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Neoliberalization, media, and union resistance:
Identity Struggles in New Zealand Education 1984-2014

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree in Doctor of Philosophy

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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.
Acknowledgments

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**List of acronyms**

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