

Prepare to challenge the **OECD PISA** explosion

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The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)¹ is expanding its global influence on education through its Education 2030 program and more international testing.

The OECD is a primary promoter of neo-liberal economic and education policies. It is made up 36 countries, primarily the most economically wealthy, such as the U.S., Canada and those in the European Union. OECD members produce 60% of the global Gross Domestic Product and it represents the interests of the dominant classes in those countries, with a focus on economic, not social and cultural development.

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1. The OECD is an international organization composed of 36 states – the majority from the “global North,” whose objective is to coordinate economic and social policies. The OECD was founded in 1961. In Latin America, only Mexico and Chile are full members.

So why should educators be worried about the OECD?

The OECD has set out to define and influence education policy on a global basis—it reaches into your education system, wherever it is.

It began with PISA—a test given every three years (most recently in 2018) that began assessing math, science and literacy. PISA stands for Programme for International Student Assessment, but is universally known as just PISA.

Not just the 36 OECD countries take the test—it has expanded to over 70 countries. One of the key problems with PISA is that the results are released in the form of ranking of countries on how they compare to all the rest of the countries. PISA rankings are used to symbolize the quality of a country's education system, despite being only the results of a representative sample of 15 year-olds in each of the countries on three test areas.

The rankings are determined by scores that reflect a complex of factors—but these factors are seldom ex-

Educación 2030

The image shows the title 'Educación 2030' in large, bold letters. 'Educación' is in red and '2030' is in blue. To the right of the year is a circular icon representing Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), which consists of 17 colored segments arranged in a circle, with a white center. The entire graphic is crossed out with a large red 'X'.

mined or understood. In fact, since it is a comparison among countries, a country's scores could improve, but their ranking falls at the same time.

The rankings are used by education ministers to justify pursuing education policy directions, whether or not they have any relationship to the what produced the scores. The rankings get very wide publicity—promoted by the OECD and often sensationalized by media. They are often used to “shame and blame” teachers for results, even though the results may not be an accurate reflection of a country's education purpose or goals.

The intention of PISA is to demonstrate a crisis that can be turned into a catalyst for reform:

...the release of a highly publicised report on disappointing educational outcomes or performance may engender a sense of crisis, not because educational outcomes have changed, but because assessments of those outcomes have.

(OECD, 2010, p. 355)

It is through this sense of crisis that countries then turn to the OECD for advice on what it should do, creating a “global governance of education” as countries

follow OECD prescriptions, hoping to climb up the rankings or to stay on top.

To expand the impact of PISA, the OECD has created a “PISA for Development Programme” that “aims to encourage and facilitate PISA participation in interested and motivated low- and middle-income countries.” Of the nine countries in this program, five are in Latin America.

The OECD has not been content to stick to math, science and literacy as areas of assessment. It has expanded to critical and creating thinking skills, “global competencies,” as well as a PISA for 5-year-olds, all of which are even more problematic areas of assessment than the initial three.

The central assumption on which all this is based is that education should be standardized everywhere—that the criteria for what is valued in education should be set on a global basis. It is a decontextualization of education from social and cultural frames that may differ substantially. It is the opposite, for example, of indigenous ways of knowing that are set in a particular place and in the stories and cultural skills of a particular group.

The PISA assumes that the interests and values represented by the OECD should apply globally—a

neo-colonial project. It is built on a claim that it is possible to construct valid assessments that go across cultures and languages and apply universally. Its method of publicizing results is based on using them to influence policy in similar directions everywhere.

These same assumptions are the base of the expansion of PISA to a new program called “Education 2030.” It is built on a framework that, according to Andreas Schleicher, Director of the OECD Education department, “is relevant across the globe.” That framework is in turn to be the basis of identifying pedagogy, assessment and the design of an instructional system.

Education 2030 has four elements: Developing a global “conceptual learning framework,” doing an “international curriculum analysis,” defining “principles

of instructional designs to implement curricula” and describing “competencies and profiles of teachers.”

In other words, its intent is to create a global system for evaluating teachers through an assessment and, in the tradition of PISA, producing country rankings of how close teachers and the system are to what the OECD thinks education should be.

The OECD through its PISA and now its Education 2030 program plays a central role in spreading and normalizing neo-liberal education policies globally.

What should be done in response? Inform and educate about the OECD and the PISA and the Education 2030 process, challenge the assumptions it is based on, reject the process, and campaign against the OECD global governance of education.

