

# Chapter 19

## Imagining School as Standards-Driven and Students as Career-Ready!

### A Comparative Genealogy of US Federal and European Transnational Turns in Education Policy



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#### 19.1 Introduction

This chapter maps in a comparative perspective the complex genealogies of the US federal and the European transnational turns in school and education policy. It maps how particular truth regimes were gradually produced which discursively linked school and education to the performance of the economy by means of discursive imaginaries and associated ideas about optimization of human capital, whereby discourse about the purpose of school and what counts as public good were fundamentally transformed. It identifies the driving discursive force at work on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean in the form of a so-called Knowledge Economy discourse that motivates by telling the story about fierce global competition where a nation will fall behind if it does not optimize its human capital, that is, produce “employable” or “career-ready” subjects for the economy (Apple 2006; Bridges and McLaughlin 1994; Cerny and Evans 1999; Cuban and Shippis 2000; Drucker 1969; Gibbons et al. 1994; Henry et al. 2001; Keating et al. 2013; Larner and Walters 2004; Meyer and Benavot 2013; OECD 1996; Rizvi and Lingard 2010). Consequently, imaginaries about school, education, and their purpose are increasingly negotiated according to a format of comparability in the United States as well as in Europe, as national economies become increasingly interconnected in so-called global Knowledge Economies (e.g., Furlong et al. 2009a; Grossman 2003; Popkewitz 1998, 2008). This format has brought about a proliferation of power technologies of parameters and procedures by which these two globally dominant regions mutually compare and rank their constituent member subjects, that is, states and nation states, in order to determine who is in the lead and who is lagging behind, and what ideas of public

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good are at play in these processes (Cerny and Evans 1999; Larner and Walters 2004; Lawn 2013; McGuinn 2006; Rizvi and Lingard 2010).

This chapter aims at identifying the genealogies of these new relationships between federal and state levels in the United States as well as the only recently created relationships between transnational organizations (the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] and European Union [EU] in particular) and European nation states in relation to school and education. In both cases, the federal and transnational levels have traditionally mainly dealt with economic cooperation, whereas school and education have until recently been issues that were taken care of in the United States by the state and in Europe at nation state level (Department 2009; Diamantopoulou 2003; Henry et al. 2001; Keating et al. 2013; Nóvoa and Lawn 2002; Rhodes 2012).

One could question with ample justification, however, whether you can compare two such disparate entities like the United States and the European Union or Europe (e.g., Diamantopoulou 2003). The United States is a nation consisting of a federation of states, where much responsibility is located at the state level, including school and education. Europe consists of a large number of big and small nations representing a complex patchwork of different languages, histories, and national identities. Nonetheless, most of the nation states are organized together in the European Union. The EU is not a government, but an intergovernmental set of institutions, strong in economic matters but relatively weak in matters of school and education. This makes the relation between central and local levels of education policy difficult to compare. Furthermore, there are basic differences in the political and administrative regulation of education and schooling in the United States and in Europe. In the case of the United States school (K-12<sup>1</sup>) and education policy has been since the 1960s a narrative about increasing federal influence that implies considerable reference to the constitution and traditions of American government as a continuous struggle between federal and state interests (e.g., Department 2009; Manna 2010; McGuinn 2006; Rhodes 2012). Nonetheless, the discursive processes that states and federal authorities engage in in the United States, between compelling and voluntary elements that eventually combine in deepening collaborations, resemble similar developments between nation states and transnational levels in European school and education policy as European national education policy formats are increasingly, since the 1990s, negotiated in transnational forums such as the OECD, EU, and the Bologna Process (advancing the European Higher Education Area) (e.g., Hopmann 2008; Krejsler et al. 2012, 2014; Lawn and Grek 2012; Nóvoa and Lawn 2002). Another argument for comparing the United States and Europe (or,

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<sup>1</sup>In the United States school debate and policy discourse is usually framed within the term K-12, that is, primary, lower, and upper secondary or high school. In a European context, however, similar debates and discourse are usually confined to primary and lower secondary school, that is, grades 1 through 9. Upper secondary or high school is usually debated in a discursive category of its own. I shall refer to the European debate with the terms comprehensive school or primary and lower secondary school when referring to grades 1 through 9, or in a few cases as K-12 when upper secondary/high school is included.

in our case, the European Union) is that the developments on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean have been closely intertwined since the 18th century; they both have developed liberal democracies and overwhelmingly support pluralism and market economies. European integration would have been hard to understand without the genealogy of American-led collaboration since World War 2 in the forms of the Marshall Plan, NATO and so forth. Both regions are of comparable size in terms of GDP and populations, with the United States having a population of 328 million and a GDP of US\$20.5 trillion, and the European Union a population of 445 million (before Brexit) and a GDP of US\$18.8 trillion (data.worldbank.org/indicators (2019)). So, in recognizing the obvious differences in institutional setup and levels of integration between the United States and Europe and the ensuing limitations to any direct comparisons, I shall pursue the thesis that considerable insight can be gained by opposing the genealogies of two dominant global regions where regulation, policy-making, and implementation in education are characterized by shifting balances between US federal and state levels and between European transnational and nation state levels in continuously deepening collaborations.

## 19.2 Theoretical Approach

This chapter draws on the work of Michel Foucault and post-Foucauldian traditions (Dean 1999, 2007; Foucault 1971; Pereyra and Franklin 2014; Popkewitz 1998, 2008; Popkewitz and Brennan 1998). The point of departure is the issue which Foucault called a *problematic*, that is, a way of making the present in its taken-for-granted status problematic by asking questions such as: How has it come about that researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners today make school and education problematic in terms of “comparability,” “standards-based education,” “excellence,” “evidence,” and so forth?

Inspired by Nietzsche, Foucault wanted to state that any history will always be a *history of the present* in the sense that it more or less explicitly looks to the past from the mess of current problems in order to make sense of this mess. What we do when we make genealogies is trying to map the trajectories of developments to their particular beginnings in order to make sense of how they were woven together from each their disconnected location, in order to produce the current situation as something that emerges as self-evident. This is also a method of alienating oneself from the self-evident taken-for-granted-ness that gives to the present its convincing objective character which often, on closer inspection, appears to be the result of myriads of previously non-interrelated events and developments which, over time, were tied together to produce this new dominant present.

Within a Foucauldian approach, one is also interested in making the taken for granted character of dominant regimes of knowledge problematic by demonstrating how they are turned into truth regimes by making some ways of speaking and acting possible while excluding others. As any other discursive regime, the school and education policy regimes explored in this chapter are also constituted as patterns of interconnected statements that reciprocally refer to one another, thereby continually reinforcing

the totality of the discourse (Foucault 1971). The immanent logic thus construed forms strategic spaces wherein a number of different subject positions emerge to be occupied by willing individuals. Obviously, one must subject one's self to the discursive regime in question in order to be included as a legitimate subject within this regime.

Foucault argued that a discourse must be measured by the extent to which it matches and mirrors the formation of dominant and less dominant discourses that set the boundaries and the truth regime for how individuals can think and act at a given time and in a given space in history (Foucault 1993, 1997). Foucault thus considered it his task to chart, via a genealogical method, the topological contours of the battlefields within different discursive fields (e.g., the fields of madness, reason, imprisonment, subjectivity, sexuality, and so forth).

I also draw inspiration from Mitchell Dean's sociological approach to governmentality analyses and its framing of four elements that can fruitfully be applied to analyses of practice regimes (Dean 1999), *in casu* the making of school and education policy: A practice regime implies (1) certain ways of making a particular field *visible* and making it an object of knowledge. This is closely intertwined with (2) particular ways of conceptualizing and agreeing upon procedures for arriving at *the proper production of truths*. From this follows (3) *forms of power*, that is, certain mechanisms and technologies to act upon, intervene in, and govern the field in question, in order to ensure that (4) fitting *subject positions* are construed as the obvious ways for individuals to conceive of legitimate subjectivities.

Thus, my focus is to identify, at a policy level, how the field of school and education is made visible as a particular practice regime in two different global regions. I shall demonstrate how wide-reaching policy processes produce a proliferating canopy of truths and political technologies serving to frame the conduct of subjects involved in school and teacher education and their self-governance. Within a Foucauldian framework, political technologies signify procedures that "...advance by taking what is essentially a political problem, removing it from the realm of political discourse, and recasting it in the neutral language of science" (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982: 196).

### **19.3 From Federal "No-Go" over *Civil Rights* to *Standards-Based Education* Discourse (1950s–2000)**

After World War 2, K-12 and education policy discourse in the United States have experienced a number of defining transformations in terms of increased federal influence that would, previously, hardly have been imaginable. A civil rights genealogical trajectory dating back to the 1960s and a standards-based education trajectory dating back to the 1980s have, in particular, contributed to producing a policy practice regime that has reshuffled how education policy discourse can be exercised (DeBray-Pelot and McGuinn 2009; Department 2009; Hamilton et al. 2008; Hess and McGuinn 2002; McGuinn 2006; Owens 2015; Patterson 2001; Rhodes 2012; Sunderman 2009).

The US constitution as the key discursive document in legal terms does not mention school and education. And what is not mentioned in the constitution is, by the

logic of the constitution, the prerogatives of the states and, in this case, local educational authorities. Basic schooling as well as teacher and higher education discourse have historically emerged and developed at local levels according to local needs (Jeynes 2007). This is why today we still see considerable differences in how schooling and teacher education are handled in different states. K-12 schooling gets the bulk of its funding from local property taxes and from state level, which often levels out between rich and poor districts, and very little from the federal level.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, discursive forces advocating that purpose and content should be determined at local and state levels are strong. In recent decades, however, the federal level has become increasingly active as the collective subject position for setting the agenda for K-12, teacher education, and educational research (Department 2009; U. S. D. O. Education 2004, 2011; Manna 2010; Sunderman 2009).

Until the 1960s, federal involvement in education was negligible (Jeynes 2007). The Northwest Ordinance 1787 and the Morill Land Grants 1863 and 1890 mainly had to do with providing land for education. In 1867, a non-cabinet level Office of Education was established, but with meager manning, funding, and powers. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act (GI Bill) of 1944 provided funding for veterans who pursued a degree at a university or college, and so on. When, in 1957, the Soviet Union put a satellite in orbit around the globe, a loud discursive event was produced, the Sputnik Shock, which contributed at a national level to stirring up fear and concern that the United States was falling behind the Soviet Union technologically. As a collateral effect, this produced at a federal level some interest in education, support for students learning foreign languages and so forth, which was enshrined in the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958.

The big leap, however, and the launch pad for what was to develop into a dominant *civil rights discourse* and spur a hitherto unseen inroad for federal influence on school and teacher education, came during the office of President Lyndon B. Johnson and his Great Society and War on Poverty programs (Patterson 2001; Silver and Silver 1991). In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed together with associated laws like the Economic Opportunity Act (1964) which brought about federal programs like Head Start to assist low-income families and their children in the pre-school to school transition and the like. ESEA was instrumental to encouraging desegregation discourse by producing arguments and political technologies to supporting ethnic minorities—African Americans in particular, but also disabled and less privileged students. ESEA programs such as Title I and others supported schools with high percentages of poor children by demanding and aiding with federal legal authority and funding a truth regime that facilitated discourse about desegregation, alleviation of poverty, affirmative action, and so forth. This happened in the wake of the landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954) decision by the US Supreme Court,

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<sup>2</sup>In the 2004–2005 school year, 83 cents out of every dollar spent on education were estimated to come from the state and local levels (45.6% from state funds and 37.1% from local governments). The federal government's share was 8.3%. The remaining 8.9% came from private sources, primarily for private schools. This division of support remains consistent with the historical reliance on local control of schools. <http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/fed/10facts/index.html?exp>.

ruling that segregation by race in schools was unconstitutional (Patterson 2001). Desegregation discourse was slow to dislocate deeply engrained race and ethnic separation discourse. By 1965, however, ESEA and the years of civil rights events leading up to it had set off an avalanche of events and discourse to eventually produce a new truth regime on how race, ethnicity and equity could be legitimately talked about. A civil rights and desegregation discourse had evolved into a dominant policy discourse that would, with ESEA as a decisive discursive monument, have a lasting influence on schooling, teacher education, and educational research. It would also, which was hard to predict at the time, gradually move federal agenda-setting powers from the aid of marginalized groups to entering the mainstream debate and organization of K-12 education as such. It was not, however, until 1979, by the end of the Carter administration, that federal education discourse would become institutionalized to the level of establishing, for the first time ever, a federal Department of Education at cabinet level which would in time come to constitute a strong collective subject advancing federal influence on education (McGuinn 2006; Rhodes 2012).

The next big leap in federal influence would gain momentum from 1983 and eventually contribute to producing the *standards-based education discourse*, which was to dislocate and finally subsume the civil rights and desegregation discourse. This new amalgamated discourse would produce a flow of dominant signifiers such as “excellence,” “high-stakes testing,” and “accountability,” while simultaneously legitimating such discourse by civil rights talk about “closing the achievement/opportunity gap” in order that “no child should be left behind” (Hamilton et al. 2008; Rhodes 2012). This trend still holds as the dominant truth regime in education today. The iconic discursive event that would spark off this turn happened during the Ronald Reagan administration, which was otherwise suspicious of what was called “the federal infringements upon states” rights. The event was triggered by the proverbial report *A Nation at Risk: The imperative for educational reform* (1983), which was published by the presidential National Commission for Excellence in Education. The report and the event it triggered would become iconic in heralding another round of “Sputnik Shock”-like deep concern that American students were falling behind their peers in an increasing number of competing countries. The report staged the crisis by referring to declining results in SAT testing (Scholastic Aptitude Test) from 1963 until 1980, as well as declining NAEP results. NAEP (the National Assessment of Educational Progress) is a national political technology, today known as the Nation’s Report Card, which can arguably be seen as an early US forerunner to the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and the Progress in Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)<sup>3</sup> (Kim et al. 2009; NCES 2004; Peterson et al. 2011). It was put on track and tested in 1969 for

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<sup>3</sup>These are political technologies in the form of international comparative surveys:

PISA (the Program for International Student Assessment) is a triennial survey test administered by the OECD to 9th grade students in literacy, math and science versions.

IEA (the International Association for Evaluation of Achievement in Education) administers TIMSS (Trends in Mathematics and Science Study) and PIRLS (Progress in Reading Literacy Study) to 4th and 8th grade students.

the first time, and has since then documented students' literacy, mathematics, and science results. By discursively linking economic growth and school results with reference to these comparative testing surveys, the report could produce fear and concern that the United States was losing its leading role in the world, this time with Japan and Germany as the upcoming contenders.

This chain of events made *A Nation at Risk* the nodal point for building up a coalition of dominant subject positions of very different orientations in relation to K-12, teacher education, and educational research in the United States (McGuinn 2006; Rhodes 2012; Sunderman 2009; Vinovskis 2009). From surprisingly different discursive positions, ranging from conservative to business and liberal civil rights orientations, this coalition began promoting debate on excellence in education that would amalgamate into a hitherto unseen national public discursive platform for debating school, teacher quality, and evidence about what works in education. This process served to pave the way for a stronger federal role in K-12 and teacher education policy to an extent that had never been seen in a US context. Entrepreneurial and big business subject position holders gathered in forums demanding a comprehensive national effort to ensure excellence in school achievements that would ensure a workforce qualified for a global knowledge economy fearing Japanese as well as German efficiency and innovation. A bipartisan group of southern governors, including Bill Clinton (D-Arkansas) and the two future secretaries of education, Lamar Alexander (R-Tennessee) and Richard W. Riley (D-South Carolina), and others, saw an overhaul of an outdated education system as essential to boosting weak southern state economies. Civil rights and liberal subject positions, the latter gathering around Massachusetts democratic senator Ted Kennedy and others, would join this debate on standards, tests, and accountability as ways to further more systematically efforts to deal with equity and social justice issues, achievement, and opportunity gaps. From a conservative discursive position, important subject holders like Diane Ravitch (key advisor under G.H.W. Bush and Clinton administrations) and Chester Finn (president of the influential Fordham Foundation think tank) established the Educational Excellence Network in the early 1980s, which argued strongly for a standards and accountability-based education system on a strong content and curriculum oriented base (Finn Jr. 1993). A similar conservative discourse supported the excellence argument by bemoaning the dropping standards, blaming the laissez-faire pedagogy and indifference to quality that had supposedly come with the permissive multicultural stance that anything goes. According to this position, this was undermining attachment to the Western and European roots that America had developed from, which was in turn connected to a *canon* of quality in literature, science, and the arts. This argument was most explicitly put forth by Allan Bloom in his bestseller *The Closing of the American Mind* (Bloom 1987).

Altogether this situation was new in that it gathered republicans and democrats, conservatives and liberals, business people, and others around building an excellence and standards-based education discourse from widely different points of departure. However, there were strong forces and discursive positions opposing this change in the education policy agenda. Conservative forces feared infringement upon the rights of states from federal levels in Washington, with strong references

to constitutional discourse. Initially, the position of teacher unions (the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers) expressed concerns that nonprofessional subject positions would capture the agenda for what should happen in schools at local levels and impose standards and accountability measures that would make teachers' work harder without involving the teachers.

This emerging standards-based education discourse gradually gained momentum (Brown 2015; Finn Jr. 1993; Hamilton et al. 2008; Kosar 2005), and education increasingly became an issue at a presidential level. Republican George H.W. Bush and Lamar Alexander, his secretary of education, pushed forward *America 2000: A national education strategy*, a discursive monument that was explicitly presented as a national strategy, rather than a federal program, in order not to stir up conservative resistance. It was the result of an unprecedented summit on education which took place in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 1989, involving the nation's state governors and other key national subjects. According to Heise, this constituted a landmark in the federalization of US education policy (Heise 1994). Lamar Alexander formulated the initiative by means of four discursive objectives, which he labeled "four giant train stations": (1) better and more accountable schools, (2) a new generation of American schools, (3) a nation of students continuing to learn throughout our lives, and (4) communities where learning can happen. It consisted of six key goals to be pursued over the course of the 9 years leading up to the turn of the millennium.

Democratic President Bill Clinton and his secretary of education, Richard W. Riley, who were both among the original Southern States governors to push this excellence and standards-based discursive platform, elaborated a similar initiative, however, more ambitious in detail and funding. In 1994, Clinton thus signed the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, labeled as a standards-based outcome reform which was by many seen as a major inroad for federalization of education policy and a predecessor to *The No Child Left Behind Act* to come (Heise 1994). During the 1990s, the surging global knowledge economy discourse and its cries for highly qualified students and updated teachers were, furthermore, boosted by the IT and computer revolution which produced an increasing awareness of an incipient, radically different economy of knowledge that was inherently connected to education and lifelong learning perspectives. Resonating well with the *A Nation at Risk* discourse, the Clinton administration thus established the *Technology Literacy Challenge Fund (TLCF)* which introduced competitive grants as a political technology to encourage teachers and schools to become proficient regarding the so-called information superhighway.

## 19.4 The Pre-Millennium Shifts in European Developments (1945–1999)

Altogether, post-World War 2 collaboration among Western European countries tended to focus upon largely US-initiated measures to ensure economic growth. It took off with the US-funded Marshall Plan and the associated Organization for European Economic Co-Operation (OEEC) in 1948 in the wake of massive World



War 2 destruction. During the same period, the European Coal and Steel Community (1951) evolved, and was with the Treaty of Rome (1957) linked to the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (1958), which put on rails, what would eventually develop into the European Union (1993), which today comprises 27 nation states (after Brexit). These developments took place under the US-led security umbrella of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which was established in 1949 in order to deal with the security challenge to Western Europe posed by the Soviet Union and its allies in the Warsaw Pact (1955) during what was to be known as the Cold War.

In a European context, school and education at all levels remained, with a few exceptions, an exclusively national matter up until around 2000. Only then did knowledge economy and lifelong learning discourses finally enter education policy discourse at a transnational level emphatically with political technologies such as PISA, TIMSS, and PIRLS, and emerging new truth regimes such as the Bologna Process and the EU Lisbon Agenda, as key movers (Hopmann 2008; Krejsler et al. 2014, 2017; Nóvoa and Lawn 2002). The only transnational organization that had until then had any durable and measurable interest in education was UNESCO, which dealt more with development in third-world countries than among industrialized countries. However, IEA (the International Association for the Evaluation of Achievement in Education) did start developing international comparative surveys in the 1950s and gradually developed—among other achievements—what would from 2001 become PIRLS (Progress in Reading Literacy Study) and from 1995 TIMSS (Trends in Mathematics and Science Study) to measure literacy, numeracy, and science knowledge and skills among 4th and 8th grade students in an increasing number of industrialized countries, initially mainly in Western Europe.

In order to understand today's dominant regime of truth regarding education in Europe, it is therefore imperative to understand how the discursive link between the economy and education was established on a larger scale. And here the OECD plays a key role. In 1961, the OEEC transformed into the OECD, which has since then been a key player in producing dominant discourse and policy advice to member states about economic development. OECD's interest in *human capital* and its impact on economic well-being and development of member states gained impetus in the 1960s and led to the 1969 establishment of the Center for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) with support from the Ford and Shell foundations (Henry et al. 2001). The OECD, however, did not succeed in spreading this discourse to national member states until the 1980s, which obviously coincided with the release of the ominous *A Nation at Risk Report* in 1983. The cocktail of economic crisis and the fear that nations would not succeed in supplying sufficiently skilled manpower to national economies spurred interest in education. This took place at a time when market-oriented, neo-liberal economic discourse was on the rise with the republican Reagan administration in the United States (1981–1989) and the conservative Margaret Thatcher government in the UK (1979–1991), which obviously involved OECD discourse as well. New Public Management reforms of the public sectors in member states flourished, praising public solutions that drew inspiration from the private sector.

These reforms discursively staged public services in quasi-market conditions as organizations that mutually competed to ensure efficiency by effective use of limited public resources under strict accountability to consumers, as defined by the state (Hood 1995; Sahlin-Andersson 2001). Ideas like giving parents vouchers in the hope that they would use them to choose the best schools and hereby intensify competition gained ground. But that would only be possible if schools and their students' achievement were made comparable, so parents would have an informed overview from which to choose. The idea gained ground that even national economies would prosper if comparative surveys could show whose education systems had most quality and were most efficient. All these factors and many more coincided to increase American pressure in particular on the OECD to develop a comparative survey to determine which nations succeed or fail, in order to be able to identify where to look for inspiration to enhance one's national education system and create better results (e.g., Lawn 2013: 22). This demand met resistance among European collaboration partners within the OECD, but eventually prevailed, and in 2000 the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) was launched, which was, subsequently and ironically, to become the most agenda-setting transnational discursive technology for national European education policies, but not for US policies (Hopmann 2008; Meyer and Beavot 2013).

In 1996, the OECD published the report on *Knowledge Economies*, and in 2001 it finally established an independent Directorate of Education, which iconically underlined how much education had risen on the agenda for securing successful economies among global Knowledge Economies (Henry et al. 2001; OECD 1996).

In an EU context—similarly to the US constitution—education falls under the discursive principle of subsidiarity as stipulated by the Maastricht treaty of 1992. The principle of subsidiarity signifies that competence is delegated to the level closest to actual practice, which typically means the nation state level or, in some cases, like that of Germany, at the level of the Bundesländer. This applies in particular to K-12 education, which is typically closely associated with nation-building and national identity discourses that easily stir up strong sensitivities in many European nation states. The EU Maastricht treaty, however, simultaneously performs a breakthrough for EU influence on education agendas by means of a particular discursive maneuver which opened up for the EU commission to maintain a coordinating role between member states concerning national education policy issues, especially those that were deemed key issues in supporting economic growth in the form of qualifying labor and similar issues (EC 1992). Linking education to economic concerns thus opened up for making education a transnational concern, which makes it the predecessor to the game-changing EU Lisbon Declaration of 2000 and the ensuing Lisbon Agenda that extol a discourse “to make Europe the most dynamic and competitive among global knowledge economies by 2010” (EC 2000). The EU commission was thus to become after the turn of the millennium the key discursive operator, in collaboration with the OECD and the Bologna Process, in merging policy discourse about economic growth and education by means of knowledge economy, human capital, and lifelong learning discourse (Nóvoa and Lawn 2002).

In conclusion, transnational impact on European national school and education policy discourse was rarely seen before the turn of the millennium. Nonetheless, there were strong seminal signs of changes to come which bore striking resemblances to the developments that had begun in the United States in the wake of *A Nation at Risk* in particular.

## 19.5 No Child Left Behind: The Climax of a Truth Regime

On January 8, 2002, the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)* was signed by President George W. Bush, inaugurating the climax and institutionalization of the standards-based education discourse. Its full title is “*An act to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind.*” It was a reauthorization of the [Elementary and Secondary Education Act](#), which included [Title I](#), the government’s flagship aid program for disadvantaged students (U. S. D. O. Education 2002; Hess and Petrilli 2006). The Act was first and foremost an argument for a [standards-based education reform](#) (Hamilton et al. 2008). As a political technology, it was based on framing a particular discourse about how setting high standards and establishing measurable [goals](#) can improve student outcomes in reading and math. The bill was passed in the [US Congress with overwhelming bipartisan support: 384 in favor versus 45 nays in the House of Representatives; 91 in favor versus 8 nays in the senate](#). It was proposed by President Bush and coauthored by highly influential congressional subject holders, Representatives: [John Boehner](#) (R-OH) (House Republican Minority Leader or Speaker from 2006–2015) and [George Miller](#) (D-CA), and Senators: [Judd Gregg](#) (R-NH) and [Edward Kennedy](#) (D-MA), who represented the span from very conservative to very liberal discursive positions.

NCLB installed a comprehensive truth regime with a panoply of political technologies that would transform K-12 policy discourse in terms of intensifying federal powers considerably in relation to states and local authorities, in terms of school organization and evaluation procedures, and in terms of how you can produce knowledge about what works (Apple 2006; Department 2009; U. S. D. O. Education 2004, 2011; Hess and Petrilli 2006; McGuinn 2005, 2010).

NCLB as a master discourse with bipartisan federal backing demanded all public schools that received federal funding to administer annually a statewide [standardized test](#) to all students, implying that all students must take the same test under the same conditions. Schools that received Title I funding had to make [Adequate Yearly Progress](#) (AYP) in test scores, that is, students at a given grade level between three and eight had to do better on standardized tests than the previous year’s students at the same grade level. If a school performed poorly, it would become subject to a series of increasingly tough measures that would, it was presumed in the discourse, ensure improvement.

The motivation or punishment measured out by the discourse were as follows: schools missing AYP for 2 consecutive years were publicly labeled “in need of improvement” and had to develop a 2-year improvement plan for the subject the

school was not teaching well. In the meantime, students were given the option to transfer to other schools within the school district. Upon 3 years of missing AYP, the school would be obliged to offer supplemental education services and free tutoring to students in need. Upon 4 consecutive years of missing AYP, the school would be labeled as requiring “corrective action,” which would typically include replacement of staff, introduction of a new curriculum, or extending the amount of time students spend at school. Upon 5 consecutive years of missing AYP, a restructuring of the entire school would be planned, which would be executed in case the school would fail to comply with AYP for a sixth consecutive year. Such a restructuring would include closing down the school, turning the school into a [charter school](#), hiring a private company to run the school, or asking the state office of education to run the school directly.

According to this truth regime, it was claimed that analyses of state accountability systems that were in place before NCLB indicated that outcomes accountability led to faster growth in achievement for the states that introduced such systems (Hamilton et al. 2008). The direct analysis of state test scores before and after enactment of NCLB also supported its positive impact according to the criteria for success set by this discursive regime. A primary criticism from counter-discourses asserted, however, that NCLB reduced effective instruction and student learning by causing states to lower achievement goals and motivate teachers to “teach to the test,” that is, it would encourage teachers to teach narrow subsets of skills which the school believed would increase test performance, rather than focusing on deeper understanding of the overall curriculum. Because each state could produce its own standardized tests, a state would be able to make its statewide tests easier to increase scores (Berliner 2009; Labaree 2014; Nichols and Berliner 2007; Ravitch 2010). The NCLB truth regime and its proponents claimed, nonetheless, that standards-based goals and increased accountability would help teachers and schools to realize more systematically the significance of their functioning within the school system and hereby help students, communities, and ultimately the nation. Other discursive positions, however, claimed that punishment and corrective action would only demotivate schools and, by implication, undermine student performance, and even exacerbate inequality (Apple 2006; Dee and Jacob 2010; Hursh 2007).

In summary, NCLB constituted a dominant truth regime that came about as the genealogical trajectories of numerous influential discourses, representing business, conservatives and liberals, were woven together to become a dominant nodal point which reconfigured into a coalition the bulk of key legal, market and political discursive players in society. NCLB could be seen as the climax of the standards-based education discourse that was initiated in the wake of the *A Nation at Risk* report in 1983. Further, NCLB could be seen as a game-changer in the sense that it had become institutionalized in policy and school practice, whereas previously it was more of a policy discourse of intent. And, in our context, NCLB—by using the legal frame of ESEA—expanded the federal role in public education through the introduction of annual testing, criteria for adequate academic progress and teacher qualifications, report cards, and funding changes (DeBray-Pelot and McGuinn 2009; U. S. D. O. Education 2004, 2011; Manna 2010; McGuinn 2006; Rhodes 2012; Vinovskis 2009).

## 19.6 NCLB in a European Perspective

In the European arena, there was nothing that vaguely resembled the level of institutionalization into a dominant truth regime which NCLB had achieved, with the aid of ESEA funding, in terms of making a federal policy initiative set the dominant discourse and reform agenda widely at a structural level for school and teacher education in states and local school districts. Nonetheless, the post-millennium tendencies have become similar in Europe in the sense that national education policy discourse is increasingly negotiated in transnational forums where political technologies, in the forms of comparative surveys and standards, are established to increasingly make national systems comparable and demand increased compliance (Krejsler et al. 2014, 2017; Meyer and Benavot 2013; Nóvoa and Lawn 2002).

In primary and lower secondary school policy discourse, PISA, TIMSS, and PIRLS surveys (see foot note 2) have increasingly become the political technologies by which educational success in literacy, numeracy and science is measured and ranked. They set the discursive criteria for what counts as truth when it comes to establishing whether a European nation state's primary and lower secondary school system is successful or not, with considerable policy consequences in their wake, including recurring pressure demanding school and teacher education reform. The creation of a comprehensive European truth regime on education has furthermore been accelerated by the growing volumes of additional political technologies, including regularly published statistics and comparative overviews from the OECD, Eurostat and Eurydice, for example, OECD publications such as *Education at a Glance*, OECD country reports, OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), and so forth (e.g., Antunes 2006; Henry et al. 2001; Lawn 2013; Lawn and Grek 2012).

One of these OECD country reports, commissioned by the Danish government in 2003, could serve as an illustrative example of a discursive technology employed to ensure compliance with a new regime, that is, the standards-based education regime. It was commissioned to assess the evaluation culture in Danish comprehensive school (grades 1 through 9). Upon comments from the Danish government, the OECD group, led by leading school effectiveness representatives, issued its report with the main conclusion that Danish school lacked a systematic evaluation culture, with probable losses in student performance as a likely consequence. In the wake of this country report and a simultaneous one from the Danish Evaluation Institute, a number of sweeping reforms of comprehensive school were undertaken: mandatory student plans were introduced and ten national test were introduced in a school where testing had hitherto been taboo; municipalities were required to work out annual quality reports in response to OECD critique of having been too permissive in their monitoring of Danish schools; and, inevitably, a reform of an allegedly insufficient teacher education was announced (Ekholm et al. 2004; Krejsler et al. 2017). The proliferation of such technologies and the multitude of measures would eventually ensure that national school and teacher education regimes became increasingly integrated under the umbrella of transnational productions of truth.

The 2000 EU Lisbon declaration stands as a key discursive document and event in reinforcing relations between economy and education. Here, EU's heads of government pledged to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic region among global Knowledge Economies by 2010. The solemn inauguration of this truth regime was forcefully followed up by the accompanying Lisbon Agenda defining EU policy guidelines, and an increased focus on the importance of education for ensuring economic growth follows (Colignon et al. 2005; EC 2000, 2010; Lawn and Lingard 2002). "Competences," "lifelong learning," and "employability" became dominant discursive signifiers to permeate national strategies for successful economies, all the way down to reformed descriptions of education courses at all levels.

Parallel to this development, the Bologna Process was put on track as another formidable truth regime in 2000 as a larger European process that would eventually comprise 48 countries. The Bologna Process solemnly pledged to establish a *European Higher Education Area* (EHEA) by 2010 (Keeling 2006). It would comprise higher education, including teacher education, and be aimed at making European higher education systems comparable and establishing common standards that would enable student and teacher mobility across borders and different education systems. Formally and abiding by dominant discourses of democracy, freedom and diversity, the Bologna process would claim to be all voluntary. Nonetheless, it had grown by 2009 to become a formidable discursive giant administering a truth regime with an increasingly compelling set of political technologies. This included ten performance indicators and a score card system ranking the compliance of participating countries, including the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), mutual recognition of diplomas, a bachelor-master-PhD format (3 + 2 + 3), quality assurance formats concerning higher education, including teacher education, across borders, and so forth (Krejsler et al. 2012).

Further integration took place as the two dominant and giant truth regimes of the EU and the Bologna Process would increasingly integrate their truth production and political technologies in order to optimize education in what was called a Lifelong Learning perspective (Keeling 2006). As the EU developed its political technology of the European Qualification Framework (EQF), which was later duplicated into National Qualification Frameworks (NQF), lifelong learning from pre-K up to PhD was partitioned into 8 levels, where the Bologna Process bachelor-master-PhD cycles were integrated as levels 6, 7, and 8 (EQF 2008). This all served to make participating countries and the education systems ever more comparable and skills—or rather competences—ever more transferable.

## 19.7 Evidence: A New Regime for Producing Knowledge About What Works

The *No Child Left Behind Act*, understood as a practice regime, has changed what counts as acceptable truth production about school and student performance. This discursive turn was accompanied by a considerable tightening of the educational

research that could obtain federal funding. It even impacted state funding of educational research, if that funding was associated with additional federal funding. The NCLB act thus instituted a discourse according to which schools would rely on [scientifically based research](#) for teaching programs and methods. The act defined scientifically based research as “research that involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs” (U. S. D. O. Education 2002; Hess and Petrilli 2006; Zucker 2004). This meant scientifically based research results in “replicable and applicable findings” from research that would use appropriate methods to generate persuasive, empirical conclusions. Non-scientific methods—in this understanding—would include following tradition, personal preferences, and non-scientific research, such as research based on [case studies](#), [ethnographies](#), personal interviews, [discourse analysis](#), [grounded theory](#), [action research](#), and other forms of [qualitative research](#). The latter would no longer be seen to form an acceptable basis for making decisions about teaching children under the act. What counted as scientific and legitimate within this truth regime would be narrowed down to research that qualified according to neo-positivist or similar, so-called evidence-based or -informed methodological approaches to researching what works in education, with the Randomized Controlled Trial, statistical meta-analyses and systematic reviews as methodological ideals (Darling-Hammond and Youngs 2002; Hamilton et al. 2008; Krejlsler 2013, 2017; Pawson 2006; Prewitt et al. 2012; Zucker 2004). This would put immense pressure on school and teacher education programs across the nation to adopt a new truth regime and its associated political technologies, in order to remain legitimate in federal, state and public eyes (U. S. D. O. Education 2004, 2011; Hargreaves 2007; McGuinn 2010; Policy 2003).

This groundbreaking change in what counted as rigorous educational research, worthy of public support, became institutionalized in the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). IES was created as part of the [Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002](#) as the primary [research](#) body of the [United States Department of Education](#). It was divided into four major research and statistics centers: (1) *The National Center for Education Statistics* (NCES), which conducts the [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#) (NAEP: The Nation’s Report Card); (2) *The National Center for Education Research* (NCER); (3) *The National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance* (NCEE), which operates the [National Library of Education](#), the [Education Resources Information Center](#) (ERIC) and the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC); and (4) the *National Center for Special Education Research* (NCSER).

The IES would propagate this new truth regime by conducting and supporting [randomized controlled trials](#) in schools (RCT) to find practical answers to questions such as whether some textbooks were better than others and whether certain [professional development](#) programs for teachers would improve student achievement. The What Works Clearinghouse, which was established with generous federal funding and scientific support from the hardcore evidence-oriented Campbell Collaboration, was given the central task of producing the systematic reviews of research about What Works according to a neo-positivist evidence methodological approach (Boruch and Herman 2007; Krejlsler 2013).

This policy discourse was backed up by a proliferation of powerful policy-sensitive bodies, including *the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy*, which gathers in its advisory board key figures from the Campbell Collaboration, for instance Robert Boruch (<http://coalition4evidence.org/>). The Coalition describes itself as “a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, whose mission is to increase government effectiveness through the use of rigorous evidence about ‘what works’”. Since 2001, the Coalition has worked closely together with US Congressional and Executive Branch officials who have advanced evidence-based reforms in US social programs, which have been enacted into law and policy. The Coalition claims to have “no affiliation with any programs or program models, and no financial interest in the policy ideas it supports, enabling it to serve as an independent, objective source of expertise to government officials on evidence-based policy.” However, such mission statements contradict the close association with a particular regime of knowledge that implies narrow understandings of objectivity, rigor, methodology, and so forth and are conveniently compliant with the dominant understandings of rigorous policy-relevant science at the policy and decision-making levels.

## 19.8 Evidence Regimes in a European Context

In a European education policy context, the evidence and what works truth regime never acquired a uniform and thorough implementation, in terms of institutionalization, that is comparable to the American developments. On the other hand, the OECD and IEA surveys certainly do follow an evidence for what works format that privileges large quantitative surveys which adhere to a neo-positivistic and school effectiveness paradigm and does not leave much room for other paradigms, in particular qualitative or post-positivist research paradigms (Burns and Schuller 2007b; Hammersley 2007; Oakley 2007; OECD 2007). Further, at national levels, a number of evidence discourse producing institutions have been established which resemble more or less the US What Works Clearinghouse, with considerable inspiration from the Campbell Collaboration, although typically with more room for inspiration from other scientific and methodological paradigms (e.g., Hammersley 2007, 2013; Hattie 2009; Meyer 2004). In the UK, one could point to the *Evidence for Policy and Practitioner Information Centre* (EPPI), which was established in the 1990s to assist policy makers in making evidence-based (or -informed) priorities and as a *What Works* repository for practitioners to consult (Oakley 2007; Wells 2007). In Denmark, an OECD report on Danish R&D resulted in the 2006 establishment of the Danish Clearinghouse for Educational Research, which was explicitly advised to look for inspiration from the US What Works Clearinghouse and EPPI (OECD/CERI 2004). Similar developments are seen in other European countries, and are increasingly influencing how school and teacher education programs can be framed in terms of legitimate knowledge and skills base (Krelsler 2013, 2017).

In 2004, the OECD hosted a meeting in Washington which focused on evidence and education, that is, how to understand the new conditions for producing knowledge



about what works. Here, the US delegation proved the most hardcore in defining evidence for What Works, in terms of privileging Randomized Controlled Trials primary studies, statistical meta-analyses of intervention studies, and elaboration of systematic reviews of research. It disregarded qualitative studies, case studies, and other non-experimental studies as irrelevant to producing valid knowledge about which interventions work. At the other end, the Nordic countries represented a different voice that stressed the importance of employing various paradigms when it comes to deciding what works (Boruch and Herman 2007; Burns and Schuller 2007a; Hammersley 2007).

Altogether, one can say that the evidence and What Works truth regime has been advancing on both sides of the Atlantic. Systematic implementation across the school, teacher education, and educational research systems of a particular evidence regime with very specific definitions of what counts as scientific has been, however, considerably more pervasive in the United States than in Europe. This is hardly surprising considering the far more profound integration that characterizes the relation between the federal and state levels in the United States, as opposed to the far feebler and more volatile character of the transnational organizations within which European nation states collaborate. The latter cannot make nation states commit and comply beyond what is possible in terms of voluntary commitment, be it guided by self-interest or peer pressure (e.g., Diamantopoulou 2003; Labaree 2014).

## **19.9 The Standards-Based Education Regime and Its Further Advances During the Obama Administration (2009–2015)**

The NCLB truth regime and its associated standards, high-stakes testing and accountability technologies, driven by conspicuous reward and punishment systems, had long contributed to building up counter-discourses among subject positions representing alternative and broader ideas of schooling and its purpose, as well as among research paradigms that were excluded by the narrow evidence for what works paradigm (Apple 2006; Hursh 2007; Nichols and Berliner 2007; Ravitch 2010). Consequently, the inauguration of the presidency of Barack Obama in January 2009 produced high expectations and hopes for a discursive dislocation of the NCLB regime, or at least reverses or considerable reforms. Many discursive adversaries to NCLB were expecting—or hoping—that Linda Darling-Hammond from Stanford University would be the choice for secretary of education, the decisive discursive position for advancing dominant federal discourse. She had been central in the build-up of the Obama campaign education discourse and represented a broader capacity building discourse than the current NCLB and evidence regime (e.g., Ravitch 2013). However, the choice of Arne Duncan, which disappointed many NCLB-adversaries among teachers and in the educational research community, and the policy regime that was put on track, showed that this administration would follow the *No Child Left Behind* truth regime of standards, high-stakes testing, and accountability (Ravitch 2010; Schneider 2015; Sunderman 2009).

The Obama administration took over an economy in tatters in the wake of the financial crisis of 2007–2008. They started out in 2009 by seeking to redress this desperate situation with an enormous bail-out package, *The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*. The act pledged 823 billion US dollars in a Keynesian or New Deal economic discursive move by pumping federal money into infrastructure projects, loans, and so on that would boost demand, create jobs, and get the economy going. An approximate 100 billion US dollars were reserved for education in the recovery act to counter, in particular, massive cuts in state school budgets, teacher layoffs, and so on.

The NCLB truth regime and its discourse were acclaimed by the Obama administration and its intended reauthorization of NCLB in the name of the *ESEA Reauthorization: A Blueprint for Reform* in 2010. This key discursive document of the Obama administration included priorities such as a focus on “producing college- and career-ready students through higher standards for all students, improved assessments, and a more broad academic program”; “recognizing, encouraging, and rewarding excellence”; fostering equality and opportunity for all students through “rigorous and fair accountability”; raising standards and rewarding excellence via [Race to the Top](#); and expanding charter schools (U. S. D. O. Education 2010). Polarized power relations between republicans and democrats in congress upon the mid-term elections, however, made it impossible to have the reauthorization approved.

Nonetheless, the Obama administration went along with the NCLB regime. The three political technologies that have received most attention have been the *Race to the Top* (RttT) and its competitive grants; the *Common Core State Standards* (CCSS), which strictly speaking was not a federal initiative but an interstate collaboration that was strongly supported by the federal administration; and the continuation of the *Teacher Incentive Fund* (approved by congress 2006) as competitive grants to encourage, in particular at state and local levels, the improvement of teachers and principals in high-needs schools where shortages of math and science teachers in particular have been a serious problem (Brown 2015; Owens 2015; Schneider 2015).

As a political technology, *Race to the Top* (RttT) was part of the [American Recovery and Reinvestment Act](#). More than four billion dollars were spent on competitive grants meant to commit states and local school districts to K-12 reforms and innovation. States were awarded points for adopting a number of particular policies such as common curriculum standards; giving preference to STEM subjects; performance-based evaluations for teachers and principals; turn-around of low-performing schools; developing systematic data systems; and expanding [charter schools](#).

As states were keen get their hands on part of these big competitive grants, a number of states actually changed their education policies to make their applications more competitive. And *Race to the Top* did become a strongly supportive incentive, encouraging states to adopt Common Core State Standards (see below). Adoption of CCSS was not an explicit requirement as such, although something similar was required in case of non-adoption. In addition, the federal government supported CCSS by funding the development of assessments aligned to the common standards with 350 million dollars. RttT included the development of a political technology, an Annual Performance Report (APR), to map how successful applicants implemented reform plans and met goals for student outcomes. In that sense,

RttT was very much a political technology in the Foucauldian sense that it would take what was basically a political problem and recast it into the neutral language of science (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982: 196).

The *Common Core State Standards* (CCSS) was a comprehensive political technology initiative to develop standards for what K-12 students should know in English language and mathematics (Owens 2015; Schneider 2015). In its own discursive language, CCSS would only specify standards for what students should know at each grade level and describe the skills that they would have to acquire in order to achieve “college or career readiness” ([www.corestandards.org/](http://www.corestandards.org/)). It would cater to state and local interests by stressing that it was the individual school district that would be responsible for choosing and specifying curriculum based on the standards. In its own discourse, the stated purpose of the initiative was to “provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them.” The standards were supposedly designed to be “robust” and “relevant” to “the real world,” reflecting the knowledge and skills that students would need for “success in college and careers.” This should, allegedly, place American students in a position where they would be able to compete in a global economy. In its discourse, CCSS stated that it was developed by teams of academics and educators from across the United States who led the development of the standards, whereas additional validation teams approved the final standards. The process claimed broader legitimacy by including public feedback from various stakeholders, which was incorporated into the standards.

The *Next Generation Science Standards* were launched in April 2013 as a seemingly separate political technology to cover the sciences that were not covered by CCSS. However, even these standards have been adopted by many states, and the standards and their content have been constructed so as to be easily compatible with the mathematical and English Language Arts standards of CCSS.

The political technologies intended to assess CCSS have been created by two consortiums, each of them regrouping some 20 states by voluntary choice of the state education agencies. The *Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers* (PARCC) would focus on computer-based “through-course assessments” in each grade, together with streamlined end-of-year tests. The second consortium, called the *Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium* (SBAC), would focus on creating “adaptive online exams.” In their own discursive presentations, both these leading consortiums would distance themselves somewhat from the mainstream standardized testing formats by proposing computer-based exams that include fewer selected and constructed response test items. This could be seen as a discursive move to placate criticism that NCLB testing had been carried out too rigidly according to templates that favored multiple-choice and rote learning, whereas these new templates would work to be more amenable to higher-level skills thinking needed to succeed in global knowledge economies.

Furthermore, the Common Core regime exhibits a genealogy of how a particularly dominant configuration of policy and corporate big business interests merged their discursive positions to support the evidence and standards-based education discourse and, subsequently, succeeded in becoming the architect behind numerous

policy initiatives that pushed this agenda forward. The CCSS genealogy thus gained impetus in 1996 with the establishment of *Achieve, Inc.* ([www.achieve.org](http://www.achieve.org)), which today encompasses the [National Governors Association](#) (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), together with corporate giants like Intel, IBM, and Prudential Financial, attracting financial support from the [Gates Foundation](#), the Pearson Publishing Company, and others (Owens 2015; Schneider 2015). In its discourse about itself, Achieve Inc. would state that it is a bipartisan organization aimed at raising academic standards and graduation requirements, improving assessments and strengthening accountability. In particular, it would highlight the work on developing standards linking what students were expected to know and be able to do at each grade level with assessments designed to measure whether students actually met those standards. Being a product of this genealogy, the Common Core as a truth regime and as a political technology could be presented as an interstate (not a federal) initiative in formal terms. The CCSS process thus sought to cater to sensitivities that cherished the rights of states, although, in practice, it was perceived as closely linked to the federal agenda. As mentioned, states were given an incentive to adopt the Common Core State Standards through the linking of CCSS to the Race to the Top competitive federal grants. And although states could adopt other college and career-ready standards (as did, e.g., Texas and Virginia), they were awarded extra points in their Race to the Top applications if they adopted CCSS. Again, it is obvious that dominant political technologies such as CCSS and the Next Generation Science Standards, as well as the regimes set up to measure them, would exert a dominant pressure upon the direction of school and teacher education programs (U. S. D. O. Education 2011; Krelsler 2018).

There is considerable need for transparency about the span of activities and dominant discursive positions that collectively make up organizations like *Achieve Inc.*, in order to evaluate what are federal and what are state interests, and what is public good and what are private market interests. This need grows even bigger when one considers that Achieve Inc. also manages the *Next Generation Science Standards* and is a so-called Project Management Partner in the development of *PARCC*. Altogether, this rightly brings forward the question posed by Mercedes K. Schneider in her book *Common Core Dilemma: Who owns our schools?* (Schneider 2015).

As the NCLB truth regime approached its target year 2014, it became clear that its discourse and political technologies were running out of steam, which gradually paved the way for competing discursive regimes concerning school and education. It became increasingly clear that a growing number of states would not succeed in complying with the NCLB aims—that all children should have proficiency in basic numeracy, literacy, and science knowledge and skills. Gains seemed to have been made during the first years of NCLB, but sustaining this and making sure that no children were left behind appeared impossible. After 2010, this gradual undermining of the NCLB truth regime was countered, when the Obama administration embarked upon the repair strategy of still keeping states committed by offering them the option to apply for so-called NCLB waivers and

still keep federal ESEA funding such as Title 1 funding. In its own discourse, the political technology of waivers would soften up demands and allow for more flexibility, but still require states to come up with plans that maintain the direction of NCLB.

As mentioned previously, another issue has been the difficulty in having the NCLB truth regime reauthorized, in particular during the second Obama term in office (2013–2017). Here, a republican majority in both houses of congress, coupled with increased enmity between republicans and democrats, and even more so between congressional republicans and the white house, would sour so much that agreements have been very difficult to negotiate at all. In fact, it appeared almost impossible to come to an agreement to reauthorize the long overdue NCLB act, which has forced the Obama administration to act according to executive orders and emergency measures ever since the 2010 mid-term elections where republicans captured a majority in the House of Representatives.

A third—but associated—issue has been that the impressive coalition of dominant subject positions that had previously warranted the NCLB regime would begin to evaporate. An increasing number of subject positions, representing the various strong discourses that initially made the standards-based education discourse so strong, came into increasingly severe doubts about whether the incessant focus upon high-stakes testing actually works, and whether the federal waiver technology is actually warranted at the expense of more power to states, local educational authorities, and so forth. Altogether, this would materialize into enhanced enmity at state and local levels against the considerably increased influence of the federal level upon K-12 education (Krejsler 2018; Manna 2010; Ravitch 2010).

By the end of 2015, what started out as a counter-discourse initiative among republicans such as Lamar Alexander, the previous secretary of education, had finally been negotiated into a bill which could summon bipartisan support and, in the end, be signed by President Obama under the name *the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* (House 2015). By avoiding contentious issues, such as launching school privatization political technologies (e.g., transforming federal aid into vouchers for parents), and by making the necessary compromises, an act had thereby been passed that finally meant the reauthorization of ESEA in a form that formally brought the *No Child Left Behind Act* to an end. Surprisingly, the ESSA act was interpreted as a victory by all major factions within congress as well as by the White House. Republicans claimed they had put a brake on secretary of education Arne Duncan and the Obama administration, reversing a situation where the federal level had achieved too much power to control states with the NCLB waiver programs and emergency executive orders. Democrats and the White House, on the other hand, claimed that ESSA would ensure federal funding for expansion of pre-school facilities and preserve important national standards. In summary, ESSA as a political technology promises that more authority will be given back to states and local authorities, while still retaining a minimum of federal authority to ensure civil rights, basic testing, and so forth (Berman 2015; House 2015; Strauss 2015; Weiss and McGuinn 2016; Wong 2015).

## 19.10 Consolidation of a European Truth Regime of a More Opaque Kind

A comprehensive truth regime and an array of political technologies have been consolidated and expanded in the increasingly frequent and commitment-based relations between transnational organizations and European nation states. *Horizon 2020* (2014–2020) has been the latest version of the EU flagship political technology of so-called 7 years framework research funding programs which, together with a number of other political technologies, are aimed at ensuring that research, including educational research, will be integrated into the overarching dominant truth regime of *the Lisbon Agenda* and its latest formulation in *Europe 2020* (Colignon et al. 2005; EC 2010, 2014; Keeling 2006). As elaborated earlier in this chapter, this truth regime mainly operates through a discourse about EU and Europe becoming a dynamic and competitive region among global knowledge economies, driven by the fear of falling behind. Consequently, EU political technologies operate by means of central templates like *Horizon 2020* and the European Qualifications Framework that are increasingly copied in member states' national school and teacher education policy and so forth, including national research councils and funding bodies (EQF 2008; Krejsler et al. 2014, 2017; Olsson et al. 2011). EU research and education policy discourse is developed in terms of keywords such as “competitiveness,” “excellence,” “life-long learning,” and “employability,” where STEM areas—like in the United States—increasingly outclass social sciences and humanities, which include educational research (Moos and Wubbels 2014; Moos et al. 2015).

European transnational policy discourse concerning primary and lower secondary school has not yet transformed into an institutionalized truth regime comparable to NCLB in the United States or even the Bologna Process concerning higher education, including teacher education. The discursive alignments that do take place, and the political technologies that have been adopted, have come about in more indirect processes. This has happened in terms of national policy-making and debates which increasingly have had their discourse shaped by transnational technologies, including the PISA, TIMSS, and PIRLS international comparative surveys, OECD country reports, and policy advice. Further, such impact has manifested itself as effects upon policy makers, researchers, and professionals, in that the subject positions they inhabit in a new truth regime have been increasingly shaped by their participation in transnational networks and events (Hopmann 2008; Meyer and Benavot 2013). This kind of commitment has mainly thrived on the motivating effects of aligning with one's partners in the dominant regional transnational regimes (the OECD, EU, and the Bologna Process), to ensure that one's nation would remain comparable, and thus eliminating the risk of being excluded—or excluding oneself—from the mainstream processes.

Since 2000, *the Open Method of Coordination* has increasingly become the political technology format for collaboration to advance consensus in largely voluntary transnational policy processes. This method works by gradually advancing consensus instead of making decisions by voting, which had proved untenable for securing efficient collaboration among too many different nation states in transnational forums that

could only count on voluntary adherence. The efficiency of the Open Method of Coordination works by producing peer pressure in the competition for success in comparisons among nations, according to agreed templates and standards; the naming and shaming of not being successful according to those measures; and—not the least—the fear of being left behind, or—even more so—being left outside. The Open Method of Coordination is the official method of collaboration of the European Union and the Bologna Process. Nonetheless, it resembles so much how collaboration takes place in even the OECD, where one usually talks of *Multilateral Surveillance*, that policy researchers increasingly find it useful to use the term to cover this particular kind of collaboration more broadly among transnational bodies (Colignon et al. 2005; Gornitzka 2006; Krejsler et al. 2014, 2017; Schäfer 2004). The acceleration of this consensus-advancing and peer pressure driven kind of collaboration took off in education policy in particular upon the launches of PISA and the Bologna Process, continuously aided by the similar, albeit not so publicly well-known, IEA surveys of TIMSS (from 1995) and PIRLS (from 2001). Since the first PISA survey was launched in 2000, the discursive effects of so-called PISA shocks have been regularly administered to different member nations and with resounding effects on their self-perceptions and policy agendas. Germany has had PISA shocks that have changed the agenda for thinking school and teacher education policy (Hopmann 2008; Waldow 2009). Among the Nordic countries, Sweden and Denmark used to believe that they had world class progressive school systems, and that it was Finland which was traditionally somewhat behind (Hopmann 2008; Telhaug et al. 2006). Having become dominant political technologies, PISA, as well as TIMSS and PIRLS, have reversed such perceptions thoroughly, notwithstanding the often forgotten caveats that PISA, TIMSS, and PIRLS—like NCLB—represent a narrow set of subjects (literacy, numeracy and science) as well as narrow ways of measuring, and an emphasis on testing and numbers with inherent limitations (Hopmann 2008; Labaree 2014; Meyer and Benavot 2013). This again produces incessant criticism of teachers and teacher education for not being sufficiently fit to produce the next generation of highly skilled lifelong learners, which is followed up by further teacher education reforms (Furlong et al. 2009a, b).

This current state of affairs has produced counter-discourses questioning whether aligning with such comparable templates quenches the diversity of school systems that correspond to the diversity of, and among, European nation states. Proponents of some discourses have even argued that a major part of the competitive advantage of Europe and the EU may be jeopardized by the political technology of aligning all to the same comparative templates. Researcher subjects of PISA and IEA discourse have often responded by claiming exasperation when policy makers and the public misuse their surveys for ranking. They have claimed surveys are meant to highlight possible problems and subsequently inspire to learn from each other, taking into consideration that any inspiration from apparently successful countries must always be considered according to criteria regarding whether they are compatible or even desirable in terms of what a given nation aims at with its particular school system. School serves many purposes that go well beyond basic literacy, numeracy, and science skills or competences (Henry et al. 2001; Hopmann 2008; Krejsler 2017; Meyer and Benavot 2013).

## 19.11 Summary of Genealogy of US K-12 and Education Policy Discourse

The genealogy of US K-12 and education policy demonstrates that conditions have been dramatically reconfigured since the 1980s with the *No Child Left Behind* Act and the ensuing standards-based education regime as an iconic and dramatic culmination (Brown 2015; DeBray-Pelot and McGuinn 2009; McGuinn 2006; Rhodes 2012; Sunderman 2009; Vinovskis 2009). In spite of education being a state responsibility in constitutional terms, strong national and even federal education discourse and practice regimes have clearly been established (Department 2009; Manna 2010; McGuinn 2005, 2006; Sunderman 2009). This turn towards a stronger federal presence in education policy discourse has been a gradual development. It gained impetus in the 1960s, when civil rights discourse found common ground with constitutional discourse and gained US supreme court approval in putting desegregation of schools and alleviation of student poverty on the education policy agenda at a federal level (Patterson 2001). This base was initially exploited, but took a turn with the influential *A Nation at Risk* report (1983). From then on, civil rights and desegregation discourse would gradually merge into the emerging standards-based education discourse. School and education policy at a federal level would gather momentum and create a drive towards standards-based education at a national level. This was made legitimate via reference to phrasings such as “no child was to be left behind,” “the achievement gap had to be closed,” and, not the least, the fear of “the nation falling behind” (Hamilton et al. 2008; Kosar 2005; Rhodes 2012).

What started out as a discourse about dwindling standards, poor student results and fear of decline in American economic and political power grew to become a dominant configuration of leading subject positions representing a plethora of diverse discourses, including conservative education researchers, business coalitions, civil rights groups, southern governors, and liberals. During the 1990s, the standards-based education discourse was consolidated and gained momentum at presidential and congressional levels with the America 2000 and Goals 2000 initiatives introduced by the Bush senior and Clinton administrations, peaking with the bipartisan adoption of the *No Child Left Behind* truth regime. The NCLB regime has succeeded in launching political technologies in terms of standards, high-stakes testing, accountability, and waiver measures that transcended individual states without being, in a formal sense, direct federally governed models as such. Aided by the incentive (aka pressure) mechanism of limited federal ESEA funding, the NCLB regime has been surprisingly successful in creating today a unity among the K-12 systems of 50 states—something that is unprecedented in the history of the United States. The Obama administration has—more or less—faithfully followed the overall intentions of the G.W. Bush administration and the NCLB truth regime (Brown 2015; Owens 2015; Ravitch 2013).

As this truth regime proliferated, it became simultaneously more compelling, unless a state wanted exclude itself by making itself irrelevant to the increasingly national mainstream debate that has come to govern the gradual on-going consensus-



building. Officially, the processes that composed this reconfiguration were never—or seldom—explicitly federal: the states would comply with NCLB but made their own testing systems; the waivers would offer flexibility but required federal acceptance of alternative ways to comply with NCLB targets and so forth. The federal subject would officially exercise an arbiter and motivator role as the player that harbored the institutional capacity that none of the single states in themselves would have or could be motivated to take upon themselves. And, most importantly, the federal level would know how to use ESEA and collateral federal funding as bait to motivate states to align.

In an exemplary way, the political technology of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) illustrated how this discursive process moved along to strengthen the NCLB truth regime (Owens 2015; Schneider 2015). The CCSS was clearly defined as an interstate (rather than a federal) collaboration, with the dominant subjects at state level leading the production of discourse and technologies, that is, National Governors' Association and the Council for Chief State School Officers. The CCSS could be seen as a way of deepening the standards and assessment objectives of the federal NCLB Act, which never forced any state to adopt anything that was not demanded by the Constitution and/or Supreme Court orders. The NCLB regime was officially a framework inspiring interstate collaboration on a voluntary basis in order to secure the future of the American economy by ensuring education provisions that made students college and career ready and so forth. The Race to the Top initiative was another exemplary political technology case that showed how the federal NCLB regime assigned more than four billion US dollars from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which was adopted under the exceptional circumstances of the major 2007–2008 financial crisis turmoil, to a competitive grant mechanism which presupposed that states adopted the CCSS without explicitly demanding so. Hereby, the federal and the state levels became increasingly tied up with each other in processes where the federal subject would coordinate what became increasingly compelling albeit still voluntary (Owens 2015; Schneider 2015).

Recent developments show, however, that this is no straightforward and linear development. Disappointment regarding a high-stakes testing technology that has gone too far, as well as NCLB punitive measures that did not work as well as anticipated, has led to a backlash among subjects and discourses that were—from the outset—allied with the standards-based education discourse and the NCLB truth regime (Labaree 2014; Manna 2010; Owens 2015: 708; Ravitch 2010, 2013). Conservative anti-federalists, parents groups, liberals, and others have now gathered in opposition to a federal involvement that was perceived by many as being too intrusive. This eventually ended in a discursive battle where the NCLB truth regime was formally dislocated by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in a bipartisan compromise that promised a reverse towards more power to states and local educational authorities (House 2015; Strauss 2015; Weiss and McGuinn 2016).

It will be interesting to see whether ESSA, the Trump administration and Betsy DeVoss, its outspoken Secretary of Education, will inaugurate a new truth regime that will reverse the federal influence which has been growing since the 1960s, and

in particular since 2002, or whether it will just be a less important bump on the road towards building a national K-12, teacher education, and educational research system with a strong federal core.

## **19.12 Conclusion: Two Regions Moving in Similar Directions Along Different But Compatible Pathways**

In conclusion, we can say that there are commonalities as well as considerable differences to be seen in how school and education policy discourse has developed in these two influential regions of the world. Many of these differences can be accounted for by the different levels of internal integration of the United States and Europe (Diamantopoulou 2003). Nonetheless, the tendencies and responses to the challenges of globalization and knowledge economy discourse do run in very similar directions, and mutually influence each other to some extent, even though it is not always very notable in state or nation state debates, because federal or transnational intrusion is often unpopular and triggers local sensitivities (Henry et al. 2001; Meyer and Benavot 2013; Nóvoa and Lawn 2002; Owens 2015; Rhodes 2012; Rizvi and Lingard 2010).

In an illustrative article, David Labaree showed how some of these key differences have been worked out in education policy discourse, persuasively comparing how the truth regimes of NCLB in the United States and PISA in Europe have responded to different background contexts (Labaree 2014). In short, Labaree argued that NCLB represented the shrinking aims of education. It largely reduced K-12 education to producing college and career-ready students according to standards-based education discourse that only measured lower-level reasoning in terms of knowledge and skills within a narrow conception of knowledge, that is, literacy, numeracy, and science skills, and largely according to what could be measured by multiple-choice high-stakes testing that eschewed higher-level reasoning. Paradoxically, however, NCLB was successful in that such political technologies (with federal funding as bait) succeeded in keeping states accountable and making them adapt their state systems to be compatible with federal demands. This, as a result, has indeed made states comparable. PISA, on the other hand, has measured higher-level reasoning and what was claimed to be necessary competences in order to be employable in twenty-first century knowledge economies. According to Labaree, however, it measures what no one teaches. Out of necessity, the OECD has constructed a political technology for comparability that cannot coerce member states into alignment, rising from the fact that the OECD has no authority over very diverse national school systems among member states and even less so over their curricula. His conclusion is that both NCLB and PISA measure what no one teaches, yet have, by means of their thorough and widespread proliferation into school and education policy discourse, developed into truth regimes that now largely define how success in student performance is measured. This, by implication, reflects back

on federal and transnational success in defining and reducing the purpose of school and teacher education, as states and nations tend to prioritize the subjects measured and prepare for the tests that will determine whether a state or a nation ranks as successful or as falling behind.

Labaree's argument encapsulates in a number of aspects the differences and similarities that this chapter has made visible by mapping the genealogies of school and education policy discourse in the United States and in Europe. The genealogy of US K-12 and education policy is a specific evolvment with references to the constitution and traditions of American government as a continuous struggle between federal and state interests. This is a narrative of the increasing federalization of education policy: the federal level started out from having almost no power over education (cf. US constitution), to gradually assuming considerable power as civil rights and desegregation discourses gained strength, and culminating in those discourses merging with the standards-based education discourse, which eventually reached its climax in the NCLB truth regime. The genealogy of European school and education policy discourse is, on the other hand, a specific evolvment that refers to a number of different nation states with particular histories, identities, and animosities towards each other, including their attempts at increasing mutual integration by way of transnational bodies whose legitimacy and authority are opaque at best. It is a narrative about how collaboration among independent nation states gradually institutionalized transnational bodies such as the OECD, EU, and the Bologna Process. It started out as an economic collaboration between war-torn countries after World War 2, but gradually deepened to cover more portfolios, including school and education. It was always an uneasy process with continuous backlashes. The Open Method of Coordination signifies as a truth regime how different nation states have gradually learned to integrate even their school and education systems more and more.

Nonetheless, as demonstrated, the discursive processes and the struggle towards establishing truth regimes that are compatible with the demands of global knowledge economy discourse bear striking similarities in these two regions, emphasizing keywords such as "employability," "competences," and "lifelong learning" in Europe, and "college and career-ready students," "standards-based education" and "excellence" in the United States. Both genealogies are narratives about moving ahead in struggles between federal and state power, or between transnational and nation state power, towards shared truth regimes, by engaging in voluntary—yet compelling—policy processes, which, over time, sediment in the form of increasing collaboration and, by consequence, transform school, teacher education and educational research regimes.

However, these are ongoing processes that are sensitive to more general political developments. And how they will be affected by recent developments and political turbulence on both sides of the Atlantic since 2016 remains to be seen. Here it will suffice to mention the surprising and potentially groundbreaking events of Brexit, the election of the Trump administration, rising populism in Eastern Europe, Italy, and elsewhere, and the spillover effects of these on policy-making in the United States, in Europe and beyond.

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