

# **The OECD program TALIS and Framing, Measuring and Selling Quality Teacher™**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the pivotal role of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) in orchestrating the framing of the problem of 'teacher quality' for global competitiveness, and the ongoing political work of the OECD and allied institutions in promoting this brand of Quality Teacher™ through its Teaching and Learning International Assessment (TALIS). We explore the wider politics at work and the implications of TALIS as a political construct, process, and global governing tool and show a dual dynamic at work involving the formation of institutions and processes at a global scale, to frame, measure and sell a particular brand of teacher; one who is flexible, privileges constructivism as a pedagogical approach, and who uses 'evidence' to make teaching and learning decisions. Taken together, the OECD's activities in framing, measuring and selling the Quality Teacher™ - whilst legitimated as creating the new professional teacher – paradoxically challenges teacher authority, relocates the governing of teachers to the global scale, and sells a slimmed down version of possibilities regarding teacher quality.

## **The OECD program TALIS and Framing, Measuring and Selling Quality**

### **Teacher™**

The teaching profession has been the subject of international political debates for decades, though until more recently, this was largely around the conditions of work in sub/national settings and in relation to those agencies that might ensure teacher professionalism (ILO & UNESCO, 1966; Papadopoulos, 1994). Over the past ten years, however, this has changed and teachers have been placed under the 'quality' spotlight over the nature of their knowledge-base, their pedagogical practices, and whether or not they add value to their students' learning (Caena, 2014; Connell, 2009; International Taskforce on Teachers for Education For All, 2014; MacBeath, 2012; Robertson, 2012; World Bank, 2012). These developments amount to a reframing of teachers' work for global competitiveness, driven by a dual denationalizing dynamic in education governance (Robertson & Sorensen, forthcoming; see also Sassen, 2003).

The argument put by international agencies like the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), a key institution engaged in promoting economic growth amongst the developed economies, is that teachers can, and should, play a role in developing the requisite 'human capital' (read students) for the global knowledge economy but that the current organisation of their work mitigates against this. They argue that we need to better understand what counts as a 'quality teacher', what country profiles look like regarding teacher quality, and what strategies might be deployed to move the country in the right direction (Schleicher, 2015).

The OECD have developed and implemented a Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) as a key response to this policy issue. The TALIS program focuses on teachers' work and school leadership and represents

some of the most ambitious efforts so far to generate knowledge about teachers. TALIS follows a five year cycle and has been conducted twice, with 24 and 34 countries or subnational political entities taking part in 2008 and 2013, respectively.

Drawing on empirical research (document analysis and qualitative interviews with personnel from OECD, the European Commission's Directorate General for Education and Culture, and Education International, the global teachers' union based in Brussels, Belgium), we explore the wider politics at work and the implications of the TALIS program as a political construct, process, and global governing tool. In this respect, we focus on the support given to TALIS by two powerful global agencies; the European Commission, on the one hand, and Education International, on the other.

We show a dual dynamic at work involving the formation of institutions and processes at a global scale, to frame, measure and sell a particular brand of teacher; one who is flexible, privileges constructivism as a pedagogical approach, and who uses 'evidence' to make teaching and learning decisions. Our use of the trademark symbol in Quality Teacher™ hence indicates that we are particularly interested in the ongoing political work of the OECD in branding and 'selling' this specific notion of teacher quality. We conclude by pointing to a set of paradoxes that are emerging around the global governing of Quality Teacher™; despite insisting on the need for a new professional – the OECD recasts understandings of teacher professionalism in its own terms, it relocates the determinants of governing to the global scale, and sells a slimmed down version of possibilities regarding teacher quality.

## **The TALIS Program and Its Framings**

TALIS can be viewed as part of the OECD's family of indicator-based data-sets which also includes for example the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). In the wake of launching the PISA program, the OECD in 2002 began to draw attention to what they claimed were concerns over the effectiveness of teachers, arguing that there was a need to review trends across OECD member and associate countries so as to identify policy options for attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers (OECD 2005). One goal to be pursued by the OECD from this was the development of indicators on teachers and teaching that might parallel that of students. In combination the hope was that these complex sets of global indicators could drive educational policy-making globally.

The TALIS program involves two questionnaires, to be filled in by teachers and principals. The primary sample group are those working in ISCED level 2 schools, yet participating countries or regions have also been given the 'international options' to include ISCED levels 1 and 3.<sup>i</sup> 24 countries or regions took part in the first round of TALIS, 34 in the second round. The European Union is well-represented, with 16 and 19 member states or regions taking part in the two rounds, respectively. Participants in TALIS 2013 from outside the European Union include, for example, Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates), Alberta (Canada), Brazil, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, and USA. Like PISA, TALIS has succeeded in attracting non-OECD members as participants. Ten non-OECD members thus took part in TALIS 2013.

The main objective of TALIS is stated as follows:

The overall objective of TALIS is to provide robust international indicators and policy-relevant analysis on teachers and teaching in a timely and cost-effective manner. These indicators help countries review and develop policies in their efforts to promote conditions for high-quality teaching and learning. Cross-country

analyses provide the opportunity to compare countries facing similar challenges to learn about different policy approaches and their impact on the learning environment in schools (OECD, 2014a, p. 27; nearly identical with OECD, 2009, p. 19).

Table 1 provides a schematic overview of the scope and main policy themes for the first two rounds of TALIS. The table indicates four general features of TALIS: (a) The survey has become more expansive in its focus on teachers, and relatively less so for school principals, indicated by the number of indices and items; (b) TALIS aspires to be wide-ranging in its coverage of key issues in relation to teachers' labor; (c) There is a large degree of continuity in the coverage of policy themes; and (d) The European Union has had a strong voice in the selection of these themes.

Yet, these general features would appear to raise as many questions as they answer with regard to the institutional arrangements for TALIS, the processes through which the survey has been designed, and the phrasing of questions. In the remaining part of this section, we put the argument forward that OECD in framing, measuring and selling the Quality Teacher™ through the TALIS program relies on a specific assumption concerning the nature of evidence by which the 'subjective' survey responses of teachers are framed as subordinate to the 'objective' data on student performance as assessed by PISA. Moreover, we show that the indices and items in the TALIS questionnaires suggest that TALIS involves a bias towards constructivist pedagogy and flexibilization of teachers' work. Thus, despite the aspirations attached to the program, TALIS is not as wide-ranging as the policy themes and number of indices and items might suggest.

### **The framing of evidence**

OECD work on the teaching profession complies with the organization's endorsement of evidence-based policy and the associated

codification and transmission of knowledge, centred on the identification of 'best practices' which it in turn measures and uses as the basis of its brokerage of knowledge (see OECD 1996; 2007). *Teachers Matter* (OECD, 2005, p. 14) thus calls for realizing the ideal of "transforming teaching into a knowledge-rich profession"; the TALIS 2008 report (OECD, 2009, p. 3) opens with the assertion that; "education is still far from being a knowledge industry in the sense that its own practices are not yet being transformed by knowledge about the efficacy of those practices"; and the main TALIS 2013 report (OECD, 2014a) refers constantly to "evidence".

Yet, the very codifications of knowledge or 'evidence' constructed in the TALIS measuring tools are presented as ambiguous due to their subjective nature:

TALIS results are based on self-reports from teachers and school leaders and therefore represent their opinions, perceptions, beliefs and accounts of their activities. This is powerful information because it provides insight into how teachers perceive the learning environments in which they work, what motivates teachers and how policies that are put in place are carried out in practice. But, as with any self-reported data, this information is subjective and therefore differs from objectively collected data. (OECD, 2014a, p. 29)

In understanding the OECD's embrace of evidence-based policy, we note the continuous efforts to forge links between TALIS and PISA (OECD, 2012). In this light, TALIS appears to serve the higher purpose of student performance, as assessed by PISA, with the more subjective data of teachers' self-reports becoming subordinated to the objective data of student performance. It is thus symptomatic that the very first paragraphs in the TALIS 2013 main report refer to PISA rather than TALIS itself (OECD, 2014a, p. 3).

### **The preference for constructivist pedagogy**

TALIS's conclusions on teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning and their reported classroom practices stand out as remarkably vague (OECD, 2009, chapter 4; OECD, 2014a, chapter 6; Rinne & Ozga, 2013). This might be due to the unhelpful juxtaposition of 'constructivist' beliefs ("characterised by a view of the teacher as the facilitator of learning with more autonomy given to students") and 'direct transmission' views (seeing "the teacher as the instructor, providing information and demonstrating solutions") (OECD, 2009, p.269; OECD, 2014a, p. 217).

Yet, OECD's pedagogical project is clearly anchored by constructivism; a central tenet of which is that reality does not exist independent of the subjects who seek it. In other words, there is no other independent, pre-existing world (Olssen, 1996). This bias towards constructivist pedagogy is epitomised by the reduction of indices in TALIS 2013 to merely include an index on constructivist beliefs to capture teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning (OECD 2014a, p.217; compare OECD 2009, p.269).

### **Flexible employment**

The OECD claims that TALIS gives 'voice' to teachers. However, TALIS might contribute to teachers losing their collective voice over time. We should note that the employment status of teachers continues to vary across the globe. In Europe, for instance, teachers can be distinguished either as civil servants, career civil servants, or employees with contractual status, depending on national or sub-national arrangements (European Commission & EACEA/Eurydice, 2013, p. 50). Overall, OECD claims that the TALIS program in its overall design acknowledges institutional differences and helps to identify cross-culturally valid and comparable information about the working conditions of teachers and the learning environment in schools (OECD, 2014a, p. 26).



We are thus faced with a contradiction: the OECD claims that TALIS acknowledges that education systems are bound to reflect societal and cultural contexts, yet policy recommendations reflect that differences in institutional arrangements are to be overruled in the maximisation of 'student performance', as conceived and reframed by OECD. In its discussion on collective bargaining, the *Teachers Matter* report represents the contradiction:

...contrasting findings reinforce the basic point that collective bargaining agreements, like any other mechanism for determining school resource levels and their uses, ultimately need to be assessed in terms of their impact on student outcomes. (OECD, 2005, p. 146)

However, despite the mixed research evidence the same report called for "using more flexible terms of employment" (OECD, 2005, p.162) as a policy priority and non-tenure in teachers' employment status.

*Teachers Matter* provided the groundwork for the TALIS program, and teacher evaluation, feedback and salary differentiation remain prominent issues in the survey. Against this background, it appears like omission by design that the main OECD reports from TALIS 2008 and TALIS 2013 do not address what various national or subnational differences in employment status might mean for the institutional arrangements concerning these issues.

TALIS is a major research exercise. Yet, the points made above shows that the program under the veneer of alleged objectivity is also a political construction, reflecting the negotiation of policy preferences by the OECD and the range of organizations and authorities involved in the programme.

## **The TALIS Ensemble: the Orchestrators and Legitimizers of Quality Teacher™**

This section focuses on the orchestrators and legitimizers of Quality Teacher™ - the OECD, the European Commission, the global teacher union Educational International, and private sector policy actors in the TALIS program. These organizations have been selected because highlighting their involvement in the survey helps to explain the framing, measuring and selling of the Quality Teacher™ and also provides the opportunity to adopt a more detached yet critical perspective on the strategies of these organizations.

However, first we should outline the basic institutional arrangements of the TALIS program. We have conceived of the range of organisations and bodies involved in the conception, design, and implementation of the TALIS program as the 'TALIS ensemble' (see Robertson & Dale, 2015, for theoretical considerations on 'education ensembles'). It would go beyond the limits of this chapter to explore in detail the internal relations and emergent properties of the TALIS ensemble as a social formation, but the following groups are some of its main constituents:

- The OECD TALIS Secretariat has the overall responsibility for managing the program.
- In principle, TALIS is financed through government authorities, typically the education ministries, of participating political entities. However, the European Commission is actually the main single funder since it has subsidized participating EU Member States with 75 percent of their fees.
- Within the OECD, there are five representative bodies engaging with TALIS. These bodies are composed of senior officials or experts appointed by national governments of OECD member countries or non-members.
- The international TALIS Consortium is responsible for coordination and management of implementation at the international level. The appointed

contractor for TALIS 2013 was the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), with Statistics Canada as a subcontractor of the IEA.

- Finally, National Project Managers and National Data Managers in National TALIS Centres implemented TALIS in participating political entities (OECD 2014a, p.29; OECD, 2015).

### **OECD and the European Commission: Main Framers of Quality Teacher™**

In taking the TALIS program forward, the roles of the OECD and the European Commission's (EC) Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) cannot be overestimated. Personnel from the OECD as well as DG EAC interviewed for this study were keen to emphasise that their organizations are first of all - bottom-up - intergovernmental fora for cooperation. Yet, it is clear that the two organizations themselves are powerful strategic policy actors capable of shaping policy agendas, and that this is reflected in the political mandates given to them by their member states. Accordingly, they are at least to some extent "expected to lead", in the words of an OECD senior analyst we interviewed, in the negotiations in which decisions are in principle taken by consensus.

However close their partnership in TALIS and collaboration on education policy in general (European Commission, 2012), OECD and DG EAC have had distinctive roles in the program and followed different strategies. Thus, with its reputation as a premier 'think-tank' for the richest countries around the globe and the world's premier supplier of educational statistics (Henry, Rizvi, Lingard, & Taylor 2001; Lawn & Grek, 2012; Mahon & McBride,

2008; Meyer & Benavot, 2013; Woodward, 2009), the OECD is the one single master framer of the survey. Meanwhile, the European Commission and DG EAC might be understood as the most important ally of the OECD, yet with its distinct policy preferences.

The OECD is the master framer of Quality Teacher™ in the TALIS ensemble since the survey was originally conceived within the OECD and the organization hosts the main activities related to its design and development. Within the OECD, the TALIS Board of Participating Countries (the TALIS Board) stands out as the most important body for multilateral decision-making on TALIS. Major issues were for the first two rounds of TALIS to be negotiated also in the OECD Education Policy Committee, and in some cases the OECD Council. But it is in the TALIS Board that decisions are being made concerning policy objectives for the survey, and where the standards for data collection and reporting are established. The TALIS Board is thus at the very core of the TALIS ensemble.

The TALIS Board was formally created on January 1st 2007 and will be abolished on December 31<sup>st</sup> 2015 (OECD, 2015). Its general features in terms of responsibilities and constituents were stable for the 2008 and 2013 rounds of TALIS. From the next round, TALIS 2018, the program is to be ‘upgraded’ in the OECD institutional hierarchy by becoming a so-called Part II program – thereby enjoying a similar status as PISA. Amongst other things, this new status is likely to entail more stable long-term commitment to participation and funding from countries for the overall TALIS program, and that the TALIS Board will enjoy further independence in its decision-making.

The TALIS Board consists of government representatives from each participating political entity and from a number of organizations. The European Commission (EC) is represented by policy officers from Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC), and UNESCO has the status as a

permanent observer. Moreover, the Business and Industry Advisory Committee (BIAC) and the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD (TUAC, the OECD formal mechanism for social dialogue with trade unions) have participated in the negotiations (OECD, 2009, pp. 303-305; OECD, 2015; OECD 2014, pp. 434-436; interviews with OECD analyst, DG EAC policy officers, and EI representatives).

As the coordinating organization of TALIS, OECD oversees the work in the TALIS Board and is the main supplier of meeting materials. Moreover, the OECD is obviously interested in further raising its profile by getting countries, both OECD members and non-members, on board. TALIS is hence complemented by other OECD activities. PISA has thus in particular cast its shadow on TALIS, with the OECD continuously exploring potential 'synergies' between the two programs and encouraged mostly reluctant participant countries to sign up for a so-called TALIS-PISA link in TALIS 2013 (interviews with OECD analyst and EI senior official; OECD, 2012). The link entails that TALIS sample populations in participant countries are aligned with those of PISA. Eight countries incorporated the TALIS-PISA link: Australia, Finland, Latvia, Mexico, Portugal, Romania, Singapore and Spain (OECD, 2014a, p.27).

TALIS is also framed by other OECD activities on teachers. Most notable of these are the annual *International Summits on the Teaching Profession*. The first of these summits was convened in New York in 2011 by the United States Department of Education, the OECD, and EI.<sup>ii</sup> The initiative for the summit were taken in the wake of TALIS 2008, and the OECD's Deputy Director of Education, Andreas Schleicher, was engaged to write the background report for the Summit (OECD, 2011) as well as play the self-styled role of *framer* of the agenda.

This leads us to one of the most intriguing aspects of the TALIS programme that concerns the ambiguous position that the programme puts

the teaching profession in. Teachers are thus simultaneously recognized as a key workforce and criticized for not living up to their responsibilities. On the one hand, the OECD has - since the *Teachers Matter* report - emphasised the importance of involving the teaching profession in policy (OECD, 2005, pp. 15, 214), and argues it seeks to give “teachers and school leaders around the world a voice to speak about their experiences” (OECD, 2014a, p. 3). This clearly marks a departure from neoliberal derision discourses (Robertson, 2013, p. 78). Yet on the other, teachers’ exclusion from debates continues, with the OECD confident it has the answers; most recently the OECD Secretary-General, Angel Gurría, asserted that “TALIS 2013 results show that we need to put teachers on a path to success immediately” (OECD, 2014a, p. 3).

Since the OECD’s foundation in 1961, the OECD has tried to inform and influence policy by targeting decision-makers, government officials, and civil society organisations (Mundy, 2007). It is therefore remarkable that the OECD in the wake of TALIS 2013 sought to target teachers and school leaders directly by publishing *A Teacher’s Guide* (OECD 2014b). OECD publications directly addressing teachers are very rare, and then only in times of a perceived threat to security, for instance during the Cold War and space race climate of the mid-1960s, which saw the publication of an OECD *Teacher’s Guide to Physics* (OECD, 1965; see also Tröhler 2013).

Branded as “a global “selfie” by teachers” (OECD, 2014b, p.7), the 28 pages-guide presents recommendations as to how TALIS data can be used by teachers and school leaders to have greater impact in classrooms. According to an OECD analyst we interviewed, the guide is part of a broader OECD strategy to reach out to teachers and school leaders directly, acknowledging that the main TALIS reports are likely not to be read by either teachers or school leaders. Raising awareness about TALIS and OECD activities more

generally is meant to achieve 'buy-in' from school professionals, and increase the support from them in future rounds of TALIS.

While currently only available in three languages, (English, French and Spanish), the guide shows that the OECD, as a global actor, is also reaching deep into local micro-spaces and in so doing by-passes nationally-located governments and teacher unions. This trend is further indicated by the recent launch of *OECD Test for Schools*, based on PISA and targeting schools "interested in international benchmarking" to "provide school-level results for benchmarking and school-improvement purposes" (OECD, 2014c).

Concerning the EC and DG EAC, TALIS is one of the first projects where they have worked closely together with the OECD in the field of education. The EC, and more specifically DG EAC, played a pivotal role in the initial stages of TALIS, particularly in getting the program off the ground. This should be understood within the context of the EU Lisbon Strategy 2000-2010 in which education and training was given a new prominent role for "making Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world" (Council of the European Union, 2000). Building on discussions in working groups of national experts set up by DG EAC, European Council Conclusions agreed by member states' ministers of education in 2005 and 2007 (Council of the European Union, 2005, 2007) gave the European Commission and DG EAC mandates to pursue cooperation with OECD on TALIS, and to encourage Member States to take part to help cover data needs in the monitoring of progress towards the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy. The 2007 Council Conclusions had also provided DG EAC with the mandate to subsidize member states for their participation in TALIS.

The EC and DG EAC, in accordance with the mandate given by the conclusions of the European Council of Ministers, thus entered the TALIS program with distinct policy priorities. During the first two rounds of TALIS,

the overriding priority was teachers' professional development, and DG EAC pursued this rather successfully since professional development has been covered in both rounds of TALIS, and EU member states have made up the bulk of participants in the TALIS program, undoubtedly encouraged by DG EACs offer to subsidize them with 75% of the TALIS participation fees. The distinctive policy preferences of the EC and DG EAC are also reflected in the fact that they prepared or commissioned their own reports with a European focus on TALIS (Scheerens, 2010; Directorate General for Education and Culture, 2014).

A senior official we interviewed in DG EAC pointed out that before each meeting in the TALIS Board, DG EAC would host coordination meetings for the EU member countries taking part in TALIS. Given that it only enjoyed observer status in the TALIS Board, it was imperative for DG EAC that the participating EU member states would carry the EC agenda forward at the TALIS Board meetings, and it had been made clear to member states that their participation in it would only be subsidized by the EC if they managed to get teachers' professional development included in the survey. Yet, this senior official also noted that OECD embraced the EC interest in TALIS and sought to accommodate TALIS as much as possible to the objectives of the EC. This close working partnership was also reflected in the fact that the initial results from TALIS 2008 were launched in the EC Berlaymont building in Brussels in July 2009; the OECD is headquartered in Paris.

While the international organizations OECD and EC in their own ways have carried the TALIS program forward, the institutional arrangements of TALIS are also designed to enable state authorities to extend their horizon of influence well beyond their own jurisdiction. Decision-making in the TALIS Board thus formally happens on the basis of votes from participating countries. Moreover, it is those participating countries that have signed up



for a TALIS round at an early stage who are invited to select policy themes and indicators through a priority-rating exercise. For TALIS 2013, there were 20 potential themes and 94 indicators. The priority-rating exercises are meant to provide a focused survey that is reflective of policy priorities in participating political entities (OECD, 2013, pp. 9-13).

Finally, while the OECD as an organization has a strong interest in tightening the links between TALIS and PISA, participating countries have since the launch of TALIS tended to insist on treating them as separate programs with distinctive identities on political as well as methodological grounds (interviews with OECD analyst and DG EAC senior official). In this light, we might see it as indicative of the capacity of the OECD to achieve 'buy-in' from governments for its more experimental projects that, despite the general scepticism, eight countries signed up for the TALIS-PISA link in TALIS 2013.

### **Education International: Legitimizing Quality Teacher™**

As the primary organisation working for teachers' interests in TALIS, Education International (EI) has been provided a broad mandate to negotiate on behalf of its affiliate member organisations in the TALIS Board. EI has taken part in TALIS Board meetings since they were initiated in 2006 and was granted permanent observer status in 2009. Attaining this status, EI has been consulted on draft chapters and enjoyed enhanced opportunities for submitting comments and ideas.

It should be noted that EI affiliates finance and decide policy priorities for EI and TUAC activities (see also Carter, Stevenson, & Passy, 2010). The TUAC representatives participating at TALIS Board meetings reported to a sub-group of EI affiliate member organisations that was set up by EI through

the TUAC Education, Training and Employment Policy Working Group. Accordingly, EI affiliates were encouraged to mobilise support for TALIS amongst their members (Education International, 2012).

Staff from EI, OECD and DG EAC all characterized their cooperation in TALIS as constructive and well-functioning. However, EI engagement in OECD was initially driven by disagreements. According to a senior official in EI, the report *Teachers Matter* (OECD 2005) prompted EI to react due to some of the OECD's policy recommendations. In particular, the issue of performance-based pay for teachers stood out as a 'red line' not to be crossed for EI and its affiliates. EI thus sought to become engaged in the TALIS Board to try to influence the construction of knowledge generated in the program, and more generally to contest the evidence presented by increasingly powerful actors such as OECD, the EC, Pearson Education and McKinsey & Company (Education International, 2012; see also Education International, 2007).

We might say that EI sees TALIS as an essentially political construction through which the prioritisation of certain policy themes, indicators, and phrasing of questions, is bound to contain a bias towards particular notions of education, society and the role and working conditions of teachers. Accordingly, a focal point for EI in the TALIS Board so far has been the phrasing of TALIS questionnaire items.

However, in assessing the impact of EI's engagement on the direction of TALIS, it is imperative to point out that OECD and EI staff emphasize that the influence of teacher unions has remained limited. The formal mandate to the OECD comes from member governments, and the role for EI as a permanent observer in the TALIS Board can therefore not be compared to that of governments, formally and informally. It is thus illustrative that EI do not take part in the TALIS priority-ranking exercise of policy themes and

indicators. Moreover, TUAC representatives are excluded from taking part in some of the discussions in the TALIS Board.

In other words, the global teacher union EI has very limited opportunities in framing and shaping the direction of TALIS; rather it has either acted to, or been used by the OECD, legitimate and this 'sell' the OECD's Quality Teacher<sup>TM</sup> product. At the same time, with its engagement EI approves the survey as a relevant measuring instrument and encourages its affiliate member organizations to support it. In short, EI offers crucial assistance in selling the program and promoting a brand of Quality Teacher<sup>TM</sup> not of its own making. The TALIS program depends on the response rates of teachers and it remains an open question whether these rates could be met if EI and teacher unions advised their members not to take part in the survey.

This raises a question as to the mechanisms through which the teaching profession is represented in TALIS, and the reframing of the vertical relationship between EI and its member affiliates. By winding in, and advancing an evolving engagement of EI in the two rounds of TALIS through TUAC (the OECD formal mechanism for social dialogue with trade unions), the OECD is also reorienting EI toward the agendas that are being advanced in this new global policy space, and thus arguably further away from those of the EI member affiliates.

Indeed, in interviews EI staff point out that they are aware of the risk of becoming entangled in the OECD's distinctive version of evidence-based policy and the associated risk of de-politicization of teachers' work. In the words of an EI senior official, the organisation sees it as a general danger that "evidence hijacks social dialogue" and undermines the development of institutional arrangement for collective bargaining.

We see that the TALIS ensemble is constituted by complex dynamics proceeding from the assumption that common issues and hence also

solutions can be identified with regard to teachers' work at the global scale. This also applies to professional autonomy, and the way teachers are able to put their ideas forward and exercise control over their work. The global teacher union EI has been given a mandate by its affiliates to engage in TALIS, yet the organization is vulnerable to the critique also directed towards the OECD and EU, namely that of democratic deficits in terms of representing the diverse interests of their members. EI is attempting to make its voice heard on the global scale, but the vertical structure that should enable EI to consult member affiliates as part of the ongoing work of TALIS appears just as ambiguous and opaque as those between for instance the EC and EU member countries.

### **Enterprises and Foundations: Selling the OECD's Quality Teacher™**

Private sector enterprises and foundations do not appear to have been very much involved in the framing of TALIS. The formal mechanism for consultation with private sector interests in the OECD, the Business and Industry Advisory Committee (BIAC), has reportedly kept a low profile at TALIS Board meetings, according to personnel from OECD, DG EAC, and EI.

Some of the National TALIS Centres implementing the survey have included private companies, and at least in the case of England in TALIS 2013, the National Project Manager, employed by a private edu-tech firm, used the possibility (offered in all participating political entities) to propose extra questions for the English survey, and these were approved by the national Steering Group. However, in terms of the overall framing and measurement of TALIS and Quality Teacher™, such influence would appear to be marginal.

More importantly, private sector organizations are very active in profiling and selling TALIS by using data, interpreting and discussing results. This is immediately visible in the thoroughly coordinated series of events surrounding the launch of TALIS results. Like in the case of their other products, OECD clearly aspires to turn these launches into ‘world events’ (Sobe, 2013; Stichweh, 2013).

Thus, the TALIS 2013 results was first officially presented in Tokyo on 25 June 2014 at an OECD Informal Meeting of Ministers of Education (the DG EAC Director General also took part). On the same date, the global live webinar “Education Fast Forward 10: Better Teaching for Better Learning” hosted by edu-tech firm Promethean Planet, connected studios in Atlanta, Boston, London, Paris, Tokyo and elsewhere to form a debate between what was labeled ‘global education experts’, remarkably dominated by consultancies and foundations based in North America or England; such as Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, TSL Education (now TES Global), Innovation Unit, and Promethean. OECD and UNESCO were also represented, along with renowned global academics, such as Professor Michael Fullan and Professor Pasi Sahlberg. In terms of national governments, only the US Department of Education was represented. Finally, John Bangs, TUAC Chair, took part as the voice of teacher unions (Education Fast Forward, 2014).

In this sense, private consultancies and corporate philanthropists mainly appear to operate in the periphery of the TALIS ensemble. Within the context of the TALIS program, their business entrepreneurship, innovation and profitmaking are based on dissemination and interpretation (hence potentially re-framing TALIS) of data generated under the auspices of the OECD.

We should note that private sector actors have very different profiles in terms of policy preferences, strategies, capacities and horizons of action

(Ball, 2012; Robertson & Verger, 2012). Yet, they share the feature that their activities, whether for-profit business or venture philanthropy, produce policy recommendations on the basis of TALIS data which in turn may well feed into new products and services. Therefore, private sector policy actors engage in a symbiotic relationship with OECD, regardless the orientation of their recommendations, since they simultaneously rely on publicly-paid research programs, such as TALIS, and help to legitimate these programs by raising their overall profile. In other words, they help to sell the brand of Quality Teacher™ implied in TALIS.

The symbiotic relationship is likely to be reinforced by the OECD's initiative for annual summits of the global education industry (OECD, 2014d). It is remarkable that these are meant to complement the annual International Summits on the Teaching Profession.

### **Concluding Remarks: Quality Teacher™**

We began this chapter by pointing to the fact that teachers around the globe have increasingly been placed under the spotlight regarding the nature of their work, and particularly the form and content of their pedagogical practice. Teachers' matter, it is argued, and few would disagree with this. But we may well ask about what really is on the agendas of the OECD, the European Commission and other policy actors engaged in what we called the TALIS ensemble.

We looked more closely at the brand of quality teacher that is at the heart of the OECD's TALIS project and argued that the Quality Teacher™ pursued through the programme is meant to endorse constructivist pedagogy and work under a flexible employment regime. We showed that the indices and items addressing pedagogy and employment status in the first two

rounds of TALIS are so simplistic that survey responses cannot question or contradict these policy preferences, let alone expose them. Moreover, TALIS is framed by PISA, the most successful enterprise in comparative educational research ever, and TALIS survey responses are hence subordinated the PISA assessment of student performance as conceived and branded by OECD.

We unpacked the TALIS ensemble and pointed out that the OECD and the European Commission have framed, measured and sold Quality Teacher™ with their distinctive objectives; that the global teacher union EI have legitimated the TALIS framing of teachers' work and the policies and politics surrounding it on the global level; and that private enterprises and foundations are very active in trying to make business on the basis of TALIS data.

As our analysis makes evident, these developments reflect a major transformation under way aimed at reframing and rescaling where and how decisions are made around teachers' pedagogy and the nature of the profession more generally. TALIS has been launched as a major data gathering effort aimed at reforming the teaching profession around the world. As a technology of governing teachers globally, it promises participating countries a wealth of data for comparative research aimed at helping countries create more effective teachers and more competitive knowledge-based economies.

But we detect a profound contradiction in this tight framing of the quality teacher – in that there is little space for discretion, innovation or risk – all elements in workplace learning that are likely to lead to higher levels of social learning, job satisfaction, productivity and system innovation (Lundvall & Lorenz, 2015; Sahlberg, 2011). Quality Teacher™ as currently framed, measured and sold through TALIS places limits on the very capacities of teachers it purports to be concerned with. Therefore, this particular brand of

teacher professionalism is likely to undermine the very thing it hopes to achieve – more innovative, creative teachers and learners for the knowledge economy.



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Table 1.

The scope and policy themes of TALIS

TALIS 2008	TALIS 2013
<p>Scope:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 indices and 43 items in the teacher questionnaire</li> <li>• 13 indices and 47 items in the principal questionnaire</li> </ul>	<p>Scope:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 14 indices and 60 items in the teacher questionnaire</li> <li>• 11 indices and 39 items in the principal questionnaire</li> </ul>
<p>Three main themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School leadership</li> <li>• Appraisal of and feedback to teachers</li> <li>• Teaching practices, beliefs and attitudes</li> </ul> <p>+ Professional development of teachers as “an important theme” due to synergies with three main themes and European Union interest</p> <p>+ Aspects of other themes: School climate, division of working time, and job satisfaction</p>	<p>Five main themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School leadership, including new indicators on distributed/team leadership</li> <li>• Appraisal of and feedback to teachers</li> <li>• Teachers’ pedagogical beliefs, attitudes and teaching practices, including new indicators on the profile of student assessment practices</li> <li>• Teacher training, including professional development and new indicators on initial teacher education</li> <li>• Teachers’ reported feelings of self-efficacy, their job satisfaction and the climate in</li> </ul>



	the schools and classrooms in which they work
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*Sources:* OECD, 2009, pp. 21, 268-275; OECD, 2014a, pp. 28, 214-221

## Footnotes

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<sup>i</sup> International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) was launched by UNESCO in 1976 to facilitate comparisons of education statistics and indicators across countries on the basis of uniform and internationally agreed definitions. ISCED has since been revised twice.

<sup>ii</sup> Subsequent summits have since taken place in New York (2012), Amsterdam, Netherlands (2013), Wellington, New Zealand (2014) and Banff, Canada (2015).