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**Neoliberalization, media, and union
resistance:**

**Identity Struggles in New Zealand
Education 1984-2014**

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Abstract

On 13 April 2013, New Zealand’s primary teachers union the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) organized protests across the country, attended by approximately 10,000 members and sympathisers. Protesters held aloft two-sided placards – on one side read “Stand Up For Kids, Save Our Schools” and on the other a grotesque cartoon figure accompanied “Fight the GERM”. *The GERM* stood for the Global Education Reform Movement and was intended to represent the policy programme of the Government as a threat to New Zealand’s “world class” public education system. Following the launch of their flagship National Standards policy in October 2009, the governing National Party had become involved in a series of struggles with teachers, schools and their unions, contributing to the splitting of the discursive landscape into two antagonistically opposed sides. This situation was then intensified by the introduction of two more controversial policies without sector-consultation: charter schools and an increase to class size ratios.

This thesis aims to investigate the underlying discursive ground structuring the three policies. By doing so, it aims to uncover the logics behind them, addressing such questions as why would the National Party, already scarred by previous battles with a powerful and relatively unified education sector, seek to implement policies on the premise that schools were failing the nation and that many teachers were not doing their jobs properly? And, conversely, why would the NZEI seek to represent the Government’s policy agenda through this combative frame?

I demonstrate that the three policies, while divergent from each other, are distinctly *neoliberal*; each emphasizing diverse, overlapping facets of

education within neoliberal governance, by setting them within a context of two previous decades of the *neoliberalization* of education in Aotearoa New Zealand. By employing the discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau, the Government's and the union's mediated framings of the policies are understood as a series of interlinked but contingent discursive struggles to fix meaning. Both sides employ a populist articulatory logic, which constructs different symbolic enemies, in order to attempt to make their version of events *hegemonic*.

Through an analysis of diverse texts such as policy documents, speeches, newspaper editorials, blogs and interviews with activists, I argue that definitions of three subject-positions, together with the relations between them, were integral to this struggle: *the teacher*, *the parent* and *the student*. While neoliberal discourse progressively colonized these identities with individualistic, self-centred traits that emphasised entrepreneurial capacities, articulations of a holistic educational ethos contested these meanings, instead emphasising an ethics of care, humanism, democracy, justice, fairness and collectivity. In other words, the level of the subject provided the limits to neoliberal discourse, providing a place of continuous disconnect.

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List of acronyms

ACT	Association of Consumers and Taxpayers (political party)
BCTF	British Columbia Teachers' Federation
BTAC	Boards Taking Action Coalition
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CTU	Chicago Teachers Union
EPRG	Education Policy Response Group
ERO	Education Review Office
GERM	Global Education Reform Movement
ICT	Information Communications Technology
IDA	Ideology and Discourse Analysis
KIPP	Knowledge is Power Program
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCEA	National Certificate of Educational Achievement
NPM	New public management
NUT	National Union of Teachers
NZCER	National Council of Educational Research
NZEI	New Zealand Educational Institute
NZME	New Zealand Media and Entertainment

NZPF	New Zealand Principals Federation
NZSTA	New Zealand School Trustees Association
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OIA	Official Information Act
OTJ	Overall Teacher Judgment
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PPTA	Post Primary Teachers' Association
QPEC	Quality Public Education Coalition
RTLB	Resource Teacher of Learning and Behaviour
SAT	Scholastic Assessment Test
SSC	State Services Commission
SPANZ	Secondary Principals' Association of NZ
SUFK	Stand Up For Kids
VAM	Value-Added Modelling

Māori terms

Aotearoa	Land of the long white cloud (New Zealand)
Kaupapa	Strategy, policy or cause
Pākehā	White settler
Te reo	The (Māori) language
Whānau	Extended family, family group

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