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**Marginalisation in Education Systems:  
The Programme for International Student Assessment  
(PISA) and the Failure Discourse Around the Italian  
Education System**

*Rogério Gonçalves de Freitas*

*Vera Lúcia Jacob Chaves*

Federal University of Pará



*Hajime Takeuchi Nozaki*

Federal University of Juiz de Fora

Brazil

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**Abstract:** The Organisation for Economic Cooperation Development (OECD) created the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) as a political actor in global education

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through a logic of governance by numbers (Grek, 2009). This article discusses how PISA has become a major showcase for the OECD as an assessment tool par excellence while also producing marginalisation discourses. By approaching neoliberal globalisation and its aim at restoring the transnational capitalist class' power over the "dangerous" classes (Harvey, 2005; Holman, 2006; Van Apeldoorn, 2001; Van der Pijl, 2010), this article analyses how school privatisation has grown in the Italian system over the last few years in the face of the PISA discourse (Bertozzi & Graziano, 2004). Building on document research and reports by Italian teachers, it traces how PISA's pressure over the Italian school system has produced a twofold marginalizing effect. The first effect is the periodical disclosure of PISA rankings to distinguish successful from failed education systems. In fact, recent PISA results have placed the Italian system as a failed, technologically retarded system compared to those of high-performance countries. The second effect is the burst of neoliberal feelings among teachers, who report both stigma and guilt.

**Keywords:** Globalization; Privatization; Marginalisation; PISA; Italy

### **Marginalización en sistemas de educación: El Programa de Evaluación Internacional de Estudiantes (PISA) y el discurso de la quiebra en torno al sistema educativo italiano**

**Resumen:** La Organización para el Desarrollo de la Cooperación Económica (OCDE) creó el Programa de Evaluación Internacional de Estudiantes (PISA) como un actor político en la educación global a través de una lógica de gobernanza por números (Grek, 2009). Este artículo discute cómo el PISA se ha convertido en una gran vitrina para la OCDE como una herramienta de evaluación por excelencia, sino también produce discursos de marginación. Al abordar la globalización neoliberal y su objetivo de restaurar el poder de la clase capitalista transnacional sobre las clases "peligrosas" (Harvey, 2005; Holman, 2006; Van Apeldoorn, 2001; Van der Pijl, 2010), este artículo analiza cómo la privatización escolar creció en el sistema italiano en los últimos años ante el discurso del PISA (Bertozzi & Graziano, 2004). Con base en la investigación de documentos e informes de profesores italianos, este artículo revela que la presión del PISA sobre el sistema escolar italiano produjo un efecto de doble marginalización en los últimos años. El primer efecto es la divulgación periódica de los rankings del PISA para distinguir los sistemas educativos exitosos de los que fallaron. De hecho, los resultados recientes del PISA colocaron el sistema italiano como un sistema fracasado y con retraso tecnológico en comparación con los países de alto desempeño. El segundo efecto es la explosión de sentimientos neoliberales entre los profesores, que relatan tanto estigma y culpa.

**Palabras-clave:** Globalización; Privatización; Marginación; PISA; Italia

### **Marginalização em sistemas de educação: O Programa de Avaliação Internacional de Estudantes (PISA) e o discurso da falência em torno do sistema educacional italiano**

**Resumo:** A Organização para o Desenvolvimento da Cooperação Econômica (OCDE) criou o Programa de Avaliação Internacional de Estudantes (PISA) como um ator político na educação global através de uma lógica de governança por números (Grek, 2009). Este artigo discute como o PISA se tornou uma grande vitrine para a OCDE como uma ferramenta de avaliação por excelência, ao mesmo tempo em que produz discursos de marginalização. Ao abordar a globalização neoliberal e seu objetivo de restaurar o poder da classe capitalista transnacional sobre as classes "perigosas" (Harvey, 2005; Holman, 2006; Van Apeldoorn, 2001; Van der Pijl, 2010), este artigo analisa como a privatização escolar cresceu no sistema italiano nos últimos anos em face do discurso do PISA (Bertozzi &

Graziano, 2004). Com base na pesquisa de documentos e relatórios sobre professores italianos, este artigo mostra que a pressão do PISA sobre o sistema escolar italiano produziu um efeito de dupla marginalização nos últimos anos. O primeiro efeito é a divulgação periódica dos rankings do PISA para distinguir os sistemas educacionais bem sucedidos daqueles fracassados. De fato, os resultados recentes do PISA colocaram o sistema italiano como um sistema fracassado e com retardo tecnológico em comparação com os países de alto desempenho. O segundo efeito é a explosão de sentimentos neoliberais entre os professores, que relatam tanto estigma quanto culpa.

**Palavras-chave:** Globalização; Privatização; Marginalização; PISA; Itália

## Introduction

This article builds on the assumption that the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a political actor in the field of education, as contended by such authors as Grek (2009), Sellar & Lingard (2013), and Bieber & Martens (2011). The central argument is that PISA, as a political actor created by the OECD, is an integral part of the complex contemporary capitalist system, which derives from strategic mediations such as globalisation, neoliberalism, and marginalisation that are articulated to form a coherent, living whole. Meanwhile, the OECD manifests itself as a large think tank of neoliberal interest. Therefore, the theoretical challenge pursued in this article is that of associating PISA with the process of educational marginalisation and characterizing it as one of the global, neoliberal strategies to manage the post-1970s capitalist crisis. As such, this article aims to discuss how PISA has become a primary mechanism for the marginalisation of education systems. To this end, this article draws on the Marxist tradition in that it shows how the effects of PISA are a “synthesis of many determinations” (Marx, 1986, p. 38)<sup>1</sup>.

The first sections describe globalisation and neoliberalism as expressions of the post-1970s crisis as well as the OECD’s major role in managing this crisis through the creation of PISA as an instrument of global assessment in the field of education. Such a description is based on documents and bibliographical references collected in the OECD Library and Archives in Paris. Subsequently, the article introduces the analysis of Italy as an empirical case, from its participation in the PISA test to the consequences for the educational marginalisation process and the stigma and guilt caused to teachers. Such an analysis uses data from the Italian education system, especially law reforms aimed to adapt the education system to the PISA rankings. The marginalisation caused through precarious teaching work was analysed through focal groups with female teachers. In total, 31 teachers participated in seven focal groups, each with three to seven participants. The focal groups followed an open script comprising groups of questions related to such things as: 1) biography, 2) daily life at school, 3) annual ranking, and 4) self-definition. The focal groups were audio recorded and transcribed. All teachers provided informed consent and had their anonymity assured.

## Globalisation and the Root of Marginalised “Dangerous” Classes

The term globalisation was first forged in the field of culture and communication in the 1960s before being incorporated into the field of economics and social sciences (Almendra, 1998). Its use in the field of economics stems from the adjective, global, as forged in the early 1980s by the major U.S. Schools of Business Administration, such as Harvard, Columbia, and Stanford. On the one hand, it is a controversial term because of its ambiguous, blurry ideology, which, according to

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<sup>1</sup> For a better understanding of the Marxist tradition, see Lukács (1967) and Kosik (1976).

Chesnais (1994), conceals a twofold polarisation movement—one that is domestic and related to the differences between the highest and the lowest incomes; and another one that is international and related to the differences between central and peripheral countries. On the other hand, globalisation is a specific stage in the internationalisation of capital (Chesnais, 1994). In fact, the establishment of a worldwide market had been gradually cementing since the mid-19th century as a second stage in the development of capitalism. At first, it had been an overwhelming power that produced goods and was based on competition between capitalists in the early Industrial Revolution, unlike the monopolist, internationalist capitalism that was established later on (Bandeira, 1998).

Considering the economic basis of globalisation established since the early 20th century, World War 2 (WW2) is relevant for the purposes of this article because of the role it played in changing the international division of labour. Chesnais (1994) states that globalisation is the longest stage of uninterrupted accumulation that capitalism has ever experienced since 1914: from the post-WW2 through the late 1970s. The late 1950s can be characterised by a swift increase in the U.S. foreign direct investments (FDI) and international expansion of U.S. multinationals, both of which reshaped the international market. In the 1970s, however, the capitalist crisis made international organisations, including the OECD, turn their policies to so-called structural adjustments. Such adjustments, as part of neoliberal globalisation, strived to manage the capitalist crisis by increasing the differences between core and periphery and between high-income people and low-income people (dangerous classes), thereby creating the process referred to as marginalisation in this article. The OECD played a crucial role in this process, as we shall see in the following section.

Globalisation has been legitimised worldwide because it has replaced modernisation theory and has been used by transnational actors as rhetoric for managing the world economy. Criticised by Sorel (1947), modernisation theory, which was based on bourgeois doctrine and the notion of development, has failed as an explanatory framework because globalisation has grown through the new exercise of market power worldwide (McMichael, 2011). Globalisation, in the sense of the internationalisation of capital, has grown as the main ingredient in neoliberal politics and ideology, and from the point of view of the power elites<sup>2</sup>, it is a project designed to eloquently disseminate the virtue of privatisation (Harvey, 2005).

It was designed to naturalise a series of inflexible policies aimed at strengthening the power of the capitalist class and providing effective responses to the crisis of capital in the 1970s, while also marginalizing the subaltern classes. In Harvey's (2005, p. 14) words, "The founding figures of neoliberal thought took political ideals of human dignity and individual freedom as fundamental, as 'the central values of civilisation.' In so doing, they chose wisely, for these are indeed compelling and seductive ideals." This choice has legitimised the U.S. international policy and redefined the compromise between capital and labor. It has thereby entailed a transition from a period of fundamental political concern with full employment, through a complex perspective of economy, to a period of inflation control, with monetarist, "supply-side" solutions.

In the 1970s, the decisive breach of the Bretton Woods agreements paved the way for a new era, one of redefined social, political and economic balance. The recovery of the European and Japanese industries gave new life to intercapitalist competition. The oil crisis, the increasing tensions burst by both the protests of 1968 and the metropolitan working classes in core countries, the constant claim for a fairer world economy for the Allies, and the U.S. defeat in Vietnam provided the background for the neoliberal counter-revolution advancement.

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<sup>2</sup> The notion of elite refers to the dominant class in the Marxist framework. Therefore, they are always economic elites and stem from the dominant class. As Marx and Engels point out in *The German Ideology* (1846), they have become spreaders of dominant ideas; as such, they are also cultural and ideological elites for the present purposes.

The *Trilateral Commission*, founded by David Rockefeller as a private organisation in 1973, became the major think tank for the new management of the transnational elites' interests. In its report entitled *The Crisis of Democracy* (1975), it proposed an avenue to restrain "excess of democracy" while also legitimizing monetarism, fighting "dangerous" classes, and marginalizing social minorities. Also, the report expressed the economic concerns of core countries in three geographic areas, namely: North America (U.S. and Canada), Europe, and Japan. The major goal of such countries was to spur a narrower collaboration between the industrialised democratic zones and urge their common responsibility for the leadership of the wider international system (Crozier et al., 1975).

At the global level, *The Reform of International Institutions* (Bergsten, 1976) report recommended national-level policy strategies based on the central role of the OECD and introduced a new architecture for multilateral institutions with a compact top-down structure to face several challenges. Pyramid-like organisations were built with a hierarchical structure whereby decision-making processes were set in motion by a small, informal group and then extended and applied to larger, more global organisations.

The report included a series of concentric circles of decision-making processes to assure the necessary collective management for an efficient international system: a small, informal group in the centre, which would have different compositions depending on the matter; a larger group including all major countries; and the formal implementation of shared initiatives through new or existing universal institutions. A system conceived as such can be legitimate and efficient if it is implemented through continuous consultation to countries from different circles and if individual countries are willing to be represented by others at certain levels of discussion (Bergsten, 1976).

Such a system was clearly elitist in its international power configuration when it came to the initiatives undertaken under the direction of the United Nations (UN) for a small, "informal group," that is, the *Trilateral Commission* itself. This management format has served groups from all major countries in the world, the G7, the OECD, and universal institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). As such a format was intended to be the world government's hierarchical composition, it seems that the root of privatisation finds meaning in the new global governance regimen created by the *Trilateral Commission*. One of the fundamental reasons for the excess of democracy, as the document argues, was the improvement of the American educational system:

The only truly important variable affecting political engagement and attitudes is education. The level of education grew rapidly in the US over the decades. In 1940, less than 40% of the population had education beyond primary school; in 1972, 75% had attended high school or university (40% and 35%, respectively). The more educated the individual is, the more likely s/he is to engage in politics, because s/he takes a more ideological stance and a more "enlightened," "liberal" or "change oriented" stance toward social, cultural and political issues. As such, the democratic wave might have been the result of a more educated population. (Crozier, 1975, p. 106)

Nonetheless, the report pointed to a disinvestment in mass education and an inversion in the attitudes toward a "welfare change," which characterised the education and media privatisation: "At the present time, a significant challenge comes from the intellectuals and related groups who assert their disgust with the corruption, materialism (...). The development of an 'adversary culture' among intellectuals has affected students, scholars, and the media" (Crozier, 1975, p. 6). Mass education through school was a way to meet the demands from political resistance movements that threatened the hegemonic social model in Western capitalism, which was by then destabilised by inflation and would not resist the impact of a strong, prolonged economic crisis.

In response, neoliberal globalization sought to bring about a redesign of the “dangerous classes” for the consequent preservation of the hierarchical structure. Neoliberalism intended to present the economy on technical grounds, in which one consequence is a high rate of unemployment. Unemployment, in turn, has become the main mechanism that has contributed to marginalization. Therefore, regulating the unemployment rate change has become a neoliberal asset because it has established a marginalized labor force.

To be politically acceptable, neoliberal globalisation was necessarily more gradual in Europe, entailing progressive exhaustion of the substantial content, rather than a negation, of the traditional democratic means on the European integration area. In Europe, the Eurosclerosis discourse became the basis of social expression and formations that were pressing for a change in the social structure due to the growing turmoil caused by political and economic instability. The continued stagflation and structural financial instability followed by the monetary shock brought forward by Paul Volker (American economist, chairman of the Federal Reserve from 1979 to 1987) were interpreted by the large companies’ management tiers in Europe as excessive state interference in industry affairs, rigidity in the labor market, and change in unemployment rates (Van Apeldoorn, 2003).

Neoliberalism found in the European Union the most apparent representation of the monetarist mantra and eventually paved its way to restore disciplinary labour market interventions. The European Central Bank’s statutory objective of a low, stable inflation rate had enormous repercussions in defining the limits for salary and social security policies. The very possibility of devising a full employment policy became not only difficult to implement, but particularly undesirable.

The construction of the European Union was incorporated into what Gill (1998) defined as the New Constitutionalism, i.e., the legal-political dimension of the neoliberal era that aims at separating economic policies from the broad political responsibility to make governments more responsive to the discipline of market forces and correspondingly less responsible for the processes of democratic forces. “Central objectives in this [governance] discourse are security of property rights and investor freedoms, and market control over the state and over the labor to secure ‘credibility’ in the eyes of private investors, e.g. those in both the global currency and capital markets” (Gill, 1998, p. 5). It is in this arrangement that the OECD, as an important instrument of global governance, has played since its foundation a role in leading national governments to transnational interests while acting as a monitoring agency for the “health” of capitalism and exercising strong soft power over the educational marginalisation.

### **The OECD and the Reconstruction of Capitalism: Soft Power Over Educational Marginalisation<sup>3</sup>**

The OECD sought to create an international political and economic network from its very inception, the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation, in preparation for the Marshall Plan (European Recovery Program) in 1948. To this end, the OECD had to legitimise itself in the

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<sup>3</sup> As previously mentioned, this section provides a brief account of the post-WW2 in order to show the OECD as an international organisation in the service of capitalist reconstruction. We build on the assumption that the OECD is a marginalisation-producing agent, rather than only a passive agent showing the marginalisation that results from neoliberal globalisation. However, it does not imply there is a cause-effect relationship indicating that marginalisation is caused by the OECD and exclusively by it. From a dialectical perspective, the OECD both produces and reveals marginalisation, i.e., it is characterised as an active agent producing and, as such, revealing such process.

world as a creator of global truths and consensuses, i.e., a type of think tank (OECD, 2014). The role of the OECD in the global economy and its legitimization in social institutions has become effective because its economic recommendations are based on cultural and economic transformations in the developed countries.

One of the OECD's objectives was the establishment of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) to perform, among others, peer-reviewed assessment of countries. Such regulation through peer-reviewed assessments is a surveillance-based, soft-governance mechanism. In general, such a mechanism is linked to political change, while reproduction of ideas and the production of data are linked to policy coordination and convergence.

The OECD's specific approach to education has allowed for a more general evolution of education policies throughout a period that has been characterised in the OECD member countries by an enormous expansion in the population's level of education (Papadopoulos, 1994). Schooling expansion took place throughout Europe: Italy, for example, witnessed a major evolution of mass schooling in the 1950s and 1960s. The schooling rate increased ca. 180% among the population aged 11 to 44 years in the country in 1964 (Benadusi & Consoli, 2004).

Such expansion was the result of a significant period of capitalist accumulation and advance in the training of the general workforce. The OECD's priority discourse on education in this period targeted highly specialised talents in the engineering and technology sectors. The scientific stagnation in Europe, which resulted from concerted war-oriented goals in the interwar period, restrained the scientific know-how development in Europe, especially in comparison to that in the US. The European education system was considered antiquated, with obsolete learning methods and a discouraging environment for the development of cutting-edge technology and science. This paved the way for the global discourse of international scientific cooperation.

A scientific research committee and a new Directorate for Scientific Affairs (DSA) were then created under the leadership of Alexander King, who was later founder of the Club of Rome and paradoxically criticised globalisation in the 1970s. The inevitability of establishing cooperation showed that progress toward improving the scientific and technical potential of European countries and, more particularly, solving the shortage of qualified researchers and engineers would have a long-term positive impact on the education system. The DSA created the Committee for Scientific and Technical Personnel (CPST), which was later transformed into the OECD's Education Committee in the 1970s (Papadopoulos, 1994).

Due to the previous Cold War tensions and the first mission of the Soviet Union's Sputnik Program, science and technology gained prominence, and training in these areas gained a new status in the education systems worldwide. New school programs were developed within the OECD, with strong financial support from the U.S. Department of Defence. The U.S. government also invested considerable resources domestically to reform and modernise U.S. school programs and develop new pedagogical proposals focused on the teaching and learning of mathematics and natural sciences. The OECD was stimulated by a half million-dollar subsidy to rapidly establish a detailed program to tackle scientific and technical scarcity (Papadopoulos, 1994).

Drawing on regulation through peer-reviewed assessment as a soft-governance mechanism, the first exams of the education system in each OECD member country were carried out along with the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) by the end of 1950. The aim was to gain an understanding of the general state of scientific teaching and its potential problems. The assessments consisted of having a small team of independent experts sent to each country to meet government officials with a view to gaining insight into the state of each country's education system (Papadopoulos, 1994). The first assessments proved to be insufficient and descriptive, rather than analytical. Yet Ministers of Education in the OECD member countries

became increasingly interested in having their education systems assessed and began to legitimise the assessments in public speeches and periodical reports.

After a conference on the need for future highly specialised workers in the scientific and technological sector, held in La Haye in 1959, the 1960 report *Privoir les cadres demain* recommended: “Expanding comparative statistics as a prerequisite for a better understanding and review of science and technology-oriented education policies” (Papadopoulos, 1994, p. 27, free translation). The Ford Foundation was then invited by the OECD to hold a Conference on Engineering Societies in Western Europe. The invitation was made based on the Ford Foundation’s experience in the US and excellent results in technical engineering qualification. The Conference concluded a large gap still existed between Western Europe and North America, despite the advance and growth of schooling and despite concerns with technological education in Europe. The United States and Canada alone had 500,000 graduates in excess compared to the entire remainder of OECD members in 1970 (Papadopoulos, 1994).

The role model of the global reform in the U.S. scientific education activated an emulation mechanism amongst the OECD member countries. Ministers of education in Europe were led to apply more energy to the learning of mathematical and technological knowledge in the school. A distinction was made between regions of highly developed education systems, such as North America and Northern Europe, and regions facing development problems in their education systems, namely: in Mediterranean countries, especially in southern Italy. Recommendations were made for both regions, but with different contents for each. Countries in Northern Europe received more systematic educational recommendations and enormous incentives for science and technology-oriented teaching at all levels of education. In contrast, Mediterranean countries received asymmetric recommendations and were stereotypically seen as featuring second-rate systems. Actions focused on how the Mediterranean schools could improve the organisation of their teaching infrastructure, programmes and materials. In addition, the poorest countries were monitored through an OECD office in each Ministry of Education (Papadopoulos, 1994). This distinction might have represented the beginning of an international division of science, which we are witnessing in the early 21st century. It can be considered the milestone in the marginalisation of education systems, including the Italian system.

One of the major aims of the recommendations was to reach the body of teachers, as they needed to understand the urgency of technological and educational innovation from the OECD’s perspective. Actions undertaken by the OECD included the diffusion of television programs of distance education and the introduction of documentaries into school syllabi and curricula, especially in marginalised regions. For that reason, a large cinemathèque was created inside the OECD in the late 1960s to systematically lend movies to countries with deficient education systems, including Italy (Papadopoulos, 1994). The idea was to build consensus among teachers to legitimise the potential of innovation and overcome resistance to changes in global education programmes. Meanwhile, the OECD’s discourse on modernizing education systems aimed at producing consensus amongst European ministers of education to facilitate reforms and modify school and university syllabi and curricula.

The changes were not limited to the teaching of mathematics; they also included the teaching of physics, chemistry, and biology. A report commissioned by the OECD itself, based on the opinion of the U.S. Physical Science Study Committee (PSSC) and physicists close to the OECD, pointed to several problems of physics teaching in Europe and how to overcome them (Papadopoulos, 1994). The 1960s and 1970s purportedly witnessed heated debates about education systems in Europe, because scientific demands reinforced the OECD’s and transnational elites’



expectation toward education on the one hand, and a critical pedagogical sector stood against the innovation trend on the other hand.

The epistemological and methodological disputes over education based on scientific demands gained momentum through the spread of the theory of human capital imported from the US and used as a guideline for education policies in Europe. The major promoters of the first version of this theory were no pedagogues, but rather economists—Theodore Schultz and Gary Becker, who in general understood education primarily as an economic key, a consumer commodity (Ferreira Jr & Bittar, 2008).

The OECD created the *Centre pour la Recherche et l'Innovation dans l'Enseignement* (CERI) in 1968, precisely during the European student resistance, with a view to exploring innovative approaches, promoting international comparative research, and bridging the gap between innovation and Human Capital-based policies. CERI aimed to be a world leader in providing policymakers with information on education. It was responsible for producing and disseminating the so-called new skills and innovative pedagogical programmes (Van Damme, 2009, 2012). In addition, it called on the education systems to respond to the economic problems through the best practices narrative (OECD-CERI, 2001). All OECD member countries are members of CERI. The Centre Board meets twice a year, and every two years its members commit to ensuring the enforcement of the work programme over the following years. The Centre's major tangible results are published periodically through national and international conferences and seminars (CERI-OECD, 2008). The descriptive and analytical results are provided in rapports that respond to a number of political and business pressures. Created by the OECD, which aims for the economic "welfare" of its member countries, CERI is intended not only to carry out research on education, but most importantly to account for economic interests.

Not only did the early 1970s crisis collapse the weakest economies, but it also enlarged the socioeconomic gap between northern and southern Europe. The 1980s and 1990s witnessed the rise of a new conceptual product by CERI: *Lifelong Learning*. Behind its educational and political guise was an economic interest identified in a meeting of OECD Ministers of Education in the 1990s. The education strategy was also adopted by UNESCO and the European Commission. Education itself was seen as the new frontier to heat markets building on the theory of human capital. Since then, CERI has adopted three priorities, namely: 1) a strong focus on educational standards and indicators, 2) recognition of the importance of technology to the labor market, and 3) a need to tackle the high rate of youth unemployment (OECD-CERI, 2008). Interestingly, the 1990s were marked by an increased number of countries interested in educational assessments, given the capitalisation of unprecedented advances in statistical methods and quality control procedures (Stephens & Moskowitz, 2004).

The development of assessment indicators was fundamental for an effective transition from research to more incisive interventions in the guise of recommendation at the international level. In 1988, CERI assimilated the Indicators of Education Systems (INES), which now includes PISA, as an authoritative source of information on education systems worldwide and data on the performance of education systems in 34 OECD member countries.

The INES program has fed into a rapport entitled *Education at a Glance*, which has been published annually since 1992. Its content is written in English and French and translated into several languages. It is of great importance to understand the countries and their education system from global perspective. By encapsulating the results of reforms and education policies, it shows, through emulation, the countries with the best results, especially in PISA, and once again it distinguishes high-performance education systems, now called successful education systems education, from low-performance systems, now characterised as failed education systems.

## PISA Hegemony in the Assessment of Educational Marginalisation<sup>4</sup>

The creation of PISA is a result of the OECD's historical evolution as an agent of truth and consensus. The rise in recent years of PISA's international legitimacy has also produced a growing critical framework around its role as a hegemonic instrument of large-scale assessment. In fact, it plays a key role in global governance (Grek, 2009; Sellar & Lingard, 2013) by exercising soft power over education (Bieber & Martens, 2011). Its influence on the international assessment regimen is deeply rooted in the neoliberal globalisation discourse (Sjøberg, 2016). Through converging education policies (Bieber & Martens, 2011; Knill; Tosun & Bauer, 2009; Yebra, 2003), PISA has been able to construct a discourse that successfully allows for the coexistence of inequality and excellence as its greatest achievement to date. However, such coexistence manifests itself more in discourse than in reality, because the assessment results have been often determined by institutional differences across the participating countries (Zancajo, Castejón & Ferrer, 2012), and inequality (Hanushek & Wößmann, 2005) has been a rhetoric for control through global governance and neoliberal technology-based marginalisation.

Arguably, neoliberal marginalisation and neoliberal emotions associated with the process reveal themselves when PISA tries to combine inequality and excellence in an (already contradictory) totality drawing on the assessments it carries out. Two elements stand out in such an attempt: 1) competition as a principle in the search for results and 2) monitoring for neoliberal control of changes in global education systems.

The first characteristic of PISA refers to the adoption of a ranking-based comparison mechanism that generates competition between education systems and, therefore, produces differences that marginalise low-performance countries. PISA-induced competitiveness can be compared to the very foundations of the capitalist system. Historical capitalism has entailed an expansion process and generalised market orientation of processes, distribution, and investment (Wallerstein, 1985). However, because of the possibility of fluctuation in the expansion rates, "the rate of accumulation for individual capitalists was based on a process of 'competition' between them, with greater rewards to those with a better understanding of the assessment, greater ability to control the workforce, and greater chances of overcoming the political constraints imposed on specific market operations" (Wallerstein, 1985, p. 6). The production of performance standards by comparing PISA rankings has allowed OECD-CERI to achieve, from a legitimacy perspective, a certain type of monopoly of large-scale assessments in recent years.

The roots of rankings can be found in the history of military ranks or in the term *Heraldry*, a system of individual identification through hereditary insignia in Middle Age Europe (Wise, Hook & Walker, 1980). In Gothic architecture, an inverted V-shaped pattern, called *Chevron*, used to be

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<sup>4</sup> There are several mediations for globally oriented education policies to reach different countries, cities, schools, and classrooms evenly. From a Marxist standpoint, a global education system would be an abstraction and, as such, would require a more accurate examination to trace mediations between the whole and the parts while also revealing the phenomenon as a contradictory, living entirety. In the field of evaluation, Afonso (1998) points to four levels: mega, macro, meso, and micro. The megalevel is aimed at assessing at the international level. The macrolevel is aimed at assessing at the national level, considering regions and cities within a country. The mesolevel is aimed at assessing in the school, while the microlevel is aimed at assessing in the classroom, both of which refer to evaluations within the school institution. In this article, the focus is on the broader movement: the dominant assessment geared by PISA. Such a focus, however, does not assume that the broader perspectives reach their targets in the classroom mechanically, indistinguishably, uncontradictable or irresistibly. This paper sole aim is to characterise PISA as a global educational and political actor within the contemporary capitalist strategies of crisis management.

applied to medieval church façades to produce a type of zigzag pattern. This symbol has become a military distinction usually present in the soldiers' uniforms to represent rank and prestige. If, on the one hand, the history of capitalism comes from a system of accumulation engendered by a competitive process between capitalists, whereby those most skilled in controlling the workforce obtain market rewards (accumulation); on the other hand, rankings, such as the PISA ranking, trigger the competitors' wish for the prestige provided by the display window and the podium.

The second characteristic is the PISA monitoring to ensure reform-enabled changes. Sjøberg (2016) states that the countries' performance ranking draws the attention of both the media and politicians, who usually panic with low performance results. From the perspective of converging education policy, low performance countries that do not achieve efficient performance levels in international assessments often undergo normative pressures and are invited by their own governments, through domestic and international education think tanks, to follow neoliberal management models that have been pre-established by international organisations. Following the converging education policy rationale, an efficient communication is in place between translational experts, who conceive of and disseminate ideas and beliefs that lead to changes to the institutional actors' attitude and turn the logic of value systems into concepts of education quality (Knill & Lehmkuhl, 2009).

In such international policy promotion, international organisations or countries disseminate best practices models through benchmarks of assessment and education policies (Bieber & Martens, 2011). This dissemination grows in the interior of a cycle of assessment—recommendation—normalisation. Such a political cycle efficiently introduces a new functioning and organizing configuration into the education systems worldwide. Therefore, the soft power mechanism of convergence is the result of a bilateral transfer of information that aims to encourage change and implementation. The answer to this, then, is the construction of a model transfer process that applies to everyone and everywhere (Yebara, 2003). The ideological power of PISA discourse can be seen in the extent to which it influences collective and institutional perceptions of appropriate economic and social policy. Through a univocal, dominant disciplinary process within education systems, PISA constructs its truth upon the research discourse (Bart, 2015), created and monitored by itself.

### **PISA and the Marginalisation of the Italian Education System: Analysis of Its Implementation History**

Italy has participated in PISA since its first version in 2000. Its performance in 2000, 2003, 2006, 2009, 2012 was always below the OECD average, especially for mathematics and sciences. The Italian education system adapted at the international and European pace. The power elites' and the market's pressure led Italy to a new world education project aimed at increasing privatisation. The education reforms in Italy have drawn on four major OECD-PISA discourses that have produced four types of marginalisation since the first PISA version back in 2000: 1) geographic and generational marginalisation; 2) marginalisation because of education lag and the need for modernisation; 3) marginalisation because of a gap in relation to the private sector; and 4) marginalisation because of a technological gap.

Geographic and generational marginalisation showed up in the first PISA version, which included 32 countries. Italy's performance was low because in this country there are historical differences in educational, social and economic performances that refer to a known "*Questione Meridionale*" discussed by Antonio Gramsci. Elements of this assessment included memorisation, elaboration, interest in reading, interest in mathematics, student self-concept of reading, and

cooperative learning (OECD, 2003). This methodology, in addition to disregarding European specificities, produced even more marginalisation because it did not respect the historical and geographical diversity across the regions of Italy, especially between northern and southern Italy. Hence, it led to low performance in learning and reading in several Italian schools.

The value-added of social segregation in schools has a negative effect on academic results (Donato & Ferrer-Esteban, 2012). This means that students in regions featuring higher levels of segregation across education centers are more likely to achieve lower performance than students in regions with more homogenous centers, regardless of their level of wealth, geographic location and level of education investment.

In addition, investments in public education started to decline in Italy from the year 2000. The OECD itself stressed this as a consequence of the 10% increase of students aged 15-19 years that neither studied nor worked (OECD, 2003). Such PISA data corroborated the idea that a problem existed in the Italian school and youth when compared to the international scenario. They were transformed into discourses that paved the way for a reform and dictated the mandatory path to achieve international competitiveness and respond to supranational orders.

In February 10th, 2000, Minister Berlinguer's Reform passed and became a milestone in the transformation of the Italian education system. It focused on school privatisation and abandoned the former Italian education model, one based on the ideal of *paideia*, emotions, and intelligence. The reform was based on two fundamental pillars: decentralisation and school autonomy. The schools started being held responsible for their own financial and organisational management. Such pillars followed the trend reported in other countries, as PISA data showed that school autonomy in hiring teachers had positive impacts on their schools: "Hiring teachers is mostly the responsibility of schools in the Flemish Community of Belgium, Denmark, Hungary, Ireland, Mexico, Norway, and Sweden. By contrast, in other countries, teachers are hired and placed in schools by professional authorities" (OECD, 2003, p. 394).

After years of political influence of the Christian Democracy party, the Catholic Church managed to claim its share in the education system. The Parity Act (Act No. 62, as of October 2000) admitted private initiatives in the education system. Such admission took place because the process of school decentralisation and political and financial autonomy adopted by Berlinguer's centre-left-wing government aimed to geographically adjust the Italian education system to the other OECD systems. Such adaptation favoured a change in the social share of the Italian public school, which then found itself marginalised in comparison to the United Kingdom's private education model. Parity entailed a renewed interference of the Church in the education process, as well as experimentation as to how school liberalisation could appeal to education companies and how the Italian education could become an expanding market.

We believe that the existence of educational marginalization and the pursuit of modernisation<sup>5</sup> engendered by neoliberal globalization has been a result of the success of international assessments, particularly that of PISA. Participating in the PISA assessment translated into a desire for educational systems to be compared with the best (Grek, 2009). As a result, there is an increase in international assessments, which goes beyond the limits of Europe. For example, there is increased competition and pressure for students from different countries such as the United States, Greece, Indonesia to get high performances. PISA is therefore understood as an indicator of the success or failure of educational systems. Old hybridisation strategies were vastly used in the education system, with the borrowing of strategies allegedly successful in other countries (Cobalti, 2006). Emulation became a virtue in the field of education, and the modernisation discourse became

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<sup>5</sup> The term modernisation is being used here in the sense of insertion into neoliberal globalisation.

synonymous with competitive advantage. In turn, virtue and competitiveness engendered another modernisation method: to inscribe accountability to the individual and to marginalise failed education systems. The governments' justification rested on the idea that inscribing accountability is more effective, as it produces vulnerability and active consensuses within education systems and among teachers. All this translated into insecurity, fear, and uncertainty. As such, assessment and accountability turned into power technologies and eventually produced neoliberal feelings across the individuals and marginalisation of school systems like the Italian system. Modern businesses exerted increased pressure for compliance with a new world project of education and tried to convince teachers of the legitimacy of the reforms through promises of innovative advantages.

The marginalisation of the Italian educational system is also justified by a discourse that problematises the supposed distancing of the school from the private sector. In this view, the school should follow the private sector management model. In 2005 in an important conference organised by the Italian think tank ADAPT (Association of International and Compared Studies on Labour Law and Industry Affairs), the minister of education appointed in Berlusconi's second government, Mrs. Letizia Moratti, made a speech on "School, University, and Work after the Biagi Reform." She stated the Italian education system and labor market were reformed to customise individual paths. Her statement signalled that the school system had to overcome a dual disadvantage—one was quantitative, and the other one was qualitative. It was necessary to initiate an articulated process of professional training, which should be based on the introduction of an assessment system, fundamental for a successful education system, and should be consistent with the framework of school autonomy introduced by Berlinguer in the previous reform. The foundation for improved education lied on strengthening the national assessment system and following up the international assessments, including PISA.

In 2003 PISA included 41 countries, and *Education at a Glance* data showed that "Private funding [was] slowly becoming more important, mainly in tertiary education" (OECD, 2006). The increasing number of private institutions in Italy expanded the supply of shorter programs and degrees that met Mrs. Moratti's expectations. The assessment showed that "Some countries saw large increases in the proportion of young people obtaining university degree-level qualifications between 2000 and 2004. The greatest increases were in Italy and Switzerland, where the availability of new shorter duration degrees was associated with at least a doubling in the proportion of young people graduating" (OECD, 2006, p. 3). Another fact that stood out in the period was "[the] major differences in the number of hours that individuals can expect to spend in non-formal job-related education and training over a typical working life (...) this range[d] from below 50 hours in Greece, Italy and the Netherlands to more than 1000 hours in Denmark, Finland, France and Switzerland" (OECD, 2006, p. 51). These data reinforced in the Italian school system the logic of parity-private schools and the school autonomy secured in the previous reform, provided norms for professional training, as well as legitimated the national and international assessment system. This setting was propitious to the emerging idea of school-job interchange, which has been adopted by the current PISA-legitimated *Buona Scuola* reform in Italy.

Another marginalisation process, which is perhaps the most powerful one and the one which best connects with the OECD's historical purposes, is the technological transfer marginalisation, i.e., discrimination because of low technological development in Italy. This was facilitated by minister Gelmini's reform in 2010, at the highest pitch of the European economic crisis. The government's speech on the purpose of the reform focused on establishing a modern, technology-oriented school that could deliver good results to the society. Such a purpose was in line with the *Education at a Glance* report that had just been published with some considerations based on the PISA results:

As governments move to get their finances back into shape in the wake of the global economic crisis, education is the subject of renewed focus. On the one hand, it is a

large item of public expenditure in most countries. On the other, investing in education is essential if countries want to develop their long-run growth potential and to respond to the changes in technology and demographics that are reshaping labour markets. (OECD, 2010, p. 2)

In fact, the reform would serve to improve the government's image and connect schools to businesses. It also followed supranational guidelines, especially those related to the OECD results about the Italian education. The OECD's pressure on the Italian education system fuelled strong government propaganda to carry out the reform.

The logic of the reform was an excuse to ratify that Italy needed to make a technological revolution. The OECD (2013) pointed out the use of information technology was of only 20% in Italy, against 50% in South Korea, according to the 2012 PISA. This figure was significant because the entire education policy of CERI was based on technological innovation. The justification for such a large technological "transformation" was not new, as described in the previous section on the OECD history, but the PISA surveys from 2009 onwards found that only 26% of 15-year olds reported using computers during language classes and 24% during science classes in the OECD area. In Italy only 30% of 15-year-old students used information technology, while the OECD average was 48% in 2011 (OECD, 2013). Meanwhile, the OECD reported:

The Ministry of education has started to address several economic obstacles to the emergence of a pedagogical digital content industry. It has encouraged investments of private firms in the development of such resources by setting up test-beds for their products. It has also lowered companies' marketing costs by aggregating and structuring teacher demand. (OECD, 2013, p. 35)

Therefore, it seems that the major OECD-PISA discourses that have produced the types of marginalisation mentioned above are articulated with the contemporary morphology of neoliberal globalisation, which establishes new chains of value creation through technological valence, while benefiting the market and modern enterprises. In fact, the OECD (2013) says,

Capitalizing on ICT's potential for transformative change is a challenge. Countries as diverse as Singapore, Uruguay, and Rwanda have identified ICT as a means to transform their education system (UNESCO, 2011). Yet findings from the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2006 and 2009 study have found no relationship between school use of computers and students' assessment scores (OECD, 2010, 2011a). Why is this so and how can Italy and other countries apply ICT more effectively? Furthermore, how can ICT policies be structured to promote innovation and transformation? (p. 87)

In July 2015 prime minister Matteo Renzi from the Democratic Party established the *Buona Scuola* reform with the minister of education Stefania Giannini, also from the Democratic Party. Renzi put himself in line to support the reform. He himself released a video from the Italian government's head office, the Palazzo Chigi, explaining to the population the main points of the reform two months before its official establishment. One such point was a proposal of humanistic culture based on computational guidance in accordance with the National Digital School Plan. Such plan was based on two key regulations. Firstly, Decree No. 911, as of November 2016, allocated 30 million euros to public calls for schools to acquire laboratories and monitoring services for a platform of digital trainers. Secondly, Decree No. 851, as of October 2015, laid the foundations for the digitisation of the Italian school and confirmed the government's stance toward the digital age.

The idea of digital literacy, as supported by the OECD (Elliott, 2017; OECD, 2011, 2016, 2018), the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) and supranational forces linked to the financial capital, lies on the belief that educational processes can no longer be protected by the education science. The failure of education is, according to such belief, in the anachronistic didactic and epistemological approach of the last century that still exists in the school. Therefore, external knowledge domains, such as finance and digital technologies, should be put in place to train the next generations. The adoption of computational principles, such as sequence, selection, cycle and composition, carved out a new mindset in the educational field. The problems posed by the disciplines underlying the education of the new generations seek numerical solutions based on visions that legitimise the management of information technologies (big data) to control complex information, create value chains and build other methodological ways of understanding the world.

Digital literacy, as expressed in the European reference framework and based on the use of big data with financial capitalist interests, rather than on the true global democratisation of information technology, is teleologically characterised as a device of digital financial training. It is an obstacle to the production of critical knowledge in the school, because it despises the value of the historical past and technically convinces that technological innovations carry better results in the teaching and learning process. Italy has been invited to follow the OECD (2013) recommendations because of its “marginal” technological production and its “lag” in the use of technology in the education system as a whole:

To make a critical mass of resources available relatively quickly, we recommend: a) To translate in Italian and adapt to the Italian curriculum existing open educational resources available in other languages; b) To develop and promote a central resource bank for teachers, including all open educational resources (and possibly other digital resources as well); c) To encourage teachers to develop and share their teaching resources as open educational resources by giving awards and using other reputation mechanisms. (p. 36)

The *Buona Scuola* reform was composed of an intelligent architecture of regulation, which disciplined education and raised the youth’s disinterest in education. The NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) phenomenon previously shown by the PISA data is an example of this. It affects a share of the young population who has had their choices curtailed in their transition to adult life. In renouncing work and study, such youth also renounced their political engagement in the society. Such renunciation was constructed, and such youth are also a marginalisation target because they are often part of the subaltern classes. This part of the population usually has high interest in the Internet, especially social media, including Facebook and Instagram, which serve as sources of escapism. In a study comparing NEET and non-NEET young people, published in the 2017 *Giovani Report*, the Italian institute Giuseppe Toniolo di Studi Superiori showed that NEET people usually browse business or Facebook-related websites whenever they use the Internet.

The 2015 PISA pointed to the same direction. The OECD notion of how to handle scientific knowledge follows a criterion of knowledge capitalisation, i.e., how it can generate capital. The OECD says the following about this: “This approach reflects the fact that modern economies reward individuals not for what they know, but for what they can do with what they know” (OECD, 2018, p. 3). Singapore, for instance, overcomes all countries in performance in science; it is number 01 in the PISA ranking. In considering such an example, the OECD argues that full engagement in a world shaped by technology is dependent on more positive promotion of school science, perhaps as a “stepping-stone” to new sources of interest and pleasure (OECD, 2018).

The recommendation of incrementing technological resources to solve education deficit is explicit in the OECD's assessment: "Solutions will vary depending on the nature of the deficiency. But even when different schools face similar problems, tailored solutions that capitalise on assets already in place may be needed; and progress toward learning goals should be continuously monitored" (OECD, 2018, p. 14). Asset capitalisation means openness to private initiative, and progress is based on a notion of assessment as a control mechanism. Combining these two factors reinforces the idea of a need for digital technologies for young people and control of their knowledge. The emergence of new conceptual and financial products for young people has reinforced the interest of capital to create new forms of value production: "As globalisation and digital technologies have made financial services more widely accessible and challenging, and as financial decisions are increasingly common in the lives of young people, everyone needs to be financially literate" (OECD, 2018, p. 22).

As to the teachers, the OECD (2018) says that teachers from better schools are better at explaining scientific ideas than teachers from inferior schools. Such a statement seems to be componential, as better schools should be expected to have better infrastructure and laboratories. However, it is not difficult to read between the lines that in general private schools are the ones provided with better resources, which is a primordial element for teachers to better develop their teaching abilities. As such, the OECD idea of better schools is linked to its notion of "scientific ideas": In almost all education systems, students score higher in science when they report that their science teachers "explain scientific ideas" (OECD, 2018, p. 12). In every use of the concept of "scientific ideas," the notion implied by the OECD is related to a need for digital literacy to mobilise the embryo of knowledge capitalisation through teachers in classrooms. Therefore, changing how teachers teach is a challenge that managers and governments face to find ways of making education effective (OECD, 2018).

Such neoliberal mediation in Italy to make the school responsive to efficiency started in the Berlinguer reform, with a proposal of education autonomy. This is consistent with the OECD idea that providing schools with more autonomy over the curriculum can give teachers more opportunities to adapt their teaching to the students and thus better develop "scientific ideas." In the OECD framework, this provides principals with higher levels of educational leadership, as the findings on the interplay of school autonomy and accountability have been identified in previous PISA reports and deemed as indispensable for successful education systems.

PISA's global discourse attempts to activate the supposed skills of the future at the price of accountability and marginalization of students and teachers. It functions as a convincing strategy that brings virtually to the present, through politics and neoliberal discourse, a non-existent future. This discourse, however, alters the normal flow of lifestyles of present and future generations. This enterprising imposition of the discourse of the anticipated future forces present generations to think about the future, leaving aside their realities and achievements. In this situation, the teacher is responsible for ensuring that this form of "knowledge control" of the OECD / PISA, based on the discourse of the anticipated future, is guaranteed in the school environment. Anticipated future discourse is revealed as contradictory: The OECD states we are trained for a profession that no longer exists, in a criticism of both teachers and education systems. However, it does not clarify that its recommendations anticipate the world of tomorrow by shaping the pedagogical culture of different countries and dictating the universal success of future generations for present generations: "Such an ambition assumes that the challenges of tomorrow's world are already known and more or less identical for young people across countries and cultures" (OECD, 2018, p. 15). Therefore, the greatest connection between globalisation and educational assessment is that PISA has a philosophical problem: It alludes to a future that is yet to come. This means to take the opportunity



of the next generations to think about their own assessment projects. Such a philosophical problem has cost teachers dearly—like the mythological Atlas that carries the world on his shoulders, teachers have also borne the burden of stigma and guilt.

## Neoliberal Feelings: Stigma and Guilt among Italian Teachers

Neoliberal feelings such as stigma and guilt stand out particularly in Italian teachers considered to be “precarious,” who add up to 135,025 individuals (FLCGIL, 2018). Three common reasons for stigma can be identified amongst such teachers. Firstly, they are subject to professional instability and constant precariousness. Secondly, age may come with stigma: Seasoned teachers can be regarded as “old” and outdated to teach the next generations. Thirdly, the teaching profession may be associated with women, who supposedly embrace more responsibility and are more flexible in the workplace. Besides, guilt is another technology of neoliberal exclusion (Torrance, 2017) mediated by the performance responsibilities posed to teachers.

### Stigma: Scar that Hurts

The Greeks coined the term *stigma* to designate bodily signs that evinced something spectacularly positive or negative in the moral status of the possessor (Goffman, 1963). Stigma generalisation has extended to psychological, subjective aspects throughout history. Stigma also serves the function of categorizing and shaping people. It is related to the law of least effort to define people, groups, and social attributes, i.e., “social status” (Goffman, 1963). Therefore, it is one of the founding elements of the marginalisation that produces neoliberal feelings. The first cause of stigma amongst precarious teachers is the very precariousness condition that surrounds them. This process begins from their very start in the teaching career. All “precarious” teachers must undergo various types of ranking processes before they reach that much desired professional stability (*cattedra di ruolo*). Arguably, this ranking mechanism for the admission to the teaching career “emulates” the same mechanism used by PISA to combine inequality and excellence in the education systems. As such, the reforms are aimed at combining precarious systems and “modern,” “technological,” “innovative” teaching systems in the same sphere of existence. This shows whenever the “rankings” come out as regulators in the hiring of teachers and admission of teachers in permanent positions. Therefore, this very system stimulates disputes for prestige between teachers, who all aspire the first ranking positions.

Rankings are also used for the annual substitutions of teachers, who start their work in October and finish it at the end of June. The period of employment contract depends on school needs. Such teachers are distributed by the provincial departments of education and for short periods, while the schools themselves set rankings and have their principals hire teachers directly. Principals are supposed to run the school as a manager, helping to build an increasingly autonomous, decentralised system. This type of management is not different from that in a company. A report provided by a teacher shows how the school autonomy of the Berlinguer reform has provided the principal with hiring prerogatives, without any transparency criteria:

Because it is the principal who chooses. Once, when I asked him about the availability of job places at the school, the principal told me to go back home because he already knew he would not choose me. (Teacher 1)

Precariousness is related to these teachers’ obligatory transit in the private sector. Some teachers report their first professional experiences were in private, low-salary, high-intensity work schools because these were the places where they managed to score in the *graduatoria* (graded list, ranking):

Then I started my first experience in private schools. One year I worked in a kindergarten, but then I left, not because they paid little, but because it was close to a slave job, which did not scare me too much, because I could make sacrifices. But they also offered low score in the graduatoria. (Teacher 2)

I spent two years in private schools, where I had to start at eight in the morning. Even though the work officially finished at four, I had to clean the classrooms. And that's why I finished at 6 pm. That's what our youth was all about. (Teacher 3)

Ever since the market was opened for private schools, this situation has become the rule for teachers in search of stability in Italy. As the reforms have moved toward capitalist modernisation, the system has become integrated, i.e., it has combined the public and the private. The discourse and reality of autonomy have transformed teachers into freelancers. Therefore, this mandatory step in the private sector has had consequences in these workers' journeys. One consequence is that often this step does not allow for continuity at work and ongoing training. Another consequence is that this step is often translated into low pay, or in some cases, total absence of remuneration, a sort of volunteer work. This is the moment when teachers are most affected by economic instability, which produces a perception of a completely impaired work, given the lack of future planning and career. Increased stigma toward these teachers also occurs through the different rights held by "precarious" teachers and permanent teachers (*ruolo*), once again caused by "disputes for prestige":

This is precisely the joke: Not only is the job precarious, but we also don't have several rights. While permanent teachers have rights to three days of paid absence without any justification, we, precarious teachers, have no allowance in the case of non-attendance. The same holds true for a number of things. These are disadvantages that aggravate our precarious condition, which, in itself, overwhelms us with a sense of emptiness. (Teacher 4)

Disadvantages in terms of labor rights eventually produce a discourse of stigma. For example, in a recent statement, the current minister of education, Marco Bussetti, said, "Precarious teachers will never disappear completely, there will always be a need for substitutes (...). A chair is an integral part of the status of a competent teacher" (Zunino, 2018, p. 1). Statement itself reveals the stigmatised perception of a precarious condition that, according to the minister, will not have an end. In addition, he distinguishes the value of teachers from a meritocratic (competent teacher-oriented) view when it comes to status.

The second factor producing stigma concerns the teachers' age. Both the professional instability and the hiring mechanism made the average age of Italian teachers one of the highest in the OECD area. Teachers were asked about their opinion toward a newspaper headline featuring a "precarious" teacher who had her stability at the age of 65, a few months before retiring. It is noteworthy in the report that the non-admission of teacher Francesca (a fictitious name) at an earlier time was supposedly determined by her personal incapacity or by mistakes made in her career.

I think Francesca made mistakes during her journey. For example, she may not have studied much for the ranking competition. On the one hand, our work is a real duel, because every new minister passes a new law, and everything changes for us every three years; on the other hand, we must also assume our responsibilities (e.g., if I had managed to transfer my scores from one ranking to another, if I had participated in the competition first, instead of studying biology while teaching physical education

...). It is certainly not just our fault, because, as I said, the rules change every three years, with every change of minister. (Teacher 2)

The teacher's opinion legitimises a discourse according to which the individual is responsible for his/her own success or failure. This discourse produces neoliberal feelings that lead to an imbalance of sociability and reveals the lack of self-perception and perception of the other—an explicit form of alienation from work. Such feelings, we argue, are related to the roots of marginalisation as a control architecture and neoliberal technology as a key factor in holding individuals accountable for their own failure and redefining the individuals belonging to “dangerous” classes. Notwithstanding, one of the teachers was able to understand her precarious identity and pinpointed some facts:

I have prepared for ranking competitions and I can say Berlusconi brought along a process of school corporatisation. It is no longer like my father used to say, that teaching is a good choice of career, as it allows you to return home at two o'clock and devote time to your family. You have to work effectively as you are constantly assessed. This process belongs to a capitalist logic, as older teachers are generally thought to be left-wing or centre-left, and therefore are stumbling blocks because they are accustomed to reason in terms of welfare, rather than accepting a logic of capitalist corporatisation. Such teachers come from another mindset and do not accept what they are imposing upon us. (Teacher 4)

This soft marginalisation stigmatises and “eliminates” older workers from the teaching circuit. Following this logic, this is because they are incapable of educating current and future generations. This tendency to constantly displaying data on teacher ages has increased over successive PISA assessments. OECD-PISA data have shown that Italian teachers are 50 years old on average, while teachers in other countries, including South Korea or Finland, which have ranked first in PISA, are 40 years or younger on average (OECD, 2003). Yet such data have not aroused in the governments and policy makers any sensitivity or empathy toward the Italian teachers. In fact, these data are frequent in the PISA reports, which do not explain the true causes of aging teacher population: the long road to stability. Minister Bussetti (2018) take a similar stance when he says, “I would like to restore order to the system of teacher recruitment: We need young, motivated teachers, prepared to face the new educational challenges.” His statement seems to despise the dignity of mature experience and stigmatises individuals who could once again lead the *paideia* to its righteous place in the Italian school.

The third factor producing stigma amongst “precarious” teachers in Italy is the idea of teaching as a female profession. This stigma was born with the historical feminisation of the teaching career in Italy. The idea that teaching is an activity of women is born in assimilation with motherhood, i.e., the care of the children, home, and family:

Actually, I started thinking about teaching since I was a child, but I arrived relatively late in the teaching profession. My father, who is a civil servant, has always said that teaching is the most appropriate profession for women, by nature and natural disposition. (Teacher 3)

Due to the shortage of teachers caused by low schooling before World War II, the most common recruitment criterion used to be the number of children the female candidates had. This in turn has created a sort of strange axiom: the more children a teacher has, the more competent in teaching she is (Gremigni, 2012).

This stigma is still current in Italy because teaching is considered a profession of low prestige, low pay, and because of gender bias in the labour market. Female labour currently accounts

for 40% of the labour force in central capitalist countries, but most often under deregulated, precarious regimes and part-time contracts. Besides, women with higher education earn 65% of the salaries earned by men with the same level of education in Italy. Meanwhile, the average is 72% in the OECD member countries (OECD, 2011).

Massive presence of women in the education sector is due to unequal opportunities in the labor market, which has been hegemonically masculinised. Domination structures in the social orders are masculine (Bourdieu, 2002), and therefore, science and education, for the OECD as an economic organisation, go hand in hand with the logic of reproducibility of male dominations in sciences: “The higher proportion of women among young teachers raises concerns about future gender imbalances at the lower levels of education, where women already dominate the profession. In addition, as the share of women graduating with a tertiary degree in education increased from 72% in 2005 to 78% in 2014 on average across OECD member countries, there is reason to believe that gender imbalances may intensify in the near future” (OECD, 2017, p. 3).

In fact, the OECD concern was with the marginal decline in expectancy of 15-year-old students pursuing a teaching career from 2006 through 2015. In the 2006 PISA, ca. 5% of 15-year-old students stated they would like to work as teachers by the age of 30, while this figure was lower in the 2015 PISA- 4.2%. Besides, male students were less inclined to become teachers in the future (OECD, 2018, p. 12). To correct this distortion, the OECD highlighted the countries whose data appeared to be different in the last PISA: “In Germany, Hong Kong (China), Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Singapore, and Switzerland (all top performers), those expecting to be teachers score the same or better than those expecting other careers” (OECD, 2018, p. 13, free translation). Persistent gender imbalances in the teaching profession have raised a number of concerns, and countries such as the United Kingdom have implemented policies encouraging the recruitment of male teachers in order to address the growing “feminisation” in the profession (OECD, 2015a, 2017).

### **Guilt: Unwelcome Ghost**

Another neoliberal feeling is guilt. Evaluative habitus is based on a production-oriented model of knowledge, a kind of infrastructure that holds the teacher accountable for the success or failure of the school in the first instance. Guilt creates a culture of terror, mistrust, and fear in the school. Exams are produced to mediate and manage the effects of socioeconomic changes and competition, to legitimate competitions, and to deploy the technology of exclusion (Torrance, 2017). Therefore, guilt can be seen as a feeling of social disqualification and impotence-based subjectivities in the face of the required performativity.

Social disqualification is based on a new mediatic communication that codifies the institutional political language directed in the first instance by the international organisations, through a new lexicon that guides individual attitudes. This language contained in documents and based on conceptual products is important because it creates the legitimacy and consensus produced in actors of the school worldwide. Low teacher salaries are an example of this. Reducing wages means constraining resources for the payment of “public debt”. Second, recent privatizations of the education system do not see human education as a national priority. Therefore, these elements eventually become control mechanisms creating feelings of guilt in teachers:

You should feel lucky when you receive your salary. For example, only in May last year did I receive the arrears accumulated since October. I have support not only from my husband, but also from my parents. For instance, last year I had to ask my parents to help me buy milk and diapers for my baby. I was ashamed of my parents because I am 35 years old and married. (Teacher 4)

Just as neoliberalism is an architecture of social, political, and economic control that hegemonises the society by privatizing public spaces, by monopolizing wealth, and by producing inequality, biopolitical guilt is a neoliberal feeling that curtails individual freedom. It expresses itself due to the economic constraint institutionally established by the international competitiveness of education systems and the marginalisation of “failed” education systems, which eventually subjectively affects teachers’ perceptions and lives.

This process is also generated by the production of professional trajectories of precariousness and uncertainty, which leads teachers to the dilemma of inconstancy and generates a series of incapacity of devising professional growth:

Actually, I still have no job, now I'm working as a substitute in a school. These continuous changes are very bad for the students, as they know us and then we leave because we have been assigned to another school. (Teacher 5)

Guilt, therefore, is expressed through subjectivations of impotence vis-à-vis unreached performativity. It connects with the accountability debate, which pervades contemporary social life (Halse, Hartung & Jan Wright, 2017) and is one of the conceptual products of the OECD-PISA (OECD, 2011, 2013). It is even more intense when accountability is linked to the performative dimension attributed to the school: “In countries where there are no such accountability arrangements, schools with greater autonomy in resource allocation tend to perform worse” (OECD, 2011, p. 1). In a meritocratic view, the absence of the performance ranking of schools becomes an argument for pointing out managerial difficulties.

The government adopts a strategy of imposing performative rules for the assessment of experience in the school but does not provide teachers with any certainty in the construction of their careers and in the accomplishment of their work, creating in them a feeling of guilt for not having reached necessary scores in a graded list. In addition, the game of hiring and forced commuting, with long journeys to work, have an impact on professional and personal performance.

Then I must say the life of commuting is a world apart. I left the first time thinking that I was desperate, but soon realised there are thousands of people in this life. It is a moving world in the morning! A world of despair ... then you compare and see there is someone who is worse than you, who works only one day, who takes the train and does not know if he will find work ... you become forcefully more flexible. The reasons for this choice are all known and are always the same: There is no work in here. You can work and score in private schools, but it is penurious, because first of all you must find someone, some school that hires you, you have to be thankful even when your salary is close to misery. (Teacher 5)

Therefore, performativity is a technology, a culture, a form of regulation that adopts judgment, comparison, and exhibits the meaning of incentive and control, friction and change based on rewards and expansion (Ball, 2003). The world of performativity changes the teachers’ lives and spirit, turning them into frustrated, impotent individuals as we can infer from the following statement provided by one of the teachers in our samples:

From the professional point of view, I feel frustrated and sad because I’m young, and I don’t know how my future will be. I imagine it black and sad. It is sad that a young person thinks like this. Thus, it defines me as a frustrated, sad person. (Teacher 7)

Producing neoliberal feelings and eventually, a multiplicity of the flexible, precarious workforce requires greater monitoring of results in education, which in turn produces not only greater control over the workforce, but also control over the future. In this sense, the introduction of a certain

performative spirit in the educational field increasingly has become the main motto in the functioning of the school in the contemporary world and of the large-scaled assessments. This new spirit is understood as the new neoliberal technology introduced by educational reforms, one capable of organizing a new culture in harmony with the functioning of the business world (Ball, 2003). This new culture introduces new hierarchies. Forms of control expand: The meritocratic system, with rewards for efficiency at work and incentives to emulate the best results, has become the real stimulus of the new generations of workers; and the minds, subdued and governed by constant assessments, contribute to nourishing the new spirit.

Contemporary performativity is nothing more than the materialisation of what Guy Debord referred to in the 1960s as the Society of Spectacle, where the world's economic transformation politically changed the perception of reality, with the only possible truth being that of technical rationality, which has eventually changed the social relations, revealing one of the most apparent signs of the present days. In this sense, guilt and future relate:

Actually, I always think of something like this: when I was 11, my mother always thought about my future; now my son is 11 years old, and I'm still thinking about my future. Sometimes I wonder, when will I start thinking about my son, investing in his college education? I spend a lot of money on master's degrees and training courses for me. I make plans for my life every six months. I don't know how my future will be, what I know is that next year I'll be pendular again and I get anxious because of that. (Teacher 8)

As such, it is necessary to reflect once again on the philosophical problem posed earlier, when one interconnects neoliberal globalisation, PISA assessment, and reforms: the greed for the future. A large part of the current education policies produced by the OECD and assimilated by educational reformers focuses on how to prepare the world's students to the challenges of the technological future, but at the same time they also produce, because of precarious, deregulated labor conditions, futureless teachers, who most often take the blame when the country periodically appears in the PISA rankings. This seems to happen because both OECD and PISA and the educational reforms in Italy have tried to continually combine inequality and excellence in an unfeasible, far-fetched reality.

### Final Remarks

This article discussed how the discourse of "failure" spread by PISA has produced marginalisation within the Italian education system and produced stigma and guilt in teachers through the national educational reforms. In our view, globalisation has turned into a new exercise of market power that has consolidated the power of the capitalist class and through monetarism set the grounds for the management of the world government. This management was led by the Trilateral Commission and based on the interests of the transnational elites. Such leadership was only possible thanks to supranational governance, which created marginalisation mechanisms for the "dangerous classes" in the name of new value chains in contemporary capitalism. This governance contributed to the OECD, which was legitimizing itself as a body that created global truths and consensus while also exercising soft power over international education systems.

Therefore, the expansion of educational assessments, motivated by a desire to exert global hegemony, especially by the post-war US, but also by capitalist accumulation worldwide, has led the world powers to race in the search for highly specialised talents in engineering and technology. Europe's presumed lag in the scientific field was used by the U.S. to invest heavily in the continents

since the Marshall Plan and in the OECD to control knowledge capitalisation. Through the diffusion of the Theory of Human Capital, the OECD policies have become guidelines for education policies in Europe and in much of the world. This theory has shaped the direction and content of international assessment indicators, especially in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

This article also analysed how PISA has become the main display window of the OECD and how it has become an evaluator par excellence and established marginalisation of “lagging” education systems according to its logic. In Italy, four major OECD-PISA discourses produced marginalisation and materialised through recent educational reforms. The logic of PISA’s global discourse anticipates the future because it needs to be in agreement with its global economic commitment as a product of the OECD itself: To sow in the educational field the most effective strategies to create capital value, it is necessary to construe a discourse on technological value. If it is true that innovation leads to the good intentions and the actual results of a quality school, as predicted in the OECD-PISA publications on the role of meta-cognitive pedagogy and the importance of educational technology for future generations, this innovation is incompatible with the depreciation of the teaching career and the acknowledgement of “precarious” teachers. The PISA-based legitimacy of the innovation rationale is ultimately based on the inefficiency and failure of the public school to turn it into a barn of market-oriented value production building on human training.

The generation of performance patterns has transformed PISA into a kind of Ministry of Global Education (Sjoberg, 2016), one which is aimed at marginalising education systems to make them responsive to market regulation as defined by Gill (1998) when he refers to new neoliberal constitutionalism. The contradiction is that throughout this process globalisation and educational privatisation mediated by large-scale assessments also create neoliberal feelings, such as stigma and guilt, amongst teachers. Therefore, the combination of equality and excellence in the OECD-based soft power seems to point to PISA as a quintessential instrument producing marginalisation discourses in the global education systems.

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## About the Authors

### **Rogério Gonçalves de Freitas**

Federal University of Pará

rogeriogf@ufpa.br

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8173-5265>

PhD in Sociology at the Università di Napoli Federico II. Rogério Gonçalves de Freitas is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the Federal University of Pará - UFPA. His research focuses on evaluation, PISA, internationalisation of higher education and physical education.

### **Vera Lúcia Jacob Chaves**

Federal University of Pará

veraluciajacob@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3128-3659>

PhD in Education - Knowledge and Social Inclusion at the Federal University of Minas Gerais. Vera Lúcia Jacob Chaves is a Full Professor at the Federal University of Pará – Faculty of Education and Graduate Program Coordinator. Her research focuses on higher education, educational policy, higher education policy, teaching work and financing of higher education.

### **Hajime Takeuchi Nozaki**

Federal University of Juiz de Fora

hajimenozaki@uol.com.br

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3419-7206>

PhD in Education at Fluminense Federal University. Hajime Takeuchi Nozaki is an Associate Professor at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora – Faculty of Education. His research focuses on work and physical education, human formation and Marxism.

## About the Guest Editors

### **D. Brent Edwards Jr.**

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

[brent.edwards@hawaii.edu](mailto:brent.edwards@hawaii.edu)

<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3955-9525>

D. Brent Edwards Jr. is an Associate Professor of Theory and Methodology in the Study of Education at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. He has over ten years of experience as an educator, researcher, and scholar of education policy. In his scholarship, he applies political economy perspectives to (a) the examination of the global governance of education and (b) the origins, spread and effects of global education policies. In particular, Brent focuses on the ways that a range of international organizations affect the politics and processes of policymaking and policy implementation. Geographically, these areas of focus have led to research projects on education in many countries across Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Africa. His recent books include *The trajectory of global education policy: Community-based management in El Salvador and the global reform agenda* and *Global education policy, impact evaluations, and alternatives: The political economy of knowledge production* (both with Palgrave MacMillan). He also has a forthcoming co-edited special issue of *Educational Policy* entitled "School choice policy and politics around the globe: Sociological contributions."

**Alexander Means**

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

[meansaj@hawaii.edu](mailto:meansaj@hawaii.edu)

Alexander Means is an Assistant Professor of Educational Policy with Global Perspectives in the Department of Educational Foundations, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. He is the author most recently of *Learning to Save the Future: Rethinking Education and Work in the Era of Digital Capitalism* (Routledge, 2018); *Educational Commons in Theory and Practice: Global Pedagogy and Politics* (Palgrave, 2017); and *The Wiley Handbook of Global Education Reform* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2018). His research examines educational policy and organization in relation to political, economic, cultural, technological, and social change.

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