational disconnect between the questions and their answers; although technically Schleicher ‘answers’ the questions, he does so by subtly redefining the questions or gently shifting the subject matter – for example the question about teaching methods is answered in part by a reference to poor school discipline in Sweden.

This press briefing is interesting for the power relationship which it reveals - Schleicher is brought in by Björklund very much as an authority figure whose opinions matter, and who has 'answers' which Sweden must listen to. This is the governing role of the OECD played out in one environment, supported and encouraged by an elected representative in a mature democracy.

Also interesting is the real challenge presented by the Swedish journalists to the premises underlying PISA - their questions reveal concerns with the idea of trying to measure things which have always been important to Sweden - creativity, informality, democracy. The ways in which Schleicher deals with the concerns of the journalists - with appeals to 'learning science' and 'brain science', as well as references to societies which appear to overcome these issues and succeed on PISA, foreshadow some of the later work done by the OECD to bring PISA into the new age by measuring '21st century skills'. This will be discussed in greater length in chapter 9.
The Press Briefing: How it was reported

What is striking about the media coverage of the press briefing in February 2014 is how little of the challenge presented by the journalists who attended is represented in their reports of it. Every media text studied for this thesis led with a headline on the same issue - that of teachers' salaries, based apparently on a press release from TT, whose representative was at the briefing, but did not ask any questions. This press release was titled 'OECD: Låga lärarlöner i Sverige' (OECD: low teacher salaries in Sweden), and concentrated initially on the fact that 'countries with good school results have higher teachers' salaries than Sweden, the OECD stresses in an evaluation of Swedish schools' (TT, 18 February 2014, online, link removed). The press release then goes into some of the issues discussed by Schleicher in his presentation: expenditure on education; class size; teaching career structure; before devoting a paragraph to a comparison with Finland (Sweden's neighbour and rival). The release ends by pointing out that Sweden had never before asked the OECD for its own analysis after PISA tests, and that, furthermore it had sought the establishing of 'a commission of international researchers and experts' who could analyse the poor results in more depth. No mention was made in the press release of any of the journalists' questions, and it seems from the media output around the event that most news organisations either released the TT report unedited, or used it as the basis for their own reports. The headline in almost all the news outlets was either the same as the TT one, or an almost identical variation on it. One online news outlet headlined with 'After the Fiasco of PISA, here is the OECD’s report on Sweden' (Omni.Se, 2014 online); and the moderate/right Svenska Dagbladet carried an in-depth report with Björklund which focused on improving classroom discipline and grading children earlier in their school career (Svenska Dagbladet, 2014, online).
Thus, while participants at the briefing demonstrated a critical engagement with the PISA material, and in this sense appeared to exercise their 'Fourth Estate' role of holding power to account, crucially this challenge was not reflected in any of the media reporting after the event, so was invisible to a Swedish mainstream media audience.

Instead, it appears that the few news organisations which did not merely reproduce the TT account of the briefing, interpreted their 'Fourth Estate' role in terms of asking a variety of domestic politicians to comment on the interim report. Predictably, this strategy led to the proposal of a range of different solutions to the problems in Swedish schools, with Björklund suggesting a more formal introduction to schooling in the early years; Fridolin, the Environment Party spokesman, drawing attention to the salary issue as well as proposing a joint initiative between the state and local authorities to improve the teaching profession; while the Social Democrats called for a national action plan with unspecified policies designed to improve schools.

This interpretation of the 'Fourth Estate' role, of holding the powerful to account by challenging only the domestic representatives of power, while allowing the messages of the OECD to go unchallenged, is also seen in England (see chapter 7). I argue that the failure of the media to see their responsibility in this regard as extending to the governance exercised by global organisations like the OECD is a major contributory factor to the increasing power and reach of such organisations.

**What Happened Next?**

A Björklund mentioned at the press briefing analysed above, the Swedish government also asked the OECD to oversee the setting up of a commission of 'experts' to undertake a more in-depth analysis of the Swedish school system and
come up with recommendations designed to improve it. This represented a departure from what has traditionally been viewed as the model of Swedish policymaking practice, where 'in-house' expertise had generally been applied to domestic policy issues and external influences remained unacknowledged or even suppressed in public discourse. While Waldow noted a Swedish reluctance to acknowledge external governance influences, which he says was because 'political culture was characterised by a powerful myth of rationality and national superiority' (Waldow, 2009a, p.477), Tveit and Lundhal suggest that the move from internal to external advocacy in Swedish policymaking marks a trend:

We observe a shift away from collaboracy – defined as policy legitimation located in partnerships and networks of stakeholders, researchers and other experts – towards more use of supranational agencies (called agency), such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the European Union and associated networks, as well as the use of individual consultants and private enterprises (called consultancy) to legitimate policy change. (Tveit and Lundahl, 2018, p. 631)

It also contrasts with responses to poor performance on ILSAs in some other nations: for example, in Germany after the 2000 'PISA-Schock', an internal committee, the Klieme committee, was set up to examine the failings and recommend policy actions (Tillmann et al.,2008). Mohamed and Morris (2019) report that in the Gulf States, the response to lack of success on international assessments was to commission teams of international consultants, not only to diagnose weaknesses in the systems, but to supply 'off the peg' reform packages to put them right. That Sweden chose to ask the OECD to co-ordinate its response to the perceived failure demonstrates that it felt the situation was grave enough to warrant outside help, but that its choice of 'expert adviser' was the organisation which had authored the reports charting its failure. Rasmussen et al. analysed the
policy environment in Sweden and noted that the stable and mature democracy was largely resistant to both public opinion and media coverage when it came to policy initiatives. In contrast with England (see chapter 7), they concluded that, 'the policy status quo is rather stable' (Rasmussen et al., 2018, p.70). I postulate that against this background, the OECD's role was as a catalyst, allowing Sweden to be seen to be accessing the world's experts to solve its education policy issues.

The team selected by the OECD to carry out the analysis and develop the policy recommendations arising from it was comprised of what the OECD called 'OECD analysts and high-level international experts' (OECD, 2015, p.177). The two 'high-level international experts' were Richard Elmore, a Harvard University professor with a background in education and public policy and management; and Graham Donaldson, a retired Professor of Social Sciences at Glasgow university and former head of HM Inspectorate of Education in the UK. The OECD had three representatives in the group: Beatriz Pont, Marco Kools and Judith Peterka. Pont and Kools have backgrounds in political science, consultancy and public administration, while Peterka is a qualified teacher with qualifications in Economics and social policy. The composition of the commission of experts reflects a heavier weighting for the OECD's own staff, and with it a bias away from educational expertise towards economics and policy administration.

The review team visited Sweden for a period of ten days in October 2014, during which they met with senior education officials at national and regional level, representatives of teaching unions and a parents' organisation, and visited teacher training institutions and a small sample of schools. In December 2014, the OECD presented a preliminary view of the findings of this report in a briefing in Sweden, and the following May, the final report was made public at a press conference. Four
representatives of the expert group were present with Schleicher; Fridolin, who by now was Education Minister (there had been a general election in Sweden in December 2014) and Aida Hadzialic, Minister for Upper Secondary School, Adult Education and Training. Also present was Anna Ekström, a senior Social Democrat whose appointment as head of a schools' commission designed to oversee the implementation of the recommendations in the report was announced ahead of the press conference.

The report published by the 'experts' ran to over 180 pages, and the press conference to launch it, which, as is standard practice in Sweden, was also available on the government's website, took more than an hour. Hadzialic introduced the conference, reminding the audience that the expert delegation had been set up 'in response to the decline in results of Swedish schools' (Skolverket, 2015, video of press conference). Fridolin spoke briefly to introduce Schleicher, who then spent around 40 minutes explaining the report's findings. He began by gravely acknowledging how disappointing it was, not only for Sweden, but for him personally, to witness the decline in performance revealed by PISA. He confessed that while at university he

...used to look at Sweden as the model for education - as a country that was providing high quality and very innovative education to students from all social classes...

Schleicher noted in tones of regret that 'the Swedish school system seemed to have 'lost its soul' since the early 2000s, prioritising 'shiny school buildings in shopping centres' (!) over addressing the 'steady decline' in Sweden's ability to compete with the best on PISA. Using the familiar graphics, Schleicher went on to repeat at length the depressing statistics which had led to the commissioning of the report,
explaining how high-performing systems manage things differently - for example by investing in teacher education, by demanding high standards of all students, and by not forcing low achievers to repeat grades. Schleicher did not go into a lot of 'Sweden-specific' detail when pointing out how the policy recommendations made by the expert group would lead to the desired improvements in the system - the 'facts' of decline were almost allowed to speak for themselves, with contrasting examples from high-performers used to imply that the report would contain the recipe for success. His presentation was more of an overview than a detailed series of policy recommendations, as the slides in figure 6.3 illustrate.

Schleicher concluded that 'we've done our best to provide advice, and the OECD continues to stand ready to work with Sweden to make it happen', once again emphasising the OECD role of expert advisor and ongoing supporter.

Anna Ekström, an academic lawyer and Social Democratic director of Skolverket, and newly-appointed head of a new schools' commission created to oversee and implement the recommendations of the OECD expert group, spoke after Schleicher. Notably, she began by calling the report 'very interesting', before going straight into the difficulties she had with aspects of it:

If this was an academic seminar, I could spend hours arguing on specific points in the analysis. I would, for instance, raise the fact that it's not, er, perfectly right to compare the Swedish results on equity with the OECD average because Sweden has a comprehensive system, unlike many other OECD nations...but I will not do that now, that will be for the seminar [nfi] and for lots of hours of discussions on this.

Ekström's presentation took each policy recommendation from the report in turn, giving a detailed response to each. In contrast with the almost reverential tone
adopted by Björklund when dealing with Schleicher, Ekström had clearly engaged in some depth with the material and was far more measured in her response. For example, while welcoming the early focus in the report on the quality of teaching and learning, she also made the point that the recommendation to improve this aspect was 'full of words that are easier said than done', and covered challenges that 'we have been discussing for years now in Sweden'.
Figure 6.3 Slides from Schleicher's 2014 Presentation in Sweden
This demonstrates that Ekström (again using the 'we' form, illustrating a degree of distance being created between the OECD and the Swedish nation) does not perhaps see the OECD as the saviours which other politicians may have framed them to be, and has adopted a critical and, at times, sceptical attitude to the OECD's intervention:

We have debated, discussed, researched, and we have tried to make it better...in political debates, in committees, in research, in different kinds of institutions...

This appears intended to serve as a reminder to the OECD that Sweden is a country which takes its education seriously, that initiatives are not undertaken lightly, and that practice needs to be informed by research. The contrast between Ekström's words and those of UK politicians after PISA 2012 is marked, and will be reflected upon further in chapter 9.

Ekström refers to 'the national feeling' that 'we are in trouble...and we all agree in Sweden that we need to do something about this'. As with the earlier press conference analysed above, personal deixis is a strong feature of her words - it is important to her that Sweden 'takes ownership' of not only the solution to the crisis, but of the crisis itself. Ekström takes each policy recommendation in turn, and the terms of engagement are similar to those outlined here for each one. She welcomes the recommendation, explains that Sweden has already identified it to be an issue, and then speaks of what has already been done, while acknowledging that more action is required, and that the OECD analysis may be helpful in determining what kind of action that should be. On the issue of teachers' career structure, she says that Sweden has been discussing it 'not only for the last years but for the last decades'. Ekström acknowledges that 'it is good that you highlight this issue', but
her tone is very much one of ownership and authority - she sees the OECD as confirming something which Sweden already knew and had been grappling with for some time. Ekström is unafraid to challenge the OECD on points where she disagrees, and her body language at the briefing demonstrates that she is unafraid to do this and to establish her own credentials, even at times appearing to assert superiority. For example, the still shot below (figure 6.4) from the video shows Ekström pointing her finger at Schleicher as she says,

...there is a bit of contradiction when you say that you want to strengthen the evaluation and at the same time you want to take away the red tape, you want to have less administration and less documentation in the Swedish school. Well, the reason for lots of the documentation and lots of the administration and lots of the red tape in the Swedish school system is, of course, the need for evaluation.

Later, Ekström openly disagrees with a point made by Schleicher, again gesticulating towards him, this time with an open hand (figure 6.5) perhaps indicating even greater confidence:
The fourth point, you said, Andreas, was the most difficult one. I am not sure I agree, I think all these points are difficult, not least the first one.

While polite, and while acknowledging that there are useful points in the report, she skilfully positions herself as an equal or superior expert on Sweden's education system. Her words, with frequent 'we' and 'you' signposting, as well as her body language, indicate that she views the OECD as playing a supporting role in the unfolding theatre of Swedish educational reform. She concludes as she began, saying:

As I said before, if this was an academic seminar I would have lots of things to say about the analysis, but I will leave that for the seminar this afternoon and also for the commission.

This makes it clear that Ekström feels there are fundamental issues with the OECD report, which she does not want to raise at an open press conference but feels are important enough to allude to twice in a 20-minute presentation. Her tone is
authoritative and commanding; she concludes by describing the OECD report as 'a very useful starting point' for the work of the commission she has been selected to lead, at the same time mentioning several other sources (TIMSS, PIRLS and 'the Swedish statistics' - nfi) which will be used to contribute to the evidence being collated before decisions are taken. She explains that the findings of the report were not surprising as it contained nothing that was not already known; she also asserts that the findings were not disappointing as she was not expecting 'a golden bullet, something magic that would solve all our problems'. Ekström concludes by saying:

After all, it is not up to the OECD to solve our problems, it is up to us to create a school system and an education which will meet our criteria for what success and good results are.

She twice states, explicitly and firmly, that 'the aim of the Swedish school system is not to gain ground in PISA' but to achieve equitable access to good knowledge and skills for all Swedish children, to allow them to grow into responsible citizens.

In summary, Ekström's responding speech to Schleicher's presentation establishes a different power relationship from that shown among other Swedish policymakers seen interacting with the PISA materials. She reiterates two main points over the course of the speech; namely that Sweden had for many years been grappling with the issues identified by the OECD; and that while the OECD report would help to inform the work of the commission, it would only be one strand of evidence in a large amount of domestic and international research. By explicitly distancing herself from the idea of improving PISA scores becoming an end in itself, Ekström demonstrates a level of resistance to the apparently hegemonic global quest to synonymise education and knowledge capital proxied by OECD measurement.
Ekström's stance is one of few challenges which were seen to the OECD's soft governance power during study for this thesis.

The press conference proceeded with a short presentation by Fridolin, who outlined government initiatives to meet the main policy recommendations in the report. These indicated that the government had indeed taken the OECD intervention seriously and was particularly looking at improving career structure and salaries for teachers. Hadzialic also spoke briefly about similar initiatives in the upper secondary sector, before the floor was opened to questions. Unlike in the briefing reported earlier, none of the assembled journalists chose to ask anything of the participants, and the conference was closed.

**Media Reporting of the OECD Report and Press Conference**

The Swedish media reporting of the conference and the report which accompanied it focused, predictably, on the terrible situation facing Sweden's schools, and the fact that urgent action had been recommended by the OECD to help fix it. Most media outlets led with the TT headline 'Swedish Schools Must Change'. By now, this narrative was familiar to those in Sweden, as the framing of crisis and blame had been well-established by earlier reporting - the media agenda had been set. All reports spoke of actions which were now being undertaken or were being proposed to tackle the 'falling results and poor international comparability' of Swedish pupils (*Lärarnastidning*, 4 May 2015, online). However, there was a little more diversity in the reporting of this event than the previous one, and indeed of the PISA results themselves. For example, the moderate/right *Sydsvenskan* and *SvT* ran the headline 'Researcher warns against sharp focus on PISA' (*Sydsvenskan*, 4 May 2015, online) on a TT report, quoting extensively from the Finnish anti-PISA academic Pasi Sahlberg, and quoting Anna Ekström who in an interview had said:
I raised my eyebrow a little when the OECD proposed the setting up of more authorities in school regions. I don't think we will solve our problems that way... (ibid.)

The specialist *Pedagogiska Magasinet* ran the headline 'Should it be quiet in class?', with the standfirst presenting the OECD view that it should, in opposition with the prevailing view of school principals, who apparently felt that 'good relations in the classroom' were more important (*Pedagogiska Magasinet*, 3 May 2015, online).

Notably, this particular intervention from the OECD also received some interest from the UK media. The British newspaper *The Guardian* published a story the day after the press conference entitled 'Sweden Urged to Rethink Parent's Choice over Schools after Education Decline'. It is not hard to see why the *Guardian* selected this angle, as the author makes explicit:

> The call for “revised school choice arrangements” will have resonance in the UK, where the coalition government’s programme to launch free schools funded by public money was in part inspired by Sweden. (Orange, 2015, online)

The UK *Financial Times* also covered the story, again focusing on the implications for other societies which might be considering the expansion of a market-based system, and including a direct comparison with the UK in the form of a reference to the former Education Secretary Michael Gove:

> A review of Sweden’s troubled schools has called for sweeping changes in the Scandinavian country hitherto held up as a model for expanding the free market in education worldwide.
For years, the system won the admiration of free-market advocates round the world, such as Michael Gove, the UK’s former education secretary, who declared in 2008: “We need a Swedish education system.” (Crouch, 2015, online)

The interest of the UK media in this aspect of the Swedish experience demonstrates another manifestation of media logic, in the form of agenda-setting, as the framing of these reports is clearly designed to inform an established agenda in the minds of the audience, who would have been familiar with the UK debate on Free Schools, and its links with Sweden, under the 2010 Coalition Government.

**Discussion**

The projection into public space in Sweden of the 2012 PISA results demonstrates a graduated approach to criticality and an evolving media relationship with the data and its presentation. I argue that in the early days, just after the results were released, the crisis they caused was seen as something to be accepted without question. The Swedish media reproduced the disaster rhetoric of their leaders with little critical engagement other than predictable ‘blame’ stories aimed at domestic politicians. At this stage, the crisis was framed only in domestic terms - the voice of the OECD was not present in Swedish public space.

Once the OECD became involved, the nature of the media engagement began to change. The launch of the OECD's in-depth analysis was met with some challenging and important questions to Andreas Schleicher, who answered them by offering up the prism of science to deflect their intended meaning. But while the journalists present at the press conference which launched this report appeared to challenge the overarching validity of the PISA tests, this challenge was not represented in their reporting of the event, which reverted largely to stereotypical crisis reporting. Such
attempts as were evident to hold power to account focused entirely on party-political blame rhetoric.

However, by the time the final OECD report on the PISA outcomes was launched in 2015, the tone of some of the media reporting had become slightly more critical, and a senior and respected member of the Government, in whom real power had been invested as she was selected to lead a schools’ commission, was also openly sceptical about the OECD’s future role in Sweden.

This trajectory, of increasing criticality over time, appears to reflect the view of Andreas Schleicher that the engagement of the media shows differences in the weeks and months after PISA results are released. When asked about the involvement of the media in reporting of PISA results, Schleicher said that ‘on the first day’ the media would tend to scandalise or focus on one small aspect of the results, but ‘on the second day, someone else will report in greater depth, and on the third day, and then gradually you will have a discussion’ (Schleicher, interview for this thesis, 2016). He expressed confidence that ‘in the media eventually the truth comes out’. This trajectory is explored more in chapter 9, when it is also noted that the audience engagement with stories is likely to go down once they leave the headlines, often leaving only the imprint of the initial crisis on the minds of most readers.

The next chapter focuses on the reception of the 2012 PISA results in England.
Chapter 7

PISA and the Media III: PISA 2012 in England

The last chapter described the ways in which the PISA 2012 results were made public in Sweden, and explored the engagement with them in policy and media discourse in the months after they were released. In this chapter, a similar analysis will be undertaken for England. Because of the different policy and media environment, this chapter will not be a ‘mirror image’ of the preceding one: the analysis has been undertaken to reflect the unique features of the English context. Thus, more emphasis in this chapter will be given to the media reporting on the day the results were released than in the previous analysis of Sweden. This is for two reasons. Firstly, the two countries interacted with the data differently on PISA Day, with a heavier involvement of the OECD in England, and an emphasis on the views of domestic actors characterising the Swedish experience. Secondly, by contrasting events in England with those in Sweden, a more complete (although still only partial, and fragmented) picture of the soft governance role of PISA through the media, in its various iterations, can be given. Whereas the chapter on Sweden used discourse and semiotic analysis techniques to analyse video material from press conferences, in this chapter these techniques, particularly of critical discourse analysis, will be applied to the both a speech given by a politician, and the reporting of PISA in the print media (including online versions), to draw attention to the ways in which language is used to frame media narratives and influence the discourse which is generated in public space. The chapter begins with an introductory exploration of the education policy environment in England and its characteristic reliance on serial reform and politicisation. I then undertake a brief analysis of the OECD and domestic documents used to launch the results in England, before moving on to look in detail at the responses of the key political actors and the media. A more detailed analysis of
a policy initiative taken by the UK Government as a direct result of PISA will also be undertaken, alongside the media involvement in constructing the narrative around it.

The first important point to make is that this analysis focuses on England, not on the UK. While the constituent countries of the United Kingdom all enter PISA under the jurisdiction of the UK, the policy and media responses varied for each. The National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) was the UK coordinating body for PISA 2012 and conducted the tests on behalf of the English Department for Education (DfE), as well as of the Department of Education (Northern Ireland), the Welsh Government and the Scottish Government. NFER published individual reports for all the 'home nations', which were available from 3 December 2013 - 'PISA Day'. Slightly confusingly, however, the OECD's analysis, including the 'Country Note' released on PISA Day, deals with the UK as a whole. The OECD reports referenced by journalists in their coverage of the story tend to be based on this document, as well as the more generic 'PISA in Focus' results documents (see chapter 5). Thus, initial national media responses did not generally differentiate the constituent countries of the UK - these were covered by the respective regional media. Where appropriate, this will be pointed out in my analysis. However, the scope of the thesis does not allow separate analyses for each of the nations, so coverage of issues in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will be peripheral and only mentioned if relevant to the central theme of this chapter.

England has been an enthusiastic consumer of PISA since the initial rounds. Unlike Sweden, where education has traditionally prioritised democracy and the production of engaged and competent citizens, with a long-term vision and 'slow' policymaking based around consensus (Anton, 1969; Trägårdh, 2007), England's education sphere has been characterised by serial reform (see chapter 1) and a highly-politicised relationship between teachers and the Government (Chitty, 2009).
England’s history on PISA has been one of consistent mediocrity. The country’s results were disallowed in both 2000 and 2003, because the OECD deemed that the small sample size led to response bias. In the OECD Country note for the UK, the organisation explicitly states that ‘the observed higher performance in 2000 should not be used for comparisons’ (OECD, 2013, p. 1). This may have been designed to pre-empt a repeat of the policy and media response to PISA 2006 and 2009, when Labour politicians tried to claim falling results were caused by Conservative policies; Conservative politicians for their part blamed the ‘legacy’ of Labour for a perceived fall, which in any case was not demonstrated by the results; and the media coverage was dominated by headlines about ‘plummeting’ and ‘plunging’ results.

Nonetheless, England has been a very willing participant in PISA, and its importance perhaps reached something of a peak during the tenure of Michael Gove as Secretary of State for Education (2010-2014). Gove was a strong admirer of Schleicher, in 2011 describing him thus:

...a man I recently have described as the most important man in the British education system - but he could equally be the most important man in world education...in truth Andreas is the father of more revolutions than any German since Karl Marx. Because Andreas is responsible for collating the PISA league tables of international educational achievement. He tells us which nations have the best-performing education systems and then analyses that data to determine why that is the case. (Gove, 2011, online)

Elizabeth Truss, the Education Minister, was similarly evangelical in her enthusiasm for PISA, restating the claims of knowledge economists in her endorsement of the value of ILSAs:

The link between student scores in international tests and real GDP growth rates per head is growing stronger; doubling between 1960 to1980 and 1980 to 2000. (Truss, 2012, online)

and restating the huge importance to the Government of participation in such tests:
Comparing ourselves to other countries is vital. It shows our strengths and our weaknesses. The pace of the race is such that we cannot afford to only learn from our own successes and failures - we must also learn from others and fast. (ibid.)

Thus, PISA 2012 took place at a time when its positive reception in England was assured. This is an important factor to consider when analysing the ways in which the messages of PISA were received and reproduced in media and political discourse in December 2013 and beyond.

**PISA Day**

As outlined in chapter 5, the OECD held a press conference in London on 3 December 2013, which constituted the main launch of the global PISA results for the 2012 assessment round. The audience consisted only of invited members of the media, who had been sent the UK Country Note, containing an outline of the results and main points as they pertained to England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, as well as the main 'PISA in Focus' results document under embargo the previous day, to allow them to begin to draft their stories ahead of the conference. As well as the OECD-led press conference, the body which had coordinated the tests in the UK, The National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) produced its own report and press release that day, which were issued via the UK Department for Education (DfE). Like the Swedish report produced by Stockholm University (see chapter 6), this report focuses entirely on domestic results, and explains them in such a way as to appeal to an academic or educational audience. Much of the material involves technical explanations of the questions used, relating them to the skills tested, and analysing UK students' performance on each. A comparison with OECD average performance is included for each question type. The Executive Summary of this document advised that
England’s performance in Mathematics, science and reading has remained stable since PISA 2006. In each survey, pupils in England have performed similarly to the OECD average in Mathematics and reading and significantly better than the OECD average in science... However, average scores give only part of the picture. In all three subjects, England has a relatively large difference in the performance of lowest and highest achievers; this is greater than the OECD average. (DfE, 2013, p. 11).

The OECD UK Country Note used almost identical language to describe UK [NB - the NFER document discussed England only] performance, stating that the UK ‘performs around the average in Mathematics and reading’ and ‘above the average’ in Science, lying at 26th position for Mathematics, the focus domain of the 2012 assessments. The eight-page Country Note is moderate in its language, spelling out the key points of the 2012 analysis in both domestic and international terms. The key findings as they relate to the UK are dealt with in bullet points on page 1 of the document, and, as well as the headline scores above, mention: expenditure on education (higher than OECD average); relative performance of socio-economically disadvantaged students (worse than OECD average) and immigrants (better than OECD average); attitude to school (generally positive) and Mathematics (anxious, but not as anxious as in other OECD states) and relative performance of girls (do not enjoy Mathematics; worse at Science, and better at reading, than boys).

As well as the release of both NFER and OECD documents, politicians were also active on PISA Day. The most important event in this regard was a statement made to the UK Parliament by Michael Gove, the then Secretary of State for Education. Given the moderate language of the OECD and NFER reports, which underlined the unchanged performance of the UK at or above the OECD average, Gove’s speech is perhaps a little surprising for the tone it adopts almost from the outset. Having praised teachers ‘for their hard work, dedication and idealism’, he then delivers a damning indictment of the state of education in England:
Although the quality of our teachers is improving, today's league tables sadly show that that is not enough. When people ask why—if teachers are better than ever—we need to press ahead with further reform to the system, today's results make the case more eloquently than any number of speeches. Since the 1990s, our performance in these league tables has been, at best, stagnant, and, at worst, declining... For all the well-intentioned efforts of past Governments, we are still falling further behind the best-performing school systems in the world. In Shanghai and Singapore, South Korea and Hong Kong—indeed even in Taiwan and Vietnam—children are learning more and performing better with every year that passes, leaving our children behind in the global race. (Gove, Hansard, 3 December 2013, columns 782-784, online)

This is interesting language indeed. The use of 'at best, stagnant, and at worst, declining' is a misrepresentation of the trend shown by the results and detailed in both the NFER and OECD documents. This language is echoed in 'still falling further behind' and 'leaving our children behind' later in the paragraph. The use of 'our children' serves to remind the audience (in this case, members of Parliament) of a patriotic and at the same time paternal need to improve matters - in fact Gove uses the terms 'child' or 'children' 15 times in a short speech, with three mentions of 'our children' and one mention of 'their children' to talk of competitor nations.

The speech is Gove's opportunity to outline what he calls his 'five pillars of reform'. I undertook a detailed analysis of each of these reform proposals (Grey and Morris, 2018), and attempted to determine how the shortcomings identified by Gove were related to the PISA results used to reference them, and whether the proposed reforms would address these shortcomings. Gove's reforms were principally designed to increase the autonomy, most specifically in financial terms, of head teachers. Two of his five 'pillars' had this as a direct or indirect aim - namely the third, 'a high level of autonomy from bureaucracy for head teachers' and the fifth, 'head teachers having the power to hire whom they want, remove
underperformers and reward the best with the recognition they deserve’. The remaining three reform proposals were: an emphasis on social justice and helping every child to succeed; a commitment to an aspirational academic curriculum for all students; and a rigorous system of accountability for performance. These proposals were expanded by Gove, partly by referencing initiatives already undertaken by the UK Government, while ignoring competing narratives from the OECD materials (see chapter 5). For example, in the case of social justice, Gove mentioned the ‘pupil premium’, a funding initiative targeted at disadvantaged two-year olds, while omitting to mention clear messages from the OECD about reducing stratification and selection in education systems, two factors which PISA had demonstrated reduced overall performance and equity. His ‘commitment to an aspirational curriculum’ similarly drew on an already-introduced policy to carry out a ‘screening check’ on 6-year old children ‘to make sure that every child is reading fluently’, and the narrowing of the secondary curriculum via the introduction, already undertaken, of the so-called ‘English Baccalaureate’, a notional award given to children who had chosen to sit GCSE exams in traditional, academic subjects. The only new initiative here, significantly, was the proposed introduction of ‘explicitly more demanding’ Maths lessons, based on those seen in ‘high-performing Asian nations such as Singapore’. In terms of accountability, the OECD’s recommendation that teachers should be autonomous in their practice, and self-regulated in their assessment, with accountability largely to peers and stakeholders, rather than to authority, was ignored, as Gove reminded his audience that the Government had sharpened OFSTED inspections, recruited more outstanding serving teachers to inspect schools and demanded that underperforming schools improve far faster. (Gove, 2013)

Grey and Morris analysed each of the proposed reforms in turn, alongside the relevant materials from PISA 2012. We concluded that ‘Gove’s speech sought to use the 2012 PISA results to promote policies which were in marked contrast to the messages of the OECD’ (Grey and Morris, 2018, p. 120); the messages of PISA around fair access to good
education, removing authoritarian accountability and giving teachers more professional autonomy had been suppressed or distorted in Gove's reform proposals, which nonetheless referenced them directly.

The Parliamentary debate which followed Gove's speech is recorded in Hansard, the UK Government record of parliamentary proceedings. Analysis of this debate reveals that, as in Sweden, the results were treated as objective data, the 'truth' about the state of British education, and that discussions around it were very quickly reduced to party-political 'blame' exchanges. A spokesman for the then Opposition party, Labour, begins by saying that he is 'disappointed' that Gove 'has adopted...such a partisan approach to the data from PISA', before then himself proceeding to credit his own party for producing the 'best generation of teachers' praised by Gove at the beginning of his speech (Tristram Hunt, Hansard Column 784, 2013, online). Hunt's response states that Gove should 'concentrate on the lessons we can learn from today's study' (ibid.) using selective references to East Asia to support party political points about teacher training; and referring also to the Swedish decline, using it to make the point that Gove's earlier enthusiasm for Sweden (around the introduction of free schools) now appeared misguided. The remainder of the debate continued in similar fashion; notable for the purposes of this thesis are two points. Firstly, the underlying premise of PISA, or its validity, was not challenged at all. Every Member of Parliament (MP) who spoke, did so from the point of view of accepting the results as a valid assessment of UK education. Secondly, no one challenged Gove's interpretation of the results which was used to justify his reform proposals. These two points are significant for my study, which is addressing a central question around the passage of OECD messages into global governance. It appears that, at the point of initial engagement, domestic politicians in England accept both the veracity and the legitimacy of PISA without question. Moreover, a skilful politician is able to manipulate the messages he allows into public debate by nimbly reframing the data to fit his own reform agenda. Thus a 'double prism' is applied to the data at this early stage, moving the debate away from the lack of mandate enjoyed by the OECD in domestic political
discourse, and demonstrating the ease with which a politician can deflect or pre-empt criticism of the wilful misuse of PISA data in support of his own political agenda.

The Media Response

The British print media is, by virtue of its ownership, largely considered to be right of centre and broadly sympathetic to the views of the Conservative party, which was in power as part of a coalition Government at the time the tests took place and the results were released. Of the mainstream print media, only The Guardian takes a left-of-centre editorial stance, with The Daily Telegraph, in particular, noted for its right-wing bias, and The Times, owned by the media tycoon Rupert Murdoch, also right of centre. The Independent, available only online, is considered to be broadly centre-left in its political orientation. Of the terrestrial television and radio media providers, the BBC, as state broadcaster, is required by law to treat subjects with impartiality and reflect different views. Similarly, the commercial broadcaster Channel 4 requires that stories must be presented with ‘due impartiality ... in an appropriately balanced and fair way’ (Channel 4 Publications, 2017, online). Sky News, which also receives a large subscription audience in the UK, states that it requires similar adherence to 'due impartiality and due balance' (Sky News, 2019, p.22).

As mentioned above, journalists at all the major news organisations in the UK had received an embargoed copy of the OECD’s UK Country Note, as well as access to an online copy of the main PISA in Focus results document (see chapter 5), the day before the OECD press conference to which they had been invited. Interviews with UK journalists (see chapter 8) revealed that most of them had already written their first iteration of the PISA story before going to the press conference, in order that it could be published in online versions of their publications as soon as the embargo was lifted at 1000 GMT. These early reports all focused on the fact that the UK had failed to progress on the tests, was being 'left behind' in the global education race, and required urgent action. The BBC headline, for example, was
'UK makes no progress in PISA tests' (Coughlan, 2013, online). This report is characteristic of most of the initial reporting on PISA Day and will be analysed in greater depth at this point to illustrate the type of language used, and the themes developed by that language.

The standfirst of the article states:

The UK has failed to make any progress in catching up global rivals in school tests taken by teenagers in maths, reading and science - and is no longer in the top 20 for any subject.

The use of the phrase 'failed to make any progress' imbues the piece with a negative tone which reflects the headline, although what it is describing is an unchanged position. This tone of negativity persists across the article, with the word 'fail', 'failure' or 'failed' appearing 5 times. The words of Andreas Schleicher appear early in the piece, to point out that 'the UK's performance has "flat-lined" while competitors have improved', reminding readers early on that this is a competition, and the UK is doing badly in it. There then follows the assertion that

In science, the UK has slipped downwards, from 16th to 21st place, in a downward trend for results in the subject.

which does not reflect the OECD’s statement that UK children performed above the OECD average in Science, using the words 'slipped down' and 'downward trend' to imply a poor performance. The position of the UK is described as 'remain[ing] stuck among the average, middle-ranking countries', with the word 'stuck' again reinforcing a negative message. Another established agenda in UK media reporting, that of the relative performance of the 'home nations' of the Union, is addressed by the inclusion of the following:

The results of the OECD's Pisa tests are particularly poor for Wales, which trails behind the rest of the UK.
Scotland has overtaken England in maths and reading, with England ahead in science tests. Northern Ireland is in third place for the three subjects.

Wales was behind in all three subjects.

Thus, as well as competing with the rest of the world, the clear implication is that the individual nations of the UK are also involved in a mini-competition with each other in education, and consolation for English, Scottish and Northern Irish readers lies in the even worse performance of Wales. The word 'overtaken' reinforces the 'global race' theme seen in political rhetoric, while readers are reminded about the sad position of Wales by the standout 'Wales was behind in all three subjects' at the end of the section. One UK journalist (see chapter 8) told me that 'Wales just adores PISA' (Journalist E, 2019, private correspondence); this report makes it difficult to understand why that might be!

The largely gloomy reporting continues through the article: a positive remark from Schleicher later in the article is immediately countered with a negative one, which also introduces the idea of reference societies as role models to the piece:

Launching the results, Mr Schleicher said the UK spent more in relative terms than most other countries on education. It was also more successful than most at improving the test results of immigrant children.

But he said that the test results showed the UK's school system had so far failed to improve as quickly as other countries, such as Poland in eastern Europe and Vietnam in south-east Asia, which are now ranked higher.

This leads into coverage of remarks from Gove, blaming the previous Labour administration for the shortcomings apparently demonstrated by the results, which had given rise to the 'stagnation; of the education system. Gove is also quoted stating the 'urgent need' for 'our
reforms’, and explicitly linking the requirement to learn from PISA to economic prosperity, reinforcing the knowledge capitalism claims underpinning the OECD’s remit:

Only by learning from other nations and confronting failure at home will we give young people a fighting chance of competing for the jobs of the future.

Predictably, a quote from the Labour shadow minister’s counter-attack appears next, in which he blamed the incumbent administration for the results:

This report exposes the failings of this government’s schools’ policy: a policy that has sent unqualified teachers into the classroom and prevented effective collaboration between schools.

Later in the BBC report, some academic and professional voices were included, all of which urged caution in the interpretation of the results. Teaching union representatives were quoted highlighting the need for fair pay and working conditions for teachers. One academic was quoted as suggesting that South Korean teenagers were very unhappy in school, despite their illustrious results, demonstrating a tendency for the media to resort to stereotypes in any critical reporting of East Asian countries. This is explored further in chapter 8. The final voice in the article is that of another academic, suggesting that politicians attach an ‘exaggerated importance’ to PISA, which implicitly means they are ‘pushing the world to a narrow and particular view of education’. (All citations from Coughlan, 2013, online3).

The above article was selected for deep analysis as it presents a typical example of the English media reporting produced on PISA Day 2013. The initial ‘shock’ headline draws readers in by playing to an established agenda of crisis and blame in the reporting of education stories. The standfirst reinforces the framing of UK failure and global competition;

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3 A full text of this article appears in appendix V
the true horror of the results forms the bulk of the article, which spells out the implications for the nation if things do not improve; then political voices from both sides of the very binary UK spectrum blame each other for the results, before more moderate and nuanced interpretations feature at the very end of the piece, almost as an afterthought. This structure is repeated across all the English articles studied for this thesis, albeit that many stop short of the final element mentioned here - the nuanced professional or academic voices. The 'Fourth Estate' role of the media in this piece, as in all the reporting seen on PISA Day in both England and Sweden, appears to be expressed through the inclusion of opposing political voices: 'balance' is achieved by offering space to those with different opinions on who is to blame for the crisis. The economic knowledge capital agenda of the OECD escapes scrutiny, in this report as in all others studied; and such critical voices as appear (and the BBC article is not typical in including these) are only included to express concern about reference societies, or the impact of testing on the aims of education.

Headline writers were exercised in their search for metaphors to describe the UK position: *The Daily Telegraph* chose 'UK schools treading water' (Paton, 2013, online); Channel 4 headlined with 'Low Marks: Report shows UK education is lagging behind' (Channel 4 news, 2013); while the tabloid *Daily Mail* ran 'Must do Better! Poor Marks for UK teens’ (Martin and Harris, 2013), continuing, in case there was any doubt about the implications of PISA, 'Pupils STILL lag behind world rivals for Maths and Reading'.

The relative weighting of the different elements of the story does vary between providers, however. For example, an editorial in *The Independent* gives prominence to the East Asian reference societies:

There is no way to make the latest international education survey anything other than bad news for Britain. Not only do Asia’s 15-year-olds continue to accelerate away at the top of the table – the top five are Shanghai, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea – but the UK’s lacklustre 26th place is unchanged from the
last Pisa ranking put together in 2009. (The Independent, 3 December 2013, online)

Channel 4 news had the following leader on its website, again referencing competition with Asia, and taking for granted the crisis exposed by the results by asking what has gone wrong:

> UK teenagers are failing to keep up with youngsters in many Asian countries in reading, maths and science, according to a new OECD survey. Where has British education gone wrong? (Channel 4 News, 2013, online)

Interestingly perhaps, there was no detailed media reportage of Gove’s five policy solutions on either PISA Day or in subsequent days. There were passing references to non-specific earlier ‘reforms’ which had variously failed, not had time to work yet or were urgently called for. Special mention should be made of the coverage in The Guardian. This newspaper, available in both print and online versions, has traditionally been the perceived publication of choice for education professionals, and those with more than a passing interest in educational issues. The Guardian ran no fewer than 13 articles on PISA on the day of the results being released. The main feature, while giving space to commentators from organisations with an interest in education, for example The Sutton Trust and the National Union of Teachers, offering alternatives to the dominant failure narrative, made no reference to Gove at all, though it did include the comments of Labour’s Tristram Hunt on the failure of the Government to ‘confront the international challenge’ posed by the ‘Eastern dominance’ of competitor nations (Adams, 2013, online). The negative messages were, nonetheless, reinforced by the headline, ‘UK Students Stuck in Educational Doldrums, Study Finds’. Later on results day, however, The Guardian did carry the only report on Gove’s speech to Parliament in its online version (Adams 2013a). In a piece entitled ‘Michael Gove stands by School reforms’, the education editor Richard Adams quotes directly from the statement to Parliament, focussing on Gove’s commitment to improve autonomy for head teachers and
drawing attention to the poor Swedish results in light of Gove’s former enthusiasm for free
schools modelled on those introduced there. This latter subject featured later in the day in a
separate article by Adams, entitled ‘Swedish results fall abruptly as free school revolution
falters’ (Adams, 2013b), in which both Björklund and Ekström were cited bemoaning the
poor results and blaming previous reforms.

As well as the crisis, stagnation and failure rhetoric, the blaming of opposing domestic actors
and the referencing of Asian societies to justify reform initiatives, a small number of media
outlets did allow space for voices contesting the validity of PISA and cautioning against
excessive importance being attached to the results. For example, an in-depth piece in The
Guardian explored the statistical methods used on PISA, questioned the translation of
papers into different languages and challenged the idea that averages from individual
schools and pupils could be extrapolated to entire countries (Chalabi, 2013). Sky News
reported the opinions of a head teacher, albeit after a lengthy report which began with the
assertion that ‘UK [is] lagging behind the best’:

We know, because we have our own attainment tests in this country, that we are
improving standards, and to compare us to South Korea or Finland doesn’t make
sense. (Sky News, 3 December 2013)

The only report issued on PISA Day which could be described as critical was found,
unexpectedly perhaps, in the right of centre Daily Telegraph. The author, Deacon,
perceptively noted that:

The results of the OECD’s Pisa tests are great. Not for our children, obviously,
but for our politicians. Because if you’re a politician, the Pisa results can be used
to prove whatever you want.

He went on to observe the tendency of politicians to reference other societies, and to claim
that one’s own policies most closely resemble those of these successful societies:
The other great thing you can do is examine the education system at the top of the global league tables – that of Shanghai – and make it look as though its success has been achieved thanks to policies that are the same as your own, and unlike the policies of your rivals. (Deacon, 2013, online)

In summary, the reporting of the results in the English media on PISA Day, 3 December 2013, revealed a strong tendency towards the use of established frames of crisis and blame, failure and stagnation, which easily fit into the agenda of serial reform of an education system long believed to be failing its children. Such criticism of the underlying premise of PISA as appeared, was focused entirely on the impact of the tests on the curriculum, and, in one case, the potential for politicians to abuse results for political gain. As in Sweden, the economic claims made for PISA by the OECD and politicians were not scrutinised or challenged. The themes identified in this section of the chapter will be explored in more detail in chapter 9, when the discussion of how the OECD exercises soft governance through PISA, and the implications of its acceptance into public space, will be more fully developed.

**Beyond PISA Day**

Media reporting of PISA after 3 December remained at a relatively high level for several days, with the focus in the mainstream media turning to the question of what could be learned from the successful countries of East Asia. Unlike in Sweden, there was no further input from the OECD, as English policymakers devised plans to send a delegation to China to discover the secrets of its Mathematics teaching. In February 2014, as Schleicher was briefing the Swedes on what the OECD's in-depth analysis of PISA results had to show, Elizabeth Truss, English education minister, announced in a press release entitled 'Experts to visit Shanghai to raise UK maths standards' that she was bound for China, accompanied by three figures from the English Mathematics teaching arena. The visit was justified on the basis that 'Shanghai is the top-performing part of the world for maths - their children are
streets ahead' (Truss, 2014), and was linked explicitly with the knowledge capital claims surrounding PISA:

> They also have a can-do attitude to maths, which contrasts with the long-term anti-maths culture that exists here.

> The reality is that unless we change our philosophy, and get better at maths, we will suffer economic decline.

> At the moment our performance in maths is weakening our skills base and threatening our productivity and growth. I am determined to change this. (ibid.)

This announcement reflects the passage of the economic claims of the OECD around PISA into domestic UK education policy. Its assumptions were readily reproduced by the media: the BBC reported the press release uncritically, leading with:

> Education Minister Elizabeth Truss is to lead a fact-finding mission to Shanghai to see how children there have become the best in the world at maths (Howse, 2014, online)

and stating that 'the successful methods' would be studied, 'with a view to adopting them in UK schools' (ibid). One newspaper did offer a slightly more critical tone, but again, did not challenge the assumptions of poor performance, or the need to learn from others to improve it. Boldly taking up the Chinese theme, the Observer, a Sunday newspaper and sister publication of The Guardian, headlined with 'The UK needs a revolution in the way maths is taught. Here's why.' (Wolfram, 2014, online). The article, however, continued by suggesting that the UK should in fact be emulating Estonia, rather than China, in attempting to improve Maths teaching. Thus, the underlying assumption of failure was accepted, while the means of tackling it, or at least, the specific foreign context in which it should be tackled, differed.
The outcome of the visit to Shanghai was soon being reported in the media, as, in early March, brief details of a delegation of teachers from that city who were being flown to England to improve maths teaching were announced. The BBC reported that:

Up to 60 Shanghai maths teachers are to be brought to England to raise standards, in an exchange arranged by the Department for Education.
(Coughlan, 2014, online)

and reminded the audience that 'the Chinese city's maths pupils have the highest international test results' (ibid.). The first teachers arrived in the UK late in 2014, and government enthusiasm for the project was such that an ongoing Maths teacher exchange programme (MTE) was announced. The Times Educational Supplement (TES), a publication for teachers, uncritically reported that the programme would be centred around 'maths hubs' which would be 'responsible for ensuring students here reach the same level in the subject as their far Eastern peers' (Ward, 2014, online).

Writing in The Guardian the following year, after the arrival of the second tranche of teachers, the new schools minister Nick Gibb, stated that 'the children of the poorest 30% of Shanghai’s population are outstripping at Mathematics the children of our wealthiest 10% in England', and dismissed criticisms of the programme, as relying on 'crude national stereotypes':

There are many who try to attribute Shanghai’s achievement to supposed socio-cultural explanations. These critics point towards "tiger mothers", China’s growing economy, or the deferential nature of Chinese society to explain away their success. (Gibb, 2015, online)

2015 also marked an apparent heightening of media interest in Chinese education, with the BBC broadcasting at prime viewing time a two-part documentary filmed at a school in Hampshire, where five Chinese teachers conducted Maths lessons for four weeks. This
documentary, entitled ‘Are our kids tough enough?’, arguably reinforced stereotypes around both Chinese and English pedagogies, with the Head teacher of the school commenting afterwards:

Chinese teaching methods were on a collision course with teenage British culture and values. Our pupils are used to being able to ask questions of the teacher - they expect their views to be considered with respect.

Furthermore, British pupils expect to have variety in their learning. They are not used to being incarcerated in a large group and in the same classroom studying a very narrow curriculum. (Strowger, cited by BBC, 2015, online)

The mixed results of the experiment showcased in this documentary did not prevent an ongoing mood of optimism in policy circles, and even among some academics, around the idea that English education could be improved by the adoption of Chinese teaching methods. Also in late 2015, Professor David Reynolds, of Southampton University, was quoted in several news publications expressing his belief that 'thanks to the Shanghai-style teaching' introduced by the Government, it was very possible that PISA scores would be improved. Reynolds was a member of a committee of 'experts' set up to evaluate the Shanghai-England teacher exchange programme, and he appeared to be a convert to the idea, stating, 'I'm an enthusiast...Everything one hears about it is impressive and suggests it's useful' (Weale, 2015, online). A full exploration of the exchange programme is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is interesting to note that in 2018, the programme, being coordinated by a new organisation called Maths Hubs, an offshoot of the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics, was extended to 2020. The DfE produced two reports on the intervention, an interim one in 2016, which concluded that:

There are early indications that the exchange has the potential to meet its core aim of fostering a radical shift in Mathematics teaching in primary schools and to impact on pupil attainment. (DfE, 2016, p.55).
However, when the final results appeared in early 2019, the DfE admitted that:

there is no quantifiable evidence from this evaluation that the MTE or implementation of East Asian informed teaching alone is leading to improvements in pupil attainment in Mathematics at KS2 in comparison with other schools. (DfE, 2019, p.23-24).

Unlike the high media interest when the project was launched, and indeed during the early stages of its implementation, the media coverage of this finding was far more low-key. The reports which did address the issue did, however, carry critical voices, not only of the 'multimillion pound' intervention itself, but of the 'naive' Government view that a single teaching method could ‘transform attainment in isolation’ (Wright and Woolcock, 2019, The Times, online). The regional newspaper The Yorkshire Post also ran the story, perhaps because of the link with Sheffield Hallam University, which coordinated the evaluation project. Interestingly, this report carries an interview which its reporter conducted with the lead researcher, Mark Boylan, in which the latter points to 'three key cultural and professional reasons' why East Asian pupils may perform more highly in Mathematics: two of them related to the structure of Chinese family units, and the other to the professional development of teachers (Blow, 2019, online). This report is the only one carried in the English media about the DfE report which seeks to unpick the results and suggest deeper reasons for them than the 'selection bias' and 'inconsistency of the intervention' line carried by other reports.

The Chinese Maths teacher exchange programme is an example, perhaps the only one, of a policy which was introduced into English schools as a direct result of PISA. This example demonstrates not only the haste with which UK politicians sought to act on perceived poor performance, but also the key role of the media in sustaining a narrative around failure, stagnation and crisis which facilitated the easy passage of the 'Chinese Maths' narrative into public space. The involvement of academic figures in the research demonstrates also the
ease with which the 'applied Comparative Education' exercised by the OECD through PISA can cross over into less obviously quantitative domains via the participation of academics.

In fact, in 2014 there had been another 'crossover' event in the English media, when, in an unprecedented move, a group of international academics wrote an open letter to Andreas Schleicher, which was initially published in The Guardian, and then widely reproduced in newspapers worldwide. In this letter, the academics claimed that the 'juggernaut' of testing encouraged by PISA was damaging education worldwide; that, significantly, the OECD, unlike other global organisations, had no mandate for involvement in education, nor were there 'mechanisms of effective democratic participation in its education decision-making process' (Andrews et al., 2014, online). Pointing out that the mechanisms by which PISA influenced education policy were 'in overt conflict with widely accepted principles of good educational and democratic practice' (ibid.), the signatories called for a pause in PISA testing, so that consideration could be given to questions around its use as 'the global arbiter of the means and ends of education around the world' (ibid).

This initiative was unprecedented in that academics chose to use the media, the OECD's vehicle for disseminating its own governance messages, rather than academic journals, to target a wider audience than such views would otherwise receive. This marks a rare crossover between academia and the media, at least in the direction illustrated, with academics taking the initiative to reach a media audience.

Schleicher replied to this letter, also by writing to The Guardian, two days after the academics' letter was published. In a robust rebuttal of its points, Schleicher claims that the academics made 'a series of false claims' about PISA, addressing each point in turn with a brief counter-argument. Unlike the academics' letter, there is no attempt at discussion or engagement in Schleicher's response - it is a cursory dismissal of points in 'not the case'; 'there is nothing that suggests'; and, 'there are no' clauses. Interestingly, this letter was itself
the subject of academic scrutiny when the journal *Policy futures in Education* invited and published responses to it, and, later, a follow-up article (Goldstein, 2014; Meyer, 2014).

**Discussion**

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that while the initial media response to the PISA 2012 results in England shared some common features with that in Sweden - specifically the tendency to resort to media frames of crisis and urgent need for action - the policy response differed significantly. Whereas in Sweden, the OECD was invited to undertake detailed research of the education environment, and policy actions were deferred until this had taken place, in England the OECD was not involved after the initial, high profile and intense media engagement. Instead, politicians embarked upon a frenetic and costly policy intervention which grabbed media attention and satisfied a political appetite for action. At the same time, radical reforms which had already taken place were retrospectively referenced to PISA, and the messages of PISA were heavily distorted to serve the agendas defined by these reforms. This response is arguably characteristic of a policy environment which has become increasingly allied to media imperatives, and a political elite whose members have often worked as journalists (e.g. Michael Gove) or have received specialised media training.

In the next chapter, the focus will move to the journalists responsible for writing stories about PISA in both Sweden and England. Interviews with these actors, as well as with media officials from the OECD, form the data for the analysis which follows.
Chapter 8

PISA and the Media IV: The Journalists

In the previous three chapters, I have explored in depth both the PISA materials produced by the OECD, and the media reporting of PISA 2012, as well as the policy initiatives in both Sweden and England which were undertaken after the results were released. This analysis revealed several dominant themes in the narratives which were created around PISA, and which persisted in policy and media discourse in the months and years after the results were released; indeed, similar themes were still prevalent by the time the 2015 results were released in December 2016. In this chapter, I undertake a more thorough analysis of these themes, using not only the reported materials, but by including the voices of some of the journalists responsible for producing the media reports. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate an understanding of the media logic and related concepts outlined in chapter 3, as they were applied to the OECD’s own materials around a specific event. The chapter begins with a description of the interviews carried out to obtain the views of the journalists. I then move on to summarise the themes which dominated the media coverage of PISA 2012; and lastly, the bulk of the chapter will attempt to relate the media materials to the views of the journalists who are among those who produced them. Towards the end of the chapter, another voice will be heard - that of the OECD’s Education Director, Andreas Schleicher, who was also interviewed as part of my study.

Methods

I carried out interviews with national journalists in both England and Sweden for the analysis undertaken in this chapter. Access to these individuals was gained via email contact initially; I attempted to contact five journalists in England and five in Sweden. Of these, four in each country replied, stating their willingness to be interviewed. I attempted to contact the
remaining two again, but neither replied to my emails so I did not pursue them further. In the event, I was able only to interview three of the Swedish journalists as one became unavailable for logistical reasons. While all the journalists were happy to be quoted, I have attempted a degree of anonymisation, and will refer to them as shown in table 8.1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Description/job title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swedish Journalist A</td>
<td>Senior Education Correspondent for national Press Agency TT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish Journalist B</td>
<td>Senior Education Reporter on national newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish Journalist C</td>
<td>Senior Education Reporter on national newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Journalist D</td>
<td>Education Editor for national online education news service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Journalist E</td>
<td>Education Editor for national newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Journalist F</td>
<td>Education Editor for national newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Journalist G</td>
<td>Education Editor for national newspaper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.0.1 Journalists interviewed for this research

Interviews in Sweden were conducted in a mixture of Swedish and English, depending on the preferences of the individual journalist. Journalist B was fluent in English and almost the entire interview took place in English; Journalist C spoke little English so answered questions mostly in Swedish; Journalist A answered in a mixture of both English and Swedish. I asked all questions in English, and the journalists were also given a copy of the questions translated into Swedish. In chapter 4 I wrote about the issues of translation; and the aspects of language use, both of my own Swedish and the journalists' English, as well as the difficulties of equivalence, must be borne in mind when data collected in this way is
considered. Interviews with English journalists took place in London and were all conducted in English, the native language of all participants. All interviewees agreed to the interviews being recorded; following interview, the recordings were transcribed. A sample interview transcript is at Appendix III. All journalists were initially asked the same questions; but the interviews were semi-structured in the sense that other questions which arose were also asked, and in some cases, the interviews became more of a conversation between journalist and interviewer.

After the initial round of interviews, I took some of my findings, with supplementary questions, back to second interviews with two journalists. For logistical reasons, these needed to be English journalists, and I approached Journalists D and E for this purpose, as both had been enthusiastic about my research and expansive at initial interview. In these instances, the interviews were individually tailored to their responses at initial interview, as well as presenting some of my early findings to them for comment.

The questions were aimed at gaining an understanding of the motivations, pressures and imperatives around choosing how to write a story - why particular angles are chosen, for example, and how the journalists see their role - as commentators, opinion-writers or reporters of what they see as ‘facts’. Later in this chapter, I will use the words of the journalists to help understand why PISA 2012 was reported in the ways it was, and how media logic was applied to the OECD materials to create media 'stories'. Before this, however, the next section explains how the themes chosen for analysis were identified from the reported material.

**Key Themes in Media reporting of PISA**

The themes discussed in this section arose from the coding of many media texts from both England and Sweden, and from analysis of both the content, and the language used. These
themes are those identified from the analysis of all the material discussed in this thesis so far; and indeed from many other media items not selected for inclusion. In total 56 items of English press material and 58 items of Swedish material were subjected to initial coding. Interview transcripts were also coded in this way. The coding schedule appears in appendix IV.

1. Crisis

The theme of crisis was evident in almost all the media reporting around PISA 2012, in both England and Sweden. It is easy to see that the media in both countries adopted this theme as it characterised the responses of politicians and policymakers on the day the results were announced. In Sweden, the decline in performance was seen in terms of a national tragedy: Björklund, the then Education Minister called it ‘very serious, for children, for schools, for Sweden’ (see chapter 6). In England, despite average, unchanged performance, Gove (see chapter 7) also framed the results in terms of a crisis. In his case, as he is a journalist as well as a politician, with a column in a daily newspaper, his choice of framing might have been influenced by his own media capital, as well as by knowing what would make a ‘good story’. Crisis is a key news value (see chapter 3), and stories framed around national crisis are likely to attract media attention.

2. Blame

Closely allied to the theme of crisis, blame stories appeared in every English media report analysed, as well as in many of the Swedish ones. Blame stories in the English media environment play to a well-established agenda, whereby both sides of the bipartisan political divide blame one another for a crisis which has been demonstrated by the media to have arisen, perhaps as a result of policy: but often natural disasters such as flooding, accidents or even crimes are framed in this way, with opposing political figures seeking to apportion
blame for perceived failings which either led to the crisis in the first place, or else hampered its effective management. Boin, t’Hart and McConnell speak of ‘crisis exploitation’, which leads to ‘framing contests’ as both government actors and their critics scramble to avoid blame and strengthen their own positions (Boin, t’Hart and McConnell, 2008, p. 81). English audiences will expect to see stories of importance framed in this way. In Sweden, the theme of blame was less prominent, perhaps because of the less polarised political system, which relies on cooperation of several parties in a coalition government. Nonetheless, a feature of many of the Swedish reports in the months after PISA Day was the apportioning of blame for the poor results, usually to reforms introduced by political opponents.

3. The Need for Policy Action

The final link in the crisis-blame pattern is the need for resolution, in the form of proposed policy action. Stone pertinently observes that the act of being amenable to human action is what defines a political problem, arguing that:

Problem definition is a process of image making, where the images have to do fundamentally with attributing cause, blame, and responsibility. (Stone, 1989, p. 282)

The link between identifying a crisis, apportioning blame for it and proposing policy agendas to ‘solve’ it, is established in policy science literature (e.g. Lodge and Hood, 2002; Kingdon, 1995). Boin et al. (2008) suggest that not only do political actors have the potential to gain from crises, but that they may also go so far as to manufacture a crisis in order to gain from it by being seen to take effective policy action. In the analysis which follows in this chapter, examples of media reporting of proposed policy solutions to ‘problems’ raised by PISA will be explored.

4. Reference Societies and National Stereotypes
The idea of reference societies identified through PISA is an important theme which has been explored in the literature and was briefly discussed in chapter 8. The use of reference societies is particularly marked in England, where policy makers themselves are open about asking what can be learned from competitor nations on PISA. The use of reference societies is often linked with the tendency of the media, but also of politicians, to resort to national stereotypes when active in this domain, and this, again, will be followed up in more critical detail in chapter 9. In this chapter, brief examples of reports based on this theme will be given, and opinions from journalists will be offered to help understand what gives rise to this form of reporting.

5. The Imperative of improvement, for economic reasons. The role of the OECD as neutral advisor

Closely linked to point 3 above, this theme is particularly strong in reporting of the views of the OECD. This is unsurprising given that it is the central narrative underlying PISA; the claim that performance on the tests is a direct indicator of a nation's future economic prosperity. Allied to this is the idea that the OECD is a non-ideological organisation which advises nations on what is best for them, without any agenda of its own. This is arguably the most important theme identified in my data; it underpins all the media reporting, and all the assertions of policymakers who are using PISA to legitimate their policy initiatives. I argue that the OECD is viewed as a non-ideological, benevolent, almost humanitarian, organisation by many of those who would be in a position to critique its role in global governance. Thus, its economic messages, particularly, in this context, those linking educational performance with human capital theory, are able to pass uncontested into public and policy discourse.

As well as themes which were privileged in politicians’ statements, and media coverage, it is notable that several issues which had prominent coverage in the OECD reporting did not
feature in the media reports. Perhaps the most obvious of these is the theme of equity, which Schleicher always prioritises in his presentations, and which is heavily covered in the 'PISA in Focus' materials. While Gove used the theme of equity to justify, retrospectively, several policy initiatives undertaken by his government (chapter 8), the media did not report on these nor offer any engagement with the opposing interpretations of the concept by the OECD.

The central aim of this chapter is to understand how journalists see their role in the reporting of PISA. In terms of this research, the key 'Fourth Estate' role of the media in holding the powerful to account on behalf of the governed underpins my thesis, and questions around how journalists see this role, both in terms of domestic policy, and, more importantly, in terms of international organisations like the OECD, are those which need deep exploration. Journalists are the critical players in determining whether global governance is held to account in the same way as domestic politics, and the analysis in this chapter aims to discover how the journalists interviewed in England and Sweden saw their role in this regard, as well as how they saw the OECD more generally, and PISA specifically.

I will now take the themes identified above in turn, giving examples of each, and then exploring the views of the journalists which help to cast light on the motivations behind their reporting.

How the themes were reported, and what the journalists said

1. Crisis

In both Sweden and England, the PISA results were portrayed as a crisis. This framing came initially from the policymakers in each nation (see chapters 6 and 7) and was readily picked up by the media in their reporting of it. As described in chapter 3, the idea of a crisis fits neatly into news values and ideas of what is newsworthy; media logic applied at this
stage to the falling or flat-lining results leads to the framing of the results as both a national disaster, or even, as the Perrins example below, fourth quote, from the UK *Daily Telegraph* shows, a potentially personal one:

Löfven: En nationell kris (Löfven: A national crisis -SvT, 4 December 2013)

Skolan en nationell katastrof (The school is a national catastrophe - Gudmundson, 2013)

These findings are a wake-up call for our schools (Hunt, 2013).

In the light of the latest PISA results what is a parent to do? (Perrins, 4 December 2013)

It is worth stating explicitly at this point that the OECD never uses this kind of emotive language in its own reporting of PISA. It may report that results have 'fallen sharply' or 'remained average', but the kind of near-hysterical reporting of crises, disasters and catastrophes originates in domestic, rather than OECD, discourse. It is also worth mentioning that the two countries studied for this thesis are not alone in reporting PISA in this way. Famously, in Germany after the 2000 PISA Schock, the German media reported of the 'PISA fiasco':

Das Land der Dichter und Denker - abgehängt (the land of poets and thinkers - hanged, Spiegel, online)

demonstrating that the crisis caused by PISA had gone straight to the heart of German national identity. However, many countries do not have a history of reporting poor or average results in this way; for example, in Canada, when the 2012 results showed a decline, a representative headline and standfirst were framed in more moderate language:
Canada’s students slipping in math and science, OECD finds: Canadian scores above average, but well behind front-running students in Shanghai, China (Canadian Press, 2013, online).

Similarly, US results were reported in a lower-key, less sensational manner:

American Students Fall in International Academic Tests, Chinese Lead the Pack: Education leaders say the results are disappointing and 'lackluster (sic).'
(Bidwell, 2013, online).

This thesis does not allow a detailed exploration of the factors affecting the framing of PISA results in different societies, though there are recent signs of scholarly interest in this field (e.g. Waldow, Takayama and Sung, 2014; Rutkowski and Rutkowski, 2016). It is interesting to note that both the countries selected for study here displayed a similar tendency to frame the results in terms of a crisis, despite the results showing different trends in each.

The framing of PISA results as a crisis demonstrates several of the key features of media logic discussed in chapter 3: a negativity bias; bad news; surprise; and the follow-up of an established narrative. All the journalists interviewed in England were open about the need to use the headline and the standfirst of a story to ‘hook’ the audience in; and several commented that this meant taking risks around ‘the truth’ - one used the term 'bending the truth' (Journalist G); another of ‘a balance between making something interesting and misrepresenting its truth’ (journalist D). Several journalists acknowledged that the competitive commercial nature of the UK media environment led to a tendency to sensationalise headlines: ‘to get an audience, it needs to compete’ (Journalist D). Another English journalist was explicit in spelling out why a negative headline and story would be preferred:

...now in the world of accessible news, usually saying England did worse at something is regarded as more successful news because people read things
[more], umm, so yeah, on the scale of like England gets worse, England gets better, and England stayed the same, they're all interesting, but those are the possible outcomes. (Journalist E).

While another stated:

negative news has always had its own persuasive powers...you know we like a bad news story (Journalist D).

In Sweden too, I was told that negative news attracts more attention: Journalist B told me that 'I think it would get more coverage if it was bad news, because that is generally how it works'. If Sweden were to improve, however, that would also be a big story, because 'it's not more of the same, it's something new' - demonstrating the pervasive media logic and imperative for news to be 'new' - the 'newness' may override the negativity if a story is big enough. Nonetheless, it seems that the use of the words 'crisis' and 'catastrophe' was an accurate reflection of the way the story was viewed on PISA day. Many staff at the Schools Ministry, Skolverket, had cried when they learned of the poor Swedish performance, I was told. The journalists in Sweden did not feel they were sensationalising the headlines; though the reporter for TT, when asked specifically about the use of the word 'katastrof' said she would not use it herself because

that would be my personal opinion in that case, and I am not paid for spreading my personal opinions. I am a news reporter.

When asked how it was in that case that the word was used so frequently, this reporter told me that the word was 'already in use' to describe PISA, because of the German PISA Schock in 2001. Reporter A also told me that TT had received

thousands of comments that day, and people were talking about a disaster, about grief, catastrophe...then it's my work to summarise this.
In summary, the framing of PISA in terms of a crisis is a natural collision of media logic, specifically in terms of news values, with the data of the OECD on education systems in both England and Sweden. While in England, journalists recognised the need to reach an audience with a negative or sensational headline, in Sweden the journalists believed they were reflecting political and public opinion with the use of 'crisis' language. Swedish reporter B noted that voices countering this narrative were heard in Swedish media discourse, 'but I don't think they came right after [the results came out]', so they were not represented in media texts.

2. Blame

As indicated above, this theme is closely allied to the theme of crisis, and an interesting aspect of this study is that blame for poor PISA results is a feature of much of the news reporting in both countries, with, as will be discussed below, little engagement with the overarching issue of the OECD and its responsibility towards PISA participants. In both Sweden and England, there was no contestation of the legitimacy of the OECD judgement, and instead, the debate focused on who could be blamed for the outcomes. This was discussed in detail in the preceding chapters, but a sample of quotes from news outlets in both countries is included here for emphasis:

The Environment party laid the blame for the negative outcomes of the PISA tests on education minister Jan Björklund's reform 'rain'; on increased control at all levels, and on falling investment in schools (Skolvärlden, 2013a, online, translated from Swedish)

In a press release the Sweden Democrats' spokesperson Carina Herrstedt said that, among other things, the freedom of establishment [of schools] and immigration policy lie behind the problems (Bloodworth, 2013, online, translated from Swedish)
PISA 2012 is not an evaluation of [our] new school policies; but the nail in the coffin for the old ones (Björklund, in Bloodworth, ibid).

These examples from Sweden show a pattern replicated in England - politicians blaming their opponents for the disasters of PISA. The Guardian, for example, pointed out that:

The findings will cast a major shadow over the last government’s education record and spark claims that a £30 billion rise in spending under Labour failed to translate into measurable improvements in standards (Paton, 2013, online)

One report for the BBC carried a paragraph which seemed to direct blame at politicians and policy makers in general, expressing the uncharacteristic view that nothing had made any difference to the results:

The UK's results have failed to show any real sign of movement and are flat-lining. Think of all those announcements, the interventions, the investment, the speeches. (Coughlan, 2013a, online)

The Times led its coverage of PISA Day with the headline 'UK children lag world rivals in maths and reading despite reforms' (Hurst and Naughton, 2013, online), leading into a report in which the words of both Gove and Hunt were framed into a bipartisan blame story, with the words of the two men being juxtaposed for emphasis:

Mr Gove called [the new results] a verdict on the education record of the previous Labour administration.

Tristram Hunt, the Shadow Education Secretary, said the current school reforms were failing to improve teaching and learning.

An interesting variation on this was seen in a Welsh report for the Independent Television Company (ITV), which carried a statement from the Shadow (Opposition) Welsh Secretary Owen Smith in a standout box headlined "'Honest' response to 'disappointing' PISA results
praised’ (ITV, 2013, online). The broadcaster chose to highlight the focus on political point-scoring stimulated by PISA, giving heavy visual emphasis to Smith’s words using colour and an outline box:

The response of the Welsh Government to today’s results has been honest, serious and long-sighted, in contrast to the short term, party-political points which Conservative UK Cabinet Ministers have sought to make today. Using the education of Welsh pupils, striving for attainment in some of the most challenged and deprived communities of Britain, as a means to score points off the Labour Party, is a cheap trick which will be seen for what it is by the Welsh people. (ibid).

The above examples illustrate that the reporting of the PISA results fits easily into a frame with which audiences in both countries would have been familiar, and which relies on a previously reported agenda around crisis, political reform and blame. Journalists interviewed were clear as to why this type of reporting was so common: it was seen as a way of achieving ‘balance’ and impartiality in an article, by including opposing views on a subject. One UK journalist stated that there was a need to 'show both sides' of a story as this satisfied the 'expectation of balance' - ‘stories are better if you have different voices in them' (Journalist D). Another UK journalist went further, explaining that nuance within a story was limited by the need to counter every view given with an opposing one:

But, what you’re constrained by is you have to have someone who is willing to say something directly opposite. Someone has to be able to point this out. (UK Journalist E)

A Swedish journalist was clear that about the need to reflect different opinions, though this extended only so far:

You should try to give all the points of view but not if one of the points of view are (sic) really crazy (Journalist B)
Another UK journalist remarked that because PISA tends to be treated as a political news story, the conventions around reporting in this way tended to be observed:

Someone publishes something, says something, the government announces something, the opposition announces something. And then that tends to be a more [...] not quite binary, but more of a, err, for and against sort of story. Someone will say this is what should be done. And then someone else will say no it shouldn’t be. And that, those sorts of news stories are different, I think. They’re, they’re often political stories...And they are often essentially representing two world views (UK Journalist D)

Thus, it seems that 'blame' reporting is a natural consequence of a story which is perceived by journalists to be 'political' in nature colliding with media logic applied to subject matter which is reported as 'news'. In both England and Sweden, political news is usually reported along binary, party-political lines, reflected the essentially bipartisan political system, with opposing actors typically blaming each other for political crises which have arisen, or been created. Despite PISA falling under the remit of education, and being assigned by media outlets to specialised education correspondents, it is reported as though it were political news. It may be significant in this respect that though all the journalists interviewed were education correspondents, all were responsible to general news editors, apart from Swedish Journalist A and UK Journalist D, who were able to act autonomously. Swedish Journalist C and UK Journalist E made the point that a web editor would usually decide on the headline which would appear online, while a general print editor would be responsible for the headline in a print edition of the newspaper. Thus, the specialist correspondent who has written the story would not usually have input into the headline. This interplay of responsibilities, along with established conventions around political reporting, would almost certainly have influenced the framing of the PISA story, and the ways in which the 'challenge' narratives were constructed around bipartisan, or in Sweden, multi-actor, lines, rather than seeking to apportion blame outside the domestic political contexts. I argue that this use of political
framing to report the PISA story is a factor in the lack of challenge to OECD governance seen in media discourse in both England and Sweden.

3. The Need for Policy Action

Linked to both factors considered above, the need for policy action is the third aspect of political crisis and blame reporting, which allows politicians to exploit the 'policy window' (Kingdon, 1995) opened by public discourse around an event. This strategy was marked in the responses to PISA in both Sweden and England and was examined in some detail in chapters 6 and 7. Media coverage of the initiatives proposed after the PISA results were released was initially muted in both countries, and largely confined to straightforward narrative accounts of what had been proposed. In neither country was there any media questioning of whether the proposed policy actions were either justified by the results, or appropriate in terms of addressing problems exposed by the results. In Sweden, it was widely reported that 'experts' from the OECD were being invited in to evaluate the education system in more depth, and propose policy actions based upon their findings. The 'catastrophe' of PISA was taken for granted in all the reporting seen at this time, and there was also no media challenge to the 'solution' of asking the OECD to produce more data about Sweden. The reporting around the OECD interventions was analysed in detail in chapter 6. In summary, after the interim report was released by the OECD in February 2014, there was an emphasis in media reporting on the issue of teachers' salaries, which had been touched upon by Schleicher in his briefing but was not a key element of the report. By the time the interim and final findings of the in-depth analysis were being reported, the media was using established framing of blame and counter-blame to interpret the results for their audiences. And while one senior actor in the education policy sphere, Anna Ekström, took a robust stance towards the intervention of the OECD, this was not reflected in the media reporting of the events.
In England, Michael Gove's 'five pillars of reform', announced on PISA Day, attracted little or no media coverage, the focus instead being on the 'stagnation' of English education and the urgent need to catch up with foreign competitors, with political voices being introduced to media narratives to blame each other for the crisis. Shortly after the PISA results were released, in July 2014, the BBC ran a story online in which Gove's career as Education Secretary was evaluated. In the middle of a report which aimed to explain the dominance of Gove in the English education debate over a period of 'a breakneck four years', Coughlan, the author, pointed out that while most of Gove's 'very personal' policy initiatives were well known and attracted lively debate and opposition, the issue of his interest in PISA remained under-evaluated:

> An under-recognised change, with far-reaching ramifications, has been his emphasis on wanting England's schools to catch up with international competitors. In the flurry of announcements it was almost overlooked that for the first time England's GCSEs are to be pegged against the global benchmark of Pisa tests. (Coughlan, 2014a, online)

This appears to be an acknowledgement that the policy interventions undertaken by Gove in the name of PISA did not receive much media coverage, while other aspects of his tenure in office (e.g. the changes to the GCSE examinations; the removal of American texts from English syllabuses) were subject to great scrutiny.

In interviews with journalists, I tried to discover why the reporting of policy initiatives around PISA 2012 received such muted coverage. This was a problematic area, and helps to illuminate observations around point 5 - the lack of challenge to the soft governance of the OECD and the hegemonic penetration of its economic messages. In Sweden, the policy initiatives announced after PISA were all directly linked to OECD reports - in other words, the Ministry and the OECD appeared to be working together on the same issue. In England, the policies announced on PISA Day were independent of the OECD and relied on
politicians for interpretation. This factor must be considered when the comments of journalists are explored. Swedish journalist C told me:

As Swedes when someone from another country is telling us what to do and what we shouldn’t do, we listen to that, it is very important to us, so [the OECD] took another perspective, looked at Sweden from the outside and said you have to do this and this and this…so it must be right.

The sense of shock in Sweden, combined with the belief that the OECD were telling ‘the truth’ about Swedish schools, helped to ensure a lack of challenge for policy initiatives seen to be driven by the OECD itself. The heavy presence of Schleicher at three separate dedicated media events in the two years after PISA helped to reinforce the legitimacy of the Swedish proposals and to maintain their credibility even after an election and a change of government. Journalist A remarked:

Ok catastrophic result in PISA - what shall we do? How can we sort this out? If PISA had not happened, I am not sure education would have been such an important election issue.

The view of the OECD as a non-ideological expert will be explored in greater detail below; but this is, in my view, key to the easy passage of the policy reform proposals in Sweden which were put forward and partially implemented after the PISA results were published.

This hypothesis does not explain why in England the policy initiatives announced on PISA Day had so little media coverage at the time; nor does it explain the lack of challenge around the one high-profile initiative which did receive extensive coverage, that of the Chinese Maths teaching. UK Journalist G attributed the media interest in PISA not only to its own success as an instrument, but to the high domestic use of the material by policymakers:
In recent years, British politicians have placed greater emphasis on PISA, so it has become more of a political story, and then the significance becomes, er, more relevant.

This journalist spoke of a 'line in the sand' when Michael Gove took office, and 'threw down the gauntlet', making it an aim of English education to improve PISA scores. It was at this point, Journalist G asserted, that PISA became a political story, and 'therefore had greater significance'. Nonetheless, there was little reporting of Gove's policy announcements on PISA Day. The English journalists interviewed all suggested that time and space constraints, along with the ever-present need to show 'both sides' of a story, lay behind editorial decisions not to include this material at the time.

It's very difficult to say, 'Michael Gove said, you know, the OECD says autonomy is really good, that's why our reforms, that's what all our reforms are about'...It's very difficult to then in a news story, where you've got lots of other things to cover, umm, to then, sort of, tail back and go, 'but the OECD said autonomy was all right, but...' (Journalist E)

There was also a feeling in England that policy initiatives were not 'exciting' or 'surprising' enough to warrant inclusion in initial stories around PISA. UK journalist F spoke constantly about the imperative of 'surprise' in a story, ideally with a degree of controversy too. 'It's difficult to do an OECD story because it's dense', this journalist remarked, suggesting that the views of a politician on the material would 'hardly be new'. When pressed explicitly on the lack of challenge to domestic interpretations of PISA messages, journalists in both England and Sweden appeared to feel that this was not their role:

So, there's two, there's two possible points of challenge, there. Firstly, umm, the sort of obvious points of rebuttal, which come from the Opposition, or teaching unions, so if Gove, if Gove stands up and says, well, or the secretary of state stands up and says 'we've seen OEC... these PISA responses. There's calls for urgent response by the government, we're going to do x', at that point the
Opposition, somebody to challenge it has got to stand up and say, at some point, and say, 'but it doesn’t' [laughs], or, you know, but there’s, we can’t spontaneously, we can’t write articles for newspapers where you just oppose government policy because you think it’s a bad idea. (UK Journalist E)

It is impossible for media to set another agenda because we have to cover what comes up - we can't ignore it, we must reflect what is said (Swedish journalist A)

Though the Swedish reporter here also stated that it is the job of a journalist to 'go deeper' into stories, and commented that if [English] reporters do not have time to do that, 'that is a huge problem then'.

The perception of the OECD as 'neutral', or at least 'removed', inspector and assessor is explored below. I argue that this presumption is also a factor in allowing the messages of PISA to find their way into domestic governance, albeit in referenced or altered form. This will be explored more in chapter 9.

Thus, it seems that the lack of coverage of, and challenge to, the domestic policy responses to PISA in England and Sweden arose from different conditions. In Sweden, I propose that the involvement of the OECD at the policy development stage led to an uncontested acceptance at key moments, which allowed the government to pass its agenda with the support of what was viewed as a legitimate outside authority. In England, I suggest that the imperative of a new, quick and exciting story overrode the need to interrogate the latest in a long line of reform initiatives from a Secretary of State who had already become known for his appetite for changing English education.

4. National Stereotypes and Reference Societies

This theme sits somewhat uneasily in my analysis of key themes in PISA reporting, as it is not central to the narrative of crisis, blame and reform upon which initiatives around PISA appear to rely so heavily. Nonetheless it warrants brief exploration, as the discourse around
The competition which helps to fuel PISA’s acceptance into national education stories is supported by the constant imperative of comparison with other nations. The presentation of the results in 'league table format' plays comfortably into predictable headlines like the English examples below:

Pisa 2012 results: which country does best at reading, maths and science? (The Guardian data blog, 2013, online)

Pisa tests: UK stagnates as Shanghai tops league table (Coughlan, 2013b, online)

The following item came directly from the Education Media Centre in London, which hosted the embargoed OECD press briefing to release the 2012 PISA results:

Shanghai Tops; UK Average – Find the full OECD’s PISA 2012 results here (EMC, 2013, online)

England is an active contributor to the promulgation of national stereotypes, especially around Asia, in the reporting of PISA stories. As a form of 'banal nationalism' (Billig, 1995), the PISA rankings play easily into notions of ‘us’ (‘how well did we do?’) and ‘them’ (‘how did they beat us?’). The rhetoric around the ‘global education race’ goes beyond this, however, as it helps to create tension around the economic imperatives at the heart of the OECD’s core mission.

It is unsurprising that at a time when English politicians were actively defining education in terms of a global race (see chapter 1), the media reporting would reflect this, along with the logical extrapolation that competitor nations outperforming England on PISA were also set to damage the country’s future economic prospects. As discussed above, Gove's speech to Parliament in the aftermath of the 2012 results, drew heavily on the idea of borrowing from East Asian nations to reference policy reforms he was planning to introduce:
In Shanghai and Singapore, South Korea and Hong Kong—indeed even in Taiwan and Vietnam—children are learning more and performing better with every year that passes.

Shanghai, the world’s best-performing education system, has a rigorous system of performance-related pay. We have given head teachers the same freedoms here.

Our new national curriculum is explicitly more demanding, especially in maths, and it is modelled on the approach of high-performing Asian nations such as Singapore. (Gove, 2013)

The media responses, which were brief or non-existent, to the reform initiatives were discussed in detail in chapter 7. The English journalists interviewed explained the focus on competitor nations in terms of a ‘ritual’ (Journalists D and E) which had to be gone through when explaining ‘what the results mean’ to readers’. Journalist E explained that a PISA story would be written in almost a formulaic way, and references to competitor nations would be part of that:

...you hoover it all up from various sources. Some of it you do directly, some of it’s from stuff you get emailed, or, you know, things they, they put out — their own statements. Umm, and then you’re getting up to, once you’ve sort of squeezed out all that, there’s a bit of, you try and get a bit of background, a few points, and then sort of, some brief mentions about how, you know, Shanghai is the best in the world, and blah blah blah, and so, you know, then you’re up to several hundred words, you know, eight, nine hundred, a thousand words, and that’s kind of your limit. So the ability to then, to put in any sort of, any countervailing, or, you know, counterarguments or counterpoints, that isn’t contained in the other people’s responses...

Thus, it seems once again that it is the very media logic which defines the ‘Fourth Estate’ role of the media, which also constrains journalists and prevents them from exercising it, at least in England. It appears to be a ‘natural’ feature of a news report based on the ranking of
nations, to attempt to draw more detailed comparisons with those nations, and the use of stereotypes to do so fits journalistic frames identified and explored in chapter 3 - particularly those of conflict and economic consequences (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000) and counts and comparisons, criticisms and contextual considerations (Baroutsis and Lingard, 2017).

Grey and Morris (2019, under review) explore the use of national stereotypes around creativity to help explain the 'us and them' stories of PISA and the framing of competitors in stereotypical terms. For example, East Asian nations tend to be portrayed in many Western media as lacking in creativity, imposing long and rigorous hours of rote learning on young people. This leads to headlines such as the following:

Nine-hour tests and lots of pressure: welcome to the Chinese school system (Kaiman, 2014, online).

The success of such nations on PISA leads to a tension in media discourse, and a paradox for the OECD. The heavy reliance on policy referencing to the Far East in Gove's reforms, and the success of these nations on PISA, would potentially have offered the English media a rich potential field of nuanced material from which to choose. It appears that in this case, again, time and space constraints and the formulaic treatment of 'political' stories prevented this engagement, at least in the crucial days around the PISA results release.

In Sweden, the use of national stereotypes was most apparent around the key concept of creativity mentioned above, and examined in detail in chapter 6. In this case, the concept was used as a kind of 'self-stereotyping' - the Swedish journalists had an image of their country as 'creative', and this image was being challenged by the success of competitor nations, who, they were being told, were not only good at Maths and science, but were creative too. Journalist C told me that the motivation behind the challenge here lay in the strong sense of Swedish identity which was being challenged through PISA:
we, as Swedes, we didn't really want it to be as bad as it was... we tried to find all these things that could be good anyway, even though you couldn't really tell, like at least we don't put our kids in school for 14 hours a day, and they are at least good at creativity - which they weren’t, when they measured the creativity part

Journalist A also mentioned creativity, as well as other subjects not measured by PISA, acknowledging that PISA may attract too much media attention:

teachers and researchers in the field say too much focus on PISA and there are good things in Swedish schools, like creativity, I mean, Swedish pupils are good in English, IT, social science...but we don't talk very much about those

At the same time, this journalist commented on the limited power the media have to influence what is published:

It is impossible for media to set another agenda because we have to cover what comes up - we can't ignore it, we must reflect what is said

The concept of creativity thus proves to be key once again in the perpetuation and use of national stereotyping in PISA. At the time of writing, the OECD was planning to include a test of creativity in PISA 2021. This will be mentioned in more detail in chapter 9, when the future of PISA is briefly discussed.

Also in Sweden, it was noted that Schleicher referenced Finland several times in his initial presentation to the media. It is likely that, as someone who knows Sweden well, Schleicher would have been aware of the longstanding rivalry between the two nations (Wood, 2017), so presenting Finland as a role model to a Swedish audience is likely to stir some uncomfortable feelings ('that is difficult for us to hear’, Journalist A). The implication that Finland not only managed to foster creativity, but also to score highly on PISA, helped to
drive the rhetoric around the need for Sweden to improve, thereby possibly bolstering support for policy action.

To understand the power of national stereotyping for nations on PISA, it is necessary to bear in mind the now reified ideas around 21st century skills and the links which have been made between the knowledge and skills of school children and the future economic performance of nations (see chapter 5). PISA allows ‘other’ nations to be framed in two key ways - as economic competitors, and as allies from whom nations must learn if they wish to compete. The equity messages so beloved of the Education Director, Schleicher, are contradictory in the sense that if all nations managed to attain top scores on PISA, the idea of being 'economically competitive' would be a redundant and self-defeating one. The corollaries of the ‘your school system today is your economy tomorrow’ message, alongside the ‘what can we learn from our competitors?’ questions, lead to a point at which education is viewed only as a means to attaining an impossible utopia where competition and cooperation, in the form of transfer of ‘best practice’ become the same thing. The journalists I interviewed seemed unaware of this discourse, and of the OECD’s role in constructing the ‘knowledge economy’. I argue that this is the largest contributing factor to the lack of media challenge around PISA and the consequent easy passage of the soft governance role of the OECD into the media space of western democracies. It is discussed in the following section.

5. The Imperative of improvement, for economic reasons. The role of the OECD as neutral advisor

The issue of how the OECD is seen by those who consume its messages is, in my view both central to its increasingly powerful role in educational governance, and an under-researched area which seems to 'slip through the cracks' between academia and journalism. In this section, I aim to demonstrate, using the words of journalists, how the organisation is
perceived and how, in my view, this has led to a lack of challenge from key political and media actors.

Every journalist I spoke to referred to the neutrality of the OECD in its educational work. Only one, UK journalist E, had a deep understanding of the origins of the organisation and a scepticism towards PISA and the motives of the OECD in its implementation, but this journalist did not see it as his role to challenge that, citing reasons of lack of space and the inability to find counter-voices to include in such a piece.

The assumed neutrality of the OECD is evident in media reporting by the absence of any description of the organisation or its remit in stories. Significant here is a point made by Gurevitch and Blumler about a phenomenon which they say is rarely noticed in discussions of media power:

> Powerful institutions in society are powerful at least in part because they can plausibly claim authority over the definition of issues falling within their spheres...Not surprisingly, when journalists seek an authoritative perspective on a certain field of issues, they turn to those officials who are defined by their positions as authoritative sources. Media professionals do not see this practice as violation of the canon of objectivity, since the sources are consulted precisely for their presumed expertise and not merely as proponents of a certain point of view. Alternative definitions of social issues are then disadvantaged - either not represented at all, given short shrift, or labelled as 'interested' and 'biased'

(Gurevitch and Blumler, 1990, p. 277)

By this logic, the OECD appears in news reports as a legitimate, or at least a plausible, to use Gurevitch and Blumler's term, authority, despite its lack of mandate to influence policy decisions in nation states. When the OECD appears in media stories around PISA, no explanation is offered, it is merely 'the OECD', in the same way that the government is 'the government'. In fact, in many of the media texts studied, the parent organisation of PISA
was not even mentioned in the report. The first layer of challenge, that which explains to the reader who exactly an actor is in a news item, is lost. I argue that this initial lack of challenge is significant in allowing the OECD to exercise power through the media by a process of tacit legitimation. Examples of references, and in one case, omissions to mention, the OECD in the body of media texts are shown below:

East Asia has strengthened its grip on the top places of the world’s most influential international education rankings, it was revealed today. Countries or states from region occupy all the top seven positions for maths, the main focus of the Programme for International Student Assessment (Pisa) 2012 results which compares the performance of 15-year-olds. (TES, 2013, online)

The OECD concluded that across all three subjects the UK’s performance has not improved since the last Pisa tests in 2009. Andreas Schleicher, from the OECD, said: “The relative standing and the absolute standing of the UK is really unchanged. In essence you can say that the UK stands where it stood in 2009.” (Channel 4 news, 2013, online)

Today the OECD’s major study of school results in the developed world was published. Sweden continues to lag behind. More and more young people are failing to get access to opportunities in their lives, and to the support they need to cope with Mathematics, science and literacy (Aftonbladet, 2013, online, translated from Swedish)

Many reports in both countries carry comparisons with other OECD countries, and speak of ‘the OECD average’; but not one attempts an explanation of what the OECD is; most do not even expand the acronym. In this way, the organisation is accorded with ‘respect, even reverence’ (Gurevitch and Blumler, 1990, p.277) which serves to legitimate its authority over the subject of educational comparison. It also escapes the much-cited journalist imperative of ‘balance’, because it is not seen as ‘biased’ or ‘interested’, but as a neutral authority, whose voice does not need to be challenged or countered to attain ‘objectivity’ in reporting. As well as being introduced and accepted as a legitimate ‘expert’, it escapes a potential
challenge point from counter-voices in much the same way as a team of cancer specialists or veterinary surgeons pronouncing on advances in treatment might.

The 'easy legitimation' which arises from the implicit lack of challenge to the OECD is supported by the views of journalists interviewed. In both Sweden and England, reporters spoke of the need to have an 'objective' authority evaluating education:

International comparisons are very important to try and get objective judgements on standards (UK Journalist G)

We don't have any national measurements, so PISA is the only way for us to tell that we are getting worse every year. (Swedish journalist B)

PISA is regarded as a good, solid test (Swedish journalist A)

The OECD are like 'international referees' (UK Journalist D)

Journalist D went so far as to say,

The interesting question is does the OECD have an agenda? What is it? I don't know. They're very respected aren't they...they have a sort of global status.

Journalist E held the view that PISA was not amenable to 'control' by politicians, and that therefore its messages could not be manipulated by them in the same way as domestic data could be. This appeared to limit the extent to which this journalist felt that OECD material was not 'objective':

And one of the big difficulties in talking about education is almost everybody involved is an institution, and that makes it really difficult. The government, the DfE, are the prime sources of education news, umm, which is one of the reasons why the OEC..., why PISA is interesting, because actually it's not in their control, umm, you know, everything else; the government has quite a lot of latitude in
terms of its manipulation, umm, ability to manipulate, or suppress, if there’s anything it doesn’t like. Or change, or, you know, but with PISA they’re signed up to something and they’ve got limited, they’ve got limited ability to influence it.

In follow-up interviews with Journalists D and E in England, I posed the question of challenge of the OECD explicitly, pointing out the questions in the Swedish press conference in which journalists had asked about, for example, creativity and school day length.

Journalist E answered:

But what’s the point of that? What’s the point of challenging it at that point, I mean?

While Journalist D felt that the 'respected' status of the OECD gave the organisation a credibility which left it above challenge:

Does it have an ideology? What is it? [...] It’s our job to reflect and to be honest and to be independent... to challenge things which are false or appear to be false.

Swedish journalist B, however, had 'never reflected' on the issue of challenging authority, but saw it as ‘my role, yes, for sure, that is part of my role, to question...on behalf of my readers’. Nonetheless, this journalist felt that her audience - teachers, parents, the public, saw PISA as valid, and 'don't question that we should be in it'. She too agreed that PISA was seen as necessary, to evaluate Swedish education and to confirm to concerned domestic professionals and parents that Sweden faced a crisis: 'we don't have the position we once had'.

This phenomenon, of an organisation being seen as a credible expert authority, not only appears to limit the challenge offered to the organisation itself, but also means that the wider messages around economics which are explicitly linked by the OECD to PISA do not filter into media texts. With the exception of Journalist E, the reporters I spoke to appeared
unaware of the economic remit of the OECD, at least with regard to education, and thus appeared unconcerned about the underlying purpose of PISA. Most of the journalists interviewed saw their audience as being parents, what UK Journalist G called 'consumers of education through their children', and through the interviews I gained the impression that it was felt that a general audience of this nature would be interested in a news story only as it applied to them. Journalist G was clear that stories on education in his newspaper (a centre-right broadsheet) would not be aimed at specialised readers, so the underlying remit of the parent organisation of PISA would not reach the threshold for inclusion in a general news item on the test results. This reporter said, 'it would be very damaging for our brand if we were not seen to be robustly independent', but also stated that he was 'slightly wary of reporting things you would expect somebody to say because of the position they hold' because it would 'not make a very interesting news story'. Like the other UK journalists interviewed, Journalist G had been a reporter in other areas before - among my sample there were two previous Economics Editors, a Political reporter and a general news editor. All the journalists, in both Sweden and England, had considerable experience in wider news journalism, and all apart from Swedish journalist C and UK Journalist F had been in the role of Education reporter/Editor for several years. Thus, one might reasonably have expected them to be familiar with the OECD's economic remit and the link with human capital theory. Yet none of them saw this as relevant to their stories about PISA. The result of this apparent 'blind spot' in the interests of journalists reporting on PISA is that Andreas Schleicher's oft-repeated statement that 'your school system today is your economy tomorrow' passes unchallenged into public space and becomes a 'common sense truth' which gradually comes to define the purpose of education. The 'if not you, then who?' question to journalists met with a mixture of 'not my role', 'no space', 'not news' responses. Thus, the core purpose of PISA, its explicit linkage to economic improvement, while it has been challenged academically, remains uncontested in public discourse and journalists believe that by reporting on PISA, they are passing on objective and valid judgements on education itself, from a legitimate, neutral authority.
The OECD View: Andreas Schleicher

At this point I feel it is relevant briefly to include the opinion of the OECD Education Director, who has shaped the PISA tests and had control over how relations with the media have been conducted since the beginning of the programme. I spoke with Andreas Schleicher and asked some specific questions about the way in which PISA interacted with the media. He sees the media as integral to sparking what he calls a 'public debate' around education, admitting that 'we create products, publications, that speak to the media'. He believes strongly that the reforms he saw in his home country of Germany after the 2001 PISA Schock arose because of the intervention of the media:

In my own country Germany for example the real changes in education started when the media picked the message up, when the media said 'why are we not as good as Finland?' or as good as, you know...that was the moment when public policy took a deep breath, you know...and I think this public discussion about education is very important

Schleicher was unconcerned about the potential for misrepresentation, or 'scandalisation' of the PISA results by the media, believing that 'the truth' would eventually come out. He agreed that early reporting would focus on 'a very simplistic view' but was satisfied that the democratic process would ensure accurate reporting in the medium to longer term:

I actually think, you know, there is enough discussion in the media that eventually the truth comes out. The media like everybody else take stances, take viewpoints, take isolated facts and you put all of that together and yeah...

...my sense is that, you know, democracy is about debate, arguing, and eventually you find the right answer and I think that's the same with the media debate, eventually I'm quite optimistic that the media actually get the right thing
Sure that [media focus on superficial/shock aspect] happens, on the first day, but on the second day someone else will (lost word) in greater depth, and on the third day, and then gradually you'll have a discussion...

Schleicher's belief that early reporting would gradually give way to more nuanced and reflective journalism around PISA was used to justify the early 'simplistic' headlines, as he felt that these would soon pass. He felt that PISA was contributing to the democratic process by encouraging 'public debate', and that the media contributed to this debate by supplying 'the truth' once initial sensational reports had been and gone. While this might be accurate on one level, my analysis suggests that, as Alexander states, 'it's the headlines which do the damage' (Alexander, 2010), and that the nuanced debates around PISA which Schleicher appears confident in fostering do not perhaps take place in quite the way he feels they do.

Schleicher pointed out something which my analysis supports: that there is a difference in the quality of the debate around PISA in Sweden and in England:

I think Sweden is a lot calmer in the debate, and they are sort of trying to look behind you know the next step, forward-looking kind of public debate...you can see also that it's less about the political spectrum, right and left...what they say is more about educational solutions I think? I don't want to say that the debate is deeper, but I do think that it is less polarised and more focused on the educational questions as opposed to the political questions.

As well as fostering debate, Schleicher attributes actual policy interventions to PISA, using the assertion that 'none of the big reforms in Germany would have happened if the media wouldn't have [become involved]' to support his strong belief in the coercive power of media actors:

I think the media have played a very important role, you know, public policy would not move without media pressure...I think that is the role of the media.
This statement lies at the heart of my thesis - how the role of the media is perceived by the different actors involved in the PISA process. In the next chapter I will discuss in more detail the ways in which the media, the OECD and political actors work in synergy to facilitate the transfer into global governance of messages around PISA.

In this chapter I have attempted to analyse and explain the motivations of, and pressures on, education reporters in England and Sweden as they choose how to frame reports on PISA. I have demonstrated that predictable news-driven agendas around crisis and blame provide the default framing for the reporting in the immediate aftermath of the PISA results. The frames used help to serve established agendas and allow policymakers to exploit policy windows opened by the perceived crisis to further, and add legitimacy to, their own domestic political agendas. Crucial to this process is the uncritical acceptance of the expert authority of the OECD to speak on education matters. This acceptance allows the key economic imperatives of the organisation to gain power in public discourse and to inform education policy across the world. While the Education Director of the OECD believes the style and enactment of media involvement in PISA contributes positively to the democratic process, the evidence analysed for my thesis suggests that the action of media logic on PISA data may suppress democratic challenge to powerful global institutions, and, indirectly, through apparent, tacit or overt legitimation, also to local political actors.
Chapter 9

Discussion

The preceding chapters of this thesis have explored in detail the ways in which the OECD projects the messages of PISA into public space via the media. They have also elaborated on the workings of the media in two democratic nation states as they interact with this data, and charted how policy discourse and policymaking have been influenced by the interaction of media and data, which has resulted in the easy passage of OECD messages into local policy arenas. In this chapter, I discuss my findings in detail and propose that these interactions help to shape the ways in which the OECD is able to influence education governance locally via the mediation of its global policy messages: something I term mediatised global governance (Grey and Morris, 2018).

The chapter is organised in the following way: firstly, I summarise the main findings of my thesis, especially as they relate to answering RQ1 and RQ2. After this, I detail the main arguments demonstrated by the findings and which address RQ3. A discussion of the significance and limitations of my research and my contribution to the field then precedes a brief concluding section.

Summary of Findings

This section summarises the findings of the previous chapters, and focuses on RQ1 and RQ2, below:
RQ1. How has the OECD interacted with the media to project its PISA messages into public and policy spaces?

RQ2. How have local media in Sweden and England responded to, and worked in synergy with, the messages of PISA?

Using techniques for the analysis of text, this thesis applied the theories of media logic to material produced by the OECD for the dissemination of information about the operations and results of its PISA programme, focusing particularly, but not exclusively, on PISA 2012. The techniques used: narrative analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis and Multimodal Discourse Analysis, helped to elicit frames and agendas from media material, which were then analysed against the theoretical framework provided by the work done in the field of media logic. This combination of text analysis techniques and media theory proved effective in producing a deep interrogation of media operations around PISA, and the governance messages which entered public space. In parallel, the media and policy responses in Sweden and England to this material were analysed, and a symbiotic relationship emerged between the media operations of the OECD and the local media actors in the two countries, which served to facilitate the easy passage of OECD governance messages into local arenas. While the expression of these messages was different in the two societies studied, the analysis noted that the underlying economic and ideological position of the OECD escaped contestation even when local agendas were challenged.

The thesis began by setting PISA against the background of OECD involvement in education, and the rise of education assessments (chapter 2); and the literature in the field of media studies, particularly media logic and mediatisation (chapter 3), before leading into the analysis with an explanation of the research methods used and a detailed discussion of the media logic and theory used to frame my findings (chapter 4). The analysis was then detailed in chapters 5-8; the findings of this analysis are outlined below.
I have demonstrated that the sophistication with which the OECD approaches its interactions with the media has increased markedly since the inception of the programme in 2000 (chapter 5). This is in some senses unsurprising, and to an extent reflects advances in technology which allow the easier production of materials created to a high visual standard, and with easily-navigable and more user-friendly online interfaces. Such developments are not unique to the OECD; they are seen throughout many sectors of commerce and industry, and to an extent in public bodies, almost universally across the globe. I argue, however, that the continued investment in the materials associated with developing the PISA 'brand' demonstrates a particular concentration on building and maintaining a media presence which is more typical of commercial organisations than of public or government bodies. The key features of the PISA 'brand' were identified as a consistency in colour and logo use, which had gained sophistication over time; the symbolism of the personal presence of Andreas Schleicher; and, more importantly perhaps, a consistent set of core values around trustworthiness, reliability and credibility. The focus of the OECD on producing materials which are easy to access and media-friendly demonstrates the importance attached by the organisation to its interactions with media actors, whom Schleicher acknowledges hold the key to maintaining PISA's high profile in governance spaces globally.

Chapters 6 and 7 looked in detail at the actions of the media in response to the messages of the OECD. The framing of media events and stories in both Sweden and England was analysed in depth, with particular attention being paid to the language used and the type of challenge offered by media and policy actors to the messages of PISA following the results of the PISA 2012 tests. Initially, the media in both Sweden, where results fell sharply, and England, where they remained essentially unchanged, framed the results in terms of a crisis, using established media agendas to give voice to opposing politicians looking to blame each other for the state of education in their respective societies. The initial reporting of the results in both countries was notable for the absence of any critique of PISA itself, or of the underlying premise of the OECD in its operations in the education sphere. It was also
notable that the messages considered by OECD staff to be the most important - around equity and teacher professionalism, for example, did not receive much media coverage, despite Schleicher putting heavy emphasis on such aspects in his presentations.

Analysis of the subsequent relationship between the media and political events and processes in the months after the release of the 2012 PISA results demonstrated differences between the two countries studied. In Sweden, the government of the time chose to involve the OECD in its policy planning after PISA, commissioning two reports which were presented at media events. At this stage, it was observed that first journalists, and then policymakers, challenged the legitimacy of the OECD mandate through critiques of the enactment of PISA - specifically its lack of focus on creativity, for example, and the emphasis put on skills other than those at which Swedish students were perceived to excel. Nonetheless, the recommendations of the OECD were carried forward and subjected to further discussion in Sweden, with an education commission being established to use the data provided by PISA and subsequent OECD reports to improve Swedish children's educational performance.

In England, the media played an integral role in the development of policy stories after PISA 2012. PISA retained a high media profile in the two years after the results appeared, with Government ministers issuing press statements and announcing policy initiatives, which they claimed were derived from the PISA data, directly to media actors. A notable difference with Sweden is that the OECD was not visible in the English arena after PISA-Day. Such references as were made to PISA were made by domestic politicians. Thus, while Sweden showcased the involvement of the OECD openly, as though to legitimate concerns around education and support reform efforts, in England the messages of PISA were interpreted locally and delivered indirectly via domestic politicians and the media. Crucially, the latter did not interrogate the original messages critically while reporting on the policy initiatives, and
not only were the domestic politicians not held to account for their interpretations, so the OECD also escaped 'Fourth Estate' scrutiny as their involvement slipped into history.

**Key arguments**

The ways in which PISA is reported and reflected in the media in both Sweden and England are determined and governed by the norms and practices of the media around news events, that is, by media logic. As outlined in chapter 8, several key themes emerged from the analysis of media materials during my research, and were supported by interviews with journalists. These were: crisis; blame; the need for policy action; the use of national stereotypes and reference societies; and the imperative of economic improvement through PISA, allied to the role of the OECD as neutral advisor. Identification and interrogation of these themes help to address RQ3: *How has media logic affected the global governance power of the OECD?* As discussed in chapter 8, the ways in which PISA results are reported and discussed in media texts are fundamental to creating PISA and defining what *PISA means* to both audiences and policymakers. The media function not only as conveyors of information, but as narrators, performing a diegetic function by commentating on material in order to explain to audiences *what they need to know*, which is defined by pre-made agendas (for example the need for reform to raise standards) and supported by established media frames ('education is in crisis').

The application of media logic to the PISA data results in a stereotypical and often binary set of frames being projected into public space and consumed by the audiences of mass media. These frames focus on the negative news values around international competition, the crisis of falling standards, the blame to be apportioned to domestic politicians and the urgent need for policy action. This leaves little or no space in news stories for a wider examination of the role of the OECD, whose legitimacy to carry out tests on children worldwide, and their claims as to the causes of low performance, are rarely questioned, especially at the initial reporting
stage. Even where journalists ask questions in person around the mandate of the OECD and its enactment through PISA, as in Sweden, the framing of articles produced from such interactions does not allow for such voices to be given space. Locally determined and pre-existing policy agendas are privileged in news reports - in Sweden this meant that stories around teacher pay and school day length displaced the more critical comments about the legitimacy of the OECD’s presence in the country. Thus, the global agenda of PISA is largely reduced to a local political news story, with local actors blamed for deficiencies, and local solutions sought.

The following propositions summarise the key arguments made in my thesis.

1. The media frames used in the reporting of PISA material in both Sweden and England rely heavily on locally-coloured, media-driven agendas of crisis, blame, national competitiveness and the need for policy action (see chapter 8). Much of the material considered by the OECD to be important is never reported - this includes many of the messages around equity, gender and teachers’ careers, as well as the underlying economic aims of the organisation as expressed through the metrics of PISA as predictors of growth. The use of established media framing, often demonstrating narrative features typical of myth (see chapter 4), around conflict and resolution, precludes and excludes novel critiques or alternative views which might result in a challenge to the underlying legitimacy of the OECD to influence education via its PISA programme, or more deeply to its core economic mission.

2. The OECD is viewed as a non-ideological global agency by media actors, whose ‘Fourth Estate’, ‘watchdog’ role in democracies includes holding the powerful to account on behalf of the governed. The ways in which the OECD is viewed globally are fundamental to its ability to operate in national policy spaces. Central to my thesis is the evidence that key players in the media, who are best placed to challenge the governance power of the OECD, see the organisation as being non-ideological, neutral and objective in its judgements about
education systems. It has the status of trusted expert, impartial advisor, and its operations are seen as being guided by almost humanitarian, compassionate principles. As mentioned earlier, the acronym OECD is rarely expanded in media reports; its agenda of economic expansion via markets and trade policies is never made explicit in media texts around PISA; and the organisation is accorded a status which then seems to require no further explanation. This status elevates it in social space so that it is considered to be beyond question - its work is not subjected to the same kind of scrutiny as policies which are clearly created and contested in domestic political contexts. Every journalist I spoke to mentioned this either directly or indirectly - they simply did not see or acknowledge that the OECD might be using PISA to further an economic, institutional or ideological agenda. The one journalist who did speak of the underlying ideology of the OECD did not see it as his role to challenge it. My question, 'if not you, then who?' met with little more than a shrug.

3. Because of the lack of challenge offered by the media to the operations of the OECD, its governance messages are afforded an easy passage into education policy space, albeit often in altered or translated forms which do little more than reference the original message, for the local purpose of legitimating, or obscuring, the policy's actual intent. Because the underlying message is never scrutinised, the resulting policy may even be at odds with the policies advocated by the OECD. The absence of the OECD from media and policy discourse in England in the months after the PISA 2012 results were announced might be explained by the observation that many of the English policy initiatives arising from, and referenced to, PISA, for example around increased school inspection and greater financial autonomy for head teachers, and later the increased investment in grammar schools, are at odds with the equity and teacher professionalisation messages delivered by the OECD itself. Similarly, Schleicher's insistence that policies should be coherent and consistent over long periods of time was not reported in England, where longevity in education policy has never been a feature. In Sweden, on the other hand, the overt involvement of the OECD served to strengthen claims of a crisis and the need for action, lending credibility to policy initiatives
and offering its own solutions. This meant that, at least after the immediate media frenzy, press coverage in Sweden was more closely aligned with the OECD's own messages. Thus, while it was expressed differently in each of the studied contexts, the 'taken-for-granted' expertise of the OECD was never publicly linked with its economic rationale, but affected the policy environment in a concrete way which did not allow for critical counter-voices to be given space.

4. The overarching economic objectives of the OECD are served by the quiet complicity of western media, whose actors do not see any role for themselves, or any imperative, in challenging or holding to account the unmandated power of the organisation. To return to McNair's five principles of the western media: in the case of PISA, the media carry out their function to inform; they arguably also educate, by explaining what PISA 'means' - though this meaning is given in accordance with the meaning afforded to PISA by local politicians as much as, or more than, that afforded by the OECD. The media also offer a platform to local politicians around PISA, and may even allow for the platforming of particular standpoints. It is in the area of the 'watchdog', 'Fourth Estate' role where I argue that the media appear to see their role exclusively in domestic terms - allowing opposing political actors to blame each other for crises around PISA, and to give space to conflicting views on solutions, while never holding to account the power of the OECD. This lack of challenge may in part arise from the perceived need of media actors to offer a counter-voice to every argument or criticism made - there are few voices speaking in opposition to the hegemonic economic and institutional imperatives which drive the OECD and its educational operations. Such counter-voices as do exist are largely concentrated in academia, with limited media capital to access the media exposure which would allow meaningful challenge.

These arguments have led to my proposal for a new type of governance to be recognised: one which I term mediatised global governance (Grey and Morris, 2018). This suggests that the media are instrumental in exerting their own norms and influences on the governance
power of global organisations, not only communicating messages to the governed, but translating, transforming and materially altering them. This form of power remains uncontested at local level because of the invisibility of the logic and mechanisms which underpin it. The OECD is happy to allow the media to act as one of the 'soft methods of coordination', by which it ensures that its key economic growth messages remain present in public space, without explicit linkage to a programme which is portrayed in educational terms. Below I outline the key features of this form of governance.

Mediatised global governance

By analysing in detail how the media in two western democracies engaged with a story which was framed as political news, I have drawn tentative conclusions about the ways in which the media shape public discourse and policy talk, not only by selecting and thereby limiting which information reaches the public domain and which does not, but by imposing its own logic and values on that information, thereby altering it and creating a 'Rashomon'-like phenomenon, by which a story is changed depending on who is narrating it. I suggest that the media engage with political stories in such a way as to exert a 'ripple effect' on public space. This is explained in figure 9.1 below. The initial story, framed according to established news values, exerts a brief but profound impact on social space via headlines, television and radio reports and perhaps interviews with key actors. At this stage, the more newsworthy the story is - i.e. the more news values it embodies, the more media coverage it will attract. It will be aimed at a wide audience who will engage most with the most newsworthy (often negative) elements of the story. After the initial impact has passed, the story will only be reported by, and for, those with a more specialised interest in it - the audience will be smaller, and will need to have engaged more fully at the first stage to sustain interest into the second stage, unless an additional newsworthy element is suddenly added (for example, a scandal or the involvement of a celebrity). After more time has elapsed, only the specialised media, and academia, will engage further with a political news
story, and the audience consuming the item will be smaller and more specialised than at the second level. By this time, details of the original story will often have been forgotten by the initial audience, but will have left an imprint on public space and discourse in the form of an established agenda which can be recalled next time a similar news story arises.

Figure 9.1 The ripple effect of the impact of news items on public discourse

I argue that this model helps to explain why the narrative of failure, crisis, and blame around PISA is so readily adopted in England, and also seen to an extent in the Swedish data I examined: a media audience has internalised the agenda around the poor state of education locally, and the release of data which appears to support this agenda can be framed in such a way as to 'reignite' the ‘failure-crisis-blame-need for urgent action’ blueprint in an audience, long after the original catalyst for this agenda has disappeared from media discourse. Figure 9.2 illustrates this triannual trajectory, and demonstrates the cyclical nature of the PISA story from the point where the OECD releases the new results.
This model has explanatory power for the operations of the mass media around the framing of PISA news stories in both England and Sweden. It may also help to explain the engagement of media more widely with political news stories, though it has not been tested beyond this thesis.

Central to the influence of the media on the type of governance enacted by the OECD are two key features: the reductive nature of news reporting which dilutes or even ignores the original messages of the OECD (for example, around equity, or teacher career structure) as they are not deemed 'newsworthy'; and the lack of challenge offered by media to a global organisation which has no mandate to act on policy at local level but which is viewed as not
having an agenda beyond its stated aim of 'better policies for better lives'. These features arise out of the tendency of the media to treat PISA as a local political news story, referencing global features (competition, the Knowledge Economy) while not directly engaging with, or challenging, them. The global messages of the OECD via PISA are ignored, or taken for granted, and the level of media engagement - 'how did we do?' stories - presupposes the legitimacy of those messages and their pertinence to local policy contexts.

In summary, the importance of this thesis lies in demonstrating the ways in which the media acts upon PISA data to produce a mediated and mediatised form of global educational governance, which by its very nature is able to slip into policy spaces unchallenged. The embedding of media logic into the operations of the OECD, as well as the lack of challenge from the media themselves, leaves the underlying ideology of the OECD unexposed and thereby tacitly legitimised in social space. Alternative forms of evaluating education are subordinated and marginalised by their lack of engagement with new forms of media: counter-discourses around the intrinsic value of children and normative enactments of 'good' education do not command the media capital to occupy global policymaking spaces and offer challenge to the hegemonic knowledge capital messages promulgated by transnational organisations. The insistence of media actors on countering every argument with an opposing voice does not extend to calling on those whose alternative visions of education would offer these counter-voices. Schleicher, in 2015, suggested disparagingly that 'the only people who are opposing this...are people from pedagogy' (Schleicher, 2015, online): these 'people from pedagogy', who one assumes are education professionals and academics, do not command a media presence with which to express this opposition.

The thesis demonstrates the blurring of the boundaries between the operations of commercial organisations, geared towards gaining competitive advantage in pressured marketplaces, and global agencies which are operating at a transnational level and without obvious competition. The tailoring of branded messages for media consumption and
dissemination is indicative of a trend towards the mediatisation of organisations which largely do not need to compete for their space on a global stage, but appear to realise that their continued success depends on maintaining a slick and consistent presence in the mass media, and beyond into newer, social media. The brand which has been created around PISA carries the hallmarks of a constantly-evolving and highly professionalised organisation which recognises the dual requirements of maintaining relevance and recognisability while also adapting to the demands of a changing world.

**Contribution to the Literature**

My thesis offers a distinctive contribution to literature in four areas. Firstly, it extends the existing scholarship on Policy Borrowing by illuminating the hitherto under-researched operations of the media as both local and global agents acting on issues of attraction and borrowing, not specifically between nation states but in advancing ideas of 'World Class' education policies. Secondly, it adds to the literature on global educational governance by interrogating the key role of the media in transforming, rather than merely transmitting, the messages around PISA which enter public space. This has been largely unexplored in existing literature as studies about PISA have focused on its methodology or its reception in individual nations or policy contexts. Thirdly, my work contributes to the literature on the operations of the mass media, particularly by examining how they exert power by imposing their own logic on reporting about the operations of transnational organisations. Finally, the distinct combination of methods and media logic employed by the thesis offers a new way of knowing about media and policy discourse. Using media theory to inform methods of text analysis enabled a novel and critical analysis of the interface between global policy messages and local media action which has not been employed before to explore the work of the OECD. Below I expand on each of these areas, with brief reference to the existing literature which was explored more fully in chapters 3 and 5.
Policy Borrowing

While the existing literature acknowledges, and attempts to evaluate, the tension between global governance and local agendas (e.g. Steiner-Khamisi, 2004; Carney et al., 2012), the existing literature on Policy Borrowing does not specifically interrogate or critique the role of the media as agents of power at either global or local level. My research furthers the literature on debates around global/local tensions which seek to attribute Policy Borrowing either to homogenising global forces, or to local attraction which addresses domestic policy agendas, or to a combination of both. By examining the key role of local media in the promulgation and alteration of policy messages, the thesis deepens our understanding of how the media, seen in PB as a 'locally distinct' force, is governed by a wider logic with its own norms and practices. Simple models of 'attraction' and borrowing are given an added explanatory power when the media is viewed as having agency to act on and transform policy messages, rather than merely transmitting them into public space. Rappleye's 'actor-centrism', which explains PB in terms of domestic political agendas (Rappleye, 2012) is taken further by a focus on the media as actor; while Wiseman's view of globalisation as an 'unstoppable force' is challenged by the application of media logic which has been demonstrated to materially transform global policy messages to comply with local media agendas. The work of Novoa and Yariv-Mashal, whose 'measuring the other' marks the most recent stage in PB (Novoa and Yariv-Mashal, 2003), is demonstrated to retain explanatory power, but to lack the dimension shown in my thesis which might be called 'mediatising the other' by means of stereotypes and urgent messages about global competitiveness which give rise to the media creation and maintenance of crises and problems requiring urgent policy solutions. The literature around Evidence-Based Education and 'World Class' education is extended by a consideration of the role of the media in allowing terms to slip into discourse unchallenged: such terms, I argue, constitute part of what Theodore and Peck term 'policy commonsense', which is
rooted in the moving centers (sic) of policymaking gravity across what is an uneven and porous policy space, and one that may also ‘leak’ into wider international policy discourses, in the form of expert claims, demonstrable norms, or best practices. (Theodore and Peck, 2012, p. 22).

The rise of ‘what works’ education policy reform, based on discourses of ‘best practice’ and ‘World Class’ education is allied to the role of the OECD in offering policy solutions which, because of its lack of legitimacy to act in actual ‘hard’ policy space, must take place via ‘soft’ governance mechanisms based on peer pressure and consensus. My thesis addresses the key role played by media actors, both in the OECD and outside it, and, crucially, the interface and synergy between the two, in exercising governance. The OECD, as Theodore and Peck note, must rely on indirect methods of governance as it lacks a mandate to exert direct control on societies. It must

operate as a deft, interstitial actor, utilizing techniques such as mediation, meditation, peer pressure, orchestration, evaluation, suasion, and exhortation to ‘move’ policy norms. (Theodore and Peck, 2012, p.22).

**Governance**

The importance of my thesis to literature on governance lies in demonstrating that the lack of challenge offered by the media facilitates the easy passage of capitalist economic governance messages into the domestic political arenas in both the countries studied - this is the essence of mediatised global governance. PISA is instrumentalised into acting as a policy technology, whereby its imperatives begin to drive education policy. This process is enacted differently in Sweden and England, with the former gratefully acknowledging, even celebrating, the input of expertise from outside, offering policy solutions which Sweden could not hope to arrive at by itself. In England, PISA offers a reliable policy-referencing tool: lack of scrutiny from the media which report on education ensures that politicians citing PISA are believed and trusted, because ‘international evidence’ supports their calls for ‘best practice’
to be implemented. This allowed English politicians to use PISA to promote policy agendas which had no coherent connection to the data, which often privileges entirely different messages around aspects considered important to the OECD, for example equality and equity of access; gender; disadvantage; and spending on education. Thus, we saw PISA used to support the creation of academies and free schools. The two cases selected here demonstrate different modes by which PISA is able to influence the local policy context; and both depend to a greater or lesser extent upon the tacit complicity of the media. My thesis adds to Woodward's (2009) critique of the types of governance expressed by the OECD (cognitive, normative, legal and palliative), not by contesting or challenging his categories, but by demonstrating a means by which these types of governance gain access to, and credibility within, social spaces. Thus, soft governance as described by Woodward, is mediated by its interactions with the media; but further, it is mediatised in that its very essence is transformed in accordance with the norms and practices of the media. The degree to which this transformation matters is contested within the literature on mediatisation: Mazzoleni, for example, sees mediatisation as a meta-process affecting all areas of society (Mazzoleni, in Strömbak and Esser 2014); whereas others, for example Blumler (ibid.) and Marcinkowski and Steiner (ibid.) suggest that the mediatisation process should not be overstated, and that 'it is always only subsystems that can be mediatised within society, and not society as a whole' (Strömbak and Esser, 2014, p. 224). These scholars were writing in a new field, none had undertaken study of transnational organisations like the OECD; most studies on the mediatisation of politics are based on within-country observations (e.g. Djerf-Pierre and Pierre, 2016; Nygren and Niemikari, 2019). Sellar and Lingard (2018) and Baroutsis and Lingard (2017) have analysed media effects on the reporting of PISA in Australia, but the global implications for the potential transformative effects of mediatisation on policy remain under-researched.

Gorur asserts that countries are beginning to 'see like PISA', The 'reductionist, synoptic and largely economic view’ (Gorur, 2016, p. 599) it fosters does not arrive in global space
spontaneously, and my thesis extends Gorur's work on the 'performativity' of PISA by demonstrating a mechanism by which this view filters into policy spaces. 'Learning from high performance nations' can only take place if there is an agent to spread the word; that agent lies in the media.

In short, my thesis helps to address 'the [fascinating] question of how institutions that are formally powerless get their way on the global stage' (Dale and Robertson, 2010, p.2).

Operations of the Media

As well as demonstrating how the media enables the OECD to exert power through PISA largely unchallenged, my thesis also contributes to the literature on the operations of the mass media. I have demonstrated how media logic acts upon a body of data to transform the messages which reach public space, and helps to define and limit the governance potential which arises as a result. While individual media actors may not intend to exert this power, and indeed may appear to be unaware that they are doing so, the norms by which they operate make it inevitable that they will impose a set of values on the material they report, and these values in turn will influence, even persuade, the audience in ways which might not have been foreseen by the original producers of the data. Existing literature on media logic often explores the ways in which news is defined, and how news values, agendas and frames determine what is reported. My thesis moves beyond this to explore how power is exercised through media logic and adds to Leeper and Slothu's work on persuasion. As with others in the field (e.g. Scheufele, 2000, see chapter 3), their focus is on audience effects, and on pinning down a distinction between the 'muddle' around the definition of framing, and what they term 'information based persuasion' (Leeper and Slothu, 2018, p. 8). My research contributes to the understanding of both concepts without the need to become preoccupied with terminology: the PISA material produced by the OECD is without doubt designed to persuade. The ways in which the media frame the
material may result in audience persuasion - but it is not clear whether the intention to persuade matches the frames used - in other words, whether what the audience ends up being persuaded of, is what the OECD intended when it released the data. The involvement of the media transforms the messages in such a way as also to transform the nature of the persuasion, so that the intention of the originator may be lost. Persuasion theory highlights two ways in which information might change opinions, i.e. might persuade, namely 'change in the content of opinion-relevant considerations (i.e., information) and change in the weights attached to considerations already in memory (i.e., emphasis).’ (ibid., p.9). The relative emphasis placed by media on new information (PISA results) and on 'considerations already in memory' (agendas already established around the subject, e.g. crisis and the urgent need for reform) determines the extent to which a news audience will be persuaded of the 'truth' of the information. The analysis carried out for my thesis demonstrates that this model is worthy of deeper exploration, but that it takes no account of the multi-layered communications which might lead to a 'persuasion event' (my terminology). To understand the psychological processes around the act of persuading an audience of the veracity and relevance of a piece of information, more research is needed into the mediating effects of multi-actor interactions such as those explored in this thesis. With those caveats, I nonetheless suggest that PISA data performs both the functions of persuasive news - not only does it speak to an established agenda, it also has the power to surprise with 'new' information. The penetration of the underlying economic imperatives which sit at the heart of the OECD and upon which its PISA tests are founded is such that it escapes contestation through media discourse, which tends to follow local agendas without engaging with the often contradictory and disconnected nature of the frames used to interpret the PISA data. My thesis also addresses a gap in media studies literature which was identified in chapter 1: Media are often considered the Fourth Estate of political power, but in public and academic discussions, there seems to be little systematic reflection on what exactly that power entails (Van Aelst et al., 2008).
I have demonstrated that the media in two countries do not exercise this 'Fourth Estate' role in any noticeable capacity in relation to the governance of the OECD. Further studies would cast light on the operations of other transnational organisations in this context, and would be valuable in understanding the 'Fourth Estate' role if undertaken in other democracies. The journalists interviewed for my research either did not see the need to challenge the OECD, as a non-ideological global player; did not see it as their role to do so; or were prevented from doing so by media logic acting on their operational need to counter every voice with an opposing one. This is a key aspect of the mediatised global governance for which I argue in this thesis.

My thesis has demonstrated that the power of the OECD's PISA programme to impact global governance is heavily dependent on the symbiotic relationship the organisation has with the mass media in two societies. The media do not operate merely as a neutral conduit through which objective data is passed from the OECD to the public; rather, there are several prisms which change the nature of the messages associated with PISA from their inception to their use in policymaking. The first prism operates within the OECD itself, where staff express the project in terms of its humanitarian function, helping to fulfil the mission statement of the OECD: 'Better policies for better lives', while the wider economic objectives of the organisation, and the myriad problems of establishing the causal status of the claims advanced, are not acknowledged.

The second prism occurs when the PISA results are released and selectively reported by the OECD, especially by its Education Director Andreas Schleicher, whose intense media presence and tireless appetite for spreading the PISA word ensures a global audience for its regular messages. This thesis focused closely on the location of the third, and crucial, change which helps to define the operational potential of PISA - that which occurs in the media of countries where PISA is consumed. Figure 9.3 illustrates the changing prisms through which PISA data is 'filtered', 'refracted', at the three stages mentioned above. At the
first level, staff at the OECD, working on PISA marketing, media and public relations, revealed in the interviews that they saw the programme in terms of its ability to improve equity and access to good quality education, for children across the globe, by giving them access to the ‘best policies’ demonstrated to be ‘effective’ in ‘improving education systems’.

The economic mission of the OECD was barely mentioned by staff, who saw it in terms of extending opportunity and promoting wellbeing. Similarly, there was no recognition of the extensive range of critiques of the PISA programme and its role in educational governance.

The loss, or suppression, of the overtly economic/capitalist narrative at this early stage of the PISA process helps to explain its absence from media stories around PISA which arise in local settings after publication of the results. I do not suggest that this represents a deliberate attempt by the OECD to mislead or deceive its very own staff, let alone the wider public, about its objectives. Rather, I see it in terms of part of a taken for granted, ‘common sense’ narrative, ‘based in culturally shared understandings or values’ (Torres, 2013, p. 181), which has been internalised, or at least, not resisted, by those working on PISA, and for whom there is no tension or contradiction implicit in the underlying logic of improving lives by improving economic performance, and of the latter demonstrating proven links with education - in other words, of the catchphrase that ‘your education system today is your economy tomorrow’ (Schleicher, multiple sources). That nations should be learning from, and attempting to emulate, their competitors is not seen as contradictory, and yet, in a market economy such as that promoted by the OECD, the increased equity and equality which Schleicher and his colleagues suggest are the goals of PISA cannot be attained through increased competition.
Figure 9.3 Three Prisms of PISA: how messages are transformed and mediatised

Prisms of PISA: reframing of a dataset

1st reframing: OECD PISA staff
- PISA as measure of quality education;
- Means for improving lives for all children;
- Policies to promote wellbeing; humanitarian function

2nd reframing: PISA results launches, OECD website, presentations, press conferences
- Appeals to media logic;
- Equity and gender messages;
- Policy advocacy;
- Links with KE and human capital;
- Global competition

3rd reframing: local media
- Mediatisation
- Local stories – domestic political agendas;
- Crisis, blame, need for urgent (local) action to address global threat from competitors
As Torres says, 'neoliberalism not only reproduces existing inequalities but also creates new ones' (Torres, 2013, p.88); neoliberal models of education privilege competition over collaboration, leading, he suggests, to the suppression of narratives of the 'common good' in education:

Thus, standards, hierarchies and even new and powerful concepts such as ‘world-class universities’ are heralded in ways that promote a kind of erasure of the historical efforts that were developed to extend quality education to the majority of the population. (ibid., p. 87).

The PISA staff interviewed did not see any apparent contradiction between the neoliberal, marketising agenda of the OECD and their assertion that PISA would lead to economic growth and consequent improvements in wellbeing for all participants. This unacknowledged contradiction underpins the uncritical adoption of narratives of economic improvement which are promulgated at the next level at which the data is filtered, and, indeed, beyond into wider media and public space. This prism operates as the default position in the many education-related activities that the Education Directorate undertakes in the periods between the triannual releases of PISA data.

At the second stage of filtering, the prism of the official discourse around the results release, and the associated PISA materials, is applied. The ways in which this is operationalised were examined in depth in chapter 5. This level sees the strong influence of media logic, with press conferences, press releases, personal appearances by Schleicher and a barrage of tailored materials launched into public space. The league table format dominates the initial pages of the report coverage and is used in the first few slides at the launch presentations, giving media actors an easy passage into writing simplified, headline-friendly stories around the data. The focus of the press materials and presentations at the interface between PISA and the journalists on whom its public profile relies, however, was on the
subtler messages of gender, inequality, the role of teachers and technology. The link with
the economy is made more explicit at this stage than at the earlier or later ones, reinforcing
messages which spell out the economic necessity of ensuring that 15 year olds can perform
tasks at the highest level of the PISA tests. The messages transmitted by the OECD at this
stage could be termed 'global' in the sense that the overarching economic imperatives of
competing in the global Knowledge Economy linked with general policy advice, rather than
more local and contextualised policy considerations, are by necessity prioritised in what is
essentially a worldwide event designed to attract maximum media attention. These
messages were not those picked up in media coverage of the event, however, and local
politically-centred interpretations were superimposed on the headline data from the league
tables (see below).

As the story ages (figure 9.2), the potential for more local input from the OECD grows - thus,
in Sweden after the 2012 results had been published, tailored reports were commissioned to
assist the Swedes in their attempts to improve their education system. In England, by
contrast, the OECD all but disappeared from education media space once the immediate
frenzy had died down. Local agendas shaped by domestic political actors quickly displaced
the key messages of the PISA launch; PISA at this stage was refracted in England through
the third prism that reduced it to a useful referencing tool to enable politicians to add
legitimacy to high-profile initiatives aimed at fixing apparent deficiencies in a specific
curricular area (Mathematics).

The final prism in diagram 9.3 describes the work of the media on the PISA data after it was
refracted through the second prism and released into public space by the OECD. In both
countries studied, PISA was now treated by journalists as a locally-focused political news
story. Chapters 6 and 7 describe in detail how this was done, using materials collected in
Sweden and England in the period after the 2012 PISA results were released, which were
analysed closely using the discourse and narrative analysis approaches described in
Chapter 4. Chapter 8 summarised the analysis from these two chapters and included additional material from journalists who were interviewed to gain insights into the pressures of media logic at the interface between the OECD PISA texts and the communication events which propelled them into public space. The global agenda and messages of the OECD and PISA were largely absent from media reporting, as the crisis/blame frames defining newsworthiness were applied to local actors only, and the watchdog, 'Fourth Estate' role of journalists was played out with reference to local politicians rather than the OECD itself. At this stage, the transformation of PISA data from a global to a local story became complete, with the media facilitating the process of 'not seeing' the contestable links between PISA performance and future economic success. In chapter 6 I demonstrated how this localising prism in Sweden operated on PISA data to focus debate on issues of teachers' pay, as well as on tensions over previous and proposed government reforms. In England, the global messages of PISA were lost as media deflected public attention onto local crisis and blame issues, and onto a high-profile government initiative aimed at introducing Chinese teaching methods into classrooms. As I showed in chapter 7, the failure of this initiative to produce the desired outcomes was not subjected to media attention: by then the 'ripple effect' had led to loss of media and public interest in the story.

The nature of the reframing of the data via the third prism in the two contexts, Sweden and England, was thus determined by local conditions and local agendas. As Lingard notes:

the apparent educational policy convergence across nations facilitated by greater global inter-connectedness and a nascent global educational policy community—are mediated, translated, and recontextualized (sic) within national and local educational structures. (2013, p. 86)

Lingard uses Appadurai's term 'vernacular globalisation' to explain the tensions between 'top down' globalising discourse and practices and more locally driven, 'context-generative' practices. This tension helps to explain:
the way local, national, and global interrelationships are being reconstituted, but mediated by the history of the local and the national and by politics... (ibid.).

Key to this process is the mediating, and mediatising, role played by the interactions between all the actors in this story - the OECD Education Directorate, the media and public relations staff working on PISA, the local political actors and, crucially, the local media in contexts where PISA data is received. The 'top down' processes of globalisation are subsequently mediated and transformed, not only by 'local educational structures' (Lingard) and 'the history of the local and the national and by politics' (Appadurai, in Lingard, ibid), but by the media within nations, who, I argue, play an important, defining role in changing the messages and filtering them through a prism which helps to deflect attention away from the wider, governance messages at the global level and onto local agendas which are more amenable to domestic policy action.

**Methods**

Finally, my thesis contributes to research in terms of the combination it employs of theory, which draws heavily upon media logic, and research methods - the use of critical text analysis approaches used. The deployment of a robust toolbox of language and semiotic analysis techniques against the framework of media theory based on identifying and exploring frames and agendas offered a distinctive prism through which to view the relationships between the media, policymakers and the OECD. A close analysis of the words and signs used by the actors in my research - the OECD, journalists and politicians, allowed a depth and breadth of analysis which alternative methods would not have offered. The close analysis of the words and actions of those involved at every level of the dissemination of the PISA story allowed me to offer insights into power relationships and motivations in a way which would have been difficult without such a combination of theory and methods.
Interrogating educational governance data in this way is, I believe, distinctive in the field of research into PISA.

**Limitations**

While I have undertaken a large-scale interrogation of the materials produced by the OECD, and in two countries, around PISA 2012, there is undoubtedly a limit to what can be gathered in this way. The OECD is a prolific and regular communicator; a thorough critique of its constantly-changing website alone would be a lengthy and challenging intellectual task; and to read and analyse every media item about PISA in the two countries selected would be impossible. Therefore, the first limitation of my research is a simple one of scale. I have tried to include all relevant material, and to be informed by far more data than I have included here for direct comment; but there will be items I have missed. Likewise, for the same reasons, I did not interview every journalist in England and Sweden who has written about PISA: though I approached all senior mainstream media education correspondents initially, not all replied to my request for interview and several did not make themselves available once asked. It is possible that those outside my sample of seven would have given different insights into the remit and operations of the media in the two countries. However, the combination of seniority, experience and the range of media outlets represented by my interviewees yielded a large volume of interview material which I feel represented a good spectrum of opinion.

As well as scale, the research was limited by its scope. It would have been interesting, and perhaps added new dimensions, if I could have expanded the project to include media coverage not only of more recent PISA rounds, but of the new initiatives of the PISA project - for example, the PISA-D tests (see below) and their results, and the IELS pilot projects. These areas are perhaps worthy of future investigation.
Finally, there are limitations around the wider applicability of media logic. While the framework used in this thesis offers good explanatory power in terms of the cases chosen for analysis, as Esser and Strömback's conceptualisation of mediatisation demonstrates, there are different constraints on press freedom in different societies, which then impact on the ways in which media logic operates on social space. This limits the wider application of my findings, and an area for future research would be to explore the subject in different contexts.

**Future Research**

The OECD seeks, via the PISA programme, to maintain its global presence and extend its reach in physical, policy and social spaces. As well as increasing the media profile of the programme, as detailed in chapter 5 of this thesis, the OECD is extending links with policy advocacy organisations in client countries, and with other global agencies like the World Bank and UNICEF. The Education Policy Institute in England and the Alliance for Excellent Education in the US are examples of organisations which now collaborate closely with the OECD to develop and extend the policy reach of PISA messages. Additionally, the organisation has already trialled a modified PISA instrument, PISA for Development (PISA-D) in several low and middle-income countries (see Bloem, 2015), addressing a gap in participation which has until now meant that predominantly wealthy nations and jurisdictions have been able to access the PISA tests. The US has been the target of a PISA for Schools initiative (Lewis et al., 2016) whereby individual schools can pay to access tests which are marketed as:

improving student learning opportunities and well-being by empowering teachers and school leaders through global connections and international benchmarking based on a common scale provided by PISA (OECD, n.d, online).
As well as these new initiatives, the domains assessed by PISA are constantly changing and being framed in terms which make them more ‘relevant’ for the 21st century. The newer skills measured by PISA were introduced in chapter 2: human traits which were previously considered to be unmeasurable are now being framed in terms which make them amenable to OECD metrics. The ability of the OECD constantly to redefine and create metrics for diverse and evolving sets of skills, which it claims are essential for the future economic success of nations, is key in ensuring a market for its future PISA products. These skills - for example creativity, critical thinking, resilience and global citizenship - are forming the focus for future iterations of PISA metrics and helping to define ‘good education’ centred on measurable, 21st Century skills. An obvious direction for future research lies in interrogating and critiquing these new skills; and in aiming to contest what Lewis calls

an OECD-endorsed global policy ensemble of ‘what works’ in education but one that largely eschews any meaningful consideration of local context, conditions or requirements, both for the participating schools and, for that matter, the systems from which these practices are borrowed. (Lewis, 2017a, p.282)

That the OECD is helping to define the very demands to which it claims to be responding again demonstrates a sophisticated engagement with the means and norms of the media, using them to further its economic objectives by skilful manipulation of the messages projected. By engaging with newer forms of social media - for example TED talks, YouTube videos and microblogging sites, Schleicher is able to project subtly altered forms of ‘demand’ into public space. Two recent online videos engage directly with the need to develop new skills for the 21st century (21st Century Skills Keynote: Andreas Schleicher, (2013); Educating for the 21st century, Big Think global education and skills forum (2014)), in the latter of which Schleicher points out that ‘schools need to prepare students’ for changes imposed by outside forces:
The world is rapidly becoming a different place, with globalization and modernization imposing huge challenges to individuals and societies. (Educating for the 21st Century, online).

References to 'the changing world' serve to remove defining agency from the OECD, which is portrayed as being ahead of the curve in developing metrics to measure the 'new skills' it claims are being demanded by employers. At the same time, Schleicher reframes the necessary skills by consigning what he calls 'routine cognitive skills' (i.e. those measured by PISA until now), to the past, as they can now be carried out by computers:

The dilemma for educators is that routine cognitive skills, the skills that are easiest to teach and easiest to test, are also the skills that are easiest to digitize, automate, and outsource. There is no question that state-of-the-art knowledge and skills in a discipline will always remain important. Innovative or creative people generally have specialized skills in a field of knowledge or a practice. (ibid.)

Not only does this result in a challenge for the OECD around the usefulness of the existing PISA data, which, being based on traditional curricular areas, risks being viewed as out-of-date and irrelevant, it also creates pressure on the OECD to maintain a narrative in which the holy grail of economic success that lies at the heart of its mission depends on an ever-changing skill set which it can assess and rank. Schleicher clearly believes that innovation and creativity will be the key skills future workers need: luckily these are areas in which the OECD is already developing metrics for PISA. The subtle changes in the vocabulary of PISA are evident from a deeper study of the language used in his newer media interactions; the tensions and pressures this creates for the OECD form an interesting area for further study which is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Future research could also usefully be applied to tracking the policy messages of PISA since its inception, to the present day, to demonstrate if there have been changes in content, or
emphasis. This would extend the work in chapter 5 of this thesis and would require a detailed interrogation of a large number of OECD documents, interviews and presentations.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have interrogated in detail the operations of the media in two contexts, and shown the effects of the application of media logic on a global data set: the 2012 PISA results. I have demonstrated how the synergistic interactions between PISA staff at the OECD and the local media around the data itself acted at the interface between 'the new global educational policy consensus and vernacular globalization at work' (Lingard, 2013, p. 89), ensuring that local agendas referencing the global messages entered policymaking space and were subject to local contestation, while the global messages themselves remained unchallenged and thereby tacitly legitimised.

I have demonstrated how PISA data is subjected to alteration and transformation by its passage through several 'prisms', operating at the OECD, outside it, and in the media. The last of these levels of alteration was the focus of this thesis, which showed how, at local level in both Sweden and England, the global governance messages of the OECD were diluted, even lost, by the operation of media logic on the publication of the 2012 PISA results. Journalists treated the PISA results as a local political news story, concentrating on apportioning blame for what they framed as 'bad' news; and seeking local solutions which failed to hold to account the overarching governance power of the OECD and its economic objectives.

I have argued that the media not only help to ensure the easy passage of PISA messages into public space, but facilitate the local changing of those messages by failing to challenge the governing power of the OECD, which is then able to operate without local mandate on the education policy sectors of two societies. The advance of large scale international
educational assessments, and the power of global actors to define what good education should look like, do not attract the attention of the media, who remain focused on reporting the results and framing them only in domestic terms of crisis and blame, bemoaning the loss of international economic competitiveness they are purported to demonstrate. Meanwhile local policymakers extract political capital from the use of PISA as a reference point to justify reform initiatives which are either overtly or tacitly claimed to have the support of robust international evidence. These policy initiatives and their links to PISA, which in some cases are tenuous, also remain largely unchallenged by the media, even when, as in Sweden, the authority of both the OECD and local actors to use PISA data in this way is subjected to critique and opposition. I have suggested that this matters, because, as I stated at the outset, the easy and uncontested passage of neoliberal conceptualisations of education quality based on narrow human capital notions of quality risks displacing other, normative ideas of what a good education should look like. Biesta’s question of the purposes of education - ‘what is education for?’, which he calls ‘the most fundamental question in all educational endeavours’ (Biesta, 2015, p. 75), is increasingly answered in performative, outcomes-based and measurable terms, and my thesis demonstrates that the mediatisation of PISA data, and the consequent lack of contestation of these objectives, is instrumental in furthering this metric-driven agenda. As Ozga and Lingard assert:

There is clearly something missing from this dominant conception of education policy as human capital development – the all pervasive globalised educational policy discourse today, around which national education polices appear to converge. The absent element seems to be a normative vision about what educated individuals and active citizens might look like in this new globalised world and about the kinds of societies we might wish to sustain. (Ozga and Lingard, 2007, p. 68)

My analysis has demonstrated that media action at the point of delivery, in other words, as PISA enters public space, is a key factor in the furthering of OECD education policy agendas. The operation of media logic on the data, and the lack of challenge to a global
organisation offered by media actors in their 'Fourth Estate' capacity, ensured that local political stories, as opposed to 'higher order' questions of legitimacy, mandate and purpose, were lost to public space and scrutiny. Those in the only position to ensure such questions enter education discourse did not see it as their role to expose them, concentrating instead on their local roles as defined by the media logic under which they operate.

The ability of the OECD to act upon global education policies into the 21st century depends upon the work of the media. If the media continue to view the OECD as a non-ideological, neutral and objective organisation, there will be little or no challenge to the creeping hegemony of discourses which link education with economic potential via the so-called 'Knowledge Economy'. Education for the 21st century will increasingly be defined not in human or normative terms, but in the new language of skills and competencies. PISA is at the very forefront of this phenomenon; its future depends on an assured media presence as much as on the faith of policymakers in its ability to foretell the future through economics.
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Appendix I

Information sheet for journalists interviewed for thesis

Study Title: PISA, the Media and Policy

Researcher: Sue Grey

Please read this information carefully before deciding to take part in this research. If you are happy to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form.

The researcher

PhD student (ESRC funded) at the Institute of Education, University College London.

The Research

My underlying theme is the changing face of educational governance - how nation states and national governments increasingly look to global organisations like the World Bank and the OECD to guide policy reform. In particular I am interested in the PISA programme of the OECD and how it is portrayed in the media, in policy 'talk' and in actual policy.
The project focuses in particular on two countries – England and Sweden - and the impact of the OECD PISA 2012 results on media and policy discourse, as well as the ongoing debate and ‘talk’ around the messages of PISA. These tests on 15 year olds in a large number of countries are gaining increasing importance as a policy technology in that they are driving reforms of education systems and being used to justify policy agendas in media and political discourse. The main aims of my research are to look at the ways in which the OECD uses the media and media techniques to promote the messages of PISA, and to analyse the ways in which local media and policymakers create and maintain narratives around the PISA data, which may or may not relate directly to the intended messages of the OECD.

My methodology is largely documentary – use of narrative and documentary analysis of sources which are in the public domain will form the basis of my work. I will also analyse, using Multimodal Discourse Analysis techniques, press conferences and ‘webinars’, usually in video form. Interviews with key individuals in each country will supplement my data, however. These individuals will be drawn from those responsible for interpreting and presenting PISA data and will vary for each country as the policy scenarios are different for each one. It is likely that, variously, academics, journalists and politicians as well as representatives of teaching organisations will be included.

Participants

Initially I will seek to interview key personnel in each country who have been involved in the dissemination and interpretation of the PISA results. Following initial interviews there may be others whom I seek to interview – these are likely to be those responsible for reporting the data further, or are active in the policy-making process. I will also interview OECD staff, in the press and media departments, and the Director of Education himself.

Process

If you agree to an interview, I would like to discuss your perspective on international comparisons and educational policymaking in general. I am particularly interested in the way in which the PISA results are reported and then used in policy and media discourse and the way in which this process works in each country. In particular, I would like to learn about how you select material for inclusion in articles on PISA, which angles you choose to pursue and how you see your role in reporting this kind of material.

If you agree, the interview will be voice recorded and I will provide you with a copy of the final analysis. If you wish I will provide you with the interview record and an indication of what I intend to write, based upon it. This may change over time, as I am some way off completing my final thesis!

Confidentiality/anonymity
The information you give will be treated in confidence and only used within the context of my thesis. You have the option to remain anonymous, or to be cited. You will have the opportunity to review transcripts/analysis and to withdraw any content you would rather not have on record, or which you feel does not represent your point of view.

**Option to withdraw**

If you change your mind about participating in the research you have the right to stop and withdraw from the research at any point.

**Potential problems**

I do not foresee any problems arising, but understand that there may be some topics you do not want to discuss. If you have any problems or concerns about the research, or would like further information, please contact me and I will address your concerns accordingly.

**After the interview**

If you are interested, I will send you the final findings when I finish my thesis.

Sue Grey

Email: [sgrey01@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:sgrey01@ioe.ac.uk); [susan.grey.14@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:susan.grey.14@ucl.ac.uk)

Address: 20 Bedford Way, London, UK, WC1H 0AL

Department of Lifelong and Comparative Education

Faculty of Policy and Society

Institute of Education, University College London

This research is supervised by Professor Paul Morris

Email: paul.morris@ucl.ac.uk
Appendix II

Consent form signed by participants

**CONSENT FORM**

(Interviewee)

Study title:

Researcher name: Sue Grey  
Department of Lifelong and Comparative Education  
Faculty of Policy and Society  
Email: sgrey@ic.ac.uk

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

- I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.  
- I agree to be interviewed and agree for the data to be used for the purpose of this study.  
- I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I could withdraw from the research at any time without my legal rights being affected.

Data Protection

I understand that information collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored on a password protected computer and that this information will only be used for the purpose of this study. All files containing any personal data will be made anonymous.

Name of participant (print name): [Redacted]  
Signature of participant: [Redacted]

Data: [Redacted]

Name of researcher (print name): [Redacted]  
Signature of researcher: [Redacted]

Date: [Redacted]
Appendix III

Sample coding schedule: English Media dat

Source of Report

1. Broadsheet newspaper - online
2. Tabloid/popular newspaper - online
3. Press release
4. Radio/TV report
5. Press conference
6. Twitter
7. Teacher union
8. Blog
9. OECD
10. Other social media
11. Other published media

Type of Report

1. Clearly opinion
2. Apparently factual

Key Words

1. Stagnate/stagnation
2. Lagging behind
3. Failing/fail/failure
4. Global
5. Competitor/competitors/rival/rivals
6. Win/Lose
7. Race
8. Plummet
9. fall/falling/fallen behind
10. Singapore
11. Hong Kong
12. Korea
13. China
14. Asia
15. Finland
16. Other nation
17. OECD
18. Schleicher
19. Gove
20. Labour (politicians/policies)
21. Conservative (politicians/policies)
22. Teachers
23. Children
24. Reform/policy/solution
UK makes no progress in Pisa tests
By Sean Coughlan
BBC News education correspondent
3 December 2013

The UK has failed to make any progress in catching up global rivals in school tests taken by teenagers in maths, reading and science - and is no longer in the top 20 for any subject.
The results of the OECD's Pisa tests are particularly poor for Wales, which trails behind the rest of the UK.

Andreas Schleicher, who runs the tests, says the UK's performance has "flat-lined" while competitors have improved.
In science, the UK has slipped downwards, from 16th to 21st place, in a downward trend for results in the subject.
The UK remains stuck among the average, middle-ranking countries, in 26th place for maths and 23rd for reading, broadly similar to three years ago.

In a breakdown of the UK results, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland are clustered around the average.
Scotland has overtaken England in maths and reading, with England ahead in science tests.
Northern Ireland is in third place for the three subjects.
Wales was behind in all three subjects.
Launching the results, Mr Schleicher said the UK spent more in relative terms than most other countries on education. It was also more successful than most at improving the test results of immigrant children.
But he said that the test results showed the UK's school system had so far failed to improve as quickly as other countries, such as Poland in eastern Europe and Vietnam in south-east Asia, which are now ranked higher.
England's Education Secretary Michael Gove said: "These poor results show the last government failed to secure the improvements in school standards our young people desperately need."
"Labour poured billions of pounds into schools and ratcheted up exam grades - yet our education system stagnated and we fell behind other nations."
"This performance underlines the urgent need for our reforms. Only by learning from other nations and confronting failure at home will we give young people a fighting chance of competing for the jobs of the future."
Teacher quality
In response, Labour's Shadow Education Secretary Tristram Hunt said the results showed the importance of high-quality teachers.
"This report exposes the failings of this government's schools policy: a policy that has sent unqualified teachers into the classroom and prevented effective collaboration between schools."
Mr Hunt said the government was "charting a course that will make our international standing worse, not better".
The deputy leader of the ASCL head teachers' union, Malcolm Trobe, said it was "far too early" for these international tests to show the impact of current education policies.

Mary Bousted, leader of the ATL teachers' union, warned politicians against "misusing the Pisa results to score political points" and cautioned that "everyone needs to remember that PISA is not an exact science".

Christine Blower, leader of the National Union of Teachers, said the results showed that successful education systems "pay teachers well, respect the profession and encourage collaboration between teachers and schools".

There were also voices of caution about how these results should be interpreted.

Prof David Spieghalter from the University of Cambridge said "we should be very cautious in the lessons to be learned" - and that measuring quality in education was not straightforward.

He also highlighted that while South Korean teenagers were at the top end of test results, they were also the unhappiest about their time in school.

Prof Alan Smithers from the Centre for Education and Employment Research, University of Buckingham said there were many factors outside school that shaped test results.

"It is disappointing that the UK's 15-year-olds should come so far down the Pisa tables, but is it the fault of the schools? So many other things affect the scores. In the Asian countries that do so well, there are tiger mothers and a lot of out-of-school tuition."

He said that the UK could boost its position by training students to take the tests, but that was not the same thing as improving the education system.

"The danger in the exaggerated importance that politicians attach to Pisa, is that implicitly they are pushing the world to a narrow and particular view of education," said Prof Smithers.