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

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

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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.

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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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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

National Standards will demand a significant step-up in performance from some of New Zealand's teachers and schools. An Education Review Office report last year found that two thirds of school leaders aren't properly monitoring how well young people are achieving. Around 30% of teachers aren't doing a good job of teaching reading and writing.

[...] why shouldn't every single child that goes to school in New Zealand [...] have a good education that delivers them out into the workforce ready for a career, why shouldn't they? I thought this was what this country was all about. (Anne Tolley, Minister of Education, February, 2010)

The Government is trying to create a crisis in education and impose a business model on our world class schools. This model, known as the GERM (Global Education Reform Movement) has infected other countries by introducing standardisation, competition and test-based accountability.

[...] But we have the antidote!

It's all of us fighting to protect a quality public education system which is fair and equitable, based on collaboration and trust and where every child's learning needs are met. (New Zealand Educational Institute, 2013)

## **Background**

As is suggested by the above two quotations, the first from New Zealand's former Minister of Education and the second from its largest teachers union, this study focuses on a period of heightened antagonisms around school education in Aotearoa New Zealand. In November 2008, in the midst of an ongoing global financial crisis, the centre-right National Party were elected to power, with education, together with the economy, as a cornerstone of their manifesto. The National Standards policy was at the centre of their "Big Idea" for the school sector (Thrupp & Easter, 2012), and their rhetoric around education was framed by a "politics of blame" (Thrupp, 2010). The continuing underperformance of a particularly disadvantaged group, *the one-in-five* children who were constructed as increasingly left behind in terms of achievement, was positioned as the "responsibility of schools and teachers" (p. 122). Together with the repercussions of this failure for the nation's economic competitiveness, schools and teachers were accused of a general disconnect with the demands of the average parent, who was constructed as eager to know the comparative position of their child's achievement status in "plain language" (O'Neill, 2014). In order to rectify this deficit, the policy

sought to implement, for the first time in New Zealand, uniform standards in reading, writing and maths for years 1-8 (primary and intermediate).

Wary of previous battles with the education sector during the 1990s (Thrupp, 2007), the New Zealand government's plans to introduce standardized testing for primary schoolchildren, as in Australia, the US and the UK, were shelved in favour of a compromise solution. Teachers were to collate data from pre-existing assessments, in order that an Overall Teacher Judgment (OTJ) would inform each students' categorization in comparison to the standards (O'Neill, 2014). However, any buy-in that this compromise achieved quickly dissipated, particularly when, over the course of 2009, it became clear that the teaching sector would be largely excluded from participating in the development of the standards (Thrupp & Easter, 2012). This exclusion exasperated feelings of unease around the imposition of a failed model from overseas (Thrupp, 2007) that threatened to undermine New Zealand's child-centred learning ethos and broad-based curriculum (Wylie, 2012). Further, despite requests from the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) for a gradual implementation process that would include a trial, in October 2009 the standards were launched with a timeline which allotted just two months for every primary and intermediate school in the country to implement them (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Then, in February 2010, the NZEI teachers union organized a bus tour across New Zealand in order to publicise their deepening concerns. The launch of the tour initiated two years of protracted struggle over National Standards, which included approximately one third of schools refusing to implement the policy until being threatened with the removal of their boards. With this



school rebellion successfully quashed in late 2011, an event which was quickly complemented by their successful re-election, the National Party confidently rearticulated their focus on “lifting student achievement” through strengthening “accountability and performance measurement” in schools (Tolley, 2011, n.p.). This preceded the unveiling of two more highly controversial policies shortly afterwards. The first of these was charter schools, which are schools funded by the state but run by private organizations (Education Policy Response Group, 2012). The policy was the result of a parliamentary coalition agreement with the right-wing libertarian ACT Party, which secured just 1% of the votes cast nationally. Furthermore, despite having been implemented for around twenty years in the US, evidence that charter schools increased achievement remained highly inconclusive (Education Policy Response Group, 2012; Ravitch, 2010). In fact, despite their articulation through the rhetoric of increasing choice and opportunity for marginalized communities, the evidence suggested that they in fact *increased* inequality (Education Policy Response Group, 2012).

With the release of the first post-election budget in May 2012, the newly installed Minister of Education, Hekia Parata, announced that there was going to have to be a “trade-off” between “teacher quality” and class sizes, guided by the underlying premise that there were currently too many teachers of poor quality. Treasury had calculated that \$43 million could be saved by increasing class size ratios, and this money could be reallocated to mechanisms for “driving up quality teaching” (Parata, 2012b, n.p.), which could include the introduction of performance pay based on National Standards achievement results.

By late 2012 sector opposition to the Government’s programme for education was becoming entrenched. The NZEI, not traditionally a combative union (L. Gordon, 1992), ran with the title “The war on education: Frontline report” on the cover of its quarterly magazine. In April 2013 the union mobilized around 10,000 of its members and sympathizers in coordinated protest marches across the country (Robinson, 2013). Around the same time, they began to publish materials on their website which characterized the Government’s program as “The GERM” (New Zealand Educational Institute, 2013). This stood for a Global Education Reform Movement, which was seen as forming an “educational reform orthodoxy within many education systems throughout the world” (Sahlberg, 2013, n.p.). The contamination now threatened to “infect” New Zealand’s “world class system” (New Zealand Educational Institute, 2013), through the manufacture of an artificial crisis which masked a privatization agenda. On its “Fight the GERM” campaign webpage the NZEI juxtaposed “The GERM” with its “Antidote”, represented as articulating the already existing professional and ethical stances of their membership:

*Table 1: The Germ versus the Antidote.*

<b>The GERM</b>	<b>The Antidote</b>
Standardisation	Personalised Learning
Choice	Equity
Competition	Collaboration
Data-Based Accountability	Trust And Professionalism

The background for this study is therefore the expression of two opposed

visions for education, summarised in the above table and in the opening quotes. While the New Zealand Government articulated a policy agenda based on the need to increase choice and accountability for the consumer through markets and performance measurement, the NZEI articulated a stance which constituted itself as fundamentally opposed to this agenda, calling instead for increased professional autonomy for the teaching workforce and collaboration between schools, over market competition. Rather than increasing teacher quality, choice for parents and opportunities for students, the union argued that the Government's agenda threatened to decrease democratic participation, increase inequality and de-professionalize its teaching workforce.

## **Aims, argument outline and research questions**

This study aims to investigate the underlying discursive ground underpinning the three policies of National Standards, class sizes and charter schools, together with the NZEI's response to them. In other words, (note: the actual research questions are at the end of this section) why would the National Party, already scarred by previous battles with a powerful and relatively unified education sector (O'Neill, 2014; Thrupp, 2007), wish to implement policies on the premise that schools were failing the nation and that many teachers were not doing their jobs properly? And why would the NZEI seek to represent these policies through the dichotomizing frame in table 1? What was the basis of their assertion that New Zealand had a better way of doing school education, and how was it seen as under threat from National's policies? And also, what was the role of the mainstream media in this

antagonised discursive terrain? Did they amplify or reduce antagonisms between the two sides? Did they uncritically reproduce the Government's discourse on all three policies, or were there differences between how they represented them? If so, why?

Over the course of this thesis I conceptualize the three policies as neoliberal, and set them within a context of two previous decades (1987-2007) of the neoliberalization of education in New Zealand. At the same time, each policy emphasizes different, overlapping facets of education within neoliberal governance (Ball, 2013; Brown, 2015): National Standards assumes that standardisation and data-based accountability increases the performance of public-sector workers and the empowerment of consumers; charter schools is based on the presumptions that the state and regulation are diametrically opposed to the "free-market", and that autonomy, choice and innovation in education can only be attained through the increased involvement of the private sector; and class sizes is grounded on an instrumentalist view of the purposes of education (which firmly ties it to economic growth), with the only question being how it can be made more efficient by agents from an external, objective and apolitical position.

Therefore, I seek to explain how each policy could be attributed the term neoliberal, while exhibiting very different characteristics, and also how they could be perceived as merely enacting economic necessities by the institutions of government and media. By understanding neoliberalism as a series of discursive logics (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Phelan, 2014), I aim to demonstrate both how the three policies contain elements of neoliberal theory, but at the same time only become neoliberal *through their*

*articulation*. Through also conceiving neoliberalism as a process of neoliberalization (Jamie Peck, 2010a), I seek to account for its ongoing impacts on fields such as education within specific contexts over time.

Drawing on the discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau, neoliberalization is conceived as a series of interlinked but contingent struggles to fix meaning (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985), characterized by recurrent but “often botched efforts to fix markets” (Jamie Peck, 2010a, p. xiii). Post-2008 financial crisis New Zealand is therefore an ideal context for understanding such processes, focusing on a point in time when neoliberal premises were being seriously challenged on a global scale for the first time since the 1970s (W. Davies, 2014; J. Kelsey, 2015; Mirowski, 2013). While this created the necessity for persistent rearticulation and rhetorical performance of neoliberal logics in the public sphere (W. Davies, 2014), the fundamental shift of the purposes of education in New Zealand from a social democratic commitment to build “communities of literate and informed citizens” (Codd, 2005, p. 193), to the production of human capital in order to facilitate economic growth (Codd, 2005; Foucault, 2008), remained largely unquestionable.

Through an analysis of key policy texts from 1984-2007, I aim to illustrate that the neoliberalization of school education in New Zealand progressed across three main historical phases, and that three main identifications or subject positions, together with the relations between them, were crucial to the “sedimentation” (Laclau, 1990) of this instrumentalized articulation of education. These were *the parent*, *the teacher* and *the student*, which have been progressively colonized with individualistic, self-centred traits, emphasizing entrepreneurial capacities. Through their reproduction within

policy, political rhetoric and media spaces, these subject positions became relatively fixed and stable discourse objects (Foucault, 1972), making their current meaning appear as if it is not discursively produced (Carusi, 2017). By drawing on recent work which has integrated discourse theory with psychoanalytic concepts (Clarke, 2011; Glynos & Howarth, 2007; McMillan, 2017), I outline how these identifications become characters in narratives, providing an affective “grip” for neoliberal discourse.

Mainstream media are viewed as important sites for the reproduction of these narratives, in particular those which construct relations between teachers and parents. I therefore undertake an analysis of newspaper editorial representations of the three policies of National Standards, class sizes and charter schools, in order to investigate their reproduction in the public sphere, together with their relation to journalism’s role as liberal democracy’s fourth estate. Newspaper editorials are viewed as representing the voice of powerful media institutions, therefore contributing to the hegemonic constitution of both public opinion and journalistic identifications (Carpentier, 2005, 2008; Couldry, 2012). I investigate the role of a historically constituted Western journalistic tradition in the reproduction of government representations of each of the three policies over the key period (2007-13). Rather than merely assuming media support for neoliberal education policies, I argue that National Standards resonated strongly with an Anglophone journalistic identity (Donsbach & Klett, 1993; Hollings, Hanusch, Balasubramanian, & Lealand, 2016) which constitutes itself in relation to the signifiers of accountability and transparency (Djerf-Pierre, Ekström, & Johansson, 2013; Karlsson, 2010), and through the exclusion of

groups (such as teachers) perceived to be against those signifiers.

Following this analysis of the mediatized construction of the three policies, I seek to illuminate the basis of the NZEI's assertion that New Zealand teachers and parents "fighting to protect a quality public education system" is the "antidote" to "the GERM". In other words, what alternatives are articulated through collective resistance against neoliberalization, how did these draw on pre-neoliberalization discourse, and how did this belief that there is an alternative motivate the resistant practices of those involved? I argue that it is neoliberal discourse's narrowing construction of relations, and therefore what it means to be a teacher, parent or student, to the "commodifying and alienating logic of the market" (J. Gilbert, 2014, p. 177), which forms the locus of its resistance. Put differently, it is the very requirement for neoliberalism to become embedded within our everyday understandings of ourselves and our relations to others (Mirowski, 2013), which forges a place of *continuous disconnect* between its narratives of ethical actualization and empowerment and its governance structures of constraint, surveillance and performance monitoring.

This sense of constraint or denial contributed to a strong rearticulation of Aotearoa New Zealand's educational identity, ethos, or kaupapa, through the ethics of care, humanism, democracy, justice, fairness and collectivity. This ethos, with a lineage from the early 20th Century, and which has been largely excluded from recent hegemonic constructions of educational policy, celebrates the affective and identificatory, alongside cognitive aspects of the educational experience, privileging the development of the whole subject.

In summary, the research questions which I will seek to address are:

### *Research questions*

1. How and in what ways has school education in New Zealand been neoliberalized over the past 30 years, and how did this then shape the three policies of National Standards, class sizes and charter schools?
2. What was the role of newspaper representations in the hegemonic reproduction of neoliberalized education policy discourse, and were there any differences between the representations of each policy?
3. What alternative visions for education were articulated through collective resistance against neoliberalization?

## **Personal background and motivations**

As was suggested in my argument outline, and which will be explored in more detail in the methods chapter (Chapter 4), the rationale for this thesis is closely interwoven with an explicit political position. Rather than seeing myself as a detached observer, the effects of my beliefs, experiences and interpretations on the structure and content of the analysis are acknowledged (Howarth, Glynos, & Griggs, 2016; Thrupp, 2010; Tracy, 2013).

At the macro level is a concern that ongoing neoliberalization threatens the very fabric of society itself, through imposing limits on the way we see ourselves and how we relate to others (Brown, 2015). I see formal education as a highly important (if not the most important) site of identity construction (Szkudlarek, 2011), and therefore its increasing commodification, marketization and instrumentalization as contributing to our seeming inability to escape a state of permanent alienation, isolation and despondency, thereby preventing political action to change the world for the better (Berardi, 2017; Dean, 2016; J. Gilbert, 2014).



At a more personal level, my direct motivation is to contribute to the unsettling of “relations of domination” (Howarth et al., 2016, p. 5) in New Zealand school-sector education. These relations are embodied in the aforementioned discursive objectifications of the subject-positions of teachers, parents and students as self-interested data-monitors. I aim to do this by highlighting their contingent origins, and offering alternatives by publicizing and therefore sustaining New Zealand’s rich holistic tradition, through the eyes of some of its practitioners and articulators. In that way, as I spoke to my interviewees and began to understand more of the history of struggles around education, together with their motivations, it became an ethical imperative for me to attempt to rearticulate those forms of knowledge which had been systematically marginalized.

However, my original motivations were slightly different, and changed as my studies developed. I moved to New Zealand from the UK in 2011, with my wife who is a New Zealand-born, primary schoolteacher. She taught for five years in England, and was highly sought after for her ability to connect with children, to plan and conduct lessons which were engaging, and to take risks and bring fresh ideas to the table. Ironically, this was within a highly regimented, performance-managed context where schools and teachers were under constant pressure to produce results through standardized testing, with schools judged as failing regularly forced to become Academies (Burns, 2015). This process of “academisation” (Francis, 2014) actually happened to my wife’s former school in an inner-city area of Birmingham soon after she left. Schools in the UK were therefore caught between the brutal and punitive necessity to satisfy performative demands from the state, while

simultaneously recognising that educational achievement defined solely in such terms cannot inspire or engage students, and in particular being far more likely to disengage those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Macfarlane, Glynn, Grace, Penetito, & Bateman, 2008; Thrupp & White, 2013).

Hence, one of the reasons we moved to New Zealand was the belief that it was a better place to bring up children, offering a fuller educational experience, lacking the same performative pressures. You can imagine our dismay when my wife returned to teaching in February 2012, with National Standards in the process of being enacted within schools (Thrupp & White, 2013). Working in an underprivileged suburb of Lower Hutt, she was expected to inform parents that their child, who may have made considerable academic progress through the year, was considered “below the standard”. She also found it frustrating as the school’s union rep, going to NZEI meetings and speaking to other members who did not have experience of the British (or US or Canadian or Australian) experience, and so did not appear to understand the wider political implications of the changes that National were introducing (see Alach, 2011).

This lack of political awareness was not helped by media coverage which appeared to construct the policy as simply increasing accountability and transparency in a straightforward way and therefore part of parents’ right to know how their children were progressing at school (see Hosking, 2012 for a particularly resonant example of this logic). As will be described in Chapter 6, such coverage was often fiercely critical of NZEI and NZPF opposition, whose motivations were presented as selfish and contrary to the democratic will of the people and to the educational rights of parents (Thrupp & Easter,

2012).

Then class sizes happened. The Government were forced to back down, in the midst of parent-led popular protests around the country. Media coverage began to turn against them, asking more probing questions on charter schools than they had for National Standards, and suddenly, their entire programme looked vulnerable to organized action. I attended a protest in Wellington in April 2013, with approximately 2,000 others (Robinson, 2013) and was struck by the strength of feeling displayed and the level of conviction that, not only was there a viable alternative, but that alternative was the very reason why New Zealand's school system was better (see figure 1), both in qualitative and quantitative achievement-based terms, as defined by international agencies such as the OECD<sup>1</sup>.

I also felt that the NZEI's *Stand Up For Kids/Fight the GERM* campaign was a very clever way of framing the issues, setting National's reforms within a broader global context, while also placing the emphasis on the impacts that they were having on schools and children at the local level. There was a lot of emphasis around that period on "Facebook revolutions" like Occupy, the Indignados and the Arab Spring. These were characterised by new, transient, horizontal and digitally networked forms of organization (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Castells, 2015). Therefore, I thought it was interesting from a theoretical perspective that a teachers union could be impacting the discourse in this way and even pushing back the seemingly inexorable global

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<sup>1</sup> A 2012 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report "singled out" New Zealand "as a top performer achieving better-than-average results despite its comparatively low gross domestic product" (Parata, 2012a, n.p.).

march of neoliberalism. Perhaps unions were still relevant after all, and perhaps they were able to offer a more solid organizational base for the new digital forms of activism which were emerging, a base which could have more of a long-term influence on governments and policy (Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2012)?

At this stage I was searching for a PhD project (having completed my Masters in the UK in 2011), and discovered that my eventual supervisor Shiv Ganesh was offering scholarships on his Marsden-funded project *Activism, technology and organising: Transformations in collective action in Aotearoa New Zealand*. On becoming involved with this project, and reading social movement literature (e.g. Chesters & Welsh, 2004; Mattoni & Treré, 2014; van Stekelenburg & Roggeband, 2013) I became increasingly aware that there was very little work being done on struggles in education involving unions, and even less which took into account the role of elite discourse in structuring the kinds of resistance which were possible within a given context. My perspective at that point was shaped by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)



Figure 1: Photo taken at the NZEI march to Parliament, Wellington, 13 April 2013.

literature, having completed my Masters on British newspaper representations of the war in Afghanistan. CDA places an emphasis onto the political work undertaken by language forms, and the ways that discourse shapes the contours of our culture and therefore society (see Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Having also been involved with *Stop the War* in the UK, I remember being frustrated by the ongoing difficulty of getting more of the public involved in the movement, with individuals often appearing to believe the official lines on why we were going to war with countries like Afghanistan and Libya. The latter (conducted by NATO in 2011) seemed particularly galling, considering its legitimization through the narrative of an evil despotic ruler with a hoard of weapons of mass destruction, therefore almost exactly mirroring the attack on Iraq conducted just eight years earlier.

With this interest in the intersections of education, social movements and media representations, I was also introduced to the discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau by my co-supervisor Sean Phelan. He had recently edited a book on the applicability of that theory to the field of critical media politics (Dahlberg & Phelan, 2011). I was struck by what I saw as the more refined conceptualization of power in discourse theory than CDA or social movement theory, through the privileging of the concept of hegemony. The building of hegemonies was not restricted to elites, therefore giving more potential power to resistance movements, while at the same time it recognised the power of language in laying the discursive ground for what was possible (Torfing, 1999). It also came with a more macro-level approach than discourse analysis, placing more emphasis on longer-term societal shifts than linguistic or semiotic details (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000; Phelan & Dahlberg, 2011),

together with an “undogmatic” (Torfing, 2005) orientation towards theoretical eclecticism and epistemological open-endedness (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000). Discourse theory therefore seemed ideal for my case study, and its key assumptions will be outlined in the next section.

## **Outline of theoretical and empirical approach**

While chapters 2, 3 and 4 will discuss discourse theory and its analytical approach to empirical material in more detail, this section aims to provide a very brief overview of its key orientations. Whereas the work of Ernesto Laclau constitutes a body of social theory, rather than a clearly defined methodology, Laclau’s “system of ontological assumptions” (Howarth, 2005, p. 317) can become the basis for a set of methodological precepts (see Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Howarth, 2005). Conceived as a “research programme or paradigm, and not an empirical theory in the narrow sense of the term” (Howarth, 2005, p. 317), discourse theory has been primarily influenced by the areas of critical theory, poststructuralism and psychoanalysis. Drawing on these traditions, discourse theorists have been highly critical of social scientific practices which become method-led, imposing a set of rigid procedures which discourage reflection on their suitability to the specific research-problem at hand (Howarth, 2005; Phelan & Dahlberg, 2011). Discourse theorists argue that the over-valorization of methods for their own sake can lead to the reification of the relation between the researcher and the researched field, encouraging the former’s detachment from the political context of the latter (Tracy, 2013). In such work the researcher becomes positioned, due to their supposed methodological expertise, in the privileged

position to uncover and reveal a scientific “truth”, which they then impose onto the less-knowledgeable (Billig, 2008; Carusi, 2014; Matheson, 2008). Hence while discourse theory may have a particular aversion to quantitative methodologies and positivist epistemologies (Glynos & Howarth, 2007), qualitative methodologies such as CDA have also come under critique (Phelan & Dahlberg, 2011).

Discourse theory does not view theory and methods as above, outside of, or pre-existing the empirical material (Laclau, 1991). Instead, the analyst “seeks to articulate their concepts in each particular enactment of concrete research” (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000, p. 5). The researcher should consider theory and empirical material to be in a constant dialogue, or “process of mutual enlightenment” (Laclau, 1991, n.p.). As will be reflected on in the methods and conclusions chapters, this lack of predetermined structure places greater weight on the judgments and writing skills of the individual analyst (Glynos & Howarth, 2007), which brings its own unique challenges.

However, a key benefit, particularly in regards to my case study, is the ability of its theoretical concepts to provide deep insights across diverse social contexts (Carpentier & De Cleen, 2007; Carpentier & Spinoy, 2008). As discussed, it encourages a macro-level view which would not, for example, perceive rigid boundaries between the theories and empirical materials of critical education studies, media studies and social movement theory, but would instead look to their points of congruence. For instance, it would highlight that in each discipline-area the reproduction of uneven power relations, and how those relations could be changed for the benefits of society, motivates the work of scholars.

Laclau's centring of an ambivalent conceptualization of hegemony is key here (Carusi, 2014; Critchley, 2004). Society is understood as a discursive "battlefield" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002) where competing paradigms struggle to impose their particular way of seeing the world as representing the beliefs of the whole of society – thereby making them hegemonic. Hegemony can therefore be conceived of as both a "mode of resistance" (Carusi, 2014, p. 19), and an elite-driven process which imposes order and structure on the less powerful, limiting their "horizon of options" (Laclau, 2000a, p. 83). Rather than hegemony being something that should be always resisted (together with linked concepts such as populism), it is therefore positioned as integral to any progressive changes in the fields of education, media studies, or social movement studies – changes which seek to influence the subjectivities of others. As I will address in later chapters, the question becomes the building of *democratic*, or *ethical* hegemonies, rooted in the demands or ethics of popular struggles (Carusi, 2014; Mårdh & Tryggvason, 2017).

Subsequently, the key concepts of Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* have been exported to a wide range of subject-areas in the humanities and social sciences (Carpentier & Spinoy, 2008). This malleability is partly because, although discourse theory is a political theory (it is sometimes called political discourse theory), it considers the "the whole field of culture" as the space "where hegemony is created and reproduced" (Mouffe quoted in Carpentier & Cammaerts, 2006, p. 967), rather than just institutional politics and media (Howarth, 2005). An analysis of the discourse of education such as this one therefore places emphasis onto the *political*



*effects* of a diverse range of materials from a wide range of groups, which are each attempting to impose their way of thinking about education as hegemonic (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). As I will explain in more detail in the next chapter, culture has political effects because ways of thinking about education, although subject to *sedimentation*, can never be totally closed, and are liable to *reactivation* by other groups or social movements.

## **Thesis structure**

Due to the potential openness and amorphous nature of a discourse-theoretical PhD thesis, I thought it necessary to proceed in a rather traditional step-by-step structure in order to ensure that it remained coherent for the reader, who would hopefully know where they are in the thesis at all times, the purpose of each part and the overall narrative being constructed.

Chapter 2 outlines the key concepts from the discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau which will be employed within the later chapters. I also aim to highlight how those concepts work together to form a social ontology, or system for understanding the world. While many of the concepts changed over the course of his career and overlapped with new ones which emerged later, Laclau's underlying "relational conception of society" (Howarth, 2004, p. 266) remained consistent. I also introduce the work of "second generation" discourse theorists who have taken Laclau's theory in different directions, where these have provided particularly prescient insights for our case study. Thereby, rather than being confined to theoretical debates, I seek to demonstrate the concepts in a way that is congruent with the paradigm's

critical stance towards the separation of theory and analysis, by sketching out the ways in which they can be usefully applied to the case study.

Chapter 3 then seeks to define in more detail the key concepts and terms which I will employ within the thesis, together with the relationships between them. It sketches out a theoretical framework to consider the effects of neoliberalism on education, together with the roles of media (mainstream and alternative), and unions. This then also sets my work within the context of broader debates in the areas of neoliberalism, education, journalism studies and teacher resistance, and I draw on this wider literature in order to flesh out an overarching structure of discursive logics, narratives and representations, while also highlighting where discourse theory can provide added insight to these areas.

Chapter 4 then focuses on how I applied this framework to the empirical material analysed in chapters 5, 6 and 7 in order to address the research questions. I outline in more detail discourse theory's post-structuralist approach to empirical issues, and how my developing understanding of this theory guided my decisions on what data to include in my analysis, together with the ethical foundations for my research. With discourse theory not providing a singular, "off the shelf" methodology, I also outline which methods I drew on in order to conduct my analysis, and their degree of compatibility with the ontological assumptions of the overarching framework. I also detail the specific selection and collection decisions that I made, including tables of newspaper articles and interview participants.

Chapter 5 is the first analysis chapter and conducts a genealogy of the

neoliberalized horizon of the two subsequent analysis chapters. It aims to outline, through the analysis of influential policy texts, curricula and political speeches, how the subject-positions of teachers, parents and students were delineated and objectified through the congruent naturalization of neoliberalized logics and narratives. Via an approach which spans three different phases of neoliberalization (Jamie Peck, 2010a), I aim to highlight macro-level discursive trends or patterns, and the key rhetorical resources which were drawn upon in order to argue for, and then embed, an instrumentalized conception for the purposes of education, firmly tied to economic growth.

Chapter 6 then illustrates, through analysis of political speeches, policy documents and newspaper editorials (among other texts), the ways in which this discursive background of embedded neoliberalization textured hegemonic articulations of National Standards, class sizes and charter schools. I outline the ways in which key signifiers (the development of which were demonstrated in Chapter 5), such as “the ineffective teacher” and “the long tail of underachievement” were again drawn upon and developed further, in order to re-problematize the education sector and those within it as not performing optimally enough. Further, the specific role of journalistic identifications as the fourth estate in reproducing this problematizing action and the logics, narratives and subject positions it constructs is discussed.

Chapter 7 then outlines the ways in which an alternative ethos for education was maintained, within the context of a neoliberalized horizon. While often forced to the underground or micro level, resistance is represented as generated from the practices of teaching itself, which draw on a historically

constituted shared resource, or “popular knowledge” (Foucault, 1980). This alternative discourse was given more coherence, unity and purpose through the antagonistic rhetoric which problematized the sector. Through an analysis of the NZEI’s campaigns and the rich descriptions of those who participated in the resistance, I demonstrate how personal ethical frameworks fed into this amplified, macro-level discourse, which articulated an ethos which emphasized the growth of the whole child – a holistic paradigm which includes affects, identifications and creative faculties which cannot be fully measured and evaluated.

Chapter 8 then concludes by firstly locating the findings of the three analysis chapters within the context of recent literature on neoliberalism, in particular Davies’ (2014) argument that in the post 2008 financial crisis era we have entered into a contingent phase which privileges the discursive. By turning back to Laclau’s theory, I argue instead that contingency has been a consistent characteristic of neoliberalism; despite extensive discursive continuity between early and late neoliberalism, the hegemonic agency of this discourse has always been undermined by a persistent process of *continuous disconnect* at the subjective level. The subsequent section then discusses in more detail, by drawing on examples from the thesis and psychoanalytic concepts, the privileged subject within neoliberal discourse – *the entrepreneurial self* – which I argue is constituted between fantasies of omnipotence and the limits of moral constraints. This figure is both hegemonically reproduced through a bureaucratizing culture of performance monitoring, and a paradoxical ability to appropriate anti-bureaucratic sentiment. This is followed by a reflection on the use of a discourse theory framework, the decisions I made,

how things could have been done differently, and suggestions for further research.

# Chapter 2

## The discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau

### Introduction and chapter aims

This chapter aims to provide a broad overview of the discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau, drawing mostly on his work, while also drawing on other contributing theorists, most notably his early collaborator Chantal Mouffe, but also Laclau's influences and the "next generation" of what has become known as the Essex School. The chapter is necessarily brief, firstly because this thesis is not a study of discourse theory *per se*, secondly because the concepts from discourse theory remain abstract, or in a sense *lifeless*, without illustration via their application to real-world contexts, and thirdly, by placing the concepts which developed over time in close proximity, I aim to demonstrate the overlaps between them, and how they all fit into Laclau's unique ontological system. As I discuss them chronologically, the core concepts of discourse, social identity, radical contingency, hegemonic articulation, sedimentation, nodal points, antagonism, dislocation, ideology, the empty signifier, populism and ethics will all be outlined.

With this being an empirically-focused thesis rather than one dedicated specifically to the development of political theory, the concepts I outline below will be illustrated in greater detail in the analysis chapters and conclusions. Further, in Chapter 3, I will aim to discuss in more detail the

applicability of Laclau's social ontology<sup>2</sup> to the areas of the neoliberalization of education, the relationship of media institutions to that process, and the role of social justice movements in disrupting, critiquing and resisting it. In doing so I draw upon work that has already applied discourse theory to those areas, employing a discourse theoretical framework with a more empirical focus, as well as others which have not, with the aim of illustrating both the core concepts of this thesis, and the contribution of such a framework to an inter-disciplinary study such as this one.

## Outlining the key concepts

While in one sense complex and intricate, Laclau's ontology is in another sense a remarkably simple take on the social order - it is a theory of society which, ironically, denies its very possibility. This does not make him a right-wing libertarian who believes only in individual freedom, a view embodied in Margaret Thatcher's (in)famous dictum that "there is no such thing as society". Instead, in a famous early essay entitled *The Impossibility of Society*, Laclau (1983) argued that *the social* is an inherently open place, having "itself has no essence" (1990, pp. 95-6) as a stable and distinct object, which we can ever possibly know all that there is to know about. Rather than seeing this impossibility as a reason for social theorists to despair however, he argued it is this openness and indefiniteness which makes society and

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<sup>2</sup> An ontology is defined as a universalizing "way of understanding the world" through specifying and delineating the objects within it, together with "their conditions of existence [and] relations of dependency" (J. Scott & Marshall, 2009, n.p.). Following Heidegger, Laclau thereby differentiates the ontological from the ontic; the latter is concerned with the particular, empirically-discernible contents of objects defined at the ontological level (see Marchart, 2007).

therefore politics so interesting, because, marked by an inherent lack or negativity, it has to *actively make itself possible* - continuously re-defining itself through meaning-making practices, or discourse.

This “relational conception of society” (Howarth, 2004, p. 266), which stresses its fundamental openness and lack of interior essence, was then developed further in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), which he wrote with Chantal Mouffe. This book became highly influential, and is widely regarded as signifying discourse theory’s genesis as a coherent research programme (Howarth, 2004; Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000; Torfing, 1999). The book sought to address the challenges that the new social movements and their politics of identity were posing to established Marxist models, which had previously placed the working class as the privileged agent of history (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000; Torfing, 1999, 2005). The emergent theoretical model proposed to abandon the notion of an essentialised working class as the foundation-stone of historical transformation, urging the left instead to turn to the work of Gramsci, among others, through the building of flexible but expansive hegemonies, with the broad aim of mobilizing against *all* forms of domination in a wide diversity of social contexts, not only class struggle. As I will outline below, this model was then subsequently developed by Laclau in some detail (1990, 1996, 2000a, 2000b, 2004, 2005b, 2005c, 2012, 2014), with many of the main concepts shifting over time, under the influence of an eclectic array of theorists.

One of Laclau and Mouffe’s key influences was structural linguistics, a school of thought initially inspired by Ferdinand de Saussure’s assertion that elements in a language have no fixed or essential meaning, because the



signifier (for example, a word) is unable to perfectly represent its signified referent or concept. This unfixity is due to the arbitrary nature of the sign, with Saussure asserting that there was “no natural relationship between signifier and signified” (Howarth, 2000, p. 19). As an illustrative example of relevance to this study, the meaning that we derive from the signifier *teacher* is not ahistorical, deriving its meaning from a pre-existing model of a teacher lying outside of language and time. Instead, the meaning that we ascribe to *teacher* in New Zealand today has shifted considerably from how it was considered just forty years ago, with critical education scholars arguing that it is becoming increasingly narrowly defined as a technical producer of skills in students, rather than as a trusted, autonomous professional, who may have greater input into policy and curricula (Codd, 2005; L. Gordon, 1992). For structural linguists, this demonstrates that the meaning of *teacher* must be constituted via its relations to, and differences from, other signifiers and signified concepts in the overall system of meanings, which changes over time.

Drawing on poststructuralists such as Derrida and Foucault (Howarth, 2000), Laclau and Mouffe (1985) applied this insight to *social identities*, which they claimed, like signifiers in language, are also constituted through relations of difference. Because “identification involves a moment of externality which is unavoidable” (Laclau, 2012, p. 396), identities become a fluctuating and continual process of symbolic *identifications* (Thomassen, 2016). This critiqued as too essentialist the long-held Marxist affirmation that identities are pre-determined by a material base which is external to language. This fixed and pre-determined, class-based conception of identity had already been

increasingly called into question by the broader cultural currents of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century. The social unrest of the 1960s, culminating in the May 1968 Paris riots, expressed the ethics of the post-World War II “regime of the self” (Rose, 1992, p. 160), by placing the rights of the individual to self-determination and self-realization at their core. This emphasis on individual expression and freedom contributed to the accumulative “difficulties of the working class in constituting itself as a historical subject” (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, pp. 104-105). Within this historical context, Laclau and Mouffe paved the theoretical ground for conceptualising the construction of identity as a *highly open and political process*, constituted not only by material/economic conditions in the classic Marxist sense, but also by acts of power enacted in discourse.

In the polemical atmosphere that animated some responses to Laclau and Mouffe’s book, their privileging of discourse and identity was sometimes interpreted as signifying a rejection of Marxists’ traditional emphasis on the determining power of economy (see Geras, 1987). However, this is not to say that Laclau’s theoretical framework precludes the consideration of the economic, but he is critical of models which impose the economic as an autonomous “base” which pre-determines the “superstructure” (i.e. culture and discourse) (see Phelan & Dahlberg, 2011, 2014; Torfing, 1999). In this way, Laclau and Mouffe’s “post-Marxism” was not a rejection of Marxist principles, but their *re-visitation, reactivation and deconstruction* “in the light of contemporary problems” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. ix), such as the rise of neoliberalism and the linked decline of class-based identifications.

For Laclau (interviewed in Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2010), rather than being a

determining base, “the economic level of society is not a self-contained entity operating as an infrastructure”, but “as with everything else, [it is] hegemonically constructed” (p. 242). As will be outlined throughout this thesis and reflected on specifically in the conclusions chapter, economic power, in particular in “post-industrial” neoliberal societies, increasingly hinges on the control over the production of subjectivities (Foucault, 2008; Hardt & Negri, 2009). Discourse theory’s close attention to the ways in which identities are constructed within combinations of power and discourse is therefore highly amenable to critiques of the increasing economic inequalities endemic to late-modern capitalism.

Laclau and Mouffe were highly influenced by Foucault’s (1972) early theory of discourse. Foucault conceived of discourse as integral to power relations, therefore embodying more than just language. Comprising of a “multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies” (Howarth, 2000, pp. 100-101), discourse provided the building blocks for discursive formations, such as psychiatry, which established themselves as socially-legitimized sciences through the constitution of “objects of knowledge”, such as *the madman* (Foucault, 1972, p. 32).

While sharing Foucault’s strategic view of discourse as something actively shaping society through its close relation to power, Laclau and Mouffe were critical of his later conceptualizations (See Foucault, 1977, 1978), which began to specify non-discursive complexes. These complexes allowed institutions such as prisons to operate by an internal logic, or “regime of practice” (Foucault, 1991b), embodied in material practices which were external to discourse. Laclau and Mouffe denied that such organizations had

non-discursive elements, highlighting that, like signifiers and identities, the material parts of a prison (such as the bricks) must also derive their *meanings* through their relations to the social world. Hence they argued that Foucault's later ontological distinction between linguistic and material practices could not be maintained, instead viewing *social practice* as coterminous with *discursive practice* (Laclau, 2004, p. 323).

Discourse for Laclau is both “the primary terrain of the constitution of objectivity [and] any complex of elements in which relations play the constitutive role” (2005b, p. 68). It therefore exists at both the metaphysical and physical levels; providing the building blocks for identity and meaning construction, while simultaneously having direct material effects on our social environment. As another illustrative example, a school owes its material features to the dominant architectural and educational streams of thought at the time it was built. Not only that, but the school will keep changing as those dominant streams change and new discourses come to the fore – such as the recent penchant for Modern Learning Environments (MLEs). Hence Laclau (1990) would see a school as *radically contingent* – because, as with society, schools lack an inner kernel which defines them as such, instead deriving both their identity and their material form from “conditions of existence [which are] exterior” (p. 19) to them.

This expansive conception of discourse, which includes “both linguistic and non-linguistic elements” (Wetherell, 1998, p. 392), has attracted critiques. For example, J. Gilbert (2004) contests that if discourse refers to everything, then the term begins to lose its ability to describe social phenomena. Further, Gilbert argues that the term *discourse*, with its etymological links to the

linguistic, potentially imposes a reifying frame which cannot capture the richness of culture and experience, such as the affectively charged experience of enjoying music. Other scholars have argued (e.g. Geras, 1987; McMillan, 2017; Stavrakakis, 2007) that to encompass everything within discourse on the basis of the rejection of Marxist essentialism has perhaps veered too far in that direction, risking a negation of the role of the body and the way that it fixes the use of language in certain directions (see also Butler, 1993; Glynos, 2000). For Laclau and Mouffe (1985) however, such fixedness can never be presumed, but must be actively produced through *hegemonic articulations*, which deploy privileged signifiers termed *nodal points* in order to constitute and then to *sediment* meaning over time (Laclau, 1990, p. 34). Therefore, they did not deny that tendential fixedness is impossible, only that it is neither necessary nor unalterable (this is why it is radically contingent). The (always temporary) fixation of meaning then becomes a political act, a moment of “decision taken in an undecidable terrain” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. xi), which necessarily involves the exclusion of other meaning possibilities. As I will illustrate in Chapter 5, those that have the power to fix the meaning of objects such as *education*, *the quality teacher* and *the good student* are those who are able to associate them with particular chains of signifiers (termed *chains of equivalence*), which crowd out chains of meaning from other discourses (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Over time, this establishes a meaning “horizon” for those objects (Laclau, 1996, p. 102), making that meaning appear as if it is not discursively produced (Carusi, 2017), instead beginning to assume a “mere objective presence” (Laclau, 1990, p. 34).

Drawing on Laclau and Mouffe, Szkudlarek (2016) argues that theories of

education are not merely descriptions of how education should be changed rationally for the better, but “ontological devices implicated in the construction of social objectivities” (p. 2). They have *ontologizing* effects because they contribute to the constitution of objects which we can take for granted in our social realities. Because education is primarily a process of identity construction (Szkudlarek, 2011), the ability to define what education, teaching and learning *are* also becomes a process of *subjectification* – those fixed meanings provide models “for people to understand what they are and what they ought to be” (Bröckling, 2015, p. viii). As I will aim to demonstrate in this thesis, this ability to represent preferred versions of objects becomes a political tool; as they become *sedimented* it becomes harder and harder to imagine alternative purposes for education, as “the system of possible alternatives tends to vanish and the traces of the original contingency to fade” (Laclau, 1990, p. 34).

So far this discussion of Laclau’s work may appear a little structurally deterministic. However, in *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, Laclau (1990) introduced a theory of the subject based on the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan. The benefits of a Lacanian model of the subject over a Foucauldian understanding based on subject-positions, is that it illustrates how discourses and their subjectifications often miss their target (C. Jones & Spicer, 2009; Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000). For Lacan, the symbolic register (or discourse), can never fully represent the human experience, always leaving a remainder, which he termed *the Real*. When applied to his own theoretical framework, Laclau (1990) termed this gap between language and bodily experience *antagonism*, defined as that which

provides “the limit of all objectivity” (p. 17). Consequently, the structuring and subjectifying effects of discourse can only ever be temporary, despite appearances to the contrary, because both subjects and the discourse which hails them are defined through a “constitutive lack” (Laclau, 1996, p. 40), which prevents them from ever being fully “sutured” (Laclau, 1990, pp. 90-92), or closed to influence from other discourses. This results in an increased potential for social identities to become politicized, as they are always already *dislocated* and precarious within the structure of their emergence (Laclau, 1996, p. 28).

Hence what defines *ideology* for Laclau is not the “false-consciousness” view propagated by classic Marxism, which thematises the working class’s misrecognition of its “true” identity, but quite the opposite: it is the misunderstanding that any “true” or authentic identity exists, and “the will to totality” (1990, p. 92) that this engenders, whereby other possibilities of identification are excluded (such as a national identity rejecting the possibility of identifying with non-nationals). Also contributing to the process of ideological closure are *empty signifiers*, a concept which Laclau in *Emancipation(s)* (1996) developed from the nodal points discussed earlier. Empty signifiers are also integral to hegemonic fixations of meaning, however Laclau added an extra dimension to this process - they also enable closure by bringing together diverse demands into one identification, through functioning as “a signifier of the pure cancellation of all differences” (Laclau, 1996, p. 38). Put differently, they come to represent the demands of a loose group of heterogeneous interests, and by simultaneously referring to both an ideal society that is striven for and a particular value of that group, they can

become the discursive grounding of a social movement. Hence, empty signifiers must not signify anything too particular, as they must have the ability to offer a universal “vision of the community as [a] coherent whole” (Laclau, 2014, p. 4). An example in an educational context is the signifier *standards*, which in the US has enabled a loose, but coherent, hegemonic alliance of politicians from both major political parties, corporate philanthropists, religious evangelicals, a managerialist middle class, and journalists (Apple, 2006; Janice Peck, 2015; Taubman, 2009). These groups may well hold very different understandings of what standards means, but these are cancelled out through a shared disidentification against a common antagonist: those who are perceived to be against standards, namely teachers and their unions. Hence the symbolic act of expulsion itself (through hegemonic articulations organized around empty signifiers) constitutes both the inside and the outside of this nascent identity, which is why that totalizing element is paradoxically referred to as “the constitutive outside” (Mouffe, 2005; Torfing, 1999).

The process by which an empty signifier moves towards representing the totality of the social, while at the same time maintaining links to its original signified referent – simultaneously taking on the identity of “both the particular and the universal” (Laclau, 1996, p. viii), should, in literal terms be impossible. Hence in *On Populist Reason*, Laclau (2005b) makes an analogy to the figurative to illustrate a process which could not be explained otherwise. To do this he clarifies that the empty signifier can be compared to both of the rhetorical tropes of *synecdoche* (a part which represents the whole) and *catachresis* (the figural naming of something that cannot be literally



named) (pp. 70-72). Paradoxically, it is the literal impossibility of a hegemonic formation ever producing a name that fully represents its emergent identity (which if you remember is defined by lack and openness), which makes this figural operation necessary (1996, pp. 5-6; 2004, p. 299; 2005b, p. 70). Without a name for the movement, “however precarious it might be” (2005b, p. 70), there could be no identification towards it. This energising tension between the impossible and the necessary is what drives political change through hegemonic articulations, which for Laclau, are the attempted representation of the vast complexity of society through a single signifier.<sup>3</sup>

The process of *naming* the empty signifier that gives structural coherence to a discourse is therefore crucial in constituting the unity of the social movement, and the most politically resonant name for Laclau is *the people*. The process of naming a movement as articulating the demands of *the people* is “essentially catachrestical” (Laclau, 2005b, p. 72) because it unifies a heterogeneous group of demands as democratically legitimized, coherent and politically mobilized; attributes which did not literally exist prior to that act of naming. As a result, the populist operation is also *retroactive* – the group is constituted as an historic *the people*, articulating a set of unified demands, as if it had always done so (2005b, p. 110).

Laclau (2005b) then draws further on Lacanian psychoanalytic theory in order to provide greater detail on how *the people* as empty signifier becomes a retroactive name for a populist movement. The rhetorical operations of

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<sup>3</sup> While Laclau (2005b) theorized that the empty signifier is a single signifier, or “one difference” (p. 76), Thomassen (2016) has recently qualified this, stating that “it is better to think of a discourse as articulated around several more or less empty signifiers, or nodal points, thus providing a more complex picture of these discourses” (p. 167).

synecdoche and catachresis can only provide the *form – force* needs to be provided by affective investment, which holds the signifier in place through libidinal energy. Analogous to the hegemonic logic, whereby a particular demand comes to represent the whole, is Lacan’s logic of the partial object of desire, or *objet petit a*, which attracts a high degree of affective investment from the subject, causing it to come to mean more than its particular content - it comes to represent a lost, mythical wholeness experienced prior to the subject entering the symbolic realm in infancy (2005b, pp. 110-6)<sup>4</sup>. Žižek (1989) gave this partial object, heavily saturated with libidinal energy, the name of the *sublime object* (see the following chapter for more on this term).

As I will explore in more detail in Chapter 6, the signifier which comes closest to performing this hegemonic operation in this study is *parents* (while *the data, choice* and *the quality teacher* were also sublimated to a degree). While obviously having some particular grounding, when deployed in neoliberalized policy and newspaper discourse, the name *parents* works to articulate demands for transparency, accountability and choice, which never seem to originate from any particular parent. Hence, the two groups whose demands it really represents most closely are those from government, media, and the private sector, with *parents* functioning as the name for the unity of

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<sup>4</sup> The logic of the *objet petit a* is central to the Lacanian subject as lack thesis, whereby the infant loses the pre-symbolic enjoyment (*jouissance*) of wholeness when entering into the world of the symbolic, which imposes its series of oppositions and differences, splitting the imaginary wholeness of the subject (Lacan, 1998). The mythical mother figure, as the original difference which the infant’s self is demarcated against, becomes the primary Other: ‘The Thing’ (Lacan, 1992), who symbolizes our lack of wholeness through her departures. The infant subject then attempts to retain a link to their pre-symbolic wholeness, through their investment in partial objects, which through libidinal investment are able to act as “cotton reel” (Lacan, 1998, p. 62) leading them back to where the imaginary mother figure came from. According to the theory we are bound into a perpetual cycle of investing in objects which represent both the mother and our primordial existence when we did not “even recognise the separate existence of other selves” (Ormrod, 2009, p. 119).

*those* groups. Consequently, the naming of *parents* in educational debates refers to something mystical, which literally could not be named, and also acts retroactively in order to become represented as a natural expression of the unfulfilled demands of all parents (*and* taxpayers). As we will see, in order to maintain this privileged unificatory position, it must be regularly articulated, and in discursive forms which attract affective investment.

I can compare the use of *parents* in education discourse to *the people*, because, for Laclau, the construction of a populist articulation is no different, formally, to any other type of hegemonic articulation; it is only one particular “way of constituting the very unity of the group” (2005b, p. 73). However, it is the most *political*, or *antagonistic* way (Thomassen, 2016). Hence Marchart (2005) describes the populist movement as not one which necessarily has to literally name *the people*, but as a “political strategy which aims at the dichotomization of the social” (p. 9). While all politics involves a division between in and out groups, whether consciously acknowledging it or not (Mouffe, 2005), populism deploys an articulatory logic which brings these divides to the fore through the construction of an internal, antagonistic frontier between the name of the unity of the group (the people/parents), whose demands have been continuously frustrated, and “an unresponsive power” (Laclau, 2005b, p. 86), which is constructed as continuously failing (or even staunchly refusing) to address the former’s demands. Hence, the articulation of *parents*, like *the people*, often works to construct an antagonistic frontier, structured by an opposition to an educational status quo - a closed, elitist, opaque and over-protected group, which through its expulsion from the hegemonic identity becomes its constitutive outside.

In contrast to a commonly-held representation of populism as the site of an inherently irrational and reactionary politics which is a sinister threat to democracy (e.g. Arditì, 2005; Canovan, 1999; Comaroff, 2011), Laclau (2005c) displaces the identification of populism from “contents to form” (p. 44). In keeping with the anti-essentialism of the rest of his theory, no political actors or groups can be defined as inherent populists through the application of “symptomatic typologies” (p. 44)<sup>5</sup>. Rather, it is the discourse which is articulated that is populist, making it an *articulatory logic* that “can start from any place in the socio-institutional structure” (p. 44). This does not reduce its potential political effects however, with Laclau defining the populist logic as coterminous with *the political* (interviewed in Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2010). Influenced by post-foundational philosophy (Marchart, 2007) the political is conceived in its ontological sense - rather than something limited to the field of representative politics, it is conceptualised as “the moment of antagonism where the undecidable nature of the alternatives and their resolution through power relations becomes fully visible” (Laclau, 1990, p. 35). Hence populism and the political are on the opposite pole to sedimentation, institutionalization and ideology, which work to reduce the visibility of contingency.

There is therefore a high degree of crossover between populism, hegemony and the political in Laclau’s conceptual repertoire, which can be somewhat confusing (see Arditì, 2010 for a critique). Further highlighting this lack of conceptual exclusivity is the political *logic of equivalence*, which emerged

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<sup>5</sup> In a New Zealand context see Denmark and Bowler (2002) and Gustafson (2006) for studies which have attempted to define the New Zealand First political party and its leader Winston Peters, respectively, as populist, through the application of set criteria.

earlier (1996) than the development of his populist logic (2005b). Like populism, equivalence in its rawest form also tends towards the construction of the social in terms of a dichotomized *them vs us* frame, thereby amplifying political antagonisms. The *logic of difference* by contrast is on the opposite pole, analogous (in its theoretically pure form) to de-politicization or institutionalization, constructing “all differences [as] equally valid within a wider totality” (Laclau, 2005b, p. 82). Difference typically emphasizes the desirability of consensus and the modulation of antagonisms, as the hegemonic identification is broadened out to potentially include all groups. As Phelan (2014) has highlighted, these two political logics are useful for understanding how neoliberalism is able to adapt to successive crises over time and co-opt seemingly contradictory discourses (see also W. Davies, 2014; Mirowski, 2013). As I will explore in Chapter 5, equivalence has most commonly been dominant during the early phases of neoliberalization, when the establishment of a hegemony is sought, whereby groups find equivalence around a shared antagonism towards the welfare state. A politics structured by difference has historically tended to be more characteristic of the Third Way variant of neoliberalism, as the regime has tended to attempt to cement its previously established hegemonic position (I will develop in more detail discourse theory’s applicability to neoliberalism in Chapter 3). Demands for change made by social movements will be addressed on an individual, differentiated basis, thereby restraining their potentially equivalent links to other social movements (Laclau, 2005b, p. 82), and therefore their ability to construct a threatening counter-hegemony.

This brings us to the central role allocated to social movements as agents of

political change in Laclau's theory (which will be explored in more detail in Chapter 3). As Spicer and Böhm (2007) have highlighted, "social movements are the major actors who seek to forge articulations or linkages between what are apparently distinct struggles" (pp. 1671-2). If a social movement's particular issue comes to represent a much broader base of demands, then these can be framed as "popular demands" (Laclau, 2005b, p. 74), and their signifiers (or slogans), can begin to represent the much more potentially universal category of *the people*. For example, Otto and Böhm (2006) found that a movement which began as a particular issue-based resistance to water privatization in Bolivia came to represent a universal "struggle against [the] imposition of neo-liberal policies" (p. 300), while simultaneously constructing *the people* as a unified agent of change. Laclau's conceptualization of populism is not restricted to movements *against* neoliberalism, however, as his theory is without guiding normative principles (Carusi, 2014; Critchley, 2004). While Laclau saw populism as on the opposite pole to institutionalism (Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2010), the latter is conceived in its ontological sense, as the closing out of contingency and antagonism. Hence, as I will outline in chapter 6, we also see the articulation of a *neoliberalizing* populism, which seeks to establish a hegemony between the political and media fields around *parents* (together with accountability, transparency and performance), while antagonistically excluding an educational status quo.

Laclau's theoretical un-mooring of populism from the domain of politics and politicians provides a high degree of (potential) political agency to both social movements and media institutions, even making the latter the potential agents

and originators of populism, not merely its reproducers<sup>6</sup>. Populism's continuing narrowing association with specific political parties and political opportunists such as Silvio Berlusconi (Fieschi & Heywood, 2004), Donald Trump and Winston Peters (a New Zealand politician, see Gustafson (2006)), causing it to become a "pejoratively-charged word" (Stavrakakis, 2014, p. 512), perhaps contributes to its under-application to conceptualizing the media's agency in education, and to the study of education social movements. In Chapter 7 I explore how a teachers union media campaign could be categorized as employing a populist articulatory logic, through the employment of the *Stand Up For Kids, Protect Our Schools/Fight the GERM* dichotomizing frame. As I will explicate in greater detail in that chapter and in the conclusions, that movement not only constitutes a catachrestical name for itself (*Stand Up For Kids*), but also its constitutive outside, with *the GERM* coming to symbolize everything that stands against New Zealand's public school system.

The NZEI's use of the populist logic came under criticism from certain activists, with some seeing it as oversimplifying a complex field, while others thought it was over-political, and risked losing touch with the relationships and ethical beliefs which motivate their teaching. However, Laclau provides additional theoretical tools for understanding how a social movement may gain a political edge while also remaining grounded in the beliefs of its members. Instead of demands, an alternative way to consider the construction of hegemonic articulations is via ethical signifiers. Laclau (2014, p. 80) views

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<sup>6</sup> Studies of the media's part in populism continue to allocate it a passive, or at best promotional role (see Arditi, 2005; D. Kelsey, 2016; Mazzoleni, 2003, 2007; Sawer & Laycock, 2009).

ethical signifiers as necessarily negative, because they can never be articulated in fully positive terms. With the example of *justice*, he provides the insight that this term is only really meaningful when perceived to be denied – when it creates a gap between “being and ought to be” (Laclau, 2014, p. 78). Similarly, in Chapter 7 I aim to show how care, justice, democracy, humanism, fairness, love and collective agency are all felt to be denied by neoliberal policy and discourse, with the movement deriving much of its mobilizing impetus from these gaps. By their very negativity, which cannot ever be fully subsumed by positivizations of the normative (Carusi, 2017), ethical signifiers prevent the hegemonic structure from ever closing in on itself, always maintaining the possibility of “the ‘positive reverse’ of the faults in the social structure” (Szkudlarek, 2016, p. 101). Put simply, ethical signifiers maintain the utopian possibility that a different society is possible, making them of crucial importance to movements interested in progressive social change.

## **Conclusions**

This section has outlined the discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau, with its central ontological principle of *radical contingency*, whereby all objects in our social world (including material objects and society itself) are constituted as distinct and meaningful via their relations to other objects, within the overarching system of signification. This provides a powerful role for discourse, making content and representation synonymous (Laclau, 2012, p. 396) - with there being no predetermined base or essential form to social identities (which includes movements and institutions). Instead, identities must be constantly re-articulated in hegemonic articulations, a practice which



each time changes the meaning of the elements placed together. While all identities are potentially open, over time a hegemonic discourse (such as neoliberalism) can work to constitute them as objects, whereby their discursive and therefore contingent origins can become forgotten through a process of sedimentation. However, through Laclau's incorporation of Lacan's theory of the subject, the objectification of identities is theorized as inherently precarious – the process of sedimentation is “subverted by *constitutive* dislocations” (Laclau, 2004, p. 280), meaning that identities are *always already dislocated* from the hegemonic articulations which structure them, leaving them necessarily open to colonization by rival discourses and counter-hegemonic articulations. This conception of identification as *identity struggle* will be of particular importance in the later chapters of this thesis, as I consider neoliberalization's hegemonic processes and fundamental limits.

Laclau's populist articulatory logic, emanating from “any place in the socio-institutional structure” (Laclau, 2005c, p. 44), will also take prominence during the analysis, as I attempt to illustrate its utilization by both newspapers and by the education union, the NZEI. As I will explicate in the next chapter, the populist logic's structural requirement to construct a *them*: symbolic enemies, has implications for the dichotomization of debates around education.

As I will also outline in the following chapter, discourse theory's privileging of articulation and identification can provide useful insights to the study of the neoliberalization of education policy, the agency of institutional media in that process, and the role of unions and textual dissent in mobilizing resistance.

# Chapter 3

## Neoliberalism, education, media and social movements: a theoretical framework

### Introduction

Following the previous chapter's overview of the discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau, this chapter aims to locate its key concepts more fully within the specific fields of this study. In order to enable the addressing of the three research questions, a loosely correlative three-part framework is outlined which defines the key theoretical concepts which will be applied within the analysis chapters of this thesis. The subject areas tackled within the three sections of this chapter correlate loosely with that of the three empirical chapters, and their exploration seeks to locate the case study within the context of broader debates around neoliberalism, the media and union-based resistance.

These key theoretical concepts which will be defined are neoliberalized logics, fantasmatic narratives and representations, the entrepreneurial self, media logics, the journalistic identity, social movement unionism, textual dissent and popular knowledges. The explication of these concepts will also continue in the subsequent analysis chapters, with no necessary boundary between their illustration here by reference to the literature and in those later chapters by reference to the empirical material (see discussion in Chapter 4).

In the first section I attempt to illustrate the benefits of conceiving of neoliberalism simultaneously as an elite social movement, as a form of governmentality which shapes subject relations, and as the process of neoliberalization. I then aim to show how neoliberalization impacts education through a discussion and delineation of the four discursive logics of instrumentalization, marketization, problematization and performativity, which are attributed ideological cohesion through their articulation alongside iterations of the entrepreneurial self and its narratives. The second section argues for the increased consideration of journalistic identifications, the history of the fourth estate ideal and media logics in conceptualizations of the print media's reproductions of neoliberal education policies. The third section considers the role of teachers unions in resisting neoliberalization, and how they combine with the practices of "textual dissent" (Thrupp, 2005): blogging and social media, together with other micro-resistant practices.

## **The neoliberalization of education**

### *Strategies, antagonisms and governmentality of an elite movement*

Neoliberalism has become established as the dominant economic, political and social paradigm of our time. Its key principles have been adopted by the majority of states globally (Harvey, 2005), shaping not only how we think about economic, political and social matters, but even how we see ourselves and how we communicate with one another on a daily basis. As I will outline in the following sections, this has profound implications for both the meaning and purposes of education. In this introductory section, rather than attempting

to define neoliberalism as a stable concept, I consider the benefits of accounting for this current conjuncture of paradigmatic dominance by considering neoliberalism as *both* an elite social movement, which was able to forge together disparate demands in the period after World War II, and as a form of governmentality, with a philosophical lineage that can be traced back to the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. In this way I also seek to illustrate its flexible, and often contradictory, conceptions of the relationships between market, state and individual freedoms.

Recent scholarship has highlighted neoliberalism's simultaneous emergence as a theory and strategy in the post-WWII period (Harvey, 2005; Mirowski, 2013; Jamie Peck, 2010a; Phelan, 2014; Srnicek & Williams, 2015). While I don't have the space here to explore this period in detail, various theoretical strands and demands were encompassed together into a hegemonic formation which included key thinkers and power-brokers from both Europe and America, resulting in the foundation of a global "neoliberal thought collective" (Mirowski, 2013; Mirowski & Plehwe, 2015). What held these broad interests together was their shared constitutive outside: the perceived over-reach of coercive bureaucracies into the freedoms of the individual. This antagonism was embodied for neoliberals in the Keynesian welfare state, a form of social compromise between labour and capital which sought to "mediate between markets and society to balance multiple objectives" (J. Kelsey, 2015, p. 127), and which had dominated Western politics in the post-WWII period. As Foucault (2008) put it, "they [neoliberals] share[d] the same objects of repulsion, namely, the state-controlled economy, planning, and state interventionism" (p. 79). Hence, through its naming of an outside

and its ability “to forge articulations or linkages” (Spicer & Böhm, 2007, pp. 1671-1672) between disparate demands, neoliberalism is conceived here as an *elite movement* (C. Jones, 2016). While the movement was founded on the influential theorizing of important thinkers such as Friedrich von Hayek and other members of the Mont Pelerin Society (W. Davies, 2014; Harvey, 2005; Phelan, 2014), specific iterations of neoliberal thought should not be considered as self-contained or divorced from the broader social terrain, in particular during the recent post-financial crisis context (W. Davies, 2014). As Jamie Peck (2010b) puts it, “the principal tenets of neoliberalism were not handed down, as policy commandments, in tablets of stone” (p. 106), with Hayek himself insisting that flexibility and openness must be instilled into the programme from the beginning. As will be outlined in the subsequent analysis chapters, if neoliberalism is conceived as a contingent, elite social movement with an ability to appropriate diverse discourses, it also leaves it open to contestation, struggle and change.

What has subsequently been defined as neoliberal (as distinct from liberal) theory began to develop in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Foucault, 2008), however it began to find much more coherence and impetus in the years immediately following World War II, as the world was recoiling from the horrors of out of control totalitarianism. This led to what Foucault (2008) has termed a widespread post-war atmosphere of “state-phobia” (p. 76), which provided much of the affective impetus behind diverse anti-authoritarian movements across the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, both on the left and right (B. Anderson, 2015), and has continued to energize movements such as Occupy (Graeber, 2013; Sitrin & Azzellini, 2014) and the Tea Party (Jutel, 2012) in

more recent times.

Neoliberals were able to take advantage of this widespread affective atmosphere (B. Anderson, 2015) in order to gradually increase their influence in elite circles over the 1950s and 60s, despite the continuing dominance of the Keynesian model in terms of state policies. They clearly understood that the battle to win hearts and minds was a long-game, and set about the establishment of a framework of organisations (including think tanks, universities and media institutions) which continually reproduced neoliberal doctrine, gradually colonizing economic and social policy, resulting in the formation of a new horizon, or common-sense policy-paradigm (Jamie Peck, 2010a; Srnicek & Williams, 2015). Then, with the onset of a severe economic recession in the 1970s, which included both high inflation and rising unemployment, the Keynesian paradigm (which had previously pumped money into the economy to decrease unemployment and conversely taken money out to reduce inflation) proved unable to adapt (Srnicek & Williams, 2015). In response to this crisis neoliberalism had a ready-made “decline” narrative populated by a central antagonist: an over-reaching, over-regulating, inefficient, undisciplined and over-politicized Keynesian state (see further discussion below).

Following its adoption by several states as an economic, political and social theory underpinning government policy in the late 1970s and early 80s (Harvey, 2005; Jamie Peck, 2010a), neoliberalism’s contradictory relationship with the state came to the fore (W. Davies, 2014; Foucault, 2008; Jamie Peck, 2010a; Phelan, 2014). While in one sense markets became a political tool which enabled a critique of the relative inefficiencies and

uncompetitiveness of bureaucracies, in another, neoliberalism requires a strong state in order to both forge new markets in previously un-marketized areas (W. Davies, 2014; Jamie Peck, 2010a), and also to deal (often coercively) with the de-regulated anarchy of the aftermath (Harvey, 2005; Jamie Peck, 2010a). Resultantly, neoliberalism has a much more complex relation to the state than is suggested by comparisons with classic liberalism's proclamation of *laissez faire* capitalism (Foucault, 2008; Phelan, 2014; Thrupp & Willmott, 2003). The neoliberal state is repeatedly called upon "to fix markets, to build quasi-markets, and to repair market failures" (Jamie Peck, 2010a, p. xiii).

Despite that contradiction, neoliberal theory posits that markets are more *natural* than the bureaucratic institutions of the state (Thrupp & Willmott, 2003). Acting omnipotently (C. Jones, 2013), as Adam Smith's (2010) "invisible hand", markets work outside of human agency, merely enhancing our pre-existing propensities to trade with and compete against one another (Apple, 2006; Hayek, 1960). This naturalness and externality to human affairs also makes market judgments more impartial, objective (Hayek, 1960) and epistemologically reliable (W. Davies, 2014; Mirowski, 2013) than decisions made by "artificial" institutions.

Linked to this naturalness and impartiality, markets enhance our *freedom*, in that they work to facilitate our rational tendencies to work in our own interests, rather than any notion of a collective interest imposed on us by a non-natural and therefore partial organisation (Olson, 1965). Following Hayek (1960), freedom comes to be defined as "negative freedom", or "the freedom of individuals from arbitrary interference by other individuals, collectives and institutions (paradigmatically the state)" (Srnicek & Williams,

2015, p. 79). Henceforth, individual autonomy (which paradoxically can be transposed onto organizations and states), becomes “the fundamental political value” (Dean, 2009, p. 51), privileged over other tenets of liberalism, such as justice or equality (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). Rather controverting the association with individual freedom, market-structured autonomy is seen as the optimal model for the generation of both economic growth *and* social stability, as individuals become compelled “to learn how to behave rationally and virtuously” (Rodrigues, 2013, p. 1012).

As a scholar of long-term discursive shifts in the governance of behaviour, Foucault (2008) interrogates whether neoliberalism should be viewed as a break from liberalism at all. Oksala (2013) highlights Foucault’s emphasis on the emergence within liberal political theory of economics as a science in the 18th century, which separated the previous close links between the economy, politics and justice (and by implication morality). This separation constituted the economy as an independent domain of “autonomous, natural phenomena governed by scientific laws and regularities” (Oksala, 2013, p. 48). The same period also witnessed the emergence of *liberal governmentality*; the art of government began to operate under scientific laws internal to itself, rather than deriving from an abstract notion of sovereignty (Foucault, 1991a; C. Gordon, 1991). Consequently, the focus of government became centred on the efficient management of populations, rather than territory, with statistics on *people* providing a technical basis for the emergent knowledge of political science and political economy (Foucault, 1991a, pp. 97-101). The central problematic of government, which tied together state and private institutions, became the economic productivity of its population



(Foucault, 2008; C. Gordon, 1991; Rose & Miller, 1992), which came to be conceived as *human capital* (see discussion of the entrepreneurial self below). Government was therefore conceived as an open process through which a state, made up of loose, temporary alliances of actors from the public and private sectors (C. Gordon, 1991; Rose & Miller, 1992), could be continually re-defined in order to maximise wealth generation. Therefore, even though elements of neoliberal *theory* call for a reduction of the state apparatus, this is not the same as a reduction in the reach of *governmentality*. As Lemke (2002) argues, neoliberal governmentality should be considered as a continuation and intensification of liberal governmentality; not a withdrawal of government, but its “prolongation” (p. 58) into previously under-governed, informal areas, with an associated internalization into subjectivities (Ball, 2003).

For Berman (1981), the genesis of the economic rationality can be traced back further still than Foucault – to the scientific revolutions of the 16th and 17th centuries; in particular to the work of Descartes and his interlinked subject/object and mind/body dualisms. These separations would allow the scientist to view their own mind as ontologically distinct from their surroundings, where they could perceive themselves “as a separate entity ‘in here’ confronting things ‘out there’” (p. 35). Hence, when transferred to the study of human behaviour, the philosophical ground was laid for the reification of populations in liberal governmentality, where they would be regarded not as agented subjects, but as objects or resources with a specific and scientifically-defined use-value to the state. For Bai (2001) this objectification is symptomatic of an instrumentalist philosophy “wherein

entities are valued not for what they are in themselves but primarily or only for their utility” (Bai, 2001, p. 3).

Hence, through this historical approach, we can perceive certain continuities between the development of the instrumental scientific method in the 16th and 17th centuries, its deployment within the emergent liberal governmental rationalities of economics and political science in the 18th and 19th centuries, and contemporary neoliberal regimes’ privileging of economics and forms of statistical calculation as methods of knowledge production, evaluation and critique (W. Davies, 2014). Foucault (2008, pp. 91-92) argues that Keynesian social democracy, rather like neoliberalism, did not possess a unique governmental rationality at all. Instead, its forms of “rationality function[ed] as counterweights, as a corrective” (p. 92) to the alienating, objectifying and stratifying effects of liberal governmentality. Hence the intensification seen within neoliberal governmentality (Lemke, 2002), can be viewed as partly due to the removal of those social democratic counterweights, coupled with more advanced, instrumental, scientific methods for increasing the performance of human capital (Hardt & Negri, 2009).

While the Foucauldian historical perspective provides many insights, we should also remember that Foucault (1972) himself viewed the history of ideas as characterised by discontinuity and rupture, as against the tendencies of many historians to present over-simplifying descriptions of continuous linear-progressions. Bearing this in mind, we should avoid easy confluences between neoliberalism and the positivist scientific method, developed 500 years ago. However, through applying the insights of governmentality studies which emphasize the historical development of neoliberalism’s modes of

governing, together with an emphasis on the hegemonic struggles and discursive strategies which have characterized its recent hegemonic ascendancy, we can avoid both conceptualizing neoliberalism as emerging in a historical vacuum and as something which progresses through a linear imperative, devoid of context. In the next section I turn to the work of Jamie Peck (2010) who has attempted to combine these two elements into an understanding of neoliberalism as a contingent process of market rule.

### *Neoliberalization: conceptualizing a process*

While understanding neoliberalism as both a social movement and a way of governing populations is useful in terms of how it has achieved paradigmatic dominance, we still need to understand what it specifically *does to education*. In this section I introduce the term “neoliberalization” (Jamie Peck, 2010a) in order to think about neoliberalism as a multi-dimensional and heterogeneous process which impacts discursive fields and practices.

Jamie Peck (2010a) employs the term neoliberalization as a corrective to an overly structuralist and loosely-defined account of neoliberalism which can be guilty of attributing all social ills to the term (Barnett, 2005). Such scholarship is critiqued by Peck as employing the “N” word to connote an indistinct but monolithic and universally malevolent force, which always proceeds in a uniform, linear progression (Barnett, 2005; Mirowski, 2013; Phelan, 2014). For Peck, emphasis should remain both on neoliberalism “as a constructed project... [which] keeps agents and agency in sight” (p. xii), and also its progression in uneven and non-linear directions, within “particular terrains of struggle” (p. 22). In order to make this point he

highlights that in some national contexts (such as New Zealand and Chile) neoliberalization progressed rapidly, while in others (such as Sweden and China), change progressed much more gradually.

Despite this stress on non-linear “backflows and undercurrents” (Peck, 2010, p. xiii), Peck has developed a useful three-phase linear typology of neoliberalization (which can obviously manifest itself very differently in different contexts). The first is the *doctrinal* phase, analogous to Klein’s (2007) “shock doctrine”, which was rapidly imposed on New Zealand from the mid-1980s through to the mid-1990s (see J. Kelsey, 1995 and Chapter 5). This phase is characterized by “funding cuts, organizational downsizing, market testing, and privatization” (Jamie Peck, 2010a, p. 22), taking advantage of an atmosphere of crisis (Mirowski, 2013) in order to implement change so broadly and rapidly that normally resistant organizations such as trade unions are left unable to react quickly enough (see Boshier, 2001; J. Kelsey, 1995, 2015; Pratt & Clark, 2005; Roberts, 2007 for further discussion of the New Zealand context). However, the doctrinal phase creates a vacuum, where much of the regulatory apparatus of the state has been removed, creating a necessity for the second phase, *intervention*, which requires market-conforming *re-regulations* (Ball, 2003, 2013). The third phase is then *normalization*, whereby neoliberal assumptions can become relatively stable, through attempts at reintegrating the signifiers of social democracy in order to reduce antagonisms (Clarke, 2011; Hay, 2007; Peters, 2010; Roberts, 2007). This emphasis on de-antagonisation and ideological heterogeneity was influenced by Giddens (1998) vision of “third way” politics (particularly influencing New Labour in the UK), which sought to merge the aims of a

competitive market economy with those of social justice and equity (Peters, 2010).

(Jamie Peck, 2010b) has also suggested a fourth, “zombie” phase, whereby the state once again becomes interventionist, but more in response to the systemic market failures endemic to late neoliberalism, exemplified by the global financial crisis (see also W. Davies, 2014). Increasingly unable to attribute these failures to Keynesian welfarism (although in the case of the GFC it has largely succeeded – see Mirowski (2013)), neoliberal governance becomes increasingly detached from rigid doctrine, instead defined by “ameliorative firefighting, trial-and-error governance, devolved experimentation, and the pragmatic embrace of ‘what works’” (Jamie Peck, 2010b, p. 106). Whether there has been evidence of this fourth phase in post-2008 financial crisis New Zealand will be reflected on in the conclusions.

### *Neoliberalized logics*

Integrating Peck’s insights with those from discourse theory, Phelan (2014) allows us to conceptualise neoliberalization as a series of articulatory logics which, when expressed together, can form relatively robust discursive chains (see also Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Howarth, 2005). These logics are not necessarily neoliberal in themselves – in line with our discourse theoretical framework neoliberalism is conceived as an ongoing process which adapts its identity in relation to context. It is only when combinations of logics are articulated hegemonically in order to produce specific effects within educational contexts, that they become both neoliberalized and neoliberalizing (Phelan, 2014, p. 57). *Neoliberalized* because the logic’s

identity changes through its articulation, and *neoliberalizing* because it changes the identity of other discursive logics it is articulated alongside, thereby impacting the broader discursive context. This is because Laclau and Mouffe (1985) conceived articulation as essentially a chain-making practice which establishes “a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result” (p. 105). And it is this changing of identity which makes neoliberalized logics so useful for understanding how neoliberalism impacts education over time.

It is this ability to reinvent and reconstitute itself which increases the capacity of neoliberalized logics to be “hegemonically articulated with other [non-neoliberal] discursive logics” (Phelan, 2014, p. 57). In other words, it is because a logic such as marketization is able to become articulated with appeals to “social justice” and “racial equality” (Salter & Phelan, 2017; J. T. Scott, 2013), that it potentially broadens its appeal beyond doctrinal neoliberals. This ability to become embedded and naturalised, and also appropriate discourses which would appear to be in direct opposition, increases the importance of delineating the logic’s historical trajectory, thereby reactivating its political origins (see following section). Before that, however, I need to define in more detail what I mean by a logic, in the context of the over-arching discourse theoretical framework.

Whereas discourse is conceptualized as the background material for the structuring of social relations, or the “primary terrain of the constitution of objectivity” (Laclau, 2005b, p. 68), discursive logics are the more specific arrangement through which that meaning becomes inscribed. By operating as a context-dependent, “rarefied system of objects governed by a cluster of

rules” (Laclau, 2004, p. 305), logics incorporate the objectifying material of discourse in certain directions by establishing unwritten rules on the kinds of things that can be said about phenomena, and the phenomena which can be talked about (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, pp. 135-136). Consequently, we can begin to perceive the usefulness of logics in describing how neoliberalism operates simultaneously as an abstract theory, but also becomes increasingly “sedimented into the common-sense fabric of everyday life” (Phelan, 2014, p. 162). Laclau (2000a) was quite clear in specifying that logics are simultaneously a form of abstraction for an analyst to account for social phenomena, but also real in the sense of their concrete effects on “the constitution of identities and political articulations” (p. 87).

As discussed in Chapter 2, Laclau posited two key forms of *political* logic, equivalence and difference, which together constitute a bi-polar dichotomy, requiring “each other as necessary conditions for the construction of the social” (Laclau, 2005b, p. 80). While the two political logics “are related to the institution of the social”, Laclau (2005b) conceived *social* logics as more akin to the establishment and governing of rules concerning the representation of objects within the instituted system (p. 117). Glynos and Howarth (2007) further developed this insight by arguing that the identification of social logics aims to capture the “patterning of social practices” (p. 140) on the *synchronic* axis (concerned with phenomena at a particular period of time), while political logics work on the *diachronic* axis (and so focus on how practices have been contested and transformed over time).

Rather than identifying a full set of social logics which they view as instrumental to neoliberal regimes, Glynos and Howarth (2007) put the onus

on the judgment of the individual researcher and the process of *naming* (see Chapter 4, Methods, for more details). This has the advantage of not setting pre-determined limits on research which employs their logics approach, allowing its application to diverse contexts using varied empirical material.

In the following section I name four key logics which have been previously foregrounded in the literature as having considerable effects on education during the era of neoliberal hegemony, together with the discourses which they are articulated with. The aim is to both define these processes and illustrate the benefits of defining instrumentalization, marketization, problematization and performativity as neoliberalized logics.

### *Instrumentalization, marketization, problematization and performativity*

Instrumentalism, referred to in the previous section as a philosophy which possesses a lineage dating back the 16<sup>th</sup> Century (Berman, 1981), plays a key role within the neoliberalization of education. When articulated within specific contexts, alongside other logics and discourses, it becomes manifested as the discursive logic of *instrumentalization*. When articulated within the genres of politics, policy, the media and others it becomes both neoliberalized and has neoliberalizing effects by delimiting the possibilities and purposes of education. Rather than being treated as an end to itself, education becomes a means; or an instrument for affecting economic productivity and competitiveness (Apple, 2006; Ball, 2013; Harris, 2008; G. B. Slater & Griggs, 2015). Spheres of education which cannot justify their existence through that re-defined purpose become progressively marginalised



(Apple, 2006; Compton & Weiner, 2008) resulting in education becoming increasingly re-defined as vocational training (Taubman, 2009). With critical disciplines such as the humanities and social sciences underfunded in comparison to those which can demonstrate “impact” in terms of economic productivity, we see a marginalization and decline of discourse on education which underlines its value as a public good, with intrinsic, unique and non-quantifiable benefits to society outside of economic growth (Codd, 2005; J. Gilbert, 2014; Roberts, 2007).

The previously discussed normalization, or “Third Way” phase of neoliberalization in the 1990s and 2000s (Hay, 2004; Jamie Peck, 2010a; Phelan, 2014), saw the instrumentalized view of education and its centrality to economic growth become increasingly naturalised and presupposed (Clarke, 2011, 2012; Francis, 2014; Szkudlarek, 2007). Tropes such as the *knowledge economy* and the *knowledge society* contributed further to this naturalization and global expansion (Ball, 2013; Clarke, 2015; Szkudlarek, 2016). The latter depended partly on the work of powerful and influential supra-national organisations such as the OECD and the World Bank, which adopted neoliberal policies from the late 1970s onwards (Crouch, 2011). A “paradigm convergence” emerged (Ball, 2001a), centred on the tenets of marketization (see below), which Sahlberg (2011) referred to as “the GERM” – the Global Education Reform Movement. For Sahlberg (2011), the GERM agenda structured itself around the signifiers of competition, choice and information, and the ideals of standardization, “efficiency, productivity, and rapid service delivery” (p. 175). As more states began to adopt a paradigm which reduced education to processes of quantification and display, and with

the performance of education systems closely discursively tied to economic competitiveness, the pressure of competition between them increased (Ball, 2001a, 2013). This logic became embodied in the global league tables of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Ball, 2013), together with profuse forms of ranking at the local level. Within such a context, intrinsically-held knowledge which stresses the human complexities of the learning process became increasingly closed out (Glynos & Howarth, 2007), as education became represented as "a world of reified statistical data that has been stripped of any trace of the human activity that produced it" (Doecke, Kostogriz, & Illesca, 2010, p. 90).

Simultaneously, the formation of education policy began to be conceived in instrumental terms as a tool to enact the desired social change of a more competitive workforce, imposed on the education sector by experts from an external vantage point in a hierarchical relation, rather than as something which is socially constructed in a democratic relation (Wood, 2004). Sociologically informed education policy research employing qualitative methodologies began to fall out of favour, as research which promised effectiveness by delivering on specific educational objectives or problems through positivist epistemologies, came to be preferred (Thrupp, 2010; Thrupp & Willmott, 2003). The instrumentalization of policy contributed further to the dominance of "conceptual metaphors" (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003) for education such as *the machine*, on which specific levers, removed from their socioeconomic contexts, could be pulled with specific, pre-destined effects (Doecke et al., 2010; J. O'Neill, 2011; Wood, 2004). This would have a further reifying effect, as the actors located within the machine

would be conceived as objects with a specific utility, rather than subjects (Bai, 2001).

Closely tied to instrumentalization comes the logic of *marketization* (Boshier, 2001; Thrupp & Willmott, 2003), whereby publically funded schools and universities are progressively required to justify themselves “in market terms” (Phelan, 2014, p. 61). While instrumentalization reifies, through this logic, education, its institutions and the human actors within them become *commodified* as a product (J. O’Neill, 2011; Shiller, 2015; G. B. Slater & Griggs, 2015) which can be marketed and exported for profit, further increasing economic growth for the state (Harris, 2008). With an education sector segmented and commodified as a series of products, parents are articulated as the consumers of those products (Peters, 2005; Shiller, 2015; Thrupp & Willmott, 2003), and teachers as contractors, providers, or low-status technicians (Ball, 2003; Codd, 2005; Mahony & Hextall, 2001; Taubman, 2009; Thrupp & Willmott, 2003), who are expected to deliver those products as efficiently and effectively as possible (D. Hall & McGinity, 2015) (see the following section on the entrepreneurial self).

Schools became compelled to compete against each other, with the logic of *competition* emerging closely intertwined to marketization and instrumentalization. With the full privatisation of public schools into profit-making businesses remaining politically unpopular (Crouch, 2011), “the construction of quasi-market mechanisms...in order to enhance national competitiveness” (Thrupp & Willmott, 2003, p. 13) became increasingly common. Quasi-markets blur neoliberal theory’s antagonistic boundary-lines between public/private and state/market. However, with normalization, those

divides are retained as rhetorically and habitually performed distinctions, used as political tools with which to attack public provision as outdated and resistant to innovation and accountability (W. Davies, 2014; Thrupp & Willmott, 2003). Together with national competitiveness, markets, even quasi ones, are presumed to increase the performance of “students, teachers, schools and [entire] education systems” (Clarke, 2012, p. 300), by all being incentivized to work harder.

Hence competition and marketization are logics untied from the specific practice of privatization, as publically-funded and managed institutions can be re-shaped internally in order to become “compatible with a market ethos” (W. Davies, 2014, p. 6), by splitting them into their component parts and by making them more accountable to the public, who are constructed as consumers (Du Gay, 1996; Power, 1999). That said, the contracting-out to private providers of formerly publically-run services to schools and government departments has also become more much more commonplace (Ball, 2009; J. O’Neill, 2011). For Ball (2009), this has a circular impact on education policy, with the services being offered to government departments by private providers often being the construction of policy itself. This further colonizes education with the instrumental language of “change management”.

The most relevant manifestation of quasi-markets to this study is the establishment of publically-funded but privately-run schools, known as charter schools in the US (Ravitch, 2010) and Academies in the UK (Francis, 2014). Embodying neoliberalism’s valorization of the individual, autonomous unit, and its state-phobia, charter schools would be “free of direct government control” (Ravitch, 2010, p. 9), and therefore would theoretically

be able to:

...be innovative, hire only the best teachers, get rid of incompetent teachers, set their own pay scales, compete for students (customers), and be judged solely by their results (test scores and graduation rates).  
(Ravitch, 2010, pp. 9-10)

By no longer being under the regulatory oversight of local education authorities, charter schools would be “unshackled” by bureaucracy, which imposes collective burdens such as teacher tenure provisions that require schools to show due diligence to teachers before firing them (Salter & Phelan, 2017). Through having their results publically available, the theory is that charter schools are directly accountable to parents and students, rather than the state, and therefore tailor their curriculum and opening hours accordingly. Accountability would also come at the state level (rather than the local level, as with other public schools in the US), whereby a school (or group of schools) owned by a company would be “chartered” by the state in order to provide education to minimum standards.

As noted by Massey University’s Education Policy Response Group (2012, pp. 16-17), New Zealand implemented a version of charter schools as a model for *all* of its public schools in 1989 with the *Tomorrow’s Schools* legislation, which abolished local education authorities (Codd, 1993; Court & O’Neill, 2011; Wylie, 2012). As will be outlined in Chapter 5, this was premised on the implementation of a quasi-market model where schools should be run as independent businesses (while still funded and controlled by central government), directly accountable to the local community through the

election of parental school boards and the latter's involvement in the writing of school charters (L. Gordon, 1992; Sullivan, 1993; Wylie, 2012). As competition was seen to promote efficiency by placing limits on the expansion of quantity of provision without a concurrent rise in quality, schools would directly compete with each other for enrolments, the numbers of which equated to funding. This imposition of a market model, run by the state, further illuminates the value of conceiving of marketization as a discursive logic which is not necessarily tied to privatization. Additionally, the call for the implementation of privately-owned charter schools in New Zealand in 2011 (see Chapter 6), within the context of an already marketized system, demonstrates the ongoing ideological authority conferred by the rhetorical divides of state/market, freedom/bureaucracy and individual innovation/collective inertia.

This brings us to our next logic: *problematization*. This logic enables the critique of schools, teachers or education systems for failing in a number of areas, including being responsive to their "customers'" market-choices (B. Davies & Bansel, 2007; Hursh, 2005; Sullivan, 1993), producing sufficiently "transparent" achievement data which demonstrates accountability and improvements (Hursh, 2013; Taubman, 2009), and for not enabling sufficient economic productivity for the state (Ball, 2013; Codd, 2005; Roberts, 2007). Nodal points which enable the articulation of this logic are the signifiers of *crisis* (Stern, 2013; Thomas, 2003), *decline* (Apple, 2006), and *broken schools* (Janice Peck, 2015), as bureaucratic over-regulation and an unaccountable workforce become responsible for the low achievement performances of marginalised groups (Salter & Phelan, 2017; J. T. Scott,

2013).

The logic of *problematization* is central to Foucault's (1991a) earlier mentioned conception of the state as an open and contingent process, within which multiple "technologies of government" (comprising elements from the public and private spheres) coalesce around the definition of problems and their solutions (see also Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Rose & Miller, 1992). For Ball (2013), one of these technologies of government with particular resonance for education are "policy technologies", which he defines as "the calculated deployment of forms of organization and procedures, and disciplines or bodies of knowledge, to organize human forces and capabilities into functioning systems" (p. 49). These "forms of organization" thus function as ideal-models of optimal efficiency and performance, to which a current education system is compared, inevitably unfavourably (Taubman, 2009; Wood, 2004). Hence, for Ball (2013), market-reform also offers a model of the ideal-system with specified roles, or subject-positions, such as the client/consumer, the manager, and the managed teacher. Consequently, as will be described in Chapter 5, the discursive logics of *instrumentalization*, *marketization* and *problematization* draw on discourses such as new public management (NPM) and other management discourses in order to define ideal-systems such as *the market* and the roles within them.

Before we discuss NPM in more detail however, I will briefly outline the discursive context which framed its emergence. Rational choice developed as a theory during the 1950s and 60s (Savigny, 2011) and was premised on the "enlargement of the territory of economic theory" (C. Gordon, 1991, p. 43) into all other spheres of social science. Through adapting the

methodology of neo-classical economics (Savigny, 2011), rational choice and its public-sector focused variant public choice aimed to provide a rational economic explanation for *all* human behaviour, including that of politicians (Hay, 2007) and public sector workers (Crouch, 2011; D. Hall & McGinity, 2015; O'Neill, 2012). Especially influential during the doctrinal phase of neoliberalization, rational choice theory universalized the liberal model of rational, self-interested economic conduct - embodied in the figure of *homo oeconomicus* (Foucault, 2008). Therefore, ethical ideals for collective action on behalf of a “common-good” are regarded as naïve, idealistic, or even coercive (See Olson, 1965). With its naturalisation of competition between individuals, rational choice quickly became appropriated as a legitimising and universalising knowledge (Phelan, 2014) for neoliberalization, pointing as it does to the market as the only organisational structure that can facilitate self-interested predispositions.

New public management (NPM) developed as a policy programme which sought to operationalize the theoretical premises of rational choice and public choice within the public sector (Du Gay, 1996; Power, 1999; Thrupp & Willmott, 2003), especially prominent during Peck's (2010) implementation and normalization phases. Famously, the British Labour Party under Tony Blair were keen proponents, adopting the rhetoric of NPM into their reformist crusade against unresponsive and inefficient bureaucracies, thereby playing a key role in the dissemination and popularization of the discourse (Elliott, 2001; Hay, 2004), together with neoliberal think tanks (Power, 1999) and the OECD (Ball, 2001a). While ostensibly aimed at efficiency and thus value-for-money for the taxpayer (O'Neill, 2012; Power, 1999), NPM goes beyond



mere reform to a wholesale “cultural re-engineering of the public sector” (Ball, 2013, p. 55), aimed at transforming the very values and norms of those working within it to becoming entrepreneurial and customer-focused (Du Gay, 1996; Gleeson & Gunter, 2001).

Reconceiving organisational structures in the public sector as “chains of low-trust relationships” (Thrupp & Willmott, 2003, p. 23), linked together as loose networks through shifting and temporary contractual associations, NPM advocates decentralisation and autonomy for departments and individuals (Power, 1999). However, in congruence with neoliberalism’s inconsistent articulation of the tension between freedom and governance, scholars argue that NPM “paradoxically concentrates governance at the centre” (Elliott, 2001, p. 192), through the imposition of accountability regimes and management hierarchies which seek to impose a new culture on their workforce (Du Gay, 1996). As will be reflected on in the conclusions chapter, control through culture is viewed by these scholars as *more totalising* than centralized bureaucracies, and they note NPM’s introduction of an anxiety-inducing atmosphere of permanent deficiency (Thrupp & Willmott, 2003), prompting a “continuous state of activation” (Elliott, 2001, p. 200) and flux (Du Gay, 1996). Empowered within this problematized terrain is the figure of *the manager*, who becomes the key agent of change (Apple, 2006). Their position is dependent on their technical expertise in the measurement of productivity and quantitative calculations of *quality* (Ball, 2003; Shore, 2008), together with their ability to engineer and monitor “culture change”, thereby imposing the NPM canons of “performance, quality and excellence” (Ball, 2013, p. 56).

This therefore brings us to our final logic, which is perhaps the most integral to the neoliberalization of education: *performativity*. Following Lyotard (1984), Ball (2013) describes performativity as both “a culture of a system of terror” *and* a “regime of accountability that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of control, attrition and change” (p. 57). That regime of evaluation demands ritualised “displays of ‘quality’” which “represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organization within a field of judgement” (Ball, 2001b, p. 210). Ball therefore delineates performativity in a more specific direction than, for example, Judith Butler (1993), by incorporating the guilt-inducing power of league tables and other comparative instruments. However, like Butler, individual performative acts of “quality” at the micro level function to consolidate longer-term identificatory practices, linking the micro to the macro by demonstrating commitment to the system and investment in the organization. In this way, performativity for Ball is both a broad culture and a specific policy technology which is deployed strategically in order to produce certain desired effects on educators. The general and the specific together empower a neoliberal governmentality which imposes “a new form of control” (Ball, 2003, p. 217) which is more totalizing, powerful, efficient and far-reaching because it works at the subjective level from the inside-out.

Conceived as a neoliberalized logic we could begin to see how performativity could exist simultaneously at the broader, abstract terrain, whereby the analyst uses it to define formerly unconnected elements as indicative of cultural shifts, but also as a more concrete policy technology which sets disciplinary constraints on subjects and actual bodies in physical space. In

contrast to NPM, which derives its name from within its own field, *performativity* is a conceptual device used within critical education and cultural studies to refer to a culture or mind-set produced by the structural changes to the public sector and by the discourse of performance management (Thompson, 2001). Hence performativity, much like instrumentalization, marketization and problematization, is defined here as a neoliberalized logic because it is the naming process itself which links together and thus makes visible and more politically resonant, real phenomena and processes (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 187)

However, the question remains, where did this new “regime of accountability” (Ball, 2013), which has had profound effects on the subjectivities of educators, derive from? This could perhaps be clarified further by returning to Lyotard (1984), who links the emergence of performativity to the interlinked evolutions of capitalism and science (see Berman, 1981). By the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the production of scientific “truths” began to become reliant on large laboratories – with their associated costs. Scientific discoveries which were not produced in such contexts could then not be verified by other scientists, and were thus not regarded as scientifically rigorous, and could not then attract further funding. For Lyotard then, science produces a *product* to be sold in the marketplaces of capitalism within a circular relation, whereby the marketing of scientific knowledge is required in order to fund further knowledge production. Consequently, the grounding rationale for the production of knowledge becomes a question of doing this in the most efficient way possible, with “the best possible input/output equation” (Lyotard, 1984, p. 46), rather than the production of truth *per se*.

In the centuries since, “performance improvement” has become universalised as its own “kind of legitimation” for institutions (p. 47).

By stressing the historical trajectory of performativity and its relation to capitalism and market logics, we can begin to understand the contribution it makes to neoliberalization. We can perceive that in order to demonstrate *quality* and *efficiency*, and thus to legitimise ourselves, we must *market ourselves* – as “quality means customer orientation” (Bröckling, 2015, p. xvii). In other words, much like science in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century, today we are all under pressure in order to forge and then sell our own truth: that we are efficient and effective, as determined through the practices of audit.

Originally a technique of organisational legitimation from the private sector and the practices of accountancy (Shore, 2008), audit began to be transferred to the public sector in the late 1980s & early 1990s (Power, 1999). Defined as *scientific*, *objective* and *neutral* (Power, 1999), audit fits comfortably within neoliberalization’s valorisation of economic and quantitative forms of validation, and its marginalisation of qualitative forms of judgment (W. Davies, 2014). Power (1999) notes how audit practice became an essential tool for neoliberal problematization and reform programmes such as NPM, whereby government departments would have to justify themselves in terms of value for money (VFM) to the “mythical reference point of the taxpayer” (p. 44).

Shore (2008) argues that while presented as neutral, the practices of audit constitute a culture, because they impose a whole set of values, including the definition of what counts as *quality*. This becomes narrowed to what

institutions or individuals can be held accountable to through audit practices, which can be compared in quantifiable terms to “timeless, fixed and immutable standards or targets” (Elliott, 2001, p. 194), thereby increasing instrumentalization’s privileging of data-based comparisons. A related value is that comparisons to those targets can be unproblematically transposed to formats such as league tables in order to neutrally represent the institution or the individual (Elliott, 2001; Flyverbom, 2016). By exposing “the schools that are performing badly” (Shore, 2008, p. 286) in terms of comparison to the fixed standards, league tables compiled through audit practices accelerate the logic of problematization (Tienken, 2012), providing sufficiently “objective” data to complement the rhetoric of “broken schools” (Goldstein, 2011; Hursh, 2013; Janice Peck, 2015). As will be demonstrated in Chapter 6, what is usually suggested, particularly for schools marked as failing in areas of social disadvantage, is increased marketization (Ravitch, 2010; Tienken, 2012; Wun, 2014), where auditing provides the standardized data required for reliable market-comparisons (Apple, 2006; Taubman, 2009).

In order that schools are able to be compared, standardized testing has become common-place in much of the English-speaking world – manifested as the No Child Left Behind policy in the US (Ravitch, 2010; Taubman, 2009), SATs in the UK (Thrupp & Willmott, 2003; Wood, 2004) and NAPLAN in Australia (Doecke et al., 2010). Individual teachers also become labelled as either “quality” or “ineffective” through their designated performances in increasing the academic achievement of students (Hursh, 2013; Ravitch, 2010; Taubman, 2009). While it is obviously unfair to compare teachers working in affluent communities to those in economically deprived locales,

techniques such value-added modelling (VAM) claim to be able to quantify and then separate from “teacher quality” the variables which impact on a student’s achievement, such as home background (Education Policy Response Group, 2013; Hursh, 2013). As will be highlighted in the discussion of the class sizes policy in Chapter 6, teachers are therefore expected to demonstrate year-on-year improvements to student achievement, further sedimenting the performative expectation of perpetual improvements in quality (outputs), while also increasing efficiency (meaning decreased inputs in the form of the number of teachers employed) (Thrupp, 2014).

The outward pressures of performativity – audit regimes, league-tables and “high-stakes” standardized testing therefore create real pressures on teachers to “teach to the test” (Thrupp, 2007), as ritualised and reified displays of *quality* increase in importance, narrowing the rich complexities of teaching and learning to that which can be calculated, measured and displayed (Shiller, 2015; Shore, 2008; Taubman, 2009). Such pressures inevitably lead to an element of “gaming” or “creative compliance” (W. Davies, 2014; Elliott, 2001), whereby incentives are created to use statistics to represent the teacher or school in the most positive way possible, and to ensure the inspecting agencies find the “quality” they are looking for. Together with these outward-facing rituals, Ball (2001b), in keeping with his interlinking of the macro to the micro, identifies inward and routinized forms of daily practice which normalize performative culture in schools within daily practice, such as “record-keeping, committee and taskforce meetings, interactions, which address forms of identity by treating people in terms of the identities of the discourses of performativity” (p. 212). Put differently, the discursive logics

of neoliberalization subjectify us as perpetual projects of self-marketing – as enterprising selves (Du Gay, 1996).

*The entrepreneurial self, morality and fantasmatic narratives*

While previous sections have briefly highlighted the ways in which neoliberalized logics, and the discourses which they draw on, implicitly construct preferred subject-positions such as the parent-consumer and the quality teacher, in this section I intend to outline more clearly a central theoretical premise of this thesis: the neoliberalization of education produces, and is anchored by, a discursive production of subjectivities – iterations of the entrepreneurial self.

For Foucault (1988) and Foucauldian scholars, the dominant forms of control exercised through neoliberal governmentality are not “technologies of power...or domination”, but:

...technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves. (Foucault, 1988, p. 18)

Put differently, subjects are increasingly encouraged within neoliberal discourse to view themselves as sites of perpetual transformation. They should view their character as a continuous project “to reform or improve themselves...to become autonomous, free [and] fulfilled” (Rose, 1999, p. xii).

Bröckling (2015) defines this call to continually work on the self as “an entrepreneur of one’s own life”, as constituting a relatively stable discursive “model for people to understand what they are and what they ought to be”,

while also telling them “how to work on the self in order to become what they ought to be” (p. viii). This ideal-model that provides the “ought to be” is “the entrepreneurial self”, a subject which is “never finished with self-optimizing” (p. ix), in order to become more skilled, more autonomous, and therefore more competitive and more marketable (Mirowski, 2013; Richards, 1992).

As with the discursive logics discussed above, the entrepreneurial self possesses a historical trajectory which pre-dates neoliberalism. As argued by Berman (1981), the cultural currents of individualization in the West date back at least to the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, before which “man [*sic*] was given a purposeful position in the universe” which “did not require an act of will on his [*sic*] part” (p. 51). In other words, a subject’s place in the medieval universe was pre-destined by God, with no thought given to how things could change. Ideas such as linear time and the possibility that selves could shape their own future developed concurrently with capitalism and industrialization. At the same time, with the development of liberal political thought in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century came the figure of the economic man or *homo oeconomicus* - the rationally-acting agent who is incentivized to only pursue their own self-interest, maximising their profit through investment in enterprises such as factories which produce goods as efficiently as possible. What Foucault (2008) saw was that in neoliberalism, *homo oeconomicus* was reconfigured to become “an entrepreneur of himself” (p. 226). Rather than investing in capital such as factories, subjects should invest in *themselves*, as they would be encouraged to perceive themselves as “abilities-machines which will produce income” (p. 229). This would mean that instead of buying machinery for factories, entrepreneurs should buy “educational investments” (p. 229),



which would increase their own or their dependent's future-life chances. As I will outline in more detail in Chapter 5 with reference to the New Zealand context, the subject constructed as an abilities-machine is integral to the logic of instrumentalization, with its representation of education as the transference of vocational skills in order to facilitate economic growth through human capital (Clarke, 2012; Harris, 2008; Taubman, 2009).

As governments and public sectors become increasingly marketized and shed their responsibilities for citizens in the form of welfare-state provisions, we are all urged to become *individually* responsible for both equipping ourselves with skills through education and the outcome of the choices we make in life more broadly (Peters, 2005; Rose, 1992). We become interpolated as “prosumers”, with education reconstituted as “an enterprise activity” (Foucault, 2008, p. 226) which increases our stock of human capital. Not only does this encourage the commodification of education (Shiller, 2015; G. B. Slater & Griggs, 2015), but viewing our lives as perpetual enterprises which can always be made more efficient blurs the lines between our work and home lives (Miller & Rose, 1995), leading us to even begin to view domestic practices such as parenthood in terms of the accrual of segmented skills, whereby we are always looking for possibilities of the furthering of future competitive edge for our dependents (Eleff & Trethewey, 2006; Nadesan, 2002). Hence, the entrepreneurial self in this regard can be viewed as the encroachment of the logic of performativity into the realm of social relations and identities, whereby the instrumental ideals of improving efficiency and productivity become grounding ethics for the living of optimally productive lives (Harvey, 2005).

Such connections to and reproductions within every-day practices contributes to neoliberalism's ideological embeddedness as common-sensical (Bourdieu, 2000; Couldry, 2012; Phelan, 2014). As Rose (1992) has highlighted, much of neoliberalism's ideological success has been due to it successfully "formulating a political rationality consonant with the new regime of the self" (p. 160). Rose (1992) argues that, following the development of the psychological sciences, the idea that subjects should "aspire to autonomy" and that self-fulfilment was a personal responsibility, became deeply culturally embedded (p. 141), so much so that it would come to orientate political ideologies across the left and right during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (B. Anderson, 2015; Dean, 2016; J. Gilbert, 2014). Psychological discourses' emphasis on expert-guided self-improvement contributed to and gained more impetus from the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century's fragmentation of points of social identification, the fundamental questioning of universalizing narratives, and the decline of life-long vocations (Laclau, 1994).

These broader societal and cultural shifts increased the significance of a subject position that privileges self-reliance, self-interest, adaptability, resilience and flexibility to the demands of the market (Bröckling, 2015; Du Gay, 1996; Mirowski, 2013; Rose, 1992). With flexibility and adaptability at its core, the precise form of the entrepreneurial self becomes largely ephemeral, possessing no fixed ground or centre, instead existing *as* "social and physical adaptability to shifting market forces" (Mirowski, 2013, p. 123). This means that the entrepreneur can "only ever be in a state of becoming one, never of being one" (Bröckling, 2015, p. viii). It is this essential openness, or lack, which for C. Jones and Spicer (2009), demonstrates the

limits of Foucauldian approaches such as Brockling's, which focus on "the construction of subject positions which carefully delimit the scope of possible action that people can and cannot carry out" (p. 16). They argue that while it may not have been Foucault's own view, it can lead to an overly structurally-determinist model by his interpreters, within which discourse is all-powerful and the subject's only route of escape is alternative subject positions. As touched on in the last chapter, Lacan's concept of *the Real* functions "as an obstacle to the effective constitution of the subject in discourse" (p. 34), thereby differentiating his approach from Foucault's. Further, his concept of the partial object of desire, or *objet petit a*, which structures the subject's identifications around a fundamental lack, maps well onto a theory of entrepreneurship as an essentially "open space" (C. Jones & Spicer, 2005, p. 235), or impossible ideal. By applying Lacan's insights, Jones and Spicer place openness at the epicentre of the entrepreneurial self's hegemonic position in society. It is the gap between the "elevated...elusive...untouchable" (Clarke, 2014, p. 585) entrepreneur and our own (continuously lacking) subjectivities which continually reproduces our desire to become one, because "this lack is central to maintaining desiring" (C. Jones & Spicer, 2005, p. 237). In other words, it is precisely because the entrepreneurial self is mysterious and imprecisely defined that it attracts our affective investment – where we all act to elevate it to the status of *sublime object*. Due to its openness we can all see ourselves partially reflected in it, but it simultaneously reflects back a mirror image that is never sufficiently entrepreneurial enough.

In that way, "entrepreneur is also an empty signifier" (C. Jones & Spicer,

2005, p. 235), because, as with *the people* in a populist logic, it can provide “a vision of the community as a coherent whole” (Laclau, 2014, p. 4). *Entrepreneur* can function catachrestically by becoming the impossible but necessary name of hegemonic articulations, maintained in its place of privilege by continuous affective investment, which acts synchronously with processes of discursive (or rhetorical) constitution (Laclau, 2004, 2005b). As I will aim to demonstrate in Chapter 6, newspaper editorial’s representations of *parents* as endowed with entrepreneurial characteristics allows for the disavowal of contradictions between logics and discourses and the complexities of contextual evidence. Such evidence, offered by dissenting voices such as teacher unions and government, is roundly admonished for threatening a representation of engaged parenting as an essentially self-interested exercise, composed largely of sifting through information in order to make the correct consumer choices (Dean, 2009), which will attain their individual child the best possible education (Nadesan, 2002).

For B. Davies and Bansel (2007), it is through such consumer choices that the entrepreneurial parent “becomes the autonomous ‘active’ citizen with rights, duties, obligations and expectations”, which constitute that “citizen as morally superior” (p. 252). In other words, the entrepreneurial self’s orientation towards educational investments, for themselves and their dependents, becomes a moral exercise in itself which allows the “the shrugging off of collective responsibility for the vulnerable and marginalized” (p. 252). What makes this self-interested action as moral, rather than anti-moral, is the focus on both economic productivity and the family. Remember that neoliberalism, at least in its early phases, was

grounded by an antagonism towards the Keynesian welfare-state and a broader cultural atmosphere of state-phobia (B. Anderson, 2015; Foucault, 2008). The “bloated state” (Kazin, 1995) was not only seen to encroach on economic freedom, but also family life, where it was discursively and affectively linked to a moral decline, seen as resulting from the more liberal attitudes to sexuality emerging from the 1960s counterculture movements (S. Hall, 1983; Kazin, 1995). If we look in more detail at what followed Margaret Thatcher’s (in)famous “there's no such thing as society” quote, we see that tied to the retreat from collectivity there is an urge to focus on family:

...there's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and *there are families*. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look after themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves and then, also, to look after our neighbours [*emphasis added*]. (Thatcher quoted in The Guardian, 2013, n.p.)

There is a strong sense of duty here to look after yourself and your family, before you turn to others. Hence, rather than view neoliberalism as a self-centred and therefore anti-moral discourse, we should view it as containing an individualizing moral code which emphasises care for others *through* care of the self and family. As scholars have noted (Heelas & Morris, 1992; Rose, 1992, 1999), there is a *responsibilization* embedded in that code, which emphasises:

...'self-reliance' and 'self-respect'; of freedom from state control; of people drawing on their own resources to compete in the 'open'

market, using the wealth they create to take responsibility for - and so exercise accountability over - their educational, housing and health requirements, rather than relying on the offices and organs of the state. (Heelas & Morris, 1992, p. 1)

The way in which this *enterprise culture* of self-reliance becomes a code for caring for others is through its contrast to *dependency culture* (Du Gay, 1996; Heelas & Morris, 1992). What are seen as moral degeneracies, such as having children outside of marriage and becoming dependent on state handouts, are linked to the state's "molly-coddling" and "politically-correct" over-intrusions into the ability of individuals to make economic/moral choices based on their own criteria. Hence, enterprise culture was presented within Thatcherism as simultaneously the solution to both economic *and* moral decline (S. Hall, 1983), having a disciplinary effect on those presented as having been corrupted by welfare-dependency (Richards, 1992).

Hayek (1960) saw *authentic* morality, as with freedom, as only deriving from individual (market) choices. Political decisions made on the basis of collective (which he saw as necessarily artificially imposed) moral codes could only lead to coercion. This leads to a rather paradoxical relation to collective morality. While neoliberalism critiques institutions such as government departments or trade unions for making decisions based on a notion of the common good, untied to economic production, self-interest, or individual freedom (Crouch, 2011), the privileging of these latter terms means that they themselves become *principles* which embody "certain presuppositions about *how and what to value*" (W. Davies, 2014, p. 8). However, because collective moral principles cannot explicitly guide political

decision-making (which should be grounded in “objective” economic judgments), it becomes an implicit discourse, with the moral and the economic becoming intertwined through representations such as the “hard-working family” (Reyes, 2005), which forge dichotomies both between producers and non-producers (Jutel, 2012; Richards, 1992), and those who believe in “family values” and those who do not (S. Hall, 1983).

As Stuart Hall (1983) has highlighted, these dichotomies regularly carry a racist and/or classist undercurrent (see also Frank, 2000; O. Jones, 2012; Kazin, 1995). The iniquitous economic positions of marginalized groups become framed as a question of dubious morality, which is partly innate, but also partly because they have been denied the freedom and responsibility to enact the self-interested moral path which leads them to look after their families. Thereby administrative bureaucracies, teacher unions, and teachers deemed to be of insufficient “quality”, become accused of forming an elitist, closed club of dependency culture (Glasson, 2012; Kazin, 1995), which stifles the potential emergence of enterprise culture in disadvantaged communities, and therefore their opportunities to become both economically productive and morally disciplined. As Du Gay (1996) puts it, public sector workers, with their bureaucratic rules and regulations, come to represent “a disease spreading through the social body destroying initiative, innovation [and] creativity” (p. 71).

Drawing on the theory of Lacan, Žižek and Laclau, Du Gay (1996) cites this representation as deriving from a fundamental antagonism within neoliberal regimes. The impossibility inherent in the universalizing entrepreneur empty signifier (everyone can be productive units, except market-competition

necessitates losers), creates a necessity for antagonism to be displaced onto *the bureaucrat*, which becomes a “symbolic enemy” (p. 71). Much like *the entrepreneur* represents neoliberal society as the way it wants to be (its utopian ideal-society), condensing a series of heterogeneous demands as an empty signifier, *the bureaucrat* represents everything that it does not want to be (a dystopia), thereby condensing “a series of heterogeneous antagonisms” (Žižek, 1989, p. 372). In other words, the bureaucrat representation is ideological because it allows the systemic limits and contradictions of neoliberal capitalism to be obscured through its symbolic exclusion from the hegemonic identification (Dahlberg, 2014; Szkudlarek, 2016).

In order to illustrate this theoretical point further I will return to the work of Glynos and Howarth (2007). Together with political and social logics, they have a third category of *fantasmatic* logic. Fantasmatic logics structure how the subject identifies (or not) with political logics and with sets of social logics - or put differently, it captures ways in which subjects become affectively invested in the social practices they engage in, or how they *enjoy* them. This enjoyment element accounts for the ideological “grip” (p. 107) of discourse. As suggested in my earlier characterisation of the entrepreneurial self as a sublime object, subjective enjoyment can displace contradictions between discursive logics, performing the ideological closure function mentioned in Chapter 2. As Engelken-Jorge (2010) puts it, the “enjoyment of the subject is what accounts for the ‘glue’ that holds the discourse together” (p. 80). Despite “rational” critique which highlights inconsistencies, it is theorized that subjects hold fast to their established frames of reference, from which they continuously derive satisfaction (Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2008;



McMillan, 2017; Stavrakakis, 2007) – a satisfaction which is often manifested through the antagonistic exclusion of Others from the avowed identity (Daly, 1999).

Glynos and Howarth's (2007) fantasmatic logic manifests itself in two narrative forms: *the beatific*, which “promises a fullness-to-come once a named or implied obstacle is overcome”, and *the horrific*, “which foretells a disaster if the obstacle proves insurmountable” (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 147). Consequently, we can see how the two figures of the entrepreneur and the bureaucrat map onto these two narratives: productive entrepreneurial subjects necessarily emerge when the obstacle of the bureaucrat is overcome, but a disaster looms for marginalized groups and the nation's economic productivity should it fail to be overcome.

Because they become manifested in this narrative form, I use the term *fantasmatic narrative* in this thesis (Clarke, 2011; McMillan, 2017). The term captures how the narratives are populated by actors, which Phelan (2008) terms “fantasmatic representations”. In an educational context, the binary of the *beatific* and the *horrific* points to how teachers are normally portrayed as one of two extreme types: either selfless saviours, or as lazy, bureaucratic, self-interested villains (Taubman, 2009, p. 139). Thereby, because neoliberalism ties education so closely to economic growth, and morality to the economic, representations of teachers become manifested through two key types of fantasmatic narrative: which I name the beatific narrative of *equality of opportunity*, and the horrific narrative of *decline*.

Equality of opportunity constructs a post-antagonistic vision of an education

system only populated by competent, motivated teachers (beatific fantasmatic representations), who are able to make precise data-facilitated calculations on levels of student achievement, using that data to inform and improve their own practice, which becomes tailored more to their disadvantaged students, thereby increasing their achievement results and boosting the economic productivity of the nation. Performance data of both teachers and students is then transferred to parents, allowing them to make an objective choice on whether or not to remove their child from that school, or to place them somewhere else. Thereby the child accesses the beatific narrative through the acquisition of skills which will make them more competitive in the future employment market. The parent does so by empowering themselves to make the correct choices in the educational marketplace, responsabilizing themselves under individualized moral criteria, while simultaneously ensuring that the system will work at optimal efficiency.

Decline, by contrast, forecasts a disaster of economic recession should the obstacle of ineffective teachers, protected by unions, weak-willed politicians and bureaucrats, not be removed (Salter & Phelan, 2017). The teacher in this narrative resists the imposition of audit systems which measure performance. They use ethics of care and collectivity as a veil with which to conceal an underlying system of self-aggrandisement which excludes and disempowers parents and students (Crouch, 2011). When not driven by self-interest, teachers are represented as resistant to data-accountability on ideological grounds (G. L. Anderson, 2007). Constituted as an “educational establishment” (G. L. Anderson, 2007), or “special interest” (Moe, 2011), teachers and their unions are signified as regarding the individualization of

audit as threatening their collective strength, because it risks the exposure of ineffective, lazy teachers (Mockler, 2013). As I will explore in more detail in the following section which examines the role of the media in the neoliberalization of education, this narrative maps well onto a populist logic which constructs the demands of parents as diametrically opposed to the “unresponsive power” (Laclau, 2005b, p. 86) of teachers and their unions.

### *Conclusions: neoliberal logics, narratives and representations*

This section has defined the neoliberalization of education as an active and divergent process dependent on the weaving together of heterogeneous logics, discourses, narratives and representations in situated contexts, in order to maintain its hegemonic position, each with their own historical trajectories which are irreducible to it. Hence, neoliberalization can be understood as an elite social movement, a form of governmentality and as a process, depending on the particular facets the analyst is aiming to highlight. This multi-modal approach has the added benefit of avoiding a monolithic conceptualisation of neoliberalism, detached from human agency or political struggle. In this section I have placed more emphasis on the governmentality and processual aspects because these are the most important for studying neoliberalism’s impacts on education, however the hegemony-building facets are also of importance in this area.

The key logics which impact education have been defined as *instrumentalization* (the narrowing of the purposes of education to a tool for stimulating economic growth), *problematization* (the critique of education for

failing to enable economic growth), *marketization* (the construction of quasi-markets in order to promote competition and thus economic growth) and *performativity* (the requirement for market-legitimation through displays of quality). Consequently, instrumentalization and the tying of education to economic growth, can be seen as the most crucial, as all of the others derive their force from the sedimentation of that presupposition.

Other linked logics include competition, self-interest and individualization, which also highlight the considerable overlaps between the four main logics: problematization, through the dichotomization of the discursive field, paves the ground for further market and efficiency-based solutions. As well as overlaps, I have highlighted that these logics draw upon discourses including new public management and audit, which provide the legitimizing knowledge for the logics to cohere, and which embody the symbolic toolkit for the required culture-changes.

Representations also allow for cohesion of these divergent logics, often performing ideological closure through attracting affective investment. The fantasmatic representation runs orthogonally to “epistemological validation and normative justification” (Glynos, 2014, p. 182), offering subjective grip and enjoyment through the disavowal of the outsided group’s normative framework. Such frameworks are presented as amoral deviations from the entrepreneurial self-ideal, articulated within a moral logic which valorises the individualist and conservative ethics of enterprise culture, presented as the only valid public good, in opposition to institutionally-based imperatives, which are represented as symptomatic of a dependency culture responsible for economic and moral decline. Hence, the fantasmatic logic becomes

manifested in the form of two key narratives: *equality of opportunity*, which represents the utopian fantasy of a fully-marketized education system, and *decline*, which represents the failure to reach that goal.

However, such a conception of the neoliberalization as anchored in articulatory logics and representations needs also to consider the role of institutional media. Therefore, the next section will critically examine the literature around the effects of media agency within education.

## **Media logics, journalistic identifications and neoliberal education policy**

The impact of media representations on educational politics has, at least until recently, been under-theorized (Gerstl-Pepin, 2007; Waller, 2012). As highlighted in the previous section, there has been a profusion of research into the effects of neoliberalism, however the role of institutional media in reproducing neoliberalized logics remains under-researched. This is a gap which is all the more gaping when considering the media's ongoing central position as a space for the legitimization and contestation of meanings emanating from the political sphere (Carpentier, 2008; Cottle, 2003, 2006; Couldry, 2012; Louw, 2005; Meyer, 2002), the extent to which media institutions are themselves neoliberalized (Bourdieu, 1998b; Phelan, 2014), and the centrality of the fourth estate role to journalistic identities, with its guiding signifiers of objectivity, accountability and transparency (Allen, 2008; Djerf-Pierre et al., 2013; Kaplan, 2010; Soffer, 2009). In other words, what has become increasingly "apparent is that no analysis of contemporary

educational politics can ignore the role of the media” (G. L. Anderson, 2007, p. 104).

While often performing a key role in the reproduction of neoliberalized logics, narratives and representations, newspapers and other media should not be considered as merely tools, or neutral conduits for governments and political opportunists to exploit in order to produce a false, ideologically-loaded account of education policy (e.g. G. L. Anderson, 2007; Blackmore & Thorpe, 2003; Cohen, 2010; Koyama & Kania, 2014). An over-simplified two-sided battle, with powerful governments and media on one side and the education sector and other agents of resistance on the other, can enforce a passivating victim role onto teachers and their unions (see Mouffe interviewed in Carpentier & Cammaerts, 2006, p. for a more general discussion on resistance movements’ attitudes to the media), together with preventing more nuanced analyses of the complex interplay between the fields of politics, media and education (Phelan, 2011; Phelan & Salter, 2017). Admittedly the recent proliferation of government public-relations offices, media consultants and spin doctors has been considerable (Cottle, 2003; Davis, 2003; Franklin, 2003; Gavin, 2010; Gewirtz, Dickson, & Power, 2004), creating an increasingly interdependent, or even “symbiotic” (Franklin, 2003) relationship between the journalistic and political fields. On the other hand, however, journalism retains historically-derived ideals such as *the watchdog* and *the fourth estate*, which while often largely symbolic (Hampton, 2010), still work to demarcate boundaries between the two fields in terms of journalistic identifications.

Therefore, in line with the discourse-theoretical framework of this thesis,

media institutions are regarded as acting on politics and society, shaping it in certain ways (Meyer, 2002), but also being *acted on* by society as spaces of contestation themselves. This means that journalistic identities are discursively constructed and therefore potentially open and contingent, subject to both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic articulations which constrain alternatives (Carpentier, 2005; Carpentier & De Cleen, 2007; Phelan, 2011). This means that the representation of educational politics and policy can also be open to ideological heterogeneity and difference, with newspapers becoming particularly open to dissenting voices once the tide of public opinion is perceived to have turned (Gavin, 2010; Haas, 2007). Hence it becomes important to understand how journalistic identifications towards *the fourth estate* ideal is constituted via the construction of *public opinion*, together with who and in what ways certain groups are systematically excluded from that latter term, in order to then gain a better understanding of why certain neoliberal policies are represented so favourably, while others are not.

### *The fourth estate, public opinion and journalistic identifications*

Edmund Burke is attributed as coining the term the “fourth estate” when the House of Commons in England first opened to press reporting in 1787. Burke contrasted the new fourth estate of the press to the already existing estates of the clergy, the aristocracy and the commoners. The term denoted the assumption (one never actually enshrined in constitutional law), that “genuine political power resides in the informal role of the press, which in turn derives from the relationship between the press and its readers” (Hampton, 2010, p.

3). Burke's confident assertion of the emergent political power of the press was based on the rapid growth of newspapers in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century, whereby they became a "weapon" for the emergent bourgeois classes, deployed in order to attempt to wrest symbolic power from the landed classes through holding them to account for corruption, misrule and scandal (Habermas, 1989).

Henceforward, up until around the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, newspapers in the US and Europe were viewed through an explicitly partisan lens, with newspapers often owned by rich individuals or political parties (Donsbach & Klett, 1993; Kaplan, 2010), "for use against the public authority itself" (Habermas, 1989, p. 138). It was only following mass industrialization in the US over the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, with changing ownership models which required the generation of advertising revenue that the ideal of objectivity emerged as a key concept for journalists. That ideal developed in tandem with journalism coming to be regarded as a technical profession in its own right, servicing the requirements of increasingly atomized but educated populations for trusted community information (Donsbach, 2010; Donsbach & Klett, 1993; Kaplan, 2010). Despite these changes, the explicitly partisan mode continued to be an influential journalistic logic in some contexts through to the current day, when there remains two contrasting conceptions or modes of journalism: the first as a neutral conduit of information which enables a public sphere (Habermas, 1989) where, through the presentation of "facts", the public is able to discuss, debate and critique government policy. The second mode is populist, with journalism purposively and "actually constituting readers' involvement in politics" (Hampton, 2010, p. 4), through media-led campaigns



on particular issues.

Rather than see the two modes as working in isolation, they often work in a synchronous relation, with populism, in a similar way to morality in neoliberalism, underlying journalistic identifications which foreground their neutral conduit role. An example of this would be digital investigative journalism. This posits that the vast amounts of data available online can serve as a factually neutral challenge to elite discourse; a “political memory” which holds the powerful to account for their claims (Manning, 2012). However, by holding the powerful to account they are implicitly constructing an audience who cares about such issues, therefore politicizing a readership.

Recent surveys of New Zealand journalists (Hannis, Hollings, & Pajo, 2014; Hollings et al., 2016) suggest that the populist mode, which sees the journalist as an active agent in politics, remains firmly backgrounded within their identifications. The surveyed journalists perceived “their main roles as being to report objectively and independently in order to inform the citizenry” from the perspective of the “detached observer” (Hollings et al., 2016, p. 130). As related through the survey, the journalists identified with what Donsbach and Klett (1993) terms “common carriers” (p. 63). This is the belief that it is both possible and desirable to present the news in a way which is “unaffected by the journalist’s own political beliefs” (p. 63). Through the journalist’s presentation of “facts”, the public is able to “make political decisions” (Hollings et al., 2016, p. 130) based on weighing up the evidence provided. Much lower ranked among the New Zealand journalists was a desire to explicitly motivate “people to participate in political activity”, and the least valued role was to openly “support government policy” (p. 131) through their

writing.

Scholars have noted that this disavowal of political agency can work to hinder the ability of journalists to perform the fourth estate role, because it furthers a homogenised news product which routinely reproduces elite perspectives (Bennett, 2010; Bourdieu, 1998b; Carpentier, 2008; Soffer, 2009). In this way, objectivity becomes a part of what Bourdieu (1998b) calls the “journalistic habitus”, embedded into the rituals and reflexive dispositions of the journalistic subject (Darras, 2005; Karlsson, 2010; Phelan, 2014), reproduced within the habits of the daily news cycle, and inscribed into the newspaper genre of “hard news” (Fairclough, 2003; J. E. Richardson, 2007; van Dijk, 1988). The latter form generates a legitimizing “rhetoric of factuality” (Fairclough, 1995) for the journalism profession, a shield which protects them from accusations of inaccuracy (Karlsson, 2010).

Together with inaccuracy, accusations of political bias are avoided through the practice of balancing opposed perspectives. However, scholars note that balancing accurate and trusted opinions, in order that the reader can weigh up the evidence, engenders a tendency towards calling on only “official” (e.g. elite) sources (Bennett, 2010; J. E. Richardson, 2007; Soffer, 2009), marginalizing dissenting voices (Bourdieu, 1998b). The tendency towards balancing the voices of only recognised political sources can constrain discourse within the terrain of institutionalized politics, whereby a cadre of safe sources are repeatedly called upon in order to represent all issues in the over-simplified terms of two opposed sides (Davis, 2003; Kumpu, 2016). As Louw (2005) notes, this dichotomization can lead to the metaphorical framing of politics as a war or game, with an attendant (over) focus on the character

traits of individual politicians and the success or otherwise of their strategies (see Chapter 6).

However, it is objectivity's practice of distancing the journalist from any truth claims made by sources which, for Soffer (2009), "reflects enduring influences of the Enlightenment and modernism in western culture and politics" (p. 473). The journalist applies the epistemological position of the scientist (Donsbach & Klett, 1993), thereby taking a cynical or denigrating stance towards political claims unsupported by "hard evidence" (usually in the form of quantitative data) (Bourdieu, 1998b; Kaplan, 2010; Phelan, 2014). This also promotes a separation of the journalist from their field of investigation, furthering a reification of the actors within it, who are perceived as research-objects, rather than subjects to be engaged with in a dialogue (Soffer, 2009). Elite voices which share the supposition that there is a singular, "abstract, objective truth" (Soffer, 2009, p. 484) waiting to be revealed by the scientific disposition, are legitimized and handed an authority to speak that "truth" in news items (Fairclough, 2003), while those that are not, are prone to have their claims disqualified as outside the hegemonic common-sense (Deacon, 2003), particularly in editorials (Featherstone, 1993; Rupa, 2007).

The editorial genre embodies the contradictions within the disavowal of political agency in journalistic identifications. As will be discussed in more detail in the methods chapter, editorials are a specific focus in Chapter 6 due to their contribution to the hegemonic construction of journalistic identities through the exclusion of Othered voices. Unlike straight news the editorial does not passively defer to the truth claims of sources but assumes an active

modality (Fairclough, 2003; Fowler, 1991) through the judgmental “commentator voice” (Martin & White, 2005). However, rather than merely barraging the reader with a rhetorical argument, the editorial invites them “to be objective analysts” (Featherstone, 1993, p. 57). Hence, rather ironically for a genre which explicitly constructs itself as opinion, in contrast to straight news (Fowler, 1991), the editorial constitutes a shared community around the presupposition of an objective world *beyond opinion* (Featherstone, 1993). The claims of dissenting groups such as unions are acknowledged, but deconstructed for being both politically motivated (Deacon, 2003) and lacking this grounding in “objective reality”.

W. Davies (2014) notes a similar epistemological stance within neoliberal problematizations of public institutions, whereby the “intrinsic values” (p. 8) of unions and public servants are dismissed as at best naïve and at worst self-serving and ideologically loaded, therefore needing to be replaced by objective forms of “extrinsic valuation (i.e. measurement)” (p. 8) from economics (see also Crouch, 2011; Hay, 2007). As touched on in the last section, this posture developed through an ongoing dialogue with discourses such as new public management (NPM) (Crouch, 2011; Du Gay, 1996; Power, 1999). Djerf-Pierre et al. (2013) found that NPM also increasingly frames how journalists view accountability, thereby delimiting that signifier’s political potential. With NPM’s privileging of market mechanisms over political judgment, accountability comes to mean *market-accountability*, with problems between institutions such as schools and the public pre-framed as issues of insufficient consumer-responsiveness or competence by individuals, rather than underlying problems with the market-model as such. In other

words, through its articulation in news articles, accountability becomes *neoliberalized* (Phelan & Salter, 2017).

Djerf-Pierre et al. (2013) note that accountability, together with transparency, are presumed as public goods within journalistic discourse. This often means that the signifiers can work to de-politicize the political nature of education reforms, representing them as based on common-sense and supported by the public (Koyama & Kania, 2014; Mockler, 2013; Shine, 2015). When articulated within neoliberalized logics, both terms also reinforce the instrumental-scientific paradigm, regarding the truth as somehow hiding behind a curtain, “needing to be properly revealed” (Christensen & Cheney, 2015, p. 75) by the journalist or the expert in statistical analysis (Clarke, 2014; Koyama & Kania, 2014). The only way to get at that “truth” is therefore through the implementation of audit technologies, which are assumed “as proxies for the direct observation of individual or organizational performance” (Flyverbom, 2016, p. 111).

However, the signifiers of accountability and transparency are in fact highly politically agentic due to their problematizing negativity, where the public sector is immediately assumed as *un-accountable* and *non-transparent* (Flyverbom, 2016; Koyama & Kania, 2014; Morales, Gendron, & Guénin-Paracini, 2014). Consequently, newspapers can perform a specific role within the neoliberal governmentality of education (Chouliaraki, 2005; Couldry, 2012; Hankins & Martin, 2006), in providing, through the publishing of school league tables, “ready ‘evidence’ of the poor performance that governments seek to manage and punish” (Couldry, 2012, p. 147). The “problems” revealed by league table data are normally accompanied in

newspaper discourse by the ready-made solutions of further marketization and performativity (Apple, 2006; Doecke et al., 2010; Hankins & Martin, 2006; Taubman, 2009).

However, the increasing influence of alternative and social media formats in the era of “digital ubiquity” (Ganesh & Stohl, 2013) and fractured identities (Fenton, 2011), coupled with ever-increasing financial pressures (Benkler, 2006), means that traditional journalism’s place as an elite node in cultural reproduction, with a specific niche as neutral conduits of “objective” performance data to publics, is increasingly open to contestation. Hence, journalism must actively maintain that place through the reproduction of what Couldry (2003) calls the “myth of the mediated centre”, which is “the belief, or assumption, that there is a centre to the social world, and that, in some sense, the media speaks ‘for’ that centre” (p. 2). This requires newspapers to actively construct “the projected ideal reader” (Conboy, 2006, p. 94); a “public” which looks to media institutions to hold the public sector to account through the fourth estate role, subsequently discursively constructing that latter identity as hegemonic. Thereby, newspapers and broadcast news media, when interrogating politicians or public servants, attempt to speak from the constructed position of “public opinion” (Clayman, 2007; Djerf-Pierre et al., 2013). Simultaneously however, market pressures have resulted in increasing audience segmentation in order to sell specific products through advertising (Fowler, 1991; J. E. Richardson, 2007), progressively tailored to the divergent lifestyle-identities of late-modernity (Fenton, 2011; Laclau, 1994). Hence, the economic imperatives which place limits around the dominant journalistic model, within a field which is one of the least protected

from market-pressures (Bourdieu, 1998b, 2005), could be seen as making it increasingly difficult for newspapers to construct a fully unified “public” (Matheson, 2007; J. E. Richardson, 2007).

Instead, what is often noted by scholars, and which correlates with a discourse theoretical framework, is that “the public” is constructed through a delimiting contrast with an outsided Other (Carpentier, 2008; Conboy, 2006; Phelan, 2009; Phelan & Shearer, 2009). Within an educational context, who is excluded from this identity are often teachers, their unions and academics (Blackmore & Thorpe, 2003; Cohen, 2010; Mockler, 2013; Stack, 2007), through the construction of a populist antagonistic frontier. The symbolic agency which the logic is able to confer means that newspapers such as the Rupert Murdoch owned *The Australian*, described by Robert Manne as “a remorselessly campaigning paper” (quoted in Sinclair, 2017), are run at a loss in order to retain their place “as an actor and agenda-setter” (Sinclair, 2017, p. 3).

The Murdoch-owned press pioneered the market-populist style during the 1980s (McKnight, 2009; Sawyer & Laycock, 2009; Sinclair, 2017), exporting it to the UK and the US with Murdoch’s acquisition of *The Times* and *The New York Post* respectively, and which has now been widely adopted by titles outside his remit (Conboy, 2006; Glasson, 2012). Market-populism divides the discursive terrain between *the people* and *elites*, but with divisions no longer constructed in class but *cultural* terms – elites are the instigators of a “political correctness” which is perceived as having taken control of the institutions of government and media since the 1960s (Frank, 2000; Kazin, 1995; Sinclair, 2017). Political correctness is therefore closely associated

with “left-liberal” institutions such as universities, who, in their privileged ivory towers, remain unaccountable to the hard-working, ordinary taxpayer (Glasson, 2012; Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Phelan, 2008). By contrast, the market is regarded as a great “leveller” and “freedom-enabler” - on the side of “ordinary people” (who become successful without privilege), making it a natural enemy of establishment elites (McKnight, 2009). Through this logic, the projected newspaper reader identity becomes converged with NPM’s “mythical reference point” of the taxpayer/consumer, a form of citizenship constructed as “entitled to monitor and demand certain minimum standards of performance” from public servants (Power, 1999, p. 44)

Market populism deployed by newspaper campaigns during the 1980s derived much of its fantasmatic grip from broader anti-elitist and state-phobic “structures of feeling” (B. Anderson, 2015) in the post-World War II period. Such was the affective resonance of the narratives depicted that markets were increasingly positioned as more democratic than democratic institutions themselves (Frank, 2000). There are obvious equivalences between market populism’s construction of cultural elitism and the previously mentioned dependency culture, juxtaposed with enterprise culture (Heelas & Morris, 1992), thereby often aligning newspaper campaigns with the neoliberal project. However, this did not mean that newspapers were merely conduits for a populism which emanated only from politicians (an assumption which often textures accounts of the relationship between media and populism, see (Arditi, 2005; Mazzoleni, 2003, 2007; Sawyer & Laycock, 2009). As argued by McKnight (2009), *The Sunday Times* in the 1980s undertook its own forms of hegemony-building through populist campaigns which were distinct from



party politics (see also Kramer, 2014 for a conceptualisation of media as the originators of populism).

Scholars have described a close association in UK media populism between “political correctness” and permissiveness, under-productivity and the decline of national morals and values within populations of welfare-recipients and immigrants (Conboy, 2006; S. Hall, 1983; J. E. Richardson, 2009). Thereby, together with the put-upon taxpayer, the “ordinary people” representation becomes articulated alongside a resurgent nationalist ideology (with racist undertones), aimed at restoring a fantasy of a pre-decline, “golden age” of the nation (S. Hall, 1983; Stavrakakis, 2007). Divergent groups seen as threatening the nation and as inordinately benefiting from its decline can be articulated by newspapers in order to suit differing discursive requirements and contexts. In the recent New Zealand setting, Phelan (2009) found that newspaper editorials, in representing the Māori foreshore and seabed controversy, acted in a somewhat uniform fashion in reproducing and amplifying elite discourse articulated by the ruling Labour Party. A simplifying antagonistic frontier was constructed between a readership/taxpayer/the nation identification and “a blanket category of Maori” (p. 230). In order to cement the symbolic exclusion, contiguous links were made between attempts by iwi (tribes) to ensure that the state’s obligations under the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi<sup>7</sup> were implemented and the

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<sup>7</sup> The Treaty of Waitangi (*Tiriti o Waitangi* in Māori) was signed in 1840 as an agreement between the British Crown and Māori chiefs. From the British perspective (it is still disputed due to language translation issues) it conferred Queen Victoria sovereignty over New Zealand. In exchange, Māori were to retain control over their land, water (fishing) and internal affairs. Because these rights provisions were never fully honoured by the Crown, this led to the instigation of a Treaty Settlement Process in the 1970s.

ability of ordinary New Zealanders to enjoy a seminal Kiwi activity: going to the beach.

Within media representations of education, the racially-inflected decline narrative can be reproduced through demands for returns to “high-standards”, “the 3 Rs” and “traditional values”, with their deterioration constructed as simultaneously symptomatic of educational, economic and moral declines (Apple, 2006; Gutiérrez, Asato, Santos, & Gotanda, 2002; Taubman, 2009). In the Australian context, Waller (2012) found that journalism constructed public opinion as implicitly white and defined against representations of indigenous people, who were depicted through “frames of social disadvantage and failure” (p. 462). “Race” functioned as a metaphor for “ability” (see also Gutiérrez et al., 2002; Wun, 2014), and forcing Aboriginal children to learn in English was justified in terms of their incorporation into the (white) mainstream, therefore ensuring their future economic productivity. The discursive cohesion of antagonistic enjoyment was provided through the figure of the well-meaning left-liberal teacher, who by attempting to implement progressive pedagogies, impeded the realisation of the mainstream, “ordinary, put-upon taxpayer” identity.

In newspaper discourse *parents* commonly becomes articulated as both the white-mainstream taxpayer and as the ideal educational entrepreneur or consumer-citizen, who, in order select the best educational products (Blackmore & Thorpe, 2003), demands the transparency of league tables provided by newspapers (Mockler, 2013). The figure of “the parent” is actively constructed as the down-to-earth and trustworthy antithesis of educational elites, through techniques such as vox-pops (Stack, 2007) and

surveys (Thomas, 2003). This is an agent who, unlike teachers who are supported by their powerful, ideologically-driven unions (Compton & Weiner, 2008; Goldstein, 2011; Moe, 2011), “speaks authentically and therefore without an [ideological] agenda” (Stack, 2007, p. 257). However, that “authentic” voice is depicted as being denied access to education policy debates by a self-serving, opaque “education establishment that needs to be controlled” (G. L. Anderson, 2007, p. 118).

Standardized testing regimes are therefore often presupposed in newspaper discourse, particularly in editorial commentary, “as an important accountability measure” (Shine, 2015, p. 28), which is endowed with the disciplinary potential to keep in check “lazy and self-interested” (Mockler, 2013, p. 7) teachers and their unions who desire to exclude the public from decision-making. Such regimes not only provide the evidence of poor performance for governments (Couldry, 2012), but actually *embody* the performative resolution, whereby the production of “data’ can provide the solution to all educational ‘problems’” (Mockler, 2013, p. 13), through measuring, sorting ranking and differentiating good schools and teachers from “‘bad’ schools and ‘bad’ teachers” (p. 2), with the latter presumed as motivated to improve through the logic of competition (Clarke, 2012) and the very public shaming of league tables (Stern, 2013)<sup>8</sup>.

*Conclusions: constructing publics through narratives of*

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<sup>8</sup> Stern (2013) related that an experienced teacher in the US, known for their strong relationships with their students, and their “caring” style in a socioeconomically deprived area, committed suicide “after the Los Angeles Times released what they called a database on ‘individual teacher effectiveness’” (p. 196).

### *objectivity*

This section theorized the role of journalism in the neoliberalization of education. I have argued that, rather than presume the media as a complicit actor within problematizations which emanate from institutional politics, increased attention should be given to the ways in which relatively autonomous journalistic identifications become hegemonically articulated within education reform discourse. I have highlighted the ways in which these articulations become manifested in relation to a tension between the two journalistic modes of objectivity and populism, which together construct a politicized public in relation to a world that it “out there”, beyond opinion, the truth of which can be ascertained through data. The neoliberalized signifiers of accountability and transparency texture these identifications, which carve a niche for journalism through the historical role of liberal-democracy’s fourth estate. Policies which seek to implement audit regimes on the premise that teachers and schools are insufficiently accountable and transparent to the taxpayer and parents, implicitly empower journalists in this role, allowing them to both construct a unified readership in antagonistic opposition to the “educational establishment” and other groups, and provide that readership with performance-ranking league-tables which allow them to rationally choose between educational products. The latter, despite newspapers actively conducting populist campaigns around their release (Mockler, 2013), allows journalists to foreground their role as “common carriers” (Donsbach & Klett, 1993); merely transmitting data in a neutral and detached way in order to “inform the citizenry” (Hollings et al., 2016, p. 130), thereby disavowing their active, partisan role in politicizing their readership.

Far from disappearing with the development of journalism as a technical profession in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the partisan style which actively constructs a public as demanding increased accountability from an opaque and corrupt political elite experienced a resurgence in the 1980s, where it captured the affective atmosphere of neoliberalization, and continues to influence representations of the politics of education in recent times. Media populism, in times of fractured audiences and enhanced economic pressures, allows for the re-construction of a relatively coherent *people* against horrific fantasmatic representations of teachers and unions as self-interested, lazy and bureaucratic.

The figure of *the bureaucrat*, termed by Du Gay (1996) as enterprise culture's "symbolic enemy", points to how representations can also turn against government attempts to guide the mediatized meaning of policies within the public sphere, particularly following an instance of mismanagement or corruption. As will be outlined in Chapter 6, politicians and government bureaucracies which seek to implement neoliberal policies can themselves become depicted through the horrific narrative – as corrupt, self-serving and incompetent "folk-devils" (Chang & Glynos, 2011; Flinders, 2012; Salter & Phelan, 2017), potentially recontextualized to a different antagonistic target, therefore opening the terrain for a more heterogeneous array of voices and interpretations. The final section of this chapter examines the ways in which teachers and their unions continue to voice alternative visions for education in the context of neoliberal instrumentalization.

## **Resistant practices and their effects on the neoliberalization of education**

The previous sections of this literature review have mapped out the articulatory logics, discourses and representations which form the agentic base of the neoliberalization of education, together with their hegemonic reliance on interaction with historically constituted media logics. However, undiscussed thus far in depth are another significant institutional actor in the politics of education – teachers unions.

Therefore, the first part of this section of the literature review discusses the shifting and often contradictory position of unions within neoliberal regimes, arguing that, while often coming under criticism from both the left and right for being a self-serving, over-bureaucratic, antiquated remnant of the Keynesian state (Antonucci, 2015; Moe, 2011; Poole, 2007; Stack, 2007; Weiner, 2012), teacher unions are potentially able to provide an institutionally stable platform for the organization of innovative resistance campaigns (Spicer & Böhm, 2007; Weiner, 2008). Such campaigns, even if they do not succeed in their instrumental objectives of stopping policy agendas, can both strengthen bonds between teachers, and those between teachers and communities, potentially disrupting the dominance of neoliberalized subject positions and their logics of self-interest (Dean, 2016; J. Gilbert, 2014). However this may require a re-imagining of the purpose and organizing structures of teacher unions, and the “social movement union” can offer a model for renewal (Bascia & Osmond-Johnson, 2015; Dibben, 2004; Weiner, 2008, 2015). Following this I discuss what insights Laclau’s discourse theory can offer for conceptualizing the efficacy of education unions in the context

of a culture of individualization, with its emphasis on political change through the constitution of a collective subject of change, orientated towards shared ethical values.

The second part of this section then focuses on the micro-level of education activism and teacher resistance, as with the increasing ubiquity of digital media (Ganesh & Stohl, 2013), resistant practices are increasingly unrestricted to established organizational structures such as unions (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). Here I will discuss the roles of blogging and social media, which, I will argue, can offer an important avenue of voice for an increasingly excluded teaching workforce (Couldry, 2010). Further, such practices, in particular blogging, can constitute and sustain “popular” (Foucault, 1980), or “commons knowledges” (Shiller, 2015), which are enabling resources for the undermining and critique of neoliberal logics, thus feeding back into macro-level campaigns and politicizing identities (Berkovich, 2011; Brickner, 2016; Shiller, 2015). Lastly I reflect on the limits of politicization and resistance in a neoliberalized educational context, when subjectivities themselves are the primary sites of capitalist production (Hardt & Negri, 2009).

### *Teachers unions and neoliberalization: towards social movement unionism*

Unions, including those in the education sector, are commonly represented within the discursive logics of neoliberalization as problematic relics of a post-war Keynesian era (Antonucci, 2015; Moe, 2011). With the decline of the latter paradigm and with the associated rises of globalization and

deregulation, unionism's primary mode of power – the raising of the price of labour through control over its supply - has been fundamentally curtailed (Clawson & Clawson, 1999). Further, the central unionist principle of collective organization in order to protect collective interests (Furåker & Berglund, 2003), is in direct opposition to neoliberalism's call to view ourselves as autonomous projects of self-realization, fully responsible for our own economic and social wellbeing (Harvey, 2005; Rose, 1992, 1999). Hence teachers unions are often critiqued for their refusal to support the imposition of audit regimes which would rank and divide their constituency by categorizing certain teachers as “quality” and others as “ineffective” (Goldstein, 2011; Mockler, 2013; Salter & Phelan, 2017). Teachers unions' mandates to serve and protect the interests of their membership, regardless of ability to adapt to the demands of performativity, leads them to become represented as a “special interest” group (Moe, 2011), in direct opposition to the purported demands of parents and taxpayers for accountability. Through this self-interested logic the protection of “ineffective” teachers is viewed as motivated purely by their own designs on maintaining the current system and thus their power-base, to the detriment of (in particular minority) children and parents (Salter & Phelan, 2017). With their lines of communication with governments narrowed through top-down, technocratic policy models (Bascia & Osmond-Johnson, 2015; Compton & Weiner, 2008; L. Gordon, 1992; Stevenson & Mercer, 2015; Wood, 2004), education unions are viewed as retaining a disproportionate degree of influence on both politicians and teachers, “thus preventing true reform” (Moe, 2011, p. 9).

Despite these pressures, teachers unions typically retain strong membership



bases, particularly in comparison to those representing other sectors<sup>9</sup>. This is contributed to by the nature of schools as collective and community-focused (Murch, 2008), and the practice of teaching itself being centred on anti-competitive and de-individualizing care ethics (Brickner, 2016; Eidelson & Jaffe, 2013; Gutstein & Lipman, 2013; Strachan, 1999). However, this relative position of strength can no longer be taken for granted (Bascia & Osmond-Johnson, 2015; Stevenson & Mercer, 2015). A failure to adapt to our contemporary individualised orientations towards organizations – whereby we expect them to be “an expression of [our] personal hopes, lifestyles, and grievances” (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 743; see also Bimber et al., 2012) connected to our particular narratives of ethical self-fulfilment - can contribute to the culturally pervasive “status quo” representation of “inertia and conservatism” (Bourdieu, 1998a, p. 25). Traditional hierarchical forms of organizing and resistant practices such as strikes can serve to reinforce this representation in the public imaginary (Frank, 2000). In a New Zealand context, such tactics conjure images of the 1970s and 80s “over-regulation” period, which was framed within policy and media spaces as one which “stifled private sector initiative” (Hope, 1999, p. 91) and individual freedom (see Chapter 5).

How then should unions adapt to an individualized cultural context when their very form is premised on collective interests? Scholars have detailed typologies of unions’ adaptive responses to neoliberalism; with Gall, Hurd,

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<sup>9</sup> See Ryall and Blumenfeld (2015) which shows a decrease in union membership density in New Zealand since 1991 of over 50% across all sectors. By contrast, the NZEI (2014) on its website claims a membership of “50,000 principals, teachers and support staff”, in comparison to a total New Zealand teaching headcount (which does not include support staff) of 55,000 (Ministry of Education, 2017c).

and Wilkinson (2011) noting how these have ranged between the *protective* (concentration on maximising benefits for individual members), the *reformist* (lobbying for reforms which benefit labour without challenging over-arching ideological precepts), and the *radical* (which overtly challenges ideology). The dominance of Gall et al.'s first two forms of response, together with only scattered evidence of the third is viewed in critical literature as indicative of a structural inability of unions to confront neoliberalism. For example, their economic and ideological ties to the Labour Party in New Zealand and in the UK is cited as working to integrate them into the establishment without giving them any real power (Boshier, 2001; McIlroy, 2011). Further, unions are perceived to have been caught in-between the first and second responses - sandwiched between the increasingly short-term and micro-level demands of constituency interests and a continuing desire to influence politicians at the macro-level (Antonucci, 2015; Dibben, 2004; Weiner, 2008). This has led to some slightly deterministic representations of unions as either neoliberalized or bureaucratized "business unions" (Dibben, 2004), as powerless victims (McIlroy, 2011), or as largely irrelevant, over-hierarchical dinosaurs in the era of horizontal, flexible, digital networks (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

The question becomes for teachers unions going forward is how to approach the radical response which overtly challenges neoliberalization, without conforming to the hegemonic representation of Keynesian relics who are pushing an outmoded political agenda, and which constrains individual freedom and expression. One way increasingly noted in the literature is for education unions to aspire to the model of "social movement unionism" (Dibben, 2004; Stevenson & Mercer, 2015; Weiner, 2012, 2015). This

approach seeks to conjoin the interests and ethical concerns of their individualized constituencies within broad political demands (Rottman, Kuehn, Stewart, Turner, & Chamberlain, 2015). As Dibben (2004) puts it, social movement unions “mobilize their constituency for collective action...[and] they do so with a political goal” (p. 280). By linking individual ethical frameworks to a broader social justice context (via issues such as poverty and housing which more indirectly impact education), together with more innovative forms of organizing (Clawson & Clawson, 1999; Spicer & Böhm, 2007), unions can both galvanize their memberships and potentially make macro-level connections to other movements and international unions (Compton & Weiner, 2008; McIlroy, 2011; Robertson, 2008), while also becoming more embedded in the struggles of their local communities (Gutstein & Lipman, 2013; Murch, 2008).

Returning to our discourse theoretical framework, with identity conceived as a continual process of identification, we can see that the social movement union can function as an identificatory ideal. As noted by Rottman et al. (2015), what they term as “social justice unionism” operates as “an umbrella under which to highlight...equity-oriented initiatives” (p. 54), rather than as a stable end-state. Rather like the entrepreneurial self discussed earlier, the union can “only ever be in a state of becoming one, never of being one” (Bröckling, 2015, p. viii). In this way, the term social movement union has the potential to incorporate heterogeneous demands around social equity, because it signifies an impossibility – a union which is fully politically active and totally embedded into the local struggles of communities. Because there is no possibility of a union ever actually becoming a social movement union

in the fullest sense of the concept, it functions as an idea to galvanize action and unify identities through a perpetual process of transitive *becoming*. In this way, the social movement union could be seen as analogous to Srnicek and Williams' (2015) "non-reformist reforms", which link the particular to the universal by being both unashamedly utopian but also "grounded in real tendencies of the world today" (p. 108). As Laclau (2014) maintains, the preservation of enigmatic universals, which become "names of the ethical", distinct from but linked to everyday particular struggles, is crucial for the project of "radical democracy" (Laclau, 2005a).

Because of the embeddedness of schools within communities and the centrality of the maintenance of strong relationships with children and parents to the teaching vocation, teachers unions are perhaps better placed than many unions in other sectors to link the universal ideals within the social movement model to their particular, everyday concerns. The interests of teachers are already bound-up closely with those of their communities, blurring the lines "between what is inside and outside union purview" (Bascia & Osmond-Johnson, 2015, p. 4). Additionally, education union-resourced campaigns which encourage working with "parent allies" (Gutstein & Lipman, 2013; Murch, 2008; Poole, 2007, 2015; Weiner, 2015) – together with groups from outside of education such as the unemployed, other unions, social movements, or the general public (Dibben, 2004; Eidelson & Jaffe, 2013; Uetrict, 2014; Weiner, 2012) - provide the ideal space for the dislocation of individualized identificatory boundaries, which can then become reoriented around collective goals.

While there is very little literature on teachers union campaigns from an

expressly communications perspective, there is growing research evidence that shared communicative activist practice forges affective and identificatory bonds between teachers and the wider public, which can form the basis of ongoing cooperative relationships (Gutstein & Lipman, 2013; Poole, 2007; Stevenson & Mercer, 2015). The considerable communicative resources of public-sector unions have been deployed increasingly strategically in recent years, often combining “media campaigns, grassroots activism and mass actions” (Peez & Bailey, 2011, p. 73) in order to create branded spectacles ideal for both mainstream and social media diffusion (Dencik & Wilkin, 2015). In an education context these have included long-term campaigns such as “Stand Up for Education” by the NUT in the UK (resonant of the NZEI’s *Stand Up For Kids* – see Chapter 7).

A second teachers union to undertake a campaign with affinities to the NZEI’s strategy was the BCTF in British Columbia, Canada. “Caravan Against the Cuts” was launched in 2003, “during which five buses took separate routes and wended their way between communities around the province, collecting impact statements from students, teachers, and parents regarding education funding” (Poole, 2007, n.p.). And the CTU in Chicago, which successfully forced government backdowns in 2011 (Eidelson & Jaffe, 2013; Gutstein & Lipman, 2013; Uetrict, 2014), similarly engaged the community with a communicative campaign which involved highly visible protests, including inviting the public to show their support through the wearing of slogan-emblazoned t-shirts. Gutstein and Lipman (2013) noted that “for nine days, the city was a carnival of resistance” (p. 1), suggesting the aesthetics and creativity of crowd events (Dean, 2016) and the ensuing potential for a

displacement of market relations between teachers and parents (J. Gilbert, 2014).

Also held in common by these three successful campaigns was the articulation of an alternative vision for education to that articulated within neoliberalized logics, centred on proclamations of democracy and human diversity (Bascia & Osmond-Johnson, 2015; Gutstein & Lipman, 2013; Poole, 2007). And while often successful in their instrumental aims of impacting policy and disrupting neoliberalization, campaign success could also be conceptualized at the discursive level, through engaging the public in discussions on the merits of education, and thus the social importance of teaching (Bascia & Osmond-Johnson, 2015). Usefully for conceptualizing the success of such campaigns, Ganesh (2015) identifies two additional and interlinked forms of social movement agency to the instrumental (i.e. what can be empirically observed through changes in institutional practice): the *constitutive* (the forming of new identificatory bonds through shared activist practice) and the *affective* (the emotional strength of such bonds). Research in social movement studies indicates that constitutive and affective forms of agency, while not immediately apparent, can effect broader cultural change, which over time can feed back into instrumental policy changes (Decreus, Lievens, & Braeckman, 2014; Giugni, 1999; Graeber, 2013; McAdam, 1999).

In addition to the forming of bonds between the membership, parents and the public, Popiel (2015) notes how innovative policies and less hierarchical organizing methods increased the moral legitimacy of a union within its membership. By advocating less on traditional union areas such as teacher tenure (Gall et. al.'s (2011) protective mode) and more on “issues that directly

affect teaching and learning”, together with “offering more opportunities for collaborative decision making” (p. 122), teachers unions can engender a feeling of a common purpose, or a “we’re all in this together” (p. 129) mentality, increasing the engagement of previously inactive members. Popiel (2015) notes that such is the pervasiveness of the mediated narrative whereby unions protect “ineffective or inadequate teachers” (p. 125) on ideological grounds (see Salter & Phelan, 2017), to the detriment of vulnerable children, that the (framed as self-centred) protections offered by tenure can no longer unify the teaching constituency, never mind bring in parents or the wider public.

While this increased engagement can partly be explained by a feeling that policies were owned at the ground level, rather than merely handed down from management, we can return here once more to Laclau’s theory for added insight, in particular his concept of ethical signifiers or “names of the ethical” (Laclau, 2014, p. 80). As noted in the last chapter, these signifiers, such as fairness and care, can only be experienced through their denial. This means that their articulation, much like the model of the social movement union, functions to keep open the possibility of a different, better society, because they create a gap between how things are currently and how they ought to be. At the same time, they are resistant to overdeterminations of meaning by particular ideologies – they can mean very different things to a broad range of people, across the political spectrum. For example, most teachers and parents would agree that *care* in education is important, but have very different ideas of how best to implement it. And together with being open to individual interpretation, *care* attracts affective investment, due to its

connotative links to children (or kids). This combination of symbolic and affective investment (what Laclau terms ethical investment) means the ethical signifier is able to function “as a surface for the inscription of something external to itself” (Laclau, 2000a, p. 82), inviting collective mobilization around a carefully-designed slogan.

As I will argue in Chapter 7, teachers union campaigns such as the NZEI’s *Stand Up For Kids* are successful partly because they offer this surface for the inscription of individual ethical frameworks, enabling a space for the attachment of the personal to the collective. According to Bennett and Segerberg (2012, 2013), this attachment now most commonly derives from a bottom-up movement, via “personal action frames”, which are “individualized orientations [resulting]...in engagement with politics as an expression of personal hopes, lifestyles, and grievances [rather than], ...social group identity, membership, or ideology” (2012, pp. 743-4)<sup>10</sup>. They conjoin the personal to the collective in a way which bypasses traditional top-down political modes, partly through invoking ethical denial (the slogan implies kids are *not* being stood up for in the current system), and partly through their unifying calls to action which this ethical denial necessitates (the collective agency required to stand up and protect kids). As with Occupy’s *We are the 99%*, *Stand Up For Kids* is potentially broad and ambiguous enough to encompass a wide range of these frames (Weiner, 2015). In that way, a purposively constructed logo which captures the most currently prominent

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<sup>10</sup> Bennett and Segerberg’s definition of ideology here would differ from Laclau’s (see Chapter 2). Rather than as a “will to totality” (Laclau, 1990, p. 92), which could therefore include “personal hopes, lifestyles, and grievances”, ideology would be something that enables organizational hierarchies through the sustainment of collective belief systems.



frustrated demands can function as an empty signifier – that is, as the name of a social movement (Aslandis, forthcoming; Szkudlarek, 2011).

I also argue in Chapter 7 that *Stand Up For Kids* signifies a populist articulatory logic, not only because it constitutes the name of a “collective subject of change” (Thomassen, 2016, p. 165), but because, through its flipside slogan of *Fight the GERM*, it builds an antagonistic hegemony through reference to a fantasmatic narrative of decline. *The GERM*, represented in the NZEI’s online and offline publication materials as a grotesque cartoon character, was constructed in order to condense together everything that standing up for kids was not: the greedy imposition of privatization policies in order to generate profit for corporations, which threatened kids’ futures, but also New Zealand’s unique, collectively-shared ethos for public education. The final part of this section theorises this ethos and how it can be articulated, constituted and sustained through digital media.

### *Finding voice, constituting alternative knowledges and politicising identities*

While teachers unions identifying with the model of social movement unionism potentially increases both the participation and ethical motivations of their memberships, in order to facilitate the broad cultural change required to shift the horizon of education debates, union-based activism also needs to be complemented by discursive actions emanating from the individual level. Terming this “textual dissent” Thrupp (2005) cites the usefulness of genres such as “opinion pieces, letters, articles and submissions”, which as “dissenting accounts help to keep the issues in front of other practitioners and

their organization, the media, public and policy-makers, building a climate of concern which may lead to shifts in policy or more fundamental change” (p. 94).

However, market-pressures for journalists to concentrate on “the sensational and the spectacular” (Bourdieu, 1998b, p. 19), together with the concentration of newspaper ownership in fewer and fewer hands (in New Zealand two overseas-based corporations dominate the market – see Gibbons, 2014; Hope, 2012; Matheson, 2010 and Chapter 4), means that in just over a decade the first three of the genres cited by Thrupp have become increasingly out of reach for dissenters, even for prominent academics. Further, tethered closely to the technocratization of policy, which becomes enacted on teachers by “expert” policy-analysts (Wood, 2004), is the process of sector-consultation becoming something that is largely performed, rather than something which actually impacts policy decisions (Futrell, 1999). Hence, Thrupp’s fourth genre, that of submissions on legislation, also begins to be closed down. This climate of closures leads Couldry (2010) to argue that neoliberalism is “a doctrine...that denies voice matters” (p. 1). In other words, the instrumental reduction of education policy to the fine tuning of a system to “improve human capital” (Foucault, 2008, p. 230) systematically excludes the voices of education workers.

However, the available avenues of textual dissent have multiplied in recent years with the exponential growth of digital media technologies (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Fenton, 2011; Hands, 2011). With their ease of access and reduced costs of participation, such forms have had a particularly strong impact on social-justice activist practices (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013;

Castells, 2015; Ganesh & Stohl, 2013; Hands, 2011; Lievrouw, 2014). While social media such as Twitter and Facebook have received most attention in recent years (see Castells, 2015; Gerbaudo, 2012), one genre which does afford a participatory voice at the level of the individual teacher or school is blogging (Barzanò & Grimaldi, 2013; Berkovich, 2011; Brickner, 2016; Shiller, 2015; Stitzlein & Quinn, 2012). Through encouraging reflection and critical debate, via more individualized and voluntary dynamics than formal union structures (Berkovich, 2011), blogging can harness spheres of participatory democracy (Stitzlein & Quinn, 2012), or “counter-publics” (Dahlberg, 2007, 2011), which can “speak back” to neoliberalized logics such as performativity, offering a collective space of dissent and shared critique, which collectively politicizes identities and reduces teachers’ feelings of isolation and stigmatization (Shiller, 2015). Shiller (2015) also notes that blogging practices can facilitate the accumulation of a shared “commons knowledge”, grounded in the localised practices of teachers. By building up “an alternate discourse” (p. 5) around the purposes of education and what good teaching looks like, and through drawing on educational research available online, the commons knowledge allows “anyone to speak as an expert” (p. 5), disrupting the dominant technocratic policy expert to teacher relation (Codd, 2005; L. Gordon, 1992).

Foucault (1980) terms such commons knowledges as “popular knowledges” - avant-garde theories which are “confined to the margins of knowledge” (p. 83) by “established regimes of thought” (p. 81), but which periodically reappear through historical struggles as critiques of “the tyranny of globalising discourses” (p. 83). The latter constitute themselves as

“scientific” partly through the constitution of “objects of knowledge” (Foucault, 1972), such as *the ineffective teacher*, or *the underachieving student*, but also through the antagonistic process of excluding “non-scientific” knowledges from their “scientific” identity. As I will describe through the blogs of Kelvin Smythe in Chapter 7, the big-data education academic John Hattie validates the abstracted forms of knowledge that he produces through describing teachers as “purveyors of opinion and myth” (Smythe, 2015a, n.p.).

Together with teachers’ implicit knowledges working to construct an antagonist embodied in quantitative, technical approaches to education policy as scientific, this relation also works the other way. Dismissals of teachers’ knowledge such as Hattie’s serve to consolidate beliefs that the alternative discourse, grounded in the contextual practices and ethical frameworks of teachers, is the more legitimate. As Dahlberg (2011) argues when articulating his model of the “counter-public”, while a group’s online identificatory space may seem open and democratic to its participants, the “space of becoming” (Goodwin, 2011) must be constructed through the exclusion of other group(s). Through the definition of an outside, the inside-group constitutes a shared identity, and education blogs, much like editorials, regularly employ affective tropes in order to create a *them v us* between education insiders and agents from the fields of politics and the media (Berkovich, 2011). This produces an emotional register of indignation which demonises “reform leaders as incompetent fools and villains” (p. 571), a register which is ideally suited to sharing on social media (Castells, 2015).

Dahlberg’s (2007, 2011) definition of a counter-public also contains an

additional role for blogs – that of enabling “critical scrutiny and democratic oversight of formal decision-making processes” (Dahlberg, 2007, p. 50). This is more akin to the fourth estate/watchdog role traditionally undertaken by journalism in liberal democracies, and signifies a mode of blogging with similarities to participatory or citizen-journalism (Lievrouw, 2014). For Keane (2009, 2011), the growth of “computerised media networks” is the “conjoined twin” (2011, p. 29) of what he terms “monitory democracy”, a new form of democracy which is displacing the representative model, “in which power-monitoring and power-controlling devices have begun to extend sideways and downwards through the whole political order” (2009, p. xxvii). I therefore term this mode of blogging as *monitory blogging*, and it holds the possibility of the subversion of power relations in appropriating the technologies of quantitative valuation and re-positioning teachers normally watched by audit regimes as instead the watchers (Ganesh, 2016). In providing teachers and the public with summaries of complex policies, or highlighting connections between political and economic actors, monitory blogging can be seen to complement commons knowledge forms, with both blogging genres providing differing forms of textual dissent, which can feed back to the macro level of union-resourced political campaigns.

Social media platforms, while lacking blogging’s capacity for in-depth critique (Shiller, 2015), can also allow teachers to speak back to hegemonic articulations. For example Brickner (2016) found that teachers used Twitter to contest a narrowed definition of teaching as an “instrument to effect student achievement” (Carusi, 2017, p. 2). By tweeting pictures which represented practices such as support for the emotional and physical well-being of

students” (Brickner, 2016, p. 18), teachers articulated “a feminist ethics of care” (p. 18), seen as overtly challenging the patriarchal logics of neoliberalization. The latter’s assumption that the entire educational experience can be satisfactorily captured within performativity’s forms of measurement and categorization was also contested through defiant hashtags such as #EvaluateThat. In that way, the seemingly informal, ironic, or playful acts of sharing material through social media could be seen to have a politicizing function in allowing teachers to display their resistant identities to each other, through “online identity performances” (Goodwin, 2011, p. 116), grounded in holistic or democratic visions of the purposes of education. For Nadesan and Trethewey (2000) and Zembylas (2003), both drawing on Judith Butler, resistance to alienating symbolically-mandated identifications such as the entrepreneurial self, manifested in policy and media discourse as the “preferred” or “quality” teacher (Gleeson & Gunter, 2001; Mahony & Hextall, 2001), becomes realised through such daily acts of bodily-grounded identity performance (both online and offline). Teaching is an inherently performative vocation, with the teacher often having to act out a series of identities on a daily basis, depending on their audience (Zembylas, 2003), thereby allowing many performative spaces for micro-level resistances to hegemonic discourse (Iyer, 2009).

In contrast, De Lissovoy (2013), drawing on Žižek, argues that the totalizing power of the performative system is such, with its reconstruction of “education as unceasing assessment and procedure” (p. 427), that resistant practices such as textual dissent or identity performances merely act as vents for the release of tension, permitting “the system to do its work without

interruption” (p. 432). While De Lissovoy does touch on an important point about the ambivalence of the system introduced by neoliberalization, which cares little about the ethical principles of individual teachers, as long as they keep producing their required “displays of ‘quality’” (Ball, 2001b, p. 210), a critique of his argument could be informed by a critique of Žižek’s framework more generally. As Laclau (2005b) puts it, with “all ‘partial’ struggles as internal to the ‘system’”, we end up “waiting for the Martians” (p. 238) to land if we want to conceive of a collective subject of change.

As argued by Hardt and Negri (2009), to diminish the role of the subject in both the process of neoliberalization and the struggles against it is to overlook the primary terrain of struggle today, which is control over “the production of subjectivity” (p. x) itself. Education systems therefore must play a key role in producing potential subjects of change, either as resistant students or teachers (Szkudlarek, 2011, 2016).

Ball (2015) and Carusi (2017) suggest that for the teacher to escape from the trappings of performative culture and transition to the resistant subject, a stance of total ethical refusal must be adopted, which full-frontally rejects the logics of performativity and instrumentalization. In contrast to this rather inflexible position, a Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective introduces the possibility of a more malleable, or ethically heterogeneous alternative, which is more akin to the relativist, performative position of Butler, but with greater purposive political agency from the individual. This is achieved through the discourse of “the hysteric” (Alakavuklar, Dickson, & Stablein, 2017; Dean, 2009). By employing satire, irony and playfulness (Taylor, 2010), by asking awkward questions, or setting “demands that can never actually be met”

(Dean, 2009, p. 80), the hysteric more indirectly undermines the “absolute authority of the master’s word” (p. 80) (the performative system). As I will outline in Chapter 7, direct challenges from teachers and principals working within a school system which is ultimately accountable to government can be punished harshly. The position of the hysteric therefore acknowledges this contextual danger, while also acknowledging the complexity of school situations, where “schools and teachers are simultaneously engaged in resistance and capitulation” (Clarke, 2013, p. 235). Thrupp (2005), who uses the term “contestation” to connote resistant practices with a more immanent relation with the institutions of the neoliberal regime, notes how *tokenism* “can be a powerful form of contestation” (p. 98) within schools, whereby the limits of audit regimes are pushed backwards in a gentle, playful and ironic way. And as Ball (2001b) stated, fabricating achievement results is “playing the game” of performativity; simultaneously embodying resistance and ironic compliance in taking the logic to its conclusion of total self-marketization and hence rather than refuse it, traversing its fantasy and allowing it to fall by its own weight (Stavrakakis, 2007).

## **Conclusions**

This chapter argued that neoliberalism’s impact on education should be conceived as an active and always incomplete process of *neoliberalization*. This is engendered by a series of discursive logics, narratives and representations, which become articulated within specific discursive contexts. Institutional media, as key centres of meaning-making (Couldry, 2003, 2012), play an important role in reproducing and disseminating these elements. But



rather than taking this role for granted, it is important to understand that journalistic practice articulates distinctive logics and identifications, with links to the history of that practice and its historical role within liberal democracies. With the centrality of iterations of the entrepreneurial self and enterprise culture in providing an identificatory ground for the neoliberalization project, such strong identifications and disidentifications take on a particular importance.

From a resistance perspective, an understanding of this complex role for journalism becomes key, as it can help to identify certain policies which align closely to journalistic logics and identifications, and others which do not, with the latter potentially able to present more opportunities for social movements which seek to emphasize the broader social and socializing benefits of public education beyond economic growth. The final section of this chapter discussed how education unions, through identifications with the model of the social movement union, can potentially offer ways to engage and politicize their membership, within a culture of individualization and personalized ethical action. Collective and communicative actions, together with offering spaces of identifications between teachers, parents and the wider public, can simultaneously articulate an alternative educational ethos. However, such an ethos must be sustained and disseminated in the broader public sphere, to become an embodied collective resource for educators to draw upon in everyday struggles, and blogging and forms of social media were discussed as containing the potential to generate an alternative popular knowledge around teaching and learning. Such knowledges, grounded in the ethics of care, collectivity, democracy and the holistic view of the child, are

of particular importance in neoliberalized institutional settings where overtly antagonistic forms of resistance are often unsustainable. In these settings resistance to the subject-positions of the entrepreneurial self can instead come at the micro level of the subject and its daily performances.

# Chapter 4

## Methods

### **Introduction**

This chapter describes how I applied the discourse theoretical framework outlined in Chapters 2 and 3 to the research questions outlined in Chapter 1. The first section is a broad discussion on applying a discourse theoretical paradigm and the methods which it is compatible with, primarily through the work of Glynos and Howarth (2007). I also aim to confer how my own political-ethical stance towards the project developed in dialogue with discourse theory, and how this stance fits within broader social scientific debates in regards to empirical analysis.

The second section then discusses how I actually applied that developing standpoint and the various influences which shaped it – how it impacted on the decisions I made when I compiled the corpus of texts, selected and interviewed the interviewees, and applied theoretical concepts. This section also includes specific details on newspaper and document searches, together with a list of interview participants.

### **Applying the discourse theory paradigm to the case study**

As discussed, discourse theory is a research programme or paradigm (Howarth, 2005), rather than a methodology which provides an “off-the-

shelf” guide which the researcher can apply to any research problem in any context. Laclau (1991) was vehemently against the unreflective application of a rigid methodology to a pre-determined set of data, particularly for PhD-level research. In a memorandum written to PhD students on the IDA (Ideology and Discourse Analysis) programme at Essex University (colloquially known as the Essex School), he argued that the straightforward application of a theoretical approach to a body of empirical material may be sufficient at Masters-level, where “the student has to show that he/she has understood a theoretical approach and knows how to relate it” (n.p.). A PhD, by contrast, “is only successful if it manages to overcome the relation of exteriority between ‘theoretical approach’ and ‘case study’” (n.p.). In that way, the concepts outlined in Chapter 2 such as dislocation, populist articulatory logic and empty signifier should not be viewed as leading towards the formation of a “hypotheses that one tries to test with ‘facts’”, rather, the theory and the empirical material should work together in a dialogic “process of mutual enlightenment” (n.p.). Hence, much of the content of that theory chapter retroactively derived from this interchange, where I worked through concepts in relation to my empirical material. In that way, certain concepts became relevant and illuminating, while others less so, as I read more theory and collected more data. This iterative process contributed more to the theoretical framework than the mere filling in of ontic details (Howarth, 2005), but worked to de-centre and challenge presuppositions, forcing me to frequently return to re-reading Laclau from new perspectives, together with supplementing this reading with other theorists, in particular Lacan and Foucault.

Discourse theory is not alone in seeking to break down barriers between theory and data. This perspective means there are areas of cross-over with established qualitative research methodologies, such as grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2009), ethnography (Bryman, 2001; Tracy, 2013) and genealogy (Carabine, 2001; Foucault, 1972, 1980; Howarth, 2000; Rose, 1999), the latter two of which I will discuss in more detail below. Alongside an eclectic mix of theoretical influences then, comes a methodological heterogeneity which encourages inter-disciplinarity, allowing the researcher freedom to be a “bricoleur” (Torfing, 1999) in assembling the best collection of methods possible for the case study. Connected to this is an ontological-level conception of discourse and the concomitant broadening of which texts are considered political (Carpentier & Cammaerts, 2006; Howarth, 2005).

While this may appear to widen the potential net of methods and theoretical perspectives too widely, work from the “next generation” of discourse theorists has sought to establish its place within the wider social scientific field more concretely, as an explicitly inter-disciplinary “research programme or paradigm” (Howarth, 2005, p. 317). Such work has noted a methodological disconnection in discourse theory (Carpentier & De Cleen, 2007; Howarth, 2005), one which has been amplified by Laclau’s (2004) unequivocal distancing of himself from empiricism. Critics have argued that this separation from the empirical has led to an overly formalistic or functionalistic approach (Howarth, 2004; Simons, 2011; Stavrakakis, 2004), which impedes increased dialogue with discipline areas such as cultural studies (Simons, 2011), media studies (Carpentier & De Cleen, 2007; Carpentier & Spinoy, 2008; Phelan & Dahlberg, 2011; Torfing, 1999) and

political economy (Dahlberg, 2014), despite the high potential extent of its applicability to those fields.

The particular deficit in regards to media studies has led Carpentier and De Cleen (2007) to devise some loose methodological guidelines, which they termed “Discourse Theoretical Analysis”, with the acronym DTA. This sought to apply “the core concepts of DT [Discourse Theory]” through “the use of qualitative (and quantitative) content analysis techniques” (p. 281). While in many ways Carpentier and De Cleen are correct in calling for more methodological guidelines, which would be particularly useful for less experienced researchers such as myself, their definition of “the core concepts of DT” is problematic. As discussed in Chapter 2, these concepts developed over the course of Laclau’s career, and there are many points of overlap between, for example, nodal points and empty signifiers. To begin to discursively separate these concepts potentially reifies them, increasing “the relation of exteriority” (Laclau, 1991) between theory, methods, and empirical material. This objectification also potentially reduces both the capacity of the researcher to introduce theoretical innovations through dialogue with theories from other social science disciplines and the likelihood of reflection on their applicability to specific contexts.

The work of Glynos and Howarth (2007) has provided a framework for the researcher to employ Laclau’s ontological precepts to empirical material through a “problem-driven approach” (p. 167-8). This approach seeks to appropriate theoretical concepts from a broad range of social science disciplines on the basis of their specific applicability to the research problem. Each concept utilised must, however, also be able to be made commensurate

with discourse theory's ontology. They provide an example whereby Olson's (1965) concept of "collective action" would be very difficult to integrate, because it is based on rational choice assumptions which position the subject as naturally individualistic and self-interested. As discussed in Chapter 3, Ball's (2003, 2013) concept of "performativity" can much more easily be made commensurate with discourse theory's ontology because it argues that subjects are not naturally self-interested, but are instead constituted as having those traits through discourse. In other words, self-interested inclinations are *radically contingent*. The concept could then be translated into a discursive logic by applying more concretely Ball's existing argument that performativity functions simultaneously at the abstract and "real" levels.

Glynos and Howarth's (2007) problem-driven method takes its cue from governmentality studies, which assert that power-relations are established and maintained through the logic of problematization (Foucault, 1985, 1991a, 2008; C. Gordon, 1991; Rose & Miller, 1992). Thereby the researcher should collect data on the ways in "which these problematizations are formed" (Foucault, 1985, pp. 11-12), and the ways in which solutions are rationalized through recourse to theories. In that way the research "begins with and challenges the political circumstances within which such theories emerge and operate" (Howarth, 2005, p. 319). My own PhD research proceeded along these lines from the outset, beginning by problematizing the notion of the school system in New Zealand as "in crisis", and the Government and the media's roles in simultaneously defining both the problems and the solutions. As discussed in the analysis chapters, key theories which underpin these problematizations are rational choice's conception of the subject and new

public management's presuppositions of public-sector inefficiency (Du Gay, 1996; Power, 1999).

The problem-driven approach is therefore opposed to methods-driven research (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 167), arguing that such work can lead to the fetishization of the technologies of data-gathering and analysis for their own sake, resulting in the researcher potentially losing sight of their political motivations. Glynos and Howarth (2007, p. 196) are clear that there is no possibility for the researcher to remove themselves from their field to some external vantage point, and neither should they want to, as "objective" research removed from its context has more likelihood of being taken out of context and used for social harm, rather than good (Thrupp, 2010). Instead, the researcher should acknowledge that they are "already engaged in a hegemonic struggle" (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 196), and that the categories and descriptions which they deploy have political effects on the field under investigation.

This critical analytical stance was developed further with the recent publication of Glynos and Howarth's first co-authored work since 2007's *Logics of Critical Explanation* (Howarth et al., 2016). The journal article responded to criticisms which charged that discourse theory is only able to describe phenomena, rather than critique from a normative vantage point (see Critchley, 2004). Hence we saw the authors move further from Laclau's detached ontological-level approach, to one which more explicitly acknowledges the presence of the analyst as a normative judge, with an agency in the field that they are studying. In that way the Foucault-influenced problem-driven method (Foucault, 1997; Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Howarth,



2005) was adapted to a stance more aligned to early iterations of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (see Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Instead of the “problematization of problems” it became more clearly orientated around the explicitly normative goal of unsettling “relations of domination” (Howarth et al., 2016, p. 5).

This overtly political stance differentiates a discourse theoretical approach from most other social scientific disciplines, and allowed me to recognize, rather than disavow, my background, perspectives and motivations behind the project (Tracy, 2013). As discussed in the introduction chapter, what first interested me in this project was the government back-down on class sizes in June 2012 (see Chapter 6), followed by attending an NZEI protest in April 2013. What struck me was not only the seeming strength of opposition to neoliberalization, but also the communicative techniques deployed by the NZEI and others in order to bring this opposition together. While I had utilized a CDA framework for my Masters dissertation, in order to study the way that newspaper representations of the war in Afghanistan systematically reproduced relations of domination, such a paradigm appeared insufficient at grasping this more complex terrain. While Fairclough (2003) briefly mentions the possibility of different discourses offering contesting “visions of the world” (p. 130) by using the same words in different ways, the study of this discursive conflict between powerful actors is not embedded within the CDA tradition, focusing as it does on the textual reproduction of “unequal power relations” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 53) and “social wrongs” (Fairclough, 2009, p. 170).

Therefore the more expansive discourse theoretical perspective, developed in

greater dialogue with political theory (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000; Phelan, 2009), and which embeds ontological assumptions about the political nature of all social practices at its core (Carpentier & Cammaerts, 2006; Marchart, 2007), was more tailored to my requirement to represent the multifarious field under investigation (Laclau, 1991). The re-positioning of the concepts of hegemony, ideology and populism as both ambivalent and central to any political movement (not only those deemed to be committing “social wrongs”), facilitated richer understandings of the data I was in the process of collecting.

Further, Fairclough’s (2003, 2009) critical realist ontological approach<sup>11</sup> conflates discourse with semiosis, rather than practice. Fairclough therefore has a similar conception of discourse to that within Foucault’s (1977, 1978) later work (discussed in Chapter 2), whereby, although it has effects on non-discursive practices through a dialectic relationship, those effects are ultimately limited in scope through the presumption of a material structure which ultimately determines “the realm of lived experience and action” (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 30). In other words, for Fairclough there would be domains (such as the economy), which run by their own (internal and non-discursive) logics, and this curtailing of the potential reach of discourse places theoretical limits on those seeking to enact social change, through changing

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<sup>11</sup> See Glynos and Howarth (2007, p. 30) for their critique of the critical realism of Roy Bhaskar, which anchors Fairclough’s iteration of CDA. They argue that critical realism, which posits the world as composed of “real” (non-discursive) objects, is too structuralist, in that there is a danger that structure will be presupposed as making lived experience possible, rather than vice-versa. See also Phelan & Dahlberg (2011, p.4), who argue against an ontological distinction between discourse and social practice (or action). They give the example of the global financial crisis, which was simultaneously a discursive and material event, with the way it was constituted discursively as having disciplining effects on governments and populations.

how we think about a subject such as education. Laclau's assertion of the radical contingency of *all* structures and their constitution through discourse, with the resultant conception of the social as a continuing political struggle to fix meaning, appeared to offer more robust concepts for understanding how the neoliberalization process was being impacted by movements in New Zealand.

At the same time however, there were no inherent barriers to the utilization of CDA concepts and techniques in the analysis, providing that they were disarticulated from the critical realist ontology favoured by CDA scholars (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 181). CDA concepts thereby acted as a "toolbox" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002) in my analysis, which I could "decide ad hoc to use in each case for pragmatic reasons" (Laclau, 1991, n.p.), rather than in any predetermined, formalistic way. CDA concepts (see Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 1988) have been of use in my analysis in contributing to my knowledge of what the text is doing strategically, even if I only explicitly name them on occasion in the analysis chapters. It is this naming process which can often lead to too great a focus on linguistic and semiotic details and the highlighting of technical concepts, rather than the building of a persuasive argument (Phelan & Dahlberg, 2011).

Ethnographic methods such as in-depth, semi-structured interviewing can also be employed within an over-arching discourse theoretical frame, with their ontological premises more easily made commensurate with discourse theory than CDA (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Howarth, 2005). Discourse theory's positioning of shared meaning-making practices as constitutive of social objectivity integrates well with ethnography's privileging of the

contextualized self-interpretations of research participants (Howarth, 2005, p. 319). Glynos and Howarth (2007) also acknowledge the hermeneutic tradition's critique of "value-free" positivism, which argues that the researcher can somehow remove themselves from their data and the real-life people who produce it, in order to uncover underlying causal laws (p. 81). Seeking to apply the epistemologies of the physical sciences to the social world, positivism assumes that "a single true reality already exists 'out there' in the world" beyond the meaning-making practices of human agents, which is "waiting to be discovered" (Tracy, 2013, p. 39), by the researcher, placed in the privileged position of objective "truth-uncoverer". As I argued in Chapter 2 and will explicate further in the following analysis chapters, positivism derives from an instrumentalist philosophy which reifies human beings into research-objects, rather than viewing them as subjects to relate to through the rich diversity of human communication (Bai, 2001; Berman, 1981). In contrast, hermeneutics and ethnography assert that "our interpretation of reality is constitutive of reality, not merely a view on reality which can be 'bracketed'", thus according "language and meaning a privileged role, insofar as they necessarily mediate all experience" (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 55).

Consequently the impact of the "researchers' past experiences, points of view" (Tracy, 2013, p. 2) etc. on that constitution of reality cannot be bracketed or removed, but instead should be explicitly acknowledged, or even celebrated. This also aligns with critical education scholarship which denies that there can be a neutral transfer of concepts and skills from teacher to student (Freire, 1996), and this perspective guided my approach to my

interviews, which I regarded as a dialogic meaning-making partnership, where we both brought perspectives and interpretations on events to the process (with theirs being the expert interpretations – see below).

However, Glynos and Howarth (2007) refute the hermeneutical claim that there is no possibility of moving beyond such contextualized self-interpretations. For them, the ethnographic tradition can over-valorise the immersion of the researcher into the culture of the participants, which can result in the imperatives of the emic ethnographic paradigm<sup>12</sup> dictating the use of the researchee’s language, theory and concepts. For Glynos and Howarth this posture, valid as it is as a critique of positivism, goes too far in the other direction, leading to a social scientific community polarised between a “narrow-minded positivism” (p. 2) and “a too firm embrace of particularism or immanentism” (p. 82). The latter can result in a circumscribed analysis which for them lacks “critical bite” (p. 51).

As a way of negotiating a middle-ground, whereby the analyst is able to find patterns without subsuming contextual meanings under causal laws, Glynos and Howarth deploy their concept of logics, the theory behind which was discussed in Chapter 3. Naming a logic such as performativity is a tool for the social analyst to articulate together elements of theory and empirical data in a way which does not deny the agency of the researcher in bringing together such elements. Consequently, as with all qualitative research (Bryman, 2001; Tracy, Eger, Huffman, Redden, & Scarduzio, 2014), the onus is on the author

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<sup>12</sup> *Emic* research attempts to conduct an investigation from the perspective of the research participants and through employing their concepts, from the perspective of the participating insider, while *etic* imposes concepts from outside, employing the stance of the external observer.

to demonstrate with a strong rhetorical argument the validity of such links, which can be challenged through peer review:

This means that the very naming and identification of social logics entails a judgment or act of gathering that articulates a set of heterogeneous discursive elements by making their links visible in the process of constituting them. It constitutes them through an act of judgment by laying a claim that cannot be analysed in or reduced to purely conceptual terms, and which can therefore be challenged. (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 187)

Hence the logics approach acknowledges the ontologizing roles of discourse and representation in Laclau's (2005b, 2005c, 2012, 2014) theory, and the practice of naming a logic has a similarly retroactive constituting function to the naming of *the people* in the theory of populism. However rather than deferring the agency to a signifier, it is acknowledged that the judgment of the researcher plays a pivotal role. Through the method of articulation the aim is the formation of a persuasive explanatory narrative through the sedimentation of linkages between empirical analysis and theoretical categories (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 165), which influences the subjectivities of peers. On consulting the literature I could also see that Glynos and Howarth's approach to logics, which confers naming agency onto the researcher, can also be applied to other Laclauian/Lacanian concepts such as nodal points/empty signifiers (Kumar, 2014; Reyes, 2005; van Bommel & Spicer, 2011), fantasmatic narratives (Clarke, 2011; McMillan, 2017; Phelan, 2008) and sublime objects (Clarke, 2014).

These conceptual naming practices are hinged together by an overarching aim of ethical critique, which is “a task of rhetorical redescription that foregrounds the political and contingent character of social practices” (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 196). Hence, Glynos and Howarth’s (2007, p. 112) definition of the ethical differs from Laclau’s (2000a, 2014) (see Chapters 2 and 3). They place it as one of four dimensions of social relations which structure a subjects’ response to dislocation<sup>13</sup>. Opposed on one axis are the social and the political, and on the other the ethical and the ideologically (or fantasmatic). With the ethical directly opposed to the fantasmatic, “ethical critique demands detailed analyses of the kinds of fantasies underpinning social and political practices, as well as the exploration of ways such fantasies can be destabilized or modulated” (Glynos and Howarth, 2007, p. 198). However, this counterpoising of the ethical and the fantasmatic/ideological also raises issues, in particular when applied to the study of progressive social movements when the researcher is, such as myself, explicitly aligned to their cause.

The key question is would it have been ethical for me to have written Chapter 7 in such a way as to systematically highlight all of the fantasmatic narratives which conceal the contingent origins of my interviewees’ practices and ethical beliefs? While I do touch upon the relations of the fantasmatic and antagonistic elements of the NZEI’s media campaigns, these texts are viewed as analogous to newspaper editorials and policy documents, in that they are both in the public domain as the voice of powerful institutions. However, to

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<sup>13</sup> This follows Howarth’s (2004) argument, critiquing Laclau, that there needs to be greater emphasis on how dislocations (considering the subject is always already dislocated from the structure) lead to politicizations.

apply these concepts to my interview transcripts is different, as these have been generated through a relationship of mutual trust. Further, to do so would also appear to contradict one of the basic tenets of research ethics frameworks (including Massey University's): the minimisation of harm to participants (my research ethics approval is discussed in the next section). This ambiguity possibly influenced Glynos and Howarth's recent clarification of the ethical and normative grounds for discourse theory: the unsettling of practices of domination, rather than the revealing of contingency for its own sake (Howarth et al., 2016).

My approach is therefore most closely aligned with this latter revised position, whereby I take an explicitly political position on the side of a dominated group, and this is reflected in the structuring of my analysis chapters and the questions which they seek to answer. While also acknowledging that power is not unidirectional (Foucault, 1994), I take the position that corporate-owned media and the state are *more powerful* than the teachers union workers, school principals, academics and bloggers that made up my interview participants. The focus of my research is how *neoliberalized* logics, discourses and representations facilitate the domination of the latter group by the former, with the closely tied exclusion of their voice from the public sphere, resulting in the marginalisation of alternative underpinnings for the purposes of education and teaching. Hence the identification of logics did not take as high a priority in Chapter 7 as in Chapters 5 and 6.

My personal motivations for the project were clearly outlined to the interviewees in the information sheet (see appendix 1). By making clear that the project aimed to speak to those who worked to resist hegemonic



articulations of the three policies, the sheet also implicitly outlined my political position, thus facilitating a trust-relationship. This was important both for getting beyond the surface-level “PR message” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006) with my often wary and politically-hardened participants (see Chapter 7), and for my transition from double-outsider (both non-New Zealander and non-education sector) to partial insider status (Maydell, 2010). The interviews, together with the policy and media analysis, were a steep learning curve for me, and so the ability to place the interviewees into the subject position of “the expert”, where they were fully relaxed and able to relate their stories, was of particular importance (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Many of my interview participants (see table 3 below) were indeed experts in their field, often holding influential and powerful positions within institutions. Consequently, by reversing the researcher-researched power dynamic (where the former is typically more powerful than the latter), where they were also far more knowledgeable than myself on the topic at hand, placed them in the relaxed position to talk about their experiences. Indeed, while some interviewees were more guarded and reserved than others, many proceeded in a semi-autobiographical format, including lengthy anecdotes and reminiscences. As described by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006), my task was merely to get them to start talking with easy, non-threatening questions concerning their background, after which I would only have to intercede with the occasional probe for further information, or to attempt to loosely guide the conversation in desired directions. Together with audio-recording the conversation, I would have in front of me an interview guide with a list of topics I wanted to address, based on internet research I had undertaken on

them beforehand (see appendix 3 for an example).

The third methodological paradigm which complements a discourse theoretical approach, together with my overt ethical-political stance, is genealogy. Closely tied to the problem-based approach, genealogy is an attempt to characterize the development of the “domain of objects and practices” (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 171), which enabled current forms of problematization and domination. It is an “attempt to try to trace...the actual history of those forms of rationality that comprise our present” (Rose, 1999, p. x), which enable the constitution of hegemonic definitions of *the teacher, the parent* and *the student*. Therefore, while seemingly concerned with historical articulations, it is very much a history of the present, or how the past has a structuring role on what is sayable in the present. In this way, it is “a painstaking rediscovery of struggles together with the rude memory of their conflicts” (Foucault, 1980, p. 83) – power struggles which have established one form of thinking about a topic such as education and the actors within it, and marginalised others. It therefore becomes an ethical imperative for the researcher undertaking genealogical research to attempt to *reactivate* what had been previously foreclosed by a regime of practices, by highlighting and articulating those alternatives (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, pp. 155-57).

In the case of this research project, while it didn’t begin that way, the reactivation of Aotearoa New Zealand’s holistic educational ethos, which articulates an alternative philosophical ground for teaching and education, became a key aim of this thesis. Hence Chapter 5 is a genealogy of this present, aiming to describe the key logics, narratives and representations which have marginalised holistic and social democratic educational

philosophies since the mid-1980s. A secondary aim is to chart how the political and institutional media articulations analysed in Chapter 6 were made possible by these historical delineations. How I selected, collected and analysed the specific texts analysed in these chapters, together with the interviews for Chapter 7, is the subject of the next section.

## **Data selection, collection and analytical steps**

In order to address research questions 1 and 2, data collection for this thesis began with the downloading of policy and media texts. However, the process which ultimately led to the contents of chapters 5 and 6 were not guided by any methodological imperative to provide a fully representative sample of such texts (see discussion in the previous section). These chapters now include the analysis of a mix of genres, including editorials, political speeches and reports (together with some press releases and news articles), the selection of which may not seem straightforward to the reader. With that in mind I will outline below the decisions which guided the compilation of the corpus which eventually formed the analysis.

In order to address research question 2, I originally set out to collect a representative corpus of editorial and opinion (or op-ed) newspaper representations between 2008 and 2014 (inclusive). I had already made a decision not to include straight, or “hard” news articles in my searches, recognising that this would create a vast amount of data for a close, interpretive, qualitative analysis. At first, this was going to include the four policies of National Standards, class sizes, charter schools and Investing in

Educational Success (launched in January 2014), but because of the expansion of my interviews and my subsequent decision to conduct a genealogy for Chapter 5, I subsequently decided not to include the latter policy. The non-inclusion of Investing in Educational Success therefore prompted an earlier cut-off point for the media and policy analysis, and I set the parameters on the six-year period of January 2008 to December 2013. From my initial reading of media texts during my first year, I felt that this period captured the core period of heightened antagonisms and politicizations of the discursive field constituting education, including the enactment of both National Standards and charter schools legislation through parliament.

I therefore began by searching for editorial and opinion pieces on National Standards between 1 January 2008 and 31 December 2012. I set the former date to include pre-2008 election discussions of the policy, and the latter to include the release of National Standards achievement data on Fairfax Media's *School Report* and the Ministry of Education's *Education Counts* websites. I used the ProQuest database for my initial searches, and the search terms used were "national standards" AND (educat\* OR school\*). This generated an initial corpus of 32 editorials and 29 opinion pieces (all from Fairfax Media titles, as NZME titles are not included in ProQuest database searches). An extra 10 editorials were then added from the NZME title the *New Zealand Herald* to make a total of 42 - see table 1 below).

As I began to read through these articles, taking notes, I began to notice an interesting anomaly. While this is not a quantitative study, and I have not undertaken the levels of reliability checking and validation associated with such work (Sapsford, 2007), I think it is worth noting here that I read 39 of

the 42 (92.85%) editorials as explicitly supportive of the National Standards policy. I judged none to be explicitly against the policy, with the remaining three (7.25%), taking an on-the-fence, or undecided stance (generally unhappy with the Government's handling of the implementation, rather than the policy itself). These figures were contrasted against the opinion pieces: only 10 of 29 (35%) were explicitly supportive of the policy, while 14 (48%) were explicitly against, and five (17%) taking an on-the-fence position. It is also worth noting here that the majority of the opinion articles were written as guest-columns, which means that they were not written by professional journalists. The central aim of Chapter 6 is to analyse the role of journalistic identifications in texturing a newspaper's support or otherwise for an education policy.

This prompted my decision to concentrate my media analysis on the specific genre of newspaper editorials only. The concentration dovetailed with an emergent theoretical interest in rhetoric and fantasy, particularly the role of fantasmatic narratives and representations in providing ideological closure during periods of crisis and dislocation (Chang & Glynos, 2011; Glynos, Klimecki, & Willmott, 2012). As discussed in Chapter 3, editorials are unconstrained by the genre conventions of straight news articles (Fairclough, 1995; Fowler, 1991; J. E. Richardson, 2007). The (anonymous) author is awarded much greater leeway to assume the judgmental "commentator voice" (Martin & White, 2005), allowing the evaluation of topics through high levels of commitment towards what is regarded as truthful (Fairclough, 2003). Through the performance of an identity that is post-ideological and post-political (Phelan, 2014; Phelan & Salter, 2017), the editorial closes out

competing definitions of the subject under discussion by way of an argument backed by “the evidence” (Featherstone, 1993). Appeals to the “objective facts”, positioned as beyond dispute, are coupled to an authoritative rhetorical style which encourages the reader to identify with a “common-sense” position, through “the words of linguistic deixis” (Billig, 1995), such as *we* and *us* (Fairclough, 2003; Fowler, 1991).

Through this identificatory position of authority backed by “the facts”, I therefore began to theorize editorials as a key site in which elites attempted to reduce the visibility of contingency through discourse, seen by Glynos and Howarth (2007), as the primary role of fantasy, through its naturalization of political logics and social practices. The more I began to read the more I noticed editorials would frequently be published following a controversy, such as the release of a new policy, a critical media-release from the NZEI, or protests from the public. As I read I began to understand the role they performed in closing out alternative interpretations on these events – what we referred to in Chapter 2 as ideological closure. This would be achieved through the rearticulation of neoliberalized logics, fantasmatic narratives and representations, making them fertile ground for the study of these concepts.

Further, I felt that editorials’ strong modal attachments to the “truth” of numeric data, together with its ability to make public servants accountable and transparent (G. L. Anderson, 2007; Djerf-Pierre et al., 2013; Shine, 2015), made them representative of how journalistic identifications are hegemonically constituted through reference to those signifiers when depicting the education field (Carpentier, 2005; Mockler, 2013; Phelan & Salter, 2017; Shine, 2015). In other words, a dominant version of the

journalistic identity was being constructed through the exclusion of *educationalists*, who were depicted as against accountability and transparency, and by implication the capacity of quantitative data to be a neutral conveyer of truth (Badiou, 2008; W. Davies, 2014; Flyverbom, 2016; Lupton, 2016). And through the use of the linguistic deixis mentioned earlier (Billig, 1995), this identification becomes transposed onto the construction of publics (Simons, 2011), constituted as demanding to hold educators to account through data (Blackmore & Thorpe, 2003; Cohen, 2010; Glasson, 2012; Mockler, 2013; Stack, 2007). What also became clear as I began to analyse examples was the vivid use of rhetorical flourishes in order to represent those seen as excluded from the insider identity – what Engelken-Jorge (2010) sees as indicative of the emergence of fantasy, which is also the “glue” which holds discourse, or neoliberalized logics, together, increasing the closure effect.

As discussed, I used the ProQuest database for my initial searches, which were later complemented by searches on the Stuff (Fairfax Media) and *New Zealand Herald* (NZME) websites for extra articles I may have missed. This manual form of searching was particularly needed for finding *New Zealand Herald* articles, as ProQuest only retrieved Fairfax titles. For the class sizes policy, the initial terms used for ProQuest searches were “school” AND “size” AND “class” between the dates of 1 March and 1 July 2012. When this failed to unearth as high a number of articles as I expected, I tried an alternative search focused on the release of the budget: (budget AND school\* OR educat\* AND class\*) between 18 May (the date of Hekia Parata’s pre-budget speech) and 15 June 2012 (a week after the Government’s backdown).

For charter schools the terms were school\* AND (charter OR partnership) between 1 January 2011 and 31 December 2013.

The editorials analysed for each policy by newspaper title are shown in table 2 below. As can be observed, a total of 68 editorials were analysed across the three policies, with National Standards by far the most represented policy, with 42. This reflects both its prolonged position as a controversial education policy across four years (2009-12 inclusive), together with its levels of integration with journalistic logics and identifications (see Chapter 6). In comparison, public debates over the class sizes policy lasted just four months (Feb-June 2012), with the intense period of debate (following the Minister of Education Hekia's Parata's pre-budget speech) taking place over the last month of that period. The search period for charter schools was longer at three years (2011-13), however the key period of debate took place in the immediate period following the policy's announcement on 5 December 2011. Seven of the eighteen editorials analysed came within four days of that announcement.

Newspaper ownership in New Zealand is dominated by two conglomerates (Fairfax Media and NZME), which ran all but one (Otago Daily Times) of New Zealand's 19 daily newspapers in 2013 (Gibbons, 2014; New Zealand Audit Bureau of Circulation Inc, 2014). The largest in terms of circulation were the *New Zealand Herald*, *Dominion Post*, *The Press*, and the *Otago Daily Times*, in that order (New Zealand Audit Bureau of Circulation Inc, 2014). These titles are each the sole newspaper in four of the five largest



cities in New Zealand<sup>14</sup>: Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin respectively.

Table 2: Editorials by newspaper title (with owner) and policy.

<i>Newspaper Title (Owner)</i>	<i>National Standards</i>	<i>Class sizes</i>	<i>Charter schools</i>
Dominion Post (Fairfax)	14	2	1
Herald On Sunday (NZME)	-	1	-
New Zealand Herald (NZME)	10	2	7
Otago Daily Times (Allied Press)	-	1	-
Sunday News (Fairfax)	-	1	-
Taranaki Daily News (Fairfax)	2	-	1
The Marlborough Express (Fairfax)	-	-	1
The Nelson Mail (Fairfax)	2	-	1
The Press (Fairfax)	5	-	2
The Southland Times (Fairfax)	3	-	2
The Timaru Herald (Fairfax)	2	-	-
Waikato Times (Fairfax)	4	1	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>18</b>

My decision to also analyse a sample of political speeches and media releases (together with policy documents) for Chapter 6 arose from a wish to fully address research question 1, which concerns the extent of the shaping of the

<sup>14</sup> The fourth largest city in New Zealand is Hamilton, which is served by the *Waikato Times*, but which also has a strong readership of the *New Zealand Herald*, being in close proximity to Auckland (Gibbons, 2014).

three policies of National Standards, class sizes and charter schools by neoliberalism. In line with the relational approach in discourse theory (see Chapter 2), the content of these policies was seen as represented by their articulation in speeches, media releases, and other genres of the political field. And to address research question 2, which concerns the reproduction of these policies by newspapers I needed to contextually situate these articulations alongside their depiction in the editorials. As I was reading the editorial sample, I noticed the unquestioning reproduction of tropes such as *the one-in-five*, and wanted to delve deeper, genealogically, in order to reveal their discursive origins. By including political speeches, together with media releases, reports and other documents from the political field, I could construct a richer narrative for the reader (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Howarth, 2005), and illustrate the discursive development of such tropes over time, their interactions with media logics, and the resultant impact on the meaning of the three policies.

Speeches and media releases could be easily located on the *Scoop* website, which has been a valuable repository for such material since the early 2000s (see Manning, 2012). Analysis of editorials, speeches and the other material was conducted primarily through NVivo qualitative analysis software. This enabled the easy storage, organization and retrieval of a large corpus, together with the coding of segments of text by concept. For example, I would have lists of codes for CDA concepts, discourse theory concepts (such as logics and empty signifiers), and rhetorical tropes and schemes, to which I could drag and drop highlighted segments. At the end of preliminary analysis, I could then open the file, containing all the segments of texts coded for each

code, and analyse these separately, before forming theoretical memos around sets of codes. I could then print out the memos for use when writing up my analysis. While many of the codes, particularly those related to the CDA concepts, were not eventually used in the analysis, the process proved useful in interrogating the corpus in a fine-grained way and becoming familiarised with the texts.

The easy access to political speeches on *Scoop* also allowed for the sample of 1999-2008 Labour Government speeches analysed in Chapter 5. However, the website also set representative limits on what was possible with that chapter in terms of addressing research question 1, with speeches only being available from 2003 onwards, resulting in a rather large 10-year gap between 1993 and that date. However, while a genealogy of the present, the chapter was not designed to be fully representative of the myriad policy changes over the 23-year period (1984-2007). Indeed, it may seem highly selective, in particular to an expert in New Zealand education policy. However, this thesis was never intended to be centred on the analysis of education policy, and a fully representative analysis could have taken up an entire thesis (or perhaps 3). The primary aim of the chapter was to demonstrate a degree of continuity over time and across governments, both National and Labour, with regards to neoliberalizing policy discourse. If my analysis had begun in 2008, as originally intended, it would have perhaps appeared that the logics, tropes and narratives deployed to effect in editorials and speeches in Chapter 6 had been pulled from thin air, and that the neoliberalization of education in New Zealand had only begun with the latest National government.

Therefore, the selection of texts analysed in Chapter 5 derived both from my

readings and my interviews, and progressed as a way of deepening my understanding of the historical development of neoliberalization, and the key texts which grounded it. Many continuities were established between what I was reading in those early texts, such as the Treasury Briefings and the Picot Report, and the later discursive rationalizations of National Standards, class sizes and charter schools. These included fantasmatic representations such as the inefficient teacher preventing the transition to a fully efficient and productive system and economy, and neoliberalized logics such as marketization. All of these became sedimented over time, setting the ground and providing the discursive resources for National's re-hegemonization of the discursive terrain from 2007 onwards.

The two Treasury Briefings (particularly 1987) analysed in Chapter 5 were well cited in the literature for their influential status in shaping the direction of thinking on educational over the initial neoliberalization period (Codd, 1993; Peters, Marshall, & Massey, 1994) and into the current period (Court & O'Neill, 2011; A.-M. O'Neill, 2015). Both were seen as pivotal in establishing the hegemony of neoliberal doctrine in elite circles as both necessary and urgent (J. Kelsey, 1995, 2015; Peters et al., 1994). Sam (see interviewee list in table 3 below) related in our interview that the 1984 Treasury report was central to the decision to implement the radical neoliberalization programme of "Rogernomics".<sup>15</sup> Within that report, "Keynesianism, full employment, the universalist welfare state, and...class compromise" (Hope, 1999, p. 91) were constructed as no longer viable. The

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<sup>15</sup> Named after the Minister of Finance in the 1984-90 Labour Government, Roger Douglas, but which has come to be a pejorative term which symbolizes New Zealand's "radical decade" (J. Kelsey, 2015) of neoliberal reform from 1984-94.

1987 Briefing, which had large sections devoted to education, marginalized the findings of a lengthy review that had recommended a new curriculum that was “whole; balanced... responsive, inclusive, enabling [and] enjoyable” (Codd, 1993, p. 76), in favour of “an economic approach to education” (Peters et al., 1994, p. 256). The ongoing power and influence of Treasury’s economized view of education can be observed in Chapter 6 when I discuss the class sizes policy.

The *Picot Report* (Administering for Excellence), the result of a taskforce which was commissioned following the 1987 general election, is well cited in the literature (Codd, 1993; Court & O’Neill, 2011; L. Gordon, 1992; Peters et al., 1994; Sullivan, 1993; Wylie, 2012) as attempting to bridge the discursive gap between Treasury’s doctrinal demands for marketization and privatization and left-wing progressive demands for community empowerment and democratization. Hence we see the genesis of key concepts such as the “self-managing school” (Wylie, 2012) and the parent-as-manager (Sullivan, 1993), together with rearticulating Treasury’s emphasis on a failing system, consumer choice and the removal of impediments to information flows. I therefore saw the Picot Report as an important example of Peck’s (2010) implementation phase, which sees the doctrinally neoliberal vision of a fully free-market utopia meet the situated context of localised struggle, resulting in a hybridized policy discourse which attempts to downplay these antagonisms by hegemonically incorporating the signifiers of both sides (Clarke, 2011; Rear & Jones, 2013). From that discursive perspective it was seen as more influential than the resulting policy document, *Tomorrow’s Schools*, released just four months later, and which implemented the majority

of Picot's recommendations (Wylie, 2012).

Other reports which could have been included in the analysis were the Government's review of the reform process, *Today's Schools* (otherwise known as the Lough Report), together with briefings from the State Services Commission (SSC). The latter agency is viewed by some as having as great (perhaps greater) an influence as Treasury on the shaping of education over this period (Court & O'Neill, 2011; Peters et al., 1994). However, their advice briefings to the incoming governments were not included in the analysis partly due to time constraints, and partly because managerialist discourse (which the SSC is cited as being emblematic of, see L. Gordon, 1992) could also be seen to be highly influential in both Picot and Sexton. The Sexton Report (New Zealand Schools: An Evaluation of Recent Reforms and Future Directions), like *Today's Schools*, was a review of the reforms, but one commissioned by the private-sector think tank The New Zealand Business Roundtable<sup>16</sup>. The late 1980s to the early 1990s saw a rapid increase in the influence of the private sector and business leaders in New Zealand, through the formation of such lobby-groups (Hope, 1999; J. Kelsey, 1995), and I thought it was important to reflect that. Further, on reading the document, it became clear that like newspaper editorials, private-sector reports such as Sexton did not have the same generic constraints around them, thus becoming important sites for the study of neoliberalized logics and fantasies.

Together with Sexton, the inclusion of the Labour party speeches was

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<sup>16</sup> Now known as *The New Zealand Initiative*, see: <http://nzinitiative.org.nz/>.

intended to reflect neoliberalization's advancement across diverse contexts, political parties, genres and time-periods (Hay, 2004; Jamie Peck, 2010a), together with its seemingly unending capacity for regeneration following crises, through the appropriation of heterogeneous discursive elements (Crouch, 2011; W. Davies, 2014; Mirowski, 2013; Phelan, 2014). The requirement to reflect this heterogeneity, which contributed to shaping of the three policies discussed in Chapter 6, also prompted the inclusion of the two curriculum documents. The 1993 Curriculum Framework was well referenced both by the interviewees and the literature (Codd, 2005; Court & O'Neill, 2011; A.-M. O'Neill, 2015; Peters et al., 1994), as highly emblematic of a technocratic, instrumentalized view of education which privileged "standards setting, measuring, monitoring and [the] reporting of outcomes" (J. O'Neill, 2011, p. 26). As I will outline in Chapter 7, the 2007 Curriculum was seen by several of my interviewees as being an important step away from this narrowing paradigm, placing importance on shared values and viewing the child holistically. Further, as I will argue in the following chapter, curriculum documents, with their emphasis on the attributes of the "good student", are important sites for the study of subjectifications of entrepreneurial selves (Bradbury, 2013; Bröckling, 2015; Vassallo, 2015).

The empirical material under analysis in Chapter 7 in order to address research question 3 is composed of a mix of interviews with activists (20 in total), media releases from the NZEI and other groups, photographs, video and text from the NZEI website, together with blogs. This original aim of this chapter was to gain an understanding of the NZEI's organizational and communicative role within the broader counter-hegemonic movement, and it

was to be more focused on the use of digital media by teachers as a counter-hegemonic force which politicizes identities (see conclusions chapter). After attending a qualitative methods workshop run by Sarah Tracy (see Tracy, 2013, for the linked textbook), I began compiling a contact information log, into which I would input names, email addresses, phone numbers and details of the results of contacts. As I already had some contacts with her before my PhD studies began, the manager of the NZEI's communications team Stephanie functioned as a key gatekeeper in these early stages. After I passed my end of year 1 confirmation and received my low-risk ethical clearance in January 2015, I sent through my information sheet (see appendix 1) to her, which she forwarded on to various members of the NZEI permanent staff, together with several former presidents. After two weeks I then followed up Stephanie's email with another email to the potential respondents, from myself directly. If I still had no reply, I took this as a sign that they were not interested in participating. As many did not reply, this broadened the focus somewhat beyond the NZEI, out to those who had been deeply involved in the movement but may only have had loose links to the union (NZEI permanent staff or former presidents comprised 4 of the 20 interviewees - see table 3 below).

The selection of interviewees then became more centred on the identification of figures who had been the most vociferous in their criticisms of the post-2008 reforms in the public sphere. This was guided by two key aims: to gain a deep understanding of the history, context and complexities of the movement, and to understand the motivations of those involved (as mentioned many held influential institutional roles, and therefore potentially



has much to lose in taking part in anti-government resistance). I therefore reasoned that those who were most ethically motivated against the Government's policies would have voiced those concerns through the genres of textual dissent: newspaper opinion pieces, blogs and other materials which could be found online, and this expanded my list of potential interviewees.

Once the interviews began this list was expanded further through a mix of the "snowball" method (whereby other suitable candidates would be identified in interviews), purposive sampling (where I wanted to find out more about a particular part of the movement, such as the Boards Taking Action Coalition), and my online research and newspaper analysis.

All gave their permissions via the consent sheet to have the interviews recorded (see appendix 2), and all but two of the 20 interviews were face-to-face (see table 3). Two were conducted via Skype, using a free to download add-in which meant I could record the conversation. On reviewing these recordings however, the quality was not comparable to face-to-face, so I avoided using this format afterwards. Fortunately, my funding included travel for research purposes. As can be seen in the below table, the interviews involved significant travel across New Zealand. Nonetheless my interviews were a little Wellington-centric, with 8 of the 20 interviews conducted there and just 2 in Auckland (New Zealand's largest urban centre).

Real first names are given in the below list (and referenced in the chapter), with the understanding that, if I had changed the names, given the small nature of New Zealand's educational activist community, they would have been easily identifiable by those internal to that community anyway. Second

names are not provided to make it a little harder for someone who is external to that community to identify individuals.

Table 3: List of interviewees.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Location</i>
<b>Allan</b>	Blog writer	Palmerston North
<b>Bill</b>	Blog writer	Wellington
<b>Bruce</b>	Blog writer	New Plymouth
<b>Dianne</b>	Blog writer	Wellington
<b>Ernie</b>	Principal and former NZDF president	Havelock North (Skype)
<b>Frances</b>	Principal and former NZEI president	Auckland
<b>John</b>	Co-chairperson - QPEC	Christchurch
<b>Liz</b>	Co-chairperson - QPEC	Christchurch
<b>Ian</b>	Principal and former NZEI president	Tauranga (Skype)
<b>Jane</b>	Former BTAC spokesperson	Wellington
<b>Kelvin</b>	Blog writer	Cambridge
<b>Malcolm</b>	Principal	Auckland
<b>Martin</b>	Academic – University of Waikato	Hamilton
<b>Paul G</b>	National secretary – NZEI	Wellington
<b>Paul P</b>	Principal	Wellington
<b>Perry</b>	Principal and former BTAC spokesperson	Wellington
<b>Sam</b>	Retired Massey University academic	Palmerston North
<b>Sarah</b>	Blog writer	Napier
<b>Stephanie</b>	Director of campaigning - NZEI	Wellington
<b>Tom</b>	Strategy and communications - PPTA	Wellington

As discussed, the format of the interviews was in-depth and semi-structured. While I compiled a list of topics I wanted to address, normally organised around examples of their activist work and their textual dissent, we would often meander away from these set topics, towards long anecdotes and general discussions on items in the news, for example. This was not something I wanted to discourage, firstly because I wanted to facilitate the building of rapport and secondly because the participants would often open themselves up on their ethical beliefs, identifications and disidentifications during such deviations. However, this did result in some long interviews, ranging from 45 minutes through to nearly two and a half hours, making transcribing a lengthy process. I did find a way to speed up the transcription process using *Dragon* voice recognition software (as suggested by Shiv my supervisor), where I listened to the recorded interview on headphones connected to an MP3 player, while speaking the words to a microphone connected to my computer. The accuracy and speed improved significantly as time progressed, with the software becoming attuned to my voice and myself becoming more used to the software's idiosyncrasies. Nevertheless, it still took a large chunk out of my working week, taking around two full days for the longer interviews. Several interviewees had requested a copy of the transcript for them to review before publishing, which required additional time to proof-read each document for errors.

Once I had all the interviews transcribed, I uploaded them into *NVivo*, along with a scan of the hand-written notes I had taken during the interview, together with any relevant blogs or newspaper op-eds they may have written. I undertook two stages of analysis: the first when I was compiling and

proofing the transcripts, at which point I was copying out the most relevant extracts to my theoretical concepts and collating memos. Almost a year later, when it came to writing Chapter 7, if I had just gone back to these memos I felt that I would have missed important information that I had earlier not considered relevant. Also, I felt that I would have imposed my own perspectives onto the data, rather than let that data speak to me, leading to a rather theoretically determined analysis.

Therefore, I undertook a similar coding process to that described by Tracy (2013, pp. 189-96), whereby I went through three successive phases of coding. The first phase was simply reading and immersing myself in the data, which I found a very useful process for seeing things from their perspective. I tried to keep these first codes to emerge from this process as descriptive as possible, and generally referred to real-world phenomena, such as government, media, charter schools, or the curriculum. The second phase was more analytical, where I would attempt to find lines between the descriptive codes, amalgamating some, and re-categorizing others, drawing from my theoretical concepts. Following this, I collated analytical memos, printed these out, and used them to chart out a structure for the analysis. This then became the basis for the structure of Chapter 7, following some condensation for narrative and argumentative flow.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has described how Laclau's theoretical concepts discussed in Chapter 2 and the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 3 were applied

to guide my compilation and analysis of a corpus of texts, in order to address the research questions. Through turning to the work of Glynos and Howarth (2007) I outlined the ways in which the ontological precepts of discourse theory, such as the discursive foundations of the objects in our social world, together with its overtly political stance, limits the kinds of theoretical concepts and methodological tools which can be employed. Viewing theory and methods as ontologically indistinct, both from each other and the empirical case study under investigation, discourse theory also places the researcher in an imminent relation to their field. This makes it more easily integrated with a hermeneutic or ethnographic epistemological stance which argues that the researcher cannot make abstract generalizations outside the specific context under investigation. Glynos and Howarth (2007), through their logics approach, however argue that the researcher can still move from this particular context to abstract concepts. However, such an approach does not take into account the specific requirement to establish high-trust relationships with human participants, and diametrically opposing ethics to fantasy/ideology could potentially, if taken to its fullest conclusions, cause them harm. An alternative ethical research imperative was argued for by turning to genealogy, which instead privileges the reactivation of forms of knowledge which had been previously marginalized by a dominant regime of practices.

The second section then detailed the often messy and contingent process of research when applying a discourse theoretical paradigm, in particular when conducted by an inexperienced researcher such as myself, who is developing their theoretical framework while in the process of collecting and analysing

data. Whether this is inevitable to a degree and the areas of research which could have been included or performed better will be reflected on in the conclusions chapter.

# **Chapter 5**

## **Doctrine, intervention and normalization: Neoliberalized education policy discourse across three phases (1984-2007)**

### **Introduction**

This chapter aims to conduct a chronological genealogy of neoliberalized education policy discourse from 1984 to 2007, in order to partly address research question 1. Through the application of Jamie Peck's (2010a) three-phase linear typology of neoliberalization, I illustrate a gradual discursive shift from an antagonistic construction of the Keynesian welfare state (which includes education), structured by a clear opposition between the twin forces of enterprise and dependency, to one where such differences are deemphasised, with neoliberal assumptions increasingly normalized and sedimented. The logic of performativity functions as the organizing principle across all three phases, allowing the problematization and proposed reconfiguration of firstly the school system, secondly individual schools, and thirdly subjective relations between teachers, parents and students. These shifts are set within a broader discursive context whereby the links between education and economic growth become increasingly presupposed.

While chiefly an analysis chapter, a secondary aim is to function as background for the reader who may be unfamiliar with the specifics of the New Zealand education context, while at the same time highlighting key

points of discursive struggle. I begin in 1984, the year that commenced “the New Zealand experiment” (J. Kelsey, 1995) in free-market economics, now commonly referred to by the moniker “Rogernomics”. This marks the beginning of the doctrinal phase, represented in the analysis by two Treasury briefings to two incoming Labour governments (elected in 1984 and 1987), the first of which problematizes the Keynesian welfare state in general, and the second the specific education system. Both are evaluated as performing inadequately under the objective gaze of Treasury’s technocratic discourse, which partitions economic decisions as apolitical and thus no longer open for debate (J. Kelsey, 2015). The market is then introduced as the ideal-model for reform, enabling direct lines of accountability between *providers* and *consumers*.

This is then followed by the interventionist phase, represented by the Picot and Sexton reports. Picot was the result of a government taskforce which sought to translate Treasury’s doctrinal recommendations into actual policy. Sexton, written two years later, is an assessment from the private sector of the relative success of the marketization process, and it constructs its failures as a result of a pulling back from Treasury’s doctrinal recommendations. The normalization phase, represented by two school curricula and eight speeches made by two Ministers for Education in the 1999-2008 Labour government, demonstrates the embeddedness of neoliberal presuppositions around education, together with the ability of neoliberal discourse to appropriate heterogeneous discursive motifs.



## The doctrinal phase (1984-87)

### *1984 Treasury Briefing*

What became known as “the New Zealand experiment” (J. Kelsey, 1995, 2015) began in 1984 with a programme which represented a wholesale break from the Keynesian interventionism which had shaped the political programmes of both major parties since the 1930s. A Labour government came to power and was advised by Treasury, the Reserve Bank and private-sector lobby groups that the Keynesian system, which attempted to provide full employment and universal welfare-state provisions, was no longer tenable (Hope, 1999). Treasury’s traditional briefing to the incoming Minister of Finance Roger Douglas provided the “blueprint” (J. Kelsey, 2015) for a wholesale neoliberal reform package which had no electoral mandate. This was to include widespread asset-sales to reduce debt and the marketization of state departments such as forestry and health, which were now to be “state-owned enterprises” run by CEOs from the private-sector who were charged with generating profit.

The 1984 Treasury Briefing document problematizes New Zealand’s Keynesian welfare-state as responsible for the economic stagflation of the 1970s and early 1980s. The state in its current form is represented as functionally incapable of being sufficiently responsive to the *external* demands of international markets, as it is plagued by far too many competing *internal* interests. As in the below extract, the influence of those disparate internal interests create “continuing patterns of unbalanced policy”, with an associated “Resistance to [market] Adjustment[s]” (the heading for the passages below):

There are many explanations for the continuing patterns of unbalanced policy but at the core has been an unwillingnesses [*sic*] to accept realistic limits as to what the government can deliver to various interests and what it can protect them from. (p. 107)

Rather than the instabilities engendered by global financial markets being responsible for the increasing difficulty of satisfying New Zealand's broad economic interests, it is the very possibility of attempting to "satisfy the community's desires" (p. 117) which must now be abandoned. The Keynesian ideals that economic policy should be the result of gradual democratic consensus-building between economic classes, and that planning and regulation could act as a corrective to the inherent systemic tendencies of capitalism to generate crises, is viewed by Treasury as creating rigid obstacles to the efficiency-facilitating reach of the market. The market is constructed as an entity which is beyond the control of a nation state, instead *it controls the state*, setting "realistic limits as to what the government can deliver to various interests and what it can protect them from" (p. 107). Attempts by the New Zealand state to alleviate economic instabilities on behalf of the population, or to "cushion the economy" (p.104) by pumping in money during recession have proved futile, merely temporarily masking the "reality" of "relative income loss" (p. 104):

However, this attempt to cushion the economy from the effects of the deteriorating terms of trade did not prevent the community having to face a real relative income loss and a dramatic increase in the rate of unemployment. (p. 104)

Because of this Keynesian policy platform of attempted containment and cushioning through increasing the money supply, “Accelerating inflation” (p. 105) accompanied high levels of unemployment; a couplet which produces *stagflation*, that is, recession attached to high inflation. While inflation was “contained in the mid- 1970s”, with a “satisfactory monetary and fiscal policy mix”, comparatively poor fiscal discipline allowed its ugly re-emergence “after 1980”, permitting “the inflation rate to rise to 17 percent” (p. 105). What had recently “contained” that inflation rate was a freeze on wage increases – a course of action that breached the established norms of union-government wage bargaining (Barry & Walsh, 2007). This consensus had the attached benefit of preventing wage decreases during periods of recession, thus attempting to avoid the concomitant declines in consumption and productivity. However, this policy of wage fixing was now presented as creating both “rigidities”, and “imbalances”, which are contrasted against “Enhanced flexibility”:

Unemployment is aggravated by rigidities which allow persistent imbalances between supply and demand. Enhanced flexibility in the labour market calls for changes in the Government’s role in wage fixing. (p. 118)

Together with merely papering over the cracks in the ailing economy, policies such as wage fixing create an unnatural imbalance between supply and demand for labour. Again, the market, while not explicitly named, functions as the all-powerful “ordering regulator” (C. Jones, 2013, p. 20), on the scene, providing life-sustaining income to the nation-state from an external point, but with disciplinary demands attached, such as “enhanced flexibility in the

labour market”. “Rigidities” such as wage fixing will mean that the state is insufficiently streamlined or elastic to adapt quickly enough to those shifting demands through the “reallocation” (p. 108) of its limited resources.

Henceforth those resources should be directed only towards making the economy streamlined and flexible and therefore responsive to the market. Welfarist policies, aimed at sustaining minimum standards of living *despite* shifting market conditions, can no longer be justified:

...it is important to recognise that the resources acquired by the government to finance its expenditures are not available to satisfy the community’s desires for various goods and services in other areas. (p. 117)

Put differently, the Government’s financial resources should be reserved only for essential, pre-specified objectives, aimed at increasing market-responsiveness, not spent frivolously in order to satiate potentially unlimited “desires”. By invoking the satisfaction of “desires” here, Treasury is articulating a latent discourse which sets the *deserved* consumption of economically productive elements of society against *undeserved*, under-productive elements petitioning the state (Richards, 1992). What is connoted is that the over-consumption of undeserving interests, which the Government attempts to placate by sustaining their standards of living at unnaturally high levels (through wage-fixing), has led to the problem of high inflation, resulting in a “bloated-state” (Kazin, 1995) too far removed from market-discipline. Through this logic it is a short step to the dismantling of Keynesian welfare systems.

The proposed solution to the problem of an unresponsive, unbalanced, rigid and bloated Keynesian state is the de-politicization of economic policy, whereby financial decision-making powers would be handed to the technocrats of Treasury. In Treasury's hands an "objective" approach to economic policy would lead to responsible stability and predictability, and thus the "consistency and continuity" (p. 110) required for credibility with other OECD nations and, most importantly, international markets. The range of this objective, non-ideologically tainted epistemological position should not be limited to macroeconomic policy however, but should reach "into every corner of the private and public sectors of the economy" (p. 106). Moreover, the "list of interventions" at page 106 is far more heavily weighted towards the public sector than the private, and includes "the protected position of the public service, and wider areas of the state sector such as *the education and health systems*" (p. 107, emphasis added).

The calculative, evaluative gaze of the objective, political economist, who problematizes what they perceive as the "protected" position of public institutions from an external vantage point, is indicative of Will Davies' (2014) definition of neoliberalism. He sees this as part of a general movement to "replace political judgement with economic evaluation" (W. Davies, 2014, p. 3) in all areas of the state. Within this logic, subjective judgements made on the basis of *collective* ethical frameworks are doomed to fail because they attempt to impose the artificial and interfering rules and regulations of bureaucratic institutions onto otherwise free subjects. Only the constitution of a "favourable incentive structure" (p. 111), which exploits an *individual's* natural propensity for self-interest in a competitive marketplace, will allow

the Government to “further its objectives” (p. 111). Hence in the following section, when the Treasury’s problematizing gaze turns specifically towards the education system, we see the emergence of a representation of an empire-maintaining education “provider”, who, protected from individualizing evaluations, acts as an impediment to marketization.

### *1987 Treasury Briefing*

While escaping the first three years of free-market restructuring that followed the Labour party’s return to Government in 1984, Treasury’s problematizing gaze moved towards the perceived protected position of education employees after the party’s re-election in 1987. An entire volume (Volume II) of the 1987 Briefing was dedicated to “The New Zealand Education System”, with volume I covering other areas as broad as the “Role and Limits of Government”, “Social Policy”, and the “Implications of the Treaty of Waitangi”.

The Keynesian social democratic ideal for education, where it was positioned as a fundamental, atemporal and universal right, was problematized by Treasury in the briefing as an outdated notion - re-positioned as a historically-contingent ideal. Near the beginning of the education volume, the report quotes a famous passage from a speech made in 1939 by Peter Fraser (New Zealand prime-minister 1940-49), which had become emblematic of New Zealand’s social democratic education philosophy during the post-war period:

The Government's objective, broadly expressed, is that all persons,

whatever their ability, rich or poor, whether they live in town or country, have a right as citizens to a free education of the kind for which they are best fitted and to the fullest extent of their powers.  
(Fraser quoted in *The Treasury*, 1987, p. 5)

Fraser's conceptualization of education in the above extract as a right to be fitted around the individual, expressing "the social ideal of equality of opportunity" (p. 5) by being tailored around need and capacity, was for *Treasury*, suited only to the "more leisurely times" (p. 4) of the post-war period. Applying the same logic seen in the 1984 briefing on wages, the contemporary "competitive realities of the international market and rising unemployment" (p. 5), means that "training for work" (p. 5) would now be a more pressing social priority than fulfilling the potentially unlimited desires of individuals. Limits would be defined through the setting of quantifiable, pre-defined, and therefore achievable objectives, meaning that a costed analysis of the benefits of education's "long-term investment[s]" could be undertaken:

At any one time it is a matter for careful assessment whether greater investment in education [...] is the better long-term investment for society as a whole. It is partly for this reason that reviewing education only in terms of its own education objectives is insufficient. [...] we attempt to develop a broader framework within which to analyse the costs and benefits of various levels and forms of government intervention in education (p. 6).

Henceforth education would be evaluated not in its own terms, but through

those of the colonizing discourse of economics, meaning that the purpose of education becomes *instrumentalized*. It would now be required to prove its financial benefits to society through analyses (presumably conducted by Treasury's objective gaze) of "the costs and benefits of [its] various levels". Education's success or otherwise would now be considered through the "broader framework" of *performativity*, the requirement for a public service to prove it has achieved a balance between "costs and benefits", defined in economic terms. This is why there must now be an emphasis on vocational training, as "education objectives" on their own cannot be justified in such terms. When Treasury does attempt to assess educationalist and humanist aims in their own terms, as in the below extract, it is via the language of economic evaluation, which naturally emphasizes their inability to meet pre-defined objectives:

...in so far as the education system has the objective of assisting the emotional, educational and work skills development of all children, it is clearly not efficient in that significant numbers of those who would seem to most need assistance are missing out at pre- and post-compulsory stages and become disaffected at the compulsory stage.  
(p. 18)

The ethical value of human emotional development, which has societal benefits which are inherently relational and affective, and therefore irreducible to a quantified cost-benefit analysis (G. B. Slater & Griggs, 2015), is marginalized in the above extract for a perceived inefficiency in achieving the specific effect of preventing disaffection from school. Thereby not only is future evaluation "in terms of its own education objectives...insufficient"



(p. 6), those criteria are also critiqued retroactively for failing to meet their performance objectives in the past.

The discursive frame of performance objectives means that the education sector must continuously demonstrate value for money through increased outputs (knowledge and skills transmitted to students) and decreased inputs (costs to the taxpayer). Furthermore, the bi-directional coupling between education and the economy means the latter is also now dependent on the former for growth, thereby further increasing demand for the efficient transmission of skills and knowledge, in a circular effect (Carusi, 2011; Szkudlarek, 2016). Treasury eagerly calculates that “a small change in the performance of the [education] system as a whole can have a significant effect on the social and economic well-being of society” (p. 3). However, in its current configuration, the system is evaluated as failing to perform sufficiently optimally in order to generate this growth. Employing the discursive device of the *old-machine*, and with societal needs acting as a placeholder for those of the market, the education system is currently not “up to the sudden gear shifts that are increasingly required if the system is to adapt to the fast changing and increasingly varied needs of society” (p. 4). As with the Keynesian state, the education system is constructed as outdated and inefficient, whereby it has not “been arrived at by careful logic”, but built up in a haphazard, imbalanced and over-politicized fashion through the “interplay of interest groups” (p. 111).

Such groups, all assumed to be pursuing their own self-interests, are barriers to efficiency, with the market model introduced as the most efficient form for the meeting of the now condensed educational/economic objectives. Central

to the market model is the *parent-as-consumer* subject-position, an identification which can only be fully realised when empowered through full access to information (Dean, 2009; Wright, 2012). Standing in their way is a system which is dominated by the collective interests of providers, rather than the individual interests of consumers. The beatific fantasmatic parent representation therefore comes with (frustrated) demands for transparency and accountability attached. These demands could only be met with the implementation of the market model, within which the transferal of information from school system to parents enforces a direct line of accountability between provider and consumer. This relation also increases efficiency by reducing the “perverse incentives” (p. 37) created through providers only being accountable to other providers. Again, comparisons are made retroactively, with the current provider-dominated framework representing a corrupting “break” from the optimal mode of a market-based system:

With the breaking of direct accountability between customer and provider, perverse incentives may be created. The pressure on quantity of government provision will not necessarily be matched by pressure on quality. (p. 37)

The interests of parents and teachers are diametrically opposed through the imposition of the twin discursive positions of “customer and provider”. While the former’s interests can only be addressed through the increased *quality*, which comes from accountability, the latter is currently incentivized only to increase *quantity* of provision. With the establishment of “direct accountability between customer and provider” (p. 37) in a marketized

system, the latter would be forced to both improve quality and reduce quantity, addressing both the demands of both the parent/consumer and those of the taxpayer for greater value for money. In contrast to these demands, without market reforms “provider interests will be served by maximising predictability, size of demand, and job security and minimising external interference, performance measurement or other forms of quality control” (p. 37).

The use of “provider interests” works here as an abstracting and condensing signifier, an umbrella term which analogises the interests of all teachers, their unions and education bureaucrats, reducing the complexity of their particular subject positions. Relations between these real people and their customers are also reified and instrumentalized, constructed only in terms of utilitarian use-value (Bai, 2001; C. Jones, 2013). The motivations of teachers and parents are presented as not only opposed, but entirely self-maximising and self-interested, with “providers” and “customers” seeking to increase their resource-share at the expense of each other.

While condensing and reifying, the unaccountable expansion of centralized state provision signified by “provider interests” also connotes something broader. It acts as a metonymy for dependency culture, a concept which, as discussed in Chapter 3, collapses together social anxieties around moral and economic decline (Bröckling, 2015; Du Gay, 1996; S. Hall, 1983; Heelas & Morris, 1992). These symptoms of decline are not only perceived to effect public sector bureaucracies; the self-enlarging tendencies of the Keynesian welfare state have also created similar “perverse” disincentives for individuals within families. Together with education, the upbringing of

children is now evaluated through the language of economic rationalism by Treasury, which assesses that the rigid rules and regulations of big-government bureaucracies have limited the educational choices of individuals, and decreased personal responsibility:

...the transfer of responsibilities between family and educational institution may go 'too far' in that the distribution of responsibility between the two sources is not optimal. For instance some families may hold institutional education responsible for developing their children's reading skills, not recognising the important [*sic*] of their own role. (p. 40)

Through the lens of rational choice logics, parents are incentivized by too much state provision to become lazy and irresponsible in bringing up their children. Assuming a passive role analogous to Olson's (1965) "free riders" within organizations, parents become over-reliant on the state to deliver a "disproportionate share of the burden of providing the collective good" (Olson, 1965, p. 35) of education. A contiguous link is then articulated between these disincentives and a societal-level moral decline:

With a growing percentage of births occurring [*sic*] outside wedlock and increasing divorce rates, a child's family is increasingly likely not to consist of both the natural mother and father [...] the dwindling of the nuclear family [...] make[s] it more likely that agency concerns arising from internal family problems will arise. We have emphasised the importance of the partnership between the family as educational source and the institution as educational source. Any failure of the

family threatens to undermine that partnership. Reducing or removing parental options, whether in respect of external educational sources or the home as source, amounts to substituting the state's judgement for that of the family. This weakens rather than strengthens the vital partnership between family and formal education. (p. 97)

In this vivid representation of dependency culture which diverges from Treasury's normally prosaic style in its sweeping normative judgments, the centripetal and expansive tendencies of "provider interests" not only blocks the realisation of the *parent as consumer* identity, but also disempowers the parent at the level of family life, where reliance on state handouts and diktats becomes habitualized, leading to apathy and irresponsibilizing disengagement from both family bonds and the education process. Higher numbers of births outside marriage, together with an increasing divorce rate, furthers the likelihood of a generation growing up increasingly dependent on the state, which correspondingly suits the tendencies of empire-expanding bureaucrats. As I will outline in more detail in the following chapter, this is a socially conservative moral logic which positions choice and the relation of accountability as offering a counter-balancing responsabilization for such parents, together with placing disciplining limits on the potentially unlimited expansions of providers.

## **The interventionist phase (1988-91)**

### *Administering for Excellence (1988)*

Following the August 1987 general election, the Prime Minister David Lange

replaced Russell Marshall, an “old style Labour supporter” (Sam - interview), as Minister of Education. In his three-year tenure Marshall had overseen The Curriculum Review, a “two-year exercise in community consultation and extensive debate about the aims and purposes of education” (Codd, 1993, p. 76). The review document echoed Peter Fraser’s 1939 vision for a child-centred conception of those purposes, centred on 15 values which included “whole; balanced; of the highest quality for every student; planned; co-operatively designed; responsive, inclusive, enabling, enjoyable” (Codd, 1993, p. 76). However, Treasury was highly critical, citing in a memo in May 1987 to the Minister of Finance that the review missed any discussion of “the relationship between education and the economy” or “issues of management and consumer choice” (The Treasury quoted in Codd, 1993, p. 76).

As discussed, during this period Treasury were outlining their own vision for education through the reform of administration, and events over the subsequent six years consigned the findings of The Curriculum Review to the margins of history, with its curriculum reform recommendations left unimplemented (Codd, 1993; Sullivan, 1993). This coincided with the Government commissioning a taskforce in June 1987 to evaluate the administration of the school sector. While ostensibly chaired and chiefly authored by the prominent businessman Brian Picot, the contents of the eventual report, *Administrating for Excellence* (known more commonly as the Picot Report), were highly influenced by Treasury. According to one of my interviewees Sam, there were Treasury officials sitting in on taskforce meetings, even though not officially part of the committee.

As outlined in the introduction to the report, the remit of the taskforce was

the review of “virtually all facets of the administration of education in New Zealand” (p. 3) outside the tertiary sector. The majority of its recommendations were subsequently adapted within the Tomorrow’s Schools policy document (published just four months later), and enacted as the Education Act (New Zealand Government, 1989), which disestablished the regional education boards and established boards of trustees within every publically-funded school in New Zealand. The notion of school-level boards, populated by elected parent members, was central to the broader concept of the self-managing school, which was to be embedded within the community and freed from the bureaucratic constraints of the regional boards, in order to realise a distinct identity (Wylie, 2012). While reproducing Treasury’s representation of education as an outdated, under-performing system, failing to meet its objectives, Picot delves into more detail on how greater accountability would be introduced in order to improve that system, resulting in clear articulations of parents, teachers and schools, together with the envisioned relationships between them.

In the below extract Picot rearticulates the rhetorical device of the *old-machine*, facilitating a representation of the current system through adjectives such as “creaky”, “cumbersome” and “haphazard”, which establishes a discursive contrast to the “rapidly changing” requirements of “late twentieth century” society:

The structure [...] is a creaky, cumbersome affair. It is not the result of an overall plan or design, but has taken on its present shape by increments and accretion. Such a haphazard collection of administrative arrangements is not suited to the rapidly changing late

twentieth century. In looking at the system, we have observed a number of serious weaknesses. These can be grouped broadly under the following themes:

- overcentralisation of decision making
- complexity
- lack of information and choice
- lack of effective management practices
- feelings of powerlessness (p. 22)

Again we have a representation of a system which is inefficient, imbalanced, rigid, overcentralized, over-complex and opaque, due to being shaped in “increments and accretion” by internal provider interests, rather than an overarching, objective, singular plan, imposed from an external point. There is particular attention given here to the “feelings of powerlessness” this engenders, through “lack of information and choice”. This lack not only impedes the consumer-choices of parents, but also impacts “effective management practices” (p. xi), reflecting the increased influence of the discourse of managerialism over this phase (Court & O’Neill, 2011; L. Gordon, 1992). The below extract bemoans a lack of management expertise in the system, contiguously linked to the absence of information:

Effective management practices are lacking and the information needed by people in all parts of the system to make informed choices is seldom available. The result is that almost everyone feels powerless to change things they see need changing. To make progress, radical



change is now required. (p. xi)

In Picot's vision of "progress", information should move freely to and from the manager; top-down through "mission statements, goals, and priorities to guide action" (p. 32), and bottom-up, through the measurement of performance to clearly-defined objectives. Only through a hierarchy of managers can you have system-efficiency, because "decision makers have control over the available resources and are then held accountable for what is achieved" (p. xi).

The path to empowerment for the individual within the system is thus now conceived as at least partly a managerial one, including an element of *self-management*. Self-managing attributes are posited as emerging naturally from the removal of unnecessary rules and regulations and a congruent increase in information flows. A faith is placed in "individual competence", with the managing subject expected to achieve their objectives via "the development of initiative, independence, personal responsibility and entrepreneurial abilities" (p. xi), rather than collectively-defined rules. With individuals all working on themselves, a culture of enterprise should emerge, and we see a clear distinction made between that ethos and a "culture of dependence" (p. 28). The latter's "administrative rules and instructions" are symptomatic of a "lack of information" (p. 28) flows in the current system, as individuals are unable to make accountable decisions in the light of clear, transparent data.

This passivizing "culture of dependence" (p. 28), strongly linked to opacity through its opposition to information circulation, is fertile terrain for the

domination of powerful groups such as teacher organizations. These groups take advantage of the apathy around engagement and monopolise policy development to their own advantage, to the detriment of the marginalized. The report establishes discursive links between the “frequent consultation between policy makers and teachers” (p. 24) and the “feelings of powerlessness and the inability to influence the present system” (p. 36), for Māori. Through this logic we see the appropriation of progressive critiques of the welfare state, which had previously argued that it was culturally biased and reproduced relations of domination (Peters et al., 1994):

Learning institutions have been largely inimical to cultural values outside the mainstream - and without a sense of security about the worth of their culture, individuals can suffer a personal and social dislocation that makes learning difficult, if not impossible. (p. 5)

The use of the term “individuals” is prescient here, as despite Māori cultural identity being derived largely through a sense of “belonging to [the group] and a sense of relating to others” (Macfarlane et al., 2008, p. 107), what is denied here by the ambivalent system is *individualized* self-realization through equal access to educational opportunities (more on this in the next section). Further, individual “learning institutions” are to blame for this cultural marginalization, rather than much broader cultural/societal forces.

In a similar way, tethered closely to the introduction of the self-managing school concept, is the empowerment of the atomised individual, rather than the collective group, despite rhetorical nods to a “co-operative partnership” (p. 4) between community and learning institution. The parental board of

trustee member's primary role is intended to measure and hold teachers to account for their performance. The envisaged "partnership" between the wider public and the school then derives from the subsequent flow of this performance information out of the school into the local community, who would be empowered, either through having a "say in the running of it", or by being "free to choose...acceptable alternatives" (p.4). Thus teachers are held to account not only by a parental/managerial hierarchy, but also through the market-choices of the parent-consumer. At this point the distinction between these two roles for the parent becomes rather blurred, as they are to ensure the accountability of providers through both the subject-positions of the consumer and the manager. Even after they are appointed to the boards of trustees, when parents become "decision makers [with] control over the available resources" (p. xi) of the school, managerial decisions and consumer choices are intertwined:

Too often statutory authorities, principals and administrators have been proscribed in their ability to seek out other options for obtaining services or products. Schools are often required to accept services, such as the provision of equipment, furniture and supplies from education boards and regional offices, whether or not the nature and kind of what is being provided is precisely what they would have chosen themselves. (p. 29)

What was previously "proscribed" was the realisation of an independent identity for the self-managing school through the consumption of consumer products. The bureaucratic rules and regulations of local education boards are represented as imposing a moribund uniformity which denies diversity

and autonomy. From this point onwards schools could see themselves as separate enterprises competing against each other (Wylie, 2012), acting as *prosumers*, with consumption choices becoming “an enterprise activity” (Foucault, 2008, p. 226) which builds a distinct identity or brand.

Together with a previously denied freedom to choose furniture and stationary, school identity-construction would take place through the board of trustees possessing the decision-making powers to set both their own values and the targets for realising them. This would occur through the drawing up of a “charter of objectives”, which would also ensure a “partnership” (p. 48) between school and community, by functioning as a contract between them, thus embedding a relation of accountability.

Accountability of the community-embedded school to the state would be guaranteed by the establishment of an external body, which would ensure that “the objectives set out in its charter” (p. 49) were being met. This was to be the Review and Audit Agency (later becoming the Education Review Office), and it was to monitor the performance of each school through periodic inspections. Henceforth the “steering from a distance” model was established (Court & O’Neill, 2011), whereby the ideals of total independence from bureaucratic control through the managerial/consumer empowerment of the parent are compromised by interventionist, pragmatic requirements for centralized planning and control. In the following section Sexton perceives this pragmatism as a betrayal of (neoliberal) doctrine.

*New Zealand Schools: An Evaluation of Recent Reforms and*

### *Future Directions (1990)*

Stuart Sexton, a former Shell marketing executive, authored a report which evaluated the success of the reforms recommended in the *Picot Report*. Funded by the right-wing think tank the New Zealand Business Roundtable, *New Zealand Schools: An Evaluation of Recent Reforms and Future Directions* was published slightly after the Government's own review of the reform process, *Today's Schools* (Lough, 1990). Both reports were prompted by a widespread perception that the reforms had been an over-rushed disaster, with many schools left abandoned, without support, during a time of massive change (Wylie, 2012). Howard Fancy, Secretary for Education (chief executive of the Ministry of Education) from July 1996 to October 2006, acknowledged in retrospect that there was an "absence of a consistent evidence and research base to inform policy and insufficient supports for implementation" (Fancy, 2007, p. 334). Instead of this prompting an acknowledgment of the limits of a market model however, Lough and Sexton are viewed in the literature as proffering "market managerialism" (Court & O'Neill, 2011) as the answer to the administrative vacuum - a new public management discourse which saw the rhetoric of "partnership" between teachers, communities and parents seen in *Picot*, increasingly marginalized (L. Gordon, 1992; Sullivan, 1993).

For Sexton, "a British lobbyist with extreme neo-liberal views on education" L. Gordon (1992, p. 33), the key reason for the failures of the Tomorrow's Schools model was that *Picot's* vision of a free-market in education had been betrayed. Politicians, under the influence of power-hungry bureaucrats, complacent educationalists and their powerful unions, had allowed those

groups to retain their hold over the system. However, this could still be resolved by taking what Sexton saw as the original intentions of Picot to their fullest conclusions: a totally marketized system where parent-consumers are supplied with vouchers, freeing them to purchase the education most suited to their requirements.

The vision could only be achieved through the full embrace of the parent-as-consumer identity and the abandonment of the parent-as-manager seen within Picot. A key stumbling block thus far had been the lack of managerial (and therefore monitoring) experience of the parental board of trustee members. For Sexton, managing should be left to the managers; the Government should abandon their democratizing pretences and fully embrace the concept of the school as a *business*, rather than as a community-servant. Hence, he argues that rather than being elected by the parents in the community, boards of trustee members should be appointed by other board members, based on their capability to “demonstrate their knowledge and ability to exercise an effective monitoring role” (p. 22).

However, for Sexton, although the failure of the parent-manager identity was a contributing factor, it was not the primary blockage to the success of the market model. This would chiefly be attributed to the aforementioned betrayal, or “pulling back” (p. 16) from *full* marketization, which allowed “administrators/politicians to retain a still over-centralised, bureaucratic system” (p. 16). The most “insidious” (p. 18) aspect of this betrayal was the abandonment of Picot’s purported vision for schools to become fully independent, symbolized by the freedom to write their own charters of objectives. Instead, in a moment which encapsulates for Sexton creeping

bureaucratic over-reach, individual schools were forced to adopt charters that were “almost totally written for the school by central government” (p. 18). What is omitted here is the vacuum left by the dissolution of the regional education boards, whereby the state was forced to intervene in order to assist schools who were suddenly expected to be responsible for their own finances and budgets, and so had very little time for the formation of a charter in cooperation with a similarly inexperienced community (Sullivan, 1993; Wylie, 2012).

As much as bureaucrats and weak-willed politicians, the self-interests of the “educational establishment” (p.53) was to blame for this betrayal, with the latter represented as sensing that their power-base was being directly threatened by Picot’s vision for parental empowerment:

The power of the teaching professions, referred to earlier, can be expected to be brought to bear against any proposal to inspect teaching and pupil achievements. Less competent teachers will feel particularly threatened. Being quasi-monopoly suppliers, it is characteristic of public schools and their personnel to resist all attempts to measure their output. Usually their standby argument is that the service being offered is so complex as to be impossible to gauge in any meaningful way. (p. 38)

In this extract there is a strongly antagonistic representation of “the teaching professions”, characterized as continuing to exercise a powerful hold over the education system. While not explicitly named here, it would be union organizations which would provide the collective “power” to protect the

interests of their members. And as in the provider interests trope observed earlier, union-influenced “public schools and their personnel”, as “quasi-monopoly suppliers”, are incentivized only to protect those interests and their privileged position to dictate policy. The possibility that ethics of collectivity, professionalism and care for others could motivate teacher’s actions is not discussed, as self-interest becomes the only possible frame through which to rationalize opposition to “attempts to measure...output” (p. 38). As will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, what Sexton means by measuring output is the imposition of audit regimes, which for him would shed the light of transparency into an opaque, centripetal and union-dominated structure. Through this light, teachers will be held to account for their performance, individualizing them through required displays of quality, with the “less competent” then becoming fully visible, thereby reducing the collective power of the unions to protect all of its members (Moe, 2011; Salter & Phelan, 2017). We can begin to see that the “less competent” teacher representation is integral both for the initial justification of audit regimes and their ongoing legitimization. Once this representation becomes objectified, complaints around the inapplicability of audit to education, whereby it reifies and instrumentalizes the rich complexity of the learning experience, can be dismissed as typical elitist obfuscations, or “standby argument[s]” (p. 38).

What is disempowered for Sexton in this representation of the refusal of the teaching profession to accept audit, is the emergence of the voice of the consumer-parent. This latter identification can only be realised through the total expulsion of provider interests, and the realization of a post-political market-utopia - or as Sexton puts it, a “complete freeing up of the system



from politics and bureaucracy” (p. 43). A “free, direct market, between supplier and consumer”, with the self-serving provider-interests removed, is the only mechanism for “the consumer's voice not only to be heard but also to be acted upon” (p. 43). Once this optimal status has been reached, empty of the power-struggles which have historically plagued the system, we would simply be able to:

...stand back and let the 'market' take over. In such a setting, education would be offered by a diversity of providers in response to the demands of consumers (parents and their children). It would meet the requirements of quality and quantity dictated by that consumer demand. (p. 43)

Thereby, like the two Treasury briefings, Sexton rearticulates full marketization as the most efficient system, with the market, when left to its own devices, facilitating a natural equilibrium between providers and consumers. Consumer demand would necessarily lead to both diversity and quality in supply, while also keeping a lid on quantity, therefore leading to both total efficiency and total consumer empowerment. The tension between quality and quantity, with the latter winning out over the former in the current pre-marketized system, would become perfectly synchronised around the requirements and choices of the consumer.

By keeping parents firmly within the identificatory boundaries of the consumer, marketization is not only efficient, but also contains a moral element through a responsabilizing requirement for parents to become engaged in their child's education through the enactment of *choices*. For

Sexton, more overtly expressing the same logic voiced in the 1987 Treasury briefing, moral decline in wider society is linked to the over-reach of the state into family life through welfare-systems. While some degree of state interference is acknowledged as necessary for the most vulnerable children, because of “incapable or irresponsible parents” (p. 4), this should not deny “the majority of parents their rights and duties” (p.4). Exploiting the grey area between education and upbringing, these duties should include obligations to “feed, clothe, cherish *and educate* that child” (p. 3, emphasis added). Sexton then makes explicit links between social anxieties around the decline of traditional family structures and bureaucratic encroachments of the welfare state:

...in most countries the state has expanded its role in education to the point where in many respects it has presumed to take over the role of parents, to subvert parents' rights and responsibilities, and to act as though the children 'belong to the state'.

This evaluation must be wrong - morally wrong - as well as educationally and financially inefficient. It is as well, therefore, to establish what, in today's society, are the acceptable boundaries of state intervention, and to keep any reforms within those boundaries.  
(p.4)

Government efficiency and family morality go hand in hand here as the intrusions of the Keynesian welfare state impinge on both the abilities of the system to be financially efficient and the family from assuming its “natural” responsibilities. Through the strongly de-legitimizing verb “subvert” (p. 4),

a representation is articulated here of the nuclear family possessing a clearly defined moral boundary, which the welfare state has repeatedly crossed, to the point where it has now arrogantly acting as though parents should no longer take responsibility for the upbringing of their own children. And as in the representations of teachers earlier, the logic of self-interest precludes motivations such as care and emotional attachment, meaning parents are disincentivized to become engaged in their child's upbringing and education. As will be outlined in more detail in the next chapter's discussion of charter schools, the beatific entrepreneurial parent identity, engaged by choices and empowered by information, has its boundaries demarcated by a horrific Other: "incapable or irresponsible parents" (p. 4) who refuse the moralizing responsibilities of marketization, with its autonomizing consumer-choices.

## **The normalization phase (1993-2007)**

### *The Curriculum Framework (1993)*

After the neoliberalization policies of the 1984-1990 Labour government had failed to deliver on promised economic growth (J. Kelsey, 2015), the 1990 general election was won by the traditionally more right-wing National Party, on a populist platform which attributed blame to "welfare scroungers" and other signifiers of dependency culture (G. Gilbert, 2012; Hope, 1999; Pratt & Clark, 2005). With both of New Zealand's major parties now adopting neoliberal doctrine, making it increasingly "normalized and necessitarian" (Hay, 2004), problematizing focus was placed onto the perceived moral decline of the population, with National's electoral mandate based on "a

pledge to return to the decent society” (Pratt & Clark, 2005, p. 308), and the defence of the New Zealand way of life.

Behind the scenes Treasury doctrine was again influential, recommending in its 1990 Briefing that welfare rates and wages should be reduced in order to encourage foreign investment (J. Kelsey, 2015). Ruth Richardson, National’s finance minister, then worked closely with Treasury economists in formulating what she coined “the mother of all budgets” in 1991, which slashed welfare payments (J. Kelsey, 2015). This program of austerity became increasingly unpopular with the public (Hope, 1999; J. Kelsey, 2015; Pratt & Clark, 2005), permitting significant union-facilitated resistance, despite their membership-base being significantly curtailed by the 1991 Employment Contracts Act.<sup>17</sup> Further, the National and Labour Parties’ continuing adherence to neoliberal doctrine produced a “growing disenchantment with the existing democratic process” (Pratt & Clark, 2005, p. 303), leading eventually to electoral reform and the institution of Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) voting in 1993 (Hope, 1999).

Within elite circles attention was turned back to how education could generate future economic growth, with the administrative system already marketized. This resulted in the “second wave of [school education] reform...focus[ing] on curriculum and assessment” (Codd, 2005, p. 196). However, rather than a return to the holistic, child-centred and democratically constituted values behind the side-lined Curriculum Review of 1987, the 1993 Curriculum

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<sup>17</sup> According to Barry and Walsh (2007), the Employment Contracts Act “prohibited the inclusion of a compulsory union membership provision in any employment contract. The automatic link between union membership and industrial representation was ended, and unions needed to separately establish their authority to negotiate on behalf of each individual member” (p. 62).

Framework was written “to reflect the business values of efficiency, enterprise and competition” (Peters et al., 1994, p. 261), being closely influenced by National’s 1990 election manifesto (which was itself influenced by Treasury). We therefore see in the Curriculum Framework a specification of the characteristics required from a workforce which must become “increasingly highly skilled and adaptable” for “tomorrow’s competitive world economy” (p. 1).

There is also a tacit acknowledgement that in order for subjects to become “highly skilled and adaptable”, there would be a requirement for a reintegration of social democratic values alongside those we could characterise as doctrinally neoliberal. While the 1987 Treasury Briefing excluded the values of social democracy from its model of the optimally performing system, stating that there was too much “optimism in New Zealand as to the potential of formal education to contribute to *both* economic growth *and* social equity” (p. 6, emphasis added), the Curriculum Framework lists both “self-management and competitive skills” *and* “social and co-operative skills” (p. 19) as equally “important if students are to achieve their potential and to participate fully in society, including the world of work” (p. 17). However, while there is a re-integration of the values of collectivity, their political potential is circumscribed (or neoliberalized) through a focus on societal expectations for the individual ideal-student, rather than on how society could be changed collectively.

The subject within this discourse is now urged to integrate responsibilities for maximising the self as an autonomous, competitive unit with responsibilities towards others, by “work[ing] in co-operative ways to achieve common

goals” and by developing “a sense of responsibility for the well-being of others” (p. 20). This bi-directional pull can be summarised in the below oxymoronic statement:

...many of the skills will enable individuals to operate more effectively in group situations. Students will learn to work in co-operative ways, and to participate confidently in a competitive environment. (p. 17)

There is no explicit tension here in an educational *mise-en-scène* where students accrue skills in order to compete against other students, while at the same time working co-operatively. In other words, there is no contradiction perceived between working for the good of the group and working for individual self-interest. We can therefore perceive a de-antagonization, or de-politicization prototypical of Third Way education policy discourse, which attempts to conjoin seemingly contradictory logics, such as competition and equality (Codd, 1993), while simultaneously naturalizing certain policy directions as inevitable (Clarke, 2011, 2012; Rear & Jones, 2013).

The inclusion of the ethics of collectivity is possible because the underlying premises of neoliberalization, and its instrumentalized conception of education as closely tied to a perpetual requirement for economic growth, have become increasingly sedimented. The goals of social democracy are no longer required to be contrasted in a dichotomy of *them v us* in order to consolidate a hegemonic identity. Instead, through their listing as one of eight essential skill groups (p. 5), communitarian ethics, which stress the importance of working together to achieve common goals, have their political

potential quarantined and then absorbed within an overarching framework of a “good student”.

Skills which facilitate the attainment of “common goals” are not emphasised for their broad societal benefits, but their ability to complement the development of the responsible, self-managing subject, permanently in need of guided self-improvement in order to become morally autonomous. This requirement also guides the below list of “self-management and competitive skills” (p. 16), which in fact is a list of detailed stipulations around self-monitoring and self-regulation. As can be seen below, while “competitive skills” is in the title, there is no explicit reference to any characteristics of competitiveness. The degree of introspection outlined in this list would seem to differ markedly from Picot’s call to place all our faith in “individual competence” (p. xi), whereby entrepreneurial faculties should emerge naturally following the unshackling of bureaucratic rules. Having said that, we can perceive a continuation of the moral logic seen within both that document and Sexton, whereby, after working on the attributes of the self, individuals would be held “accountable for what is achieved” (Picot, 1988, p. xi). The below list includes both “self-discipline” and “practical life skills” (p. 16), with the latter including parenting:

### **Self-management and Competitive Skills**

Students will:

- set, evaluate, and achieve realistic personal goals;
- manage time effectively;
- show initiative, commitment, perseverance, courage, and enterprise;

- adapt to new ideas, technologies, and situations;
- develop constructive approaches to challenge and change, stress and conflict, competition, and success and failure;
- develop the skills of self-appraisal and self-advocacy;
- achieve self-discipline and take responsibility for their own actions and decisions;
- develop self-esteem and personal integrity;
- take increasing responsibility for their own health and safety, including the development of skills for protecting the body from harm and abuse;
- develop a range of practical life skills, such as parenting, budgeting, consumer, transport, and household maintenance skills. (p. 16)

We therefore see in this document a stipulation for the teacher to ensure that self-managing attributes develop, through the ticking off of skills such as those above on a check-list. Henceforth, together with school to state, school to community and teacher to parent, the relation between teacher and student now becomes defined through a relation of accountability, with teachers assigned the role of monitor-technician, expected to ensure that students themselves internalise the skills of self-monitoring and self-regulation.

In order to facilitate this monitoring role there is an urgent requirement for teachers to adapt to new technologies. With the onset of “rapid technological change” accompanying the “move towards the twenty-first century” (p. 1), the Curriculum Framework foregrounds the newly preeminent driver of



change in education: information technology. As we shall see in the following analysis of speeches made by Labour Party Ministers, the need to adapt to technology, closely tied to a focus on the attributes of “the quality teacher”, would become the central tool for further problematizations of education.

### *Trevor Mallard Speeches (2003-04)*

The Labour Party formed a coalition government in 1999 with Helen Clark as Prime Minister and Trevor Mallard as Minister of Education, a post he then retained for six years. Together with the New Labour Government in the UK, New Zealand Labour were influenced by the work of Anthony Giddens, who perceived the need for a politics of the Third Way, contrasted against both Keynesian social democracy and the kinds of antagonistic, doctrinal neoliberalism which had been exemplified by Thatcherism and Reaganism in the 1980s (Giddens, 1998; Peters, 2010; Piercy, Murray, & Abernethy, 2006). However, as discussed in Chapter 3, despite the integration of the ethical signifiers of equality and social justice into a heterogeneous social-policy discourse (Leathwood & Hayton, 2002), in terms of education policy the Third Way perhaps came closest to Foucault’s (2008) definition of neoliberalism, essentially became a formula for ascertaining that “which may or may not improve human capital” (p. 230). This was because the market remained presupposed as both a great modernising force and a freedom-enabler for individuals (Leathwood & Hayton, 2002), with increasing educational choices seen as a major avenue for increasing equality of opportunity for marginalised groups with concurrent increases in the nation’s economic productivity (Leathwood & Hayton, 2002; Peters, 2010; Roberts,

2007).

In accordance with the move to discursive heterogeneity anchored by market imperatives, we can observe diverse influences in the four Mallard speeches analysed: collaboration, student-centred learning, creativity and knowledge-sharing all sit comfortably alongside the more conservative and instrumentalist language of outcomes, value for money, achievement and “getting the basics right” with literacy and numeracy. However, what grounds this mix of signifiers is an intensified thrust to increase economic competitiveness through the integration of information technology, centred on “a strong push to develop New Zealand as a knowledge society and economy” (Roberts, 2007, p. 351). In the below extract Mallard uses the trope of *technology* to re-problematize the education system, positioning it, as in the market during the doctrinal phase, as an object of change which exerts its agency on that system and on society from an external point:

It's now 15 years since Tomorrow's Schools radically changed the way our schools are managed and governed. Back in 1989 I don't think anyone would have imagined how our education system, and indeed the world around us would change over the next decade and a half.

Just think back to when those first boards of trustees took office in 1989. Back then the internet age was the sort of thing that belonged in sci-fi movies, cellphones were the size of small suitcases – and were the privilege of the wealthy. Most families would have made do with one car, one TV, and if they were really lucky, a video player.

Just as the world has changed in the last 15 years, so too will it change

equally as radically over the next 15 years.

We need to build an education system that will equip our students with the skills they will need for a world we will barely recognise.

Taken from a speech entitled *Education Today and for the Future*, delivered to the New Zealand Principals Federation Conference on 4 July 2003, Mallard both discursively constructs technology as a problematizing object, while simultaneously reducing that threat. This is achieved through placing the adoption of new technology in education as the latest step in a linear history of innovation and progress, and by embedding it in affectively engaging rhetoric and a heavy dose of nostalgia. By closely interlinking the Tomorrow's Schools reforms and new technology, Mallard reduces the political ramifications of both; fixing the marketized structure of the former as a necessary part of "radical change", while domesticating the latter as a humorous component of New Zealand's social history ("cellphones the size of small suitcases" etc.).

The repetition of the agentless verb *change* (rather than for example *reform* or *disruption*, which are much more suggestive of an agent), also allows Mallard to foreground technology as a problematizing but de-agentified object, outside of the control of education professionals. With the lines between marketization and technological progress blurred, *change* will necessarily come as "equally as radically over the next 15 years" as during the previous 15 years of neoliberalization, whether teachers agree to it or not. It will simply be up to principals and teachers to prepare children and society for this coming wave, by "equip[ping] our students with the skills they will

need for a world we will barely recognise”.

While technological change itself lacks a discernible agent behind it, in the same speech Mallard reassures the principals in the audience that his Government is ensuring that New Zealand adapts to its force:

We are committed to developing the use of information communications technology (ICT) as a teaching and learning tool.

Over the next four years \$4 million will be invested in yearly e-learning fellowships to encourage innovation, and to support teachers who are prepared to push the boundaries and explore in more depth how ICT can enhance learning.

We can see in this extract that information technology is having its meaning fixed through the articulation of signifiers previously linked to enterprise culture. Rather than articulating ICTs as promoting connections, collaboration and therefore equality between schools and teachers, Mallard is encouraging teachers to compete against each other in order to gain access to a limited pool of funds. Only those few teachers who are deemed to “encourage innovation” and “push the boundaries” will be bestowed with the capacity to “explore in more depth how ICT can enhance learning”. As in Sexton earlier with reference to audit technologies, Mallard is introducing a discursive split between two different types of teacher: the modern and competitive, who embraces the potential for technology to facilitate innovation, set against the traditional and change-resistant.

In a later speech entitled *Focusing on quality teaching*, made to a Teacher Education Forum on 7 July 2004, Mallard populates the meaning of the

quality teacher as the reflective practitioner – the modern professional who is able to internalize the disruptive agency of technology in order to perpetually problematize their own practice:

Quality teachers like these are sometimes called ‘reflective practitioners’ - they think carefully and deeply about what assessment information is telling them about student understandings, but more particularly about their own teaching. What should they do differently? What can they do better?

They use their knowledge of their field, their knowledge of a range of strategies, and evidence about their students’ current knowledge and understandings to connect to and adapt to the thinking of each student.

The purpose to which information technologies should be employed here is not to push the boundaries of learning but those of subjectivity. As in the 1993 Curriculum Framework and the intervention phase, the emphasis is on self-transformation through the practices of self-management. What ICTs have enabled is more efficient ways to collect monitory data on student achievement, or “evidence about their students’ current knowledge and understandings”, which is to be used to problematize and then improve current (non-data informed) teaching practices. What is implied here through the holding aloft of an example of *the quality teacher*, is that without reflecting on the hard, objective data produced by such technologies, teachers would be incapable of knowing their students’ abilities and how to improve them.

Adapting to the thinking of the individual student is not the result here of

talking to the students and their parents in order to gain a deep understanding of their family life and culture, but is the result of an expert-object relation, whereby the teacher gathers empirical data on performance and applies it to their theoretical “knowledge of their field”, before using that data to inform “a range of strategies” in order to increase the performance of that research object.

Rather than seeing achievement data as potentially reifying the rich complexities of the teacher-student relation by downgrading the importance of relational bonds, Mallard views it as facilitating greater connections between the Pākehā (white settler) mainstream and marginalized cultures. Moving back to Mallard’s July 2003 speech, the discourse of diversity provides a secondary rhetorical resource for Mallard’s problematization of teaching:

Our second goal is reducing the inequalities in educational achievement to ensure that all New Zealanders, regardless of their background, can reach their potential.

We want our schools and teachers to be in a position where they can recognise the differences between and the educational needs of all students and teach in ways that meet those needs.

[...] Focussing on students from diverse backgrounds is a priority for this Government and for our schools.

This is especially so when we consider that poor educational achievement is concentrated in relatively high proportions amongst low socio-economic and Māori and Pasifika communities.

As in the Picot report, the broad systemic social and economic inequalities experienced by Māori and Pasifika are constructed here as a problem internal to the school system. Within this discourse, historical injustices and inequalities are reduced to a simple matter of diversity training, whereby teachers are given “support to improve their teaching of diverse students”. Again, as in technology, diversity discourse must be used by teachers to problematize their own individual teaching practices through the technologies of the self. By confronting their prejudices, teachers will be able to “recognise the differences between and the educational needs of all students and teach in ways that meet those needs”. As in the below extract from a 2004 speech, if only teachers discarded their low-expectation biases towards Māori and Pasifika students, then all structural “barriers to learning can be overcome”:

Recent research has confirmed what many of us probably felt intuitively already – good teachers can and do make the biggest difference. Students' socio-economic status, home life, and geographical area does have an impact, but all of the associated barriers to learning can be overcome through high teacher expectations and quality teaching.

What is left tacit within this discourse is the subject-position of the low-quality or incompetent teacher. While not explicitly named, as in the more overtly antagonistic discourse seen in the Sexton report, their presence is still felt in between the delineation of a current problem (decreased economic growth because of iniquitous educational outcomes) and a proposed solution. If only *all* teachers evidenced “high...expectations and quality teaching”, then “all New Zealanders... can reach their potential”. As will be explored

in more detail in the following chapter, together with being reduced to a reified relation of accountability, relationships between teachers and students are being structured by a fantasmatic equality of opportunity narrative, populated by distinct actors. Māori/Pasifika students find their path to achievement and potential blocked by the low expectations and poor teaching of the ineffective teacher, with the former becoming objectified as a “tail of underachievement”. Because of the now sedimented links between education and economic growth, “a big gap between our top and bottom achievers” means a horrific path not only for the individual student but for the entire nation, consigned to a future of under-productivity and under-competitiveness. Inability to change teaching now will result in a failure to “educate a generation of young people to be flexible, adaptable, creative, light on their feet, and driven to succeed”.

### *Steve Maharey Speeches (2003-07)*

Steve Maharey’s two-year (2005-07) tenure as Minister of Education (he was also Associate Minister of Education 2002-04) has become associated with a more collaborative and inclusive relationship with the teaching sector. A former lecturer in Sociology, Maharey was elected to Parliament in 1990, and therefore, unlike Mallard, was not part of the 1984-1990 Labour Government which imposed the rapid and fundamental marketization reforms, while largely ignoring the concerns of the sector (Wylie, 2012). Furthermore, Mallard became associated with the new curriculum, which as will be discussed below and in Chapter 7, was perceived to be developed via gradual consultation with the sector, including the unions. That curriculum was seen



to fit much more closely with New Zealand's educational ethos than the 1993 Curriculum, with its emphasis on pedagogical autonomy for teachers and adaptability to the learning needs of the individual student.

However, in his speeches Maharey takes ownership for his government of that latter emphasis through the branding term "Personalising Learning". Rather than conferring autonomy and control to the teaching sector, "Personalising Learning", like technology for Mallard, is a process which disrupts the status-quo of teaching practice from an external point. While employing the inclusive deixis in "*we* need to help change the system to meet the needs of individual students [*emphasis added*]", Maharey omits references in his speeches to New Zealand's rich tradition of child-centred teaching theory and practice (see Chapter 7). Instead, the need to personalise learning is presented as an entirely new course of action, made necessary by the rapid technological and societal changes of the 21st century and the associated expectations of the global marketplace. Hence, rather than empowering the teaching workforce to employ their localised knowledges through ICT technologies for the benefits of society, that knowledge is both marginalized and commodified by the privileging of a modernizing, market-centric discourse.

In the below extract from a 2007 speech, "the system" re-emerges as a signifier for dependency culture. In a similar logic to Picot's faith in "individual competence", the system is constructed as an ambivalent, overly-bureaucratic, constraining force, blocking individual projects of self-realisation. Because of its overly inflexible rules and regulations, expecting individual students to "change to meet the needs of the system", rather than

vice-versa, that system will constrain the reaching of “full potential”:

### **Personalising Learning**

The term I have been using to describe this transformation in education is personalising learning.

We need to help change the system to meet the needs of individual students, rather than expecting them to change to meet the needs of the system.

Personalising learning is about ensuring that the learning opportunities and resources available for each and every child are maximised so that they can reach their full potential. It's about having high expectations of every child, effective teaching, assessment and high achievement.

Like Mallard, “effective teaching”, through its articulation alongside “high expectations”, “assessment and high achievement”, connotes a representation of *the quality teacher* which is colonized by the signifiers of enterprise culture and the practices of data-facilitated self-management. Unlike the current system (and by implication those who work within it), entrepreneurship coupled to audit will ensure “the learning opportunities and resources available for each and every child are maximised”.

Hence, as in Sexton’s vision for a fully-marketized system, “Personalising Learning” offers a vision of an optimally-performing, post-antagonistic “vision of the community as coherent whole” (Laclau, 2014, p. 4). In that way, it is an empty signifier; while making connections to the real daily struggles and frustrations of teachers against insufficient resources and an

instrumentalized curriculum, it is also noticeably indistinct and vague and potentially refers to a very wide variety of different, particular practices. What makes it potentially hegemonic is that very few politicians, teachers, principals, bureaucrats, journalists or members of the public would express a view that they disagree with a movement which seeks to personalise learning. Although tendentially empty and therefore potentially populated with a wide variety of meanings, Maharey places parameters around it through the contiguous linking of “Personalising Learning” to other signifiers. Hence its purpose is not the realisation of individual creative potential for its own sake, but the most efficient and effective way of creating economically productive citizens (in another speech he refers to it as “Personalised Learning for Success”). These links are made through the signifiers of enterprise culture (“high expectations” and “high achievement”) and the language of audit (“effective teaching” and “assessment”).

Further, “Personalising Learning” connects to the logics of individualization and post-democracy, endemic to late-modern, Western societies (Crouch, 2004; J. Gilbert, 2014; Mouffe, 2005). The signifier, referred to in the below extract as legitimized by “the interests of young people”, articulates education as interactions between atomised individuals, constructed as asking for the consumption of learning tailored around their personal desires, rather than rather than through their membership of a collective. While purportedly representing their “interests”, it is highly questionable whether the drive to personalise learning derives from actually talking to young people. The impetus for change in the following extract comes instead from the requirements of “the 21st century”, which again introduces “change” from a

position outside human agency:

Now, I'd like to share with you where we see education heading in the 21st century.

In each of our countries there is little doubt education is changing. We know education has to change. We cannot continue to use last century's model if we are to meet contemporary needs.

But like all major institutions, change does not come easy.

[...] Our education systems can be like this too. In fact a lot of what we do has roots much older than twenty years and changing it is therefore going to be a challenge. But if we are to serve the interests of young people and the world they will populate – we need to change.

As in Mallard's speech earlier, Maharey repeatedly deploys the de-agentified verb *change* (which, along with *changing*, is repeated five times in the extract). In opposition to the "contemporary needs" of "the 21st century", it is "last century's model" for education that needs to "change". As with Picot, Maharey is appropriating the critical position of liberal-progressive education movements (see Freire, 1996), by connoting commonly-held experiences of schooling in overcrowded, but silent classrooms, where the teacher stands at the front, writing on the blackboard, "banking" facts and figures into the brains of passive students. However, while those movements critiqued a form of education which served the interests of a capitalist system, for Maharey, it is "we", *the individual teacher* who needs to change. Education's place as driving the development of a modern "knowledge economy/society", through the production of entrepreneurial, tech-savvy subjects, is therefore

consolidated.

### *The New Zealand Curriculum (2007)*

The 2007 New Zealand Curriculum derived from a review, undertaken between 2000 and 2002, of the previously discussed 1993 Curriculum Framework. It was to become a symbol of a more collaborative approach taken by the Ministry of Education in its relations with the education sector, under the 1999-2008 Labour government (see Chapter 7). After the initial review period there followed a lengthy process of consultation which “included trials in schools, collaborative working parties, online discussions, and an inquiry into relevant national and international research” (p. 4).

Therefore, after a long period in the cold, teachers and their unions were again being widely consulted on a key education policy. Further, the curriculum did represent a turn back towards the child-centred, holistic values which underwrote the side-lined 1987 Curriculum Review. However, rather than using those values to construct students as collective agents of change, the broad structure of the 1993 Curriculum Framework is retained, centred on the attributes of *the good student*, and how it must adapt, through the accumulation of skills, to changes situated as outside of their control. Hence, rather than representing a clear break from an objectives and outcomes-based curriculum, Karen Sewell, the then Secretary for Education, emphasised in the forward that it was a continuation and development of an instrumental educational philosophy:

The previous curriculum [...] was our first outcomes-focused

curriculum: a curriculum that sets out what we want students to know and to be able to do. (p. 4)

Sewell therefore viewed the 2007 curriculum as part of a lineage – traceable to the 1987 Treasury briefing - which had consistently applied the language of economics in order to evaluate education, resulting in educational success being defined as an ability to meet clearly defined and measurable objectives as efficiently as possible. Rather than viewing education as necessarily exceeding quantitative forms of measurement, enabling human capacities to develop in often unpredictable and disorderly directions, the ability here to prescribe in advance “what we want students to know and to be able to do” is presupposed as a social good.

As a caveat, there are undoubtedly many areas of this curriculum that are socially progressive, such as the privileging of the *te reo* Māori language, the integration of the values of equity, community and environmental protection, and the level of professional and curricula autonomy granted to schools and teachers. My analysis here is necessarily selective – as elsewhere in this chapter I concentrate on how subject positions are discursively constructed. This results in charting clear continuities with the other texts in this chapter – the subject is once again constructed as a self-managing and self-regulating project, with detailed normative constraints placed around their development.

Like the 1993 curriculum, the 2007 version again includes detailed self-regulatory responsibilities for *the good student*. This is a student who, under a “Vision” statement that has the subtitle “What we want for our young people”, is required to be simultaneously “confident”, “connected”, “actively

involved”, and “lifelong learners” (p. 8). The attributes listed under “confident” and “connected” are loosely equivalent to “self-management and competitive skills” and “social and co-operative skills” respectively in the 1993 Curriculum, and like that document they are placed contiguously, but with any potential political friction between them even further de-emphasized. Now “confident” includes being “positive in their own identity; motivated and reliable; resourceful; enterprising and entrepreneurial and resilient”, while “connected” specifies being “able to relate well to others; effective users of communication tools; connected to the land and environment; members of communities; international citizens” (p. 8). Hence, while the former constructs the ideal student on the grounds of self-management, autonomy and assertiveness (hence downplaying the need for others), the latter moves towards incorporating the influence of progressive social movements, such as environmentalism and human rights, through its construction of the subject as realised through its relations and connections - both to others and the environment.



*Figure 2: Image taken from the section entitled “Vision: What we want for our young people”. From New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 8).*

Therefore, while there is considerable evidence for the influence of the education sector and progressive movements, these are placed in such a way that limits their political potential. Rather than being set against neoliberal values in an antagonistic relation which unsettles the instrumentalization of education through a logic of equivalence, a logic of difference prevails in which there is no discernible friction between entrepreneurial attributes in the individual and working “for the common good” (p. 10). Both sides merely contribute to a post-political logic which centres education on the objective of “what works” (Taylor, 2010), rather than its potential to question the



underlying assumptions of society (Szkudlarek, 2016). The centring objective is the production of individual subjects who can be flexible and adaptable enough to respond to *change*, the only constant:

...there has been no slowing of the pace of social change. Our population has become increasingly diverse, technologies are more sophisticated, and the demands of the workplace are more complex.  
(p. 4)

Change is again something which is outside of us, as inevitably linked to powerful global forces such as migration and the increasing sophistication of technology. While these issues are global, the response that education must provide to them is at the level of the individual, ensuring that students are “equipped with the knowledge, competencies, and values they will need to be successful citizens in the twenty-first century” (p. 4). “The twenty-first century” functions as a placeholder for the increasingly globalized and competitive market, which creates “technologies [which] are more sophisticated” and “demands of the workplace [which ] are more complex” (p. 3). Hence the stipulations “to relate well to others” and to be “international citizens” (p. 8) are not constructed as imperatives to solve pressing global problems together, but skills which the individual should add to their CV in order to respond to coming change and remain competitive. Moreover, as can be seen in the below extract taken from the section on “key competencies” (p. 12-13), these are concentrated on the abilities of self-regulation, self-monitoring, adaptability and performance – attributes which, as I have outlined throughout this chapter, are closely associated with the entrepreneurial self:

### **Managing self**

This competency is associated with self-motivation, a “can-do” attitude, and with students seeing themselves as capable learners. It is integral to self-assessment.

Students who manage themselves are enterprising, resourceful, reliable, and resilient. They establish personal goals, make plans, manage projects, and set high standards. They have strategies for meeting challenges. They know when to lead, when to follow, and when and how to act independently.

### **Relating to others**

Relating to others is about interacting effectively with a diverse range of people in a variety of contexts. This competency includes the ability to listen actively, recognise different points of view, negotiate, and share ideas.

Students who relate well to others are open to new learning and able to take different roles in different situations. They are aware of how their words and actions affect others. They know when it is appropriate to compete and when it is appropriate to co-operate. By working effectively together, they can come up with new approaches, ideas, and ways of thinking. (p. 12)

The competencies of “Managing self” and “Relating to others” in this extract are, like the character traits of “confident” and “connected” (p. 8), analogous to “self-management and competitive skills” and “social and co-operative skills” in the 1993 Curriculum Framework. “Managing self” describes the

self-reliant, autonomous, high-achieving, competitive individual, and is “associated with self-motivation, a “can-do” attitude, and with students seeing themselves as capable learners. It is also “integral to self-assessment”, the inclusion of which is key; no longer is it the requirement of the teacher to monitor student progression towards these attributes in a tick-list fashion as seen in the 1993 document, but it is now incumbent on the student themselves to monitor their own progression towards values and goals set at the national level. Hereby, the definition of *the quality teacher* as the reflective, self-maximising subject, able to monitor their own progress towards objectives through the monitoring of data, has also been expanded to *the good student*.

What is also noticeable under “Relating to others” is that it is now incumbent on the individual student to “know when it is appropriate to compete and when it is appropriate to co-operate” (p. 12), rather than something ascertained collectively through the mutual establishment of democratic values, for example (see Elwyn Richardson’s philosophy in Chapter 7). Hence the key competencies which sees the good student becoming responsible, autonomous and open are *self-control* and *self-management*. The “good student” is now expected to performance-manage themselves, by monitoring and then tempering their own behaviour, so that it does not impact on the abilities of others to learn.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has demonstrated that Jamie Peck’s (2010a) three-phase linear typology can be successfully applied in order to illuminate the key discursive

mechanisms behind the neoliberalization of education in New Zealand from the 1980s through to 2007. The two Treasury documents exemplified the doctrinal phase, whereby the bureaucratic apparatus of the Keynesian welfare-state was problematized for its inefficiency, under-performance and expansive tendencies, through an unfavourable comparison to the as yet untried, optimal performance of the market model. In this discourse the parent is constructed as a consumer of educational products, whose interests are directly opposed to teachers and their unions.

The interventionist phase was characterized by the application and adaptation of this market-model doctrine to a situated context. In order to broaden the hegemonic appeal of the proposed changes we saw the discourses of managerialism and diversity gaining more influence, which offered potential empowerment to parents and Māori, resulting in a more hybridized discourse which added the position of the manager to the parent-as-consumer. However, in the Sexton report, this more expansive construction of the parent was recast as the doctrinal phase's consumer, as the problems created by the implementation of the reforms were displaced to parents' incompetence and teachers' and bureaucrats' self-serving motivations. During the normalization phase such antagonistic constructions of "provider interests" were downplayed, but remained tacitly assumed within constructions of *the quality teacher* and *the system*.

Hence, rather than viewing education policy discourse during the 1999-2008 Labour Government as embodying a break from the trajectory of the previous twenty years and the following six (see following chapter), we can view this period in terms of adaptation, instability and heterogeneity, where sometimes

conflicting ideological currents can (re)emerge. However, due to the sedimentation of the norms of neoliberal governmentality, the political potential of these currents was decreased markedly, held in a contiguous relation through the dominance of the political logic of difference.

The possibility of substantial political change, where the purposes of education and its place in society could be contested, was seen only during the doctrinal and interventionist phases. During these periods, the Keynesian welfare state and its conception of education based around human need and capacity was excluded as outdated and inefficient through an antagonistic, equivalential political logic, which repositioned education as subservient to economic growth. At the same time, educational goals were colonized by the language of economic evaluation, which redefined those protean and excessive purposes as neatly delineable outcomes and objectives. During the interventionist phase this form of evaluation and the antagonistic relation to the welfare state remained, as its remnants (teachers who refuse audit systems and bureaucrats who assist schools) were blamed for the failures of marketization.

What also became increasingly apparent during the normalization phase was the increasing importance of education to the state, within which the only “true and fundamental social policy [is] economic growth” (Foucault, 2008, p. 159). Following the failures of marketization and its concurrent recessions and crises, we saw the development of a new micro-level strategy through which education was expected to stimulate market-competitiveness. This strategy was the “production of subjectivit[ies]” (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. x): parents as consumers, teachers as self-managing “reflective practitioners” and

students as self-monitors and regulators. These preferred subject-positions were articulated within, while simultaneously legitimizing, neoliberalism's moral logic. By stressing *individual* responsibility, performance and self-care, the onus was placed on the necessity for subjects to internalize change, instability and the increasingly varied demands of the market. Choices made to consume educational products, cultivate awareness of cultural differences, or accrue skills, meant subjects accepted the responsibility to make themselves more entrepreneurial, reducing dependence on the state, while simultaneously not impinging on the abilities of others to do the same.

Hence, during the normalization phase, overt antagonism towards Keynesianism and its culture of dependence was backgrounded, in order to facilitate the reintegration of collective values. Rather than challenge neoliberal presuppositions however, it strengthened the focus on the production of self-reliant human capital and more clearly articulated neoliberalism's moral logic: *care for others through care of the self*. The entrepreneurial self must take responsibility to ensure it becomes autonomous and productive, and therefore not a dependent drain on scarce resources, but also ensure that other's freedoms to become entrepreneurial are similarly unconstrained.

# **Chapter 6**

## **Mediated policy meanings: Hegemonic articulations of National Standards, class sizes and charter schools 2007-13**

### **Introduction**

Focused on the subsequent six-year period following the conclusion of Chapter 5, this chapter aims to address both research questions 1 and 2, by highlighting neoliberalized logics, narratives and representations within hegemonic articulations of the three policies of National Standards, class sizes and charter schools<sup>18</sup>. As with the previous chapter, focus will be placed onto the discursive constructions of teachers, students and parents, as articulated in horrific and beatific narratives.

As in the previous chapter I draw on reports and speeches, but add news articles, government media releases and newspaper editorials. The latter genre has a particular focus, being viewed as representing a prominent and powerful institutional voice, which can discursively construct neoliberal policy programs as enjoying popular support (Fowler, 1991; Rupar, 2007). Such representation can also contribute to the constitution of journalistic identities (Carpentier, 2005), and I aim to investigate the extent to which these

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<sup>18</sup> See Chapter 1 (Introduction) for more details on the specific contents of these three policies.

became integrated into a broader hegemonic identity. I argue that this is achieved through disidentifications with “educationalists”, an antagonistic signifier which works to marginalize dissenting voices through a simplifying and dichotomizing frame.

By analysing representations of each of the three policies in turn, I aim to highlight some of the reasons why the newspaper editorial corpus so strongly supported National Standards, while the coverage of the other two policies was considerably more mixed. Of particular focus will be the way that certain signifiers, such as the *one-in-five*, *30% of teachers*, *the quality teacher* and *choice* functioned as nodal points, intertextually rearticulated in speeches, media releases and editorials, following their genesis in reports from the Education Review Office and Treasury.

Also highlighted will be the ways in which *parents* functioned as a name for the aligned interests of government and media institutions within a populist articulatory logic. *Parents* signified demands for the increased transparency and accountability of league tables, carving a fourth estate role for journalists as neutral transmitters of objective data. The signifier came to be progressively overdetermined with entrepreneurial traits – parents desired league tables in order to make rational, self-interested consumer choices on which school to send their individual child. Investment in that representation allowed the increasing contradictions and inconsistencies between neoliberalized logics to be closed out and dissenting voices dismissed, even following instances of mismanagement by politicians and revelations about the poor reliability of the data. Such was the integration of journalistic identifications into legitimizing the narrative behind the policy, that Fairfax



Media instigated a campaign to collect the data from schools directly, bypassing the Government.

I argue that the charter schools and class sizes policies lacked the same niche for journalistic identifications, which was reflected in the representation of those policies in the editorials. While the charter schools policy's discourse of increasing *choice* for marginalized minority parents somewhat resonated with a neoliberalized journalistic imaginary which frames educational problems as created by insufficient consumer-responsiveness (Djerf-Pierre et al., 2013), the policy could not be made commensurate with the signifiers of democracy and accountability to the same extent. Further, the *parents* signifier could not have the same hegemonic potential, as while it stood to increase consumer choices, this only potentially benefited a small (and what were represented as a morally problematic) segment: Māori and Pasifika.

Similarly, there was no role for a unified and universalizing *parents* identification within the policy proposal to increase class sizes. While political field articulations of increasing education system-efficiency by non-political outsiders at first mapped closely onto the journalistic logic of objectivity, *the quality teacher* could not match *parents* in terms of journalistic investment, particularly following revelations of government miscalculations and parent-led protests.

## **National Standards: Problematization, performativity and populism**

*Problematization and performativity: the one-in-five and 30% of*

*teachers*

During the first two years following the policy's passage through Parliament in late 2008, the interlinked logics of problematization and performativity were both highly prominent within legitimizing discourse, with certain articulations placing more prominence on the former logic and others on the latter. Problematization was conferred with a cohesive moral force through the affectively charged figure of *one-in-five* children being "left behind" by an ambivalent and uncaring education system, closely linked to the cultural bias, low expectations and complacency of teachers. In that way, problematization became interconnected to performativity through a horrific decline narrative which presented the plight of *the one-in-five* as being connected to a culture of dependence endemic within teaching culture, which made it ideologically resistant to performance measurement. The beatific path to the entrepreneurial self for disadvantaged children was directly blocked by *30% of teachers* and their management, who refused to closely monitor achievement.

The interwoven links between the moral, the economic and the educational that *the one-in-five* represented had already been signalled by Trevor Mallard's use of a "tail of underachievement", which laid the blame for a growing disparity between high and low achievers, and therefore the nation's future economic productivity, squarely at the door of teachers and schools. A 2005 Education Review Office (ERO) report then associated this "tail" with a specific number, venturing that this underachieving group was "perhaps as large as 20 percent" (p. 6). Within a section entitled "The system does not work for every child", the report argued that "engaging these students in

education” depends on “cultural congruence between them and their teachers” (p. 6). However, rather than arguing for increased opportunities for the formation of strong, caring relationships between teachers, students and their whānau, the report re-articulates the teacher-student relation as one of scientific researcher to a thus far insufficiently defined research-object. The problem of Māori and Pasifika disaffection could then be solved by simply “collect[ing] data about them and their achievement in order to find out more about their needs” (p. 6).

Katherine Rich, the National Party’s education spokesperson while in opposition prior to the November 2008 election, was the first politician to then deploy the objectifying figure (now imbued with the institutional/scientific authority of ERO), by situating it within a logic of problematization and a decline narrative. In an August 2007 speech, Rich made the assertive and morally loaded contention that there is “one in five kids who finish their school years barely able to read or write”. Quoting the ERO report at length, Rich contrasted the fortunes of the problematized group to “high-achieving Kiwi kids”, the majority who continue to do very well out of the current education system, but in so doing leave *the one-in-five* further and further behind. Rich then intimated that an over-emphasis on that lucky majority contributes to the sustainment of an unwarranted level of complacency within the teaching profession, which rather cruelly ignores the plight and the diverse requirements of *the one-in-five*.

Through the first seven months of 2009, following the National Party’s election victory in November 2008 and the rapid enactment of the Education

(National Standards) Amendment Act<sup>19</sup>, the policy was receiving significant affirmative coverage within newspaper editorials. *The Dominion Post* (School standards must be raised, 2 January 2009) mirrored Rich's apportionment of blame to teacher complacency and cultural bias for the perceived failures of the "tail", while also constructing public opinion as in agreement with this view. It spoke of "public exasperation with the current education system", and quoted Māori Party co-leader and Associate Education Minister (2008-11) Pita Sharples' criticisms of the deficit-thinking of too many teachers towards minorities, who "believe that brown children from poor homes could not achieve what their better-off counterparts could". For the editorial, the policy's aim of establishing fixed standards in reading, writing and maths would ensure that the same high aspirational ideals would be applicable to *all* students, regardless of cultural background. It inferred that the "political leanings of many of the country's teachers", who "suffer no financial penalty if some of their class move on to the next level unable to read, write or do mathematics proficiently", was to blame for their opposition to the standards, and thus the unequal outcomes of minority children.

However, the majority of the editorials over this period positioned the obstinate resistance of teachers towards performance measurement as having a detrimental effect on a more universal *parents* signifier, rather than particular, disadvantaged children. For example, the *Taranaki Daily News* (Poor performance from teachers, 1 July 2009) argued that "the self-interests of a certain group" directly impacted "Parents" abilities to "make decisions

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<sup>19</sup> The legislation was enacted under urgency, without Select Committee scrutiny, on 16 December 2008.

about the education of their children”. On the same day the *New Zealand Herald* (Govt mustn't give way on league tables) claimed that “caring parents want to know their child is in a good school”, and that if “some schools have to work harder than others to bring most of their pupils to the desired standards, so be it”. The *New Zealand Herald* therefore rearticulated a logic of competition imbued with a moral hue seen in the previous chapter: comparisons enabled by audit regimes not only improves the performance of all, but comparative data on child performance empowers caring parental instincts by enabling increased responsibility.

Later that same month, in a speech to the New Zealand Principals Federation’s (NZPF) annual conference, Anne Tolley, Minister of Education, placed the “progress of at-risk students” at the centre of her rationale behind the National Standards policy, reminding the audience that “intervening early” in their progress will thereby ensure that those “students remain on track to obtain worthwhile qualifications in secondary school”. This sense of urgency, uncertainty and anxiety around students that could be falling through the cracks because we are failing to collect sufficient data on their achievement, was then amplified by the Prime Minister John Key, who, in a media release which preceded the official launch of the policy on 23 October 2009, asserted that “as many as one-in-five students are being left behind” and that “we need to identify those students early so they get the help they need to make progress”.

This emphasis did then appear to have an impact on editorial coverage, as over a seven-day period following the Key media release *the one-in-five* trope was reproduced within two articles. The *Dominion Post* (Teachers should

follow the rules, 26 October 2009) clearly articulated the one-in-five's horrific decline narrative, which it juxtaposed with the image of a "21st century New Zealand society", the latter being a referent for globalization, technological progress and the increasing demands of the marketplace for literate, skilled workers. Within this heightened competitive context, the *Dominion Post* asserted that the consequences of "as many as one-in-five pupils...being left behind...are as inevitable as they are disastrous", as "without basic literacy and numeracy" they would have "little chance of succeeding". For the editorial, educational underachievement inexorably leads to economic and social marginalisation, meaning *the one-in-five* will drift into crime. The editorial makes such links explicit and institutionally legitimized by referencing research evidence which "showed 90 per cent of prisoners are functionally illiterate".

*The one-in-five* therefore becomes a latent signifier for broad tensions around race and class in New Zealand society. As argued in Chapter 3, the horrific fantasmatic decline narrative presupposes a moral code emphasising self-responsibility, which is tied closely to economic reason by way of the subject being equipped to take care of oneself financially. That *the one-in-five* signals this ideal-subject's antithesis, a horrific product of the loose morals of dependency culture, is made explicit by the *Waikato Times* on 30 October 2009 (Teachers: just get on with it). Redolent of Katherine Rich's evocation of thousands of teenagers leaving school "barely able to read or write", the editorial warns that "around one-in-five of our children are bailing out of school uneducated at the earliest opportunity", most of whom "have no goals, ambitions or any urge to learn". The represented subject is not only a current

underachiever, but also lacks any aspirations to better themselves through education in the future.

What this subject needs in order to be saved from dependency is objective comparisons to the high (moral/educational/economic) principles of the rest of society. Hence, for the *Dominion Post* (26 October 2009) failing to compare *the one-in-five* to these standards “is cruelly unfair”, as it marks the beginning of an insulated existence where “parents and pupils [are allowed] to falsely believe they are performing adequately”, which “is a sure step to failure”. What is preventing such moralizing comparisons is the educationalist, who, through trying to conceal failure in their left-liberal, politically correct, elitist language, frustrates parents’ demands for transparency by producing “school reports that say much while telling them little about how their children are faring”. The *Waikato Times* (30 October 2009) therefore intimates that National Standards’ institution of a new, more objective and transparent regime of accountability between schools and parents will raise the performance bar for both students *and* teachers, freeing them from the cushioning and pandering constraints of dependency culture. What anchors this logic is the “Parents” signifier, who, merged with the taxpayer, has a right-to-know that both students and teachers are producing the expected markers of “quality”, as they “pay the taxes that provide teachers with their salaries”.

Hence both *the one-in-five* and *the ineffective teacher* signifiers work together within a narrative of dependency-led decline, and the latter was attributed objectifying potency within another ERO report. Entitled *Reading and Writing in Years 1 and 2*, the December 2009 report found that “30 percent

of teachers...had minimal understanding of effective reading and writing teaching, set inappropriately low expectations and did not seek opportunities to extend their own confidence in using a wider range of teaching practices” (p. 1). In contrast, “effective teachers were more likely to inquire into ways of improving their teaching” (p. 1), ways which, like *the reflective practitioner* from the previous chapter, were defined through the collection and analysis of data - both on their own and their students’ performances:

In effective schools teachers discussed achievement data together and used it to reflect on how well children were progressing.

[...] Good data analysis and interpretation helped teachers decide on teaching objectives, set group and individual learning goals, and identify specific reading behaviours to focus on. Teachers used additional, or more specific, assessments to focus on children who were not making expected progress. They targeted additional instruction and monitoring for these children. (p. 9)

This idealised representation of “the preferred teacher” (Gleeson & Gunter, 2001; Mahony & Hextall, 2001) has areas of crossover with the journalistic logic of objectivity outlined in Chapter 3. It also valorises the epistemological stance of the detached observer, whereby the teacher should regard their students as research-objects rather than subjects who should be entered into a dialogue with (Bai, 2001; Soffer, 2009). Data gleaned from scientific observations, rather than subjective perceptions (seen as too unreliable), would enable the identification of “children who were not making expected progress”, who could then be “targeted” for “additional instruction and



monitoring”. To know the student is made equivalent to “good data analysis”, which must be placed at the heart of “effective” teaching practices; including both group discussions and individual reflections on “goals” and “objectives”. Failure to do so is a sign of the setting of “inappropriately low expectations” in the form of achievement targets for students, as the language of audit and enterprise are again articulated contiguously.

While ERO’s research had a specific focus on the first two years of schooling, with a sample of around 10% of primary schools, Anne Tolley and John Key, in a joint media conference on 2 February 2010, quickly deployed the 30% figure as a universalizing synecdoche for the general teaching population, claiming that “around 30% of teachers aren't doing a good job of teaching reading and writing”. The media conference was organised in order to coincide with the commencement of the first school year in which National Standards data would be collected from schools, and the mailing of a promotional pamphlet to 350,000 homes on the policy. The public relations campaign was also in response to the NZEI’s launch of their National Standards bus tour, a protest strategy which included the touring of schools across small town New Zealand, providing ample photo opportunities for local newspapers, consequently threatening to colonize media attention (see Chapter 7). Rather than the articulation of New Zealand’s public education ethos as a plausible alternative to the philosophy behind National Standards, the motivations behind the tour are articulated by Tolley and Key as a hysterical, self-preserving and reactionary fear of performativity. Urging that their “criticism [should be] seen in context”, Tolley and Key reminded their audience of journalists that “National Standards will demand a significant

step-up in performance from some of New Zealand's teachers and schools". Key added that "there will always be those that resist change, who fear increased accountability, and who put their own vested interests ahead of New Zealand's young people".

Now armed with both *the one-in-five* and *30% of teachers* nodes, Key outlined the fantasmatic relation between them by contrasting two futures: a beatific "brighter-future" populated by "highly-skilled citizens, who have better job-prospects, greater life-choices", set against a much darker, horrific future, characterized by "dysfunction, unemployment, welfare-dependency, and crime". Associating teaching with an elitist and opaque dependency culture which impedes the beatific path, Key went on to assert that "in New Zealand parents [should not] have to put up with declining education standards, being kept in the dark about their children's progress, or creeping political correctness in our schools".

ERO, as a public-sector audit institution, functions as an authoritative/objective legitimation for Tolley and Key's rhetorical assault on teaching culture, an authority which enables a direct contrast to the subjective, selfish and fearful motivations of the NZEI. The latter's oppositional stance, like the *30% of teachers*, is placed as indicative of a much broader cultural malaise within the (over-unionised) teaching profession; a culture whose leaders (school principals) cannot properly monitor "how well young people are achieving", and who continually fail to hold the *30% of teachers* to account for their poor performance. Consequently, the most damning evidence from the ERO report for Tolley and Key was not that "around 30% of teachers aren't doing a good job of teaching reading and writing", but that

“67% of senior managers in our schools...were not tracking the achievement of those [year 1 and 2] students”. Hence the relaxed attitude towards the use of data to identify and monitor *the one-in-five* was not restricted to a third of teachers, but was endemic within schools, reflecting widespread antipathy towards the objective measurement of performance, both on philosophical grounds and on the grounds of protecting their own power and interests.

The day following the media conference, *the 30% of teachers* trope was rearticulated within two editorials, *The Nelson Mail* (Standards essential for our children) and the *Dominion Post* (Teacher union must allow for progress). *The Nelson Mail* also repeated Tolley’s claim that “almost two-thirds [of school senior managers] weren't properly monitoring pupils' progress”, while also adding the extra statistic from the ERO report that “three-quarters of primary principals did not set expectations of high achievement”. What the ERO report actually stated was that 63% (Tolley stated 67%) of schools were found to “not monitor reading and writing achievement well” (p. 37) in Years 1 and 2, and that they found no evidence of the “promotion of high achievement in reading and writing” for those years, in only 19% of the schools that they reviewed (p. 30). However, the accuracy of statistics matters less than the personification of an agent who typifies a culture which enjoys inordinate privileges at “our” expense. Buffered from the individual accountability mechanisms which characterize most other professions by their powerful unions, this culture allows bad teachers to remain in their posts to the detriment of children and their ambitious parents. As put succinctly by the *Dominion Post* (3 February, 2010), ERO’s figures merely “confirm what parents already know. There are good teachers and bad teachers. The good

ones find ways to engage and motivate children; the bad ones don't".

*Populism: Parents, league tables and the release of the data*

As touched on in the last section, *the one-in-five* and *30% of teachers* tropes were used as nodal points, in both the editorials and Government articulations, to construct an antagonistic frontier between teachers and parents, through a populist articulatory logic. In the editorials, *parents* condensed together demands for greater transparency in terms of their individual child's and their child's school's performance in comparison to others, and taxpayer demands for greater efficiency from the system. Hence *parents* began to function as a synecdoche for *the people*, and this association was consolidated during 2009 through numerous references to National Standards' democratic mandate, with it being a policy in National's 2008 election manifesto.

Hence for the *New Zealand Herald* (Teachers must learn to obey Govt's orders, 15 December 2009), the "policy was put to the electorate at the last election" and "it comes with the stamp of democracy". Teachers and the NZEI, through their threats of "boycotts and industrial action" are, by implication, opposed to democracy and therefore the will of the people. Seemingly reasonable requests for a "trial period" and allowing schools "more time to prepare" are framed as cover stories for self-interested motivations, with pedagogical and philosophical reservations dismissed as obfuscating tactics aimed at delaying a policy with a clear popular mandate. In other editorial titles during the same period teachers are told to "just get on

with it” by the *Waikato Times* (30 October 2009) and the *Dominion Post* asserts that they “should follow the rules” (26 October 2009). The latter piece admonishes both the NZEI and the NZPF (New Zealand Principals Federation) for boycotting “the announcement of the policy”, which “cannot be allowed to develop into an undercutting of its implementation”. Despite any ethically-based arguments these groups may voice, for the editorial, “teachers are public servants”<sup>20</sup>, ultimately accountable to a government democratically elected by “the people”.

Together with democracy, transparency and accountability were used to consolidate the frontier between parents/the people and teachers. Anne Tolley, Minister of Education, articulated the metaphoric cliché that “the best disinfectant is fresh air” in comments quoted in a *The Press* news report in April 2009. Not only was it the community’s right to “have all of the information possible” on student achievement in the self-managing schools structure, she also linked the policy to a more universal vision of New Zealand “society [which] values freedom of information”.

As argued in Chapter 3, this reference to “freedom of information” constructs the policy as linked to the media logic of objectivity and the journalistic principles of the fourth estate. Tolley is therefore attempting to construct an equivalence between journalistic demands for the transparent flow of information, in order that they can hold Government departments to account through the Official Information Act, and a National Standards policy

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<sup>20</sup> Following the 1989 Tomorrow’s Schools reforms New Zealand teachers are employed by individual school boards of trustees, rather than directly by the Government, meaning that they are not strictly public servants. This was cited by several interviewees as justification for greater freedom of expression for teachers to criticise government policy.

purportedly aimed at “providing sound information about how students are progressing” (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 1). Through her considerable media capital, she is attempting to direct the always partial gaze of media-transparency (Flyverbom, 2016; Koyama & Kania, 2014) towards schools and teachers, and away from her government. This is achieved through the articulation of shared points of investment with journalists: the New Zealand people’s valuing of freedom of information, and “parents”, for whom accountability will be increased through “full information about schools’ performances being made available”.

The latter signifies the promise of league tables, which interpolates the newspapers as tacitly in support of the policy, but in their safe, established role as neutral providers of objective information, rather than as overt political actors – merely reporting the “fact” that the government intends to “fast-track school league tables” (*The Press*, 7 April 2009). With New Zealanders’ demands for transparency and parents’ demands for accountability merged within the subjectivity of a citizen/consumer, the matter is taken out of both of the hands of the Government and media, becoming a question of duty to the people. Even if they wished to, the “Government could not stop the media from accessing the information and producing league tables” (Tolley quoted in *The Press*).

A hegemonic identification is thereby constructed through the exclusion of the teaching sector, or “the educationalists” (*New Zealand Herald*, Govt mustn't give way on league tables, 1 July 09), who are represented as vehemently opposed to transparency, accountability, and “the measurement of schools' performance” (*The Press*, Testing issue, 14 April 09) on

ideological grounds. *The Press* editorial, published a week after Tolley's comments in Christchurch, explicitly frames the NZEI's attempts at preventing National Standards data from coming under the Official Information Act as the "alarmist protests" of "a whole range of vested interests". What "the education lobby" is worried about, as outlined by *The Press*, is schools "playing the game" of performativity; narrowing the curriculum and massaging achievement results in order to provide the demanded displays of "quality" (Ball, 2001b; Thrupp, 2005). However, these concerns, while "significant", are dismissed through a YES-BUT logic (Featherstone, 1993) which constructs the parent/citizen/reader as an objective, rational agent, who, in contrast to the teaching sector, is able to weigh up these concerns, but is also "sceptical" towards the latter's claims of a well-performing system. "Faced with striking evidence of apparently declining literacy and numeracy...the public" would rather see the evidence themselves in the form of cold, hard, quantitative data; information which they will be able to use to "ask questions and demand accountability" from failing schools, and identify whether "the teachers, or the principal, or the board are not up to scratch".

However, the primary barrier to this empowerment through information is the "the New Zealand Educational Institute [NZEI]", who is so frightened of school information becoming available to the public that "it tried to get a law passed to keep the information secret" (*The Press*, Testing issue, 14 April 09). In an editorial published on 1 July 2009, *The New Zealand Herald* continues this outsidering of "the educationalists" (a phrase it repeats four times in the piece), who are represented as willing to "go to extraordinary lengths to resist

the ranking of schools”. As in *The Press*, fears of the effects of league tables’ ranking of schools by results, with no accounting for socio-economic disadvantage, are dismissed as the patronising attitude of an elitist club, which has “dominated” education “for too long”, and which “treats parents as children incapable of properly reading a league table or much else”. However, rather than the objective analyst subject-position depicted in *The Press*, “parents” in the *New Zealand Herald* are analogised to “customers”, who, through a neoliberalized logic of market-accountability, keep “the pressure on all schools to perform to the best of their ability”, or else send their child elsewhere.

However, accountability could also disrupt the hegemonic identification between the Government and media institutions. With the term overdetermined by its usage within new public management discourse, which makes it equivalent to the spending efficiency of government (Djerf-Pierre et al., 2013; Power, 1999), on the 5 February 2010, just three days after the Tolley/Key media conference, the *New Zealand Herald* complained of the “misuse of public funds” by the National Party in mailing its leaflet promoting the policy to 350,000 homes. “Financed by the taxpayer”, the leaflet is critiqued for being emblazoned with “the National Party logo on every page”. For the editorial, public funds should be for the neutral “communication of policies and other information of public interest”, not “used to sell politically charged flagship policies”.

Hence, the *New Zealand Herald* was confirming the meaning of the policy as a site of contestation, politicized by the actions of the NZEI and the NZPF, even while the latter are simultaneously critiqued for delaying a “desirable”



policy, mandated by parents and the people. The actions of the Government in sending out the leaflet are criticized for adding further to this non-objective contamination of the policy's meaning; if they had used the politically neutral "masthead" of the Ministry of Education, rather than the National Party logo, "the undoubted merits of testing and reporting primary school pupils' progress in learning basic literacy and numeracy skills would not have been sullied by politicisation". Such is the strength of association between the domain of party politics and the signifiers of ideology, rhetoric and spin (Crouch, 2004; Hay, 2007; Phelan, 2014), the pamphlet's emblazoning with National Party branding would come across to the public as the propagandist "language of a party manifesto".

This coverage is representative of several editorials over the subsequent two-year period (2010-12) which criticised both what they saw as a poor implementation of the core principles behind the policy (always presumed as logically sound and backed by public opinion), and the Government's perceived heavy-handed (mis)management of an increasingly strident opposition. The NZPF (who represent school principals) were becoming more vociferous in their critiques, lending a more authoritative (and arguably male) professional voice to the opposed side than teachers on their own (represented by the NZEI). Furthermore, the announcement of the Boards Taking Action Coalition (BTAC) in November 2010 added a parental voice (see Chapter 7) to the opposition. The latter's signed declaration that 225 school boards found the policy "fundamentally flawed, confusing and unworkable", was representative of a line of critique aimed not at the nodal signifiers of transparency and accountability, but at the Government's rushed

and poorly-planned implementation.

Politicians can often become represented in media spaces as out of touch, self-serving, opaque, incompetent and bureaucratic (Chang & Glynos, 2011; Flinders, 2012), rather than fulfilling a transparency mandate from *the people*, and Anne Tolley began to be associated with an ideological agenda following her handling of a school closure in Christchurch, which was seen to fail to consult the community adequately (*The Press*, Glimmer of hope, 26 November 2009). And this image of an “agenda of the minister and her education bureaucrats” being pushed in a brash, insensitive and unnecessarily confrontational manner, began to be transposed onto her handling of the implementation of National Standards. By July 2011 *The Press* (Tolley's standards) was reporting on evidence obtained through a school's Official Information Act (OIA) request that the Minister and the Ministry colluded in planning intimidating tactics aimed at the school boards within the BTAC coalition. The latter movement, based as it was within a network of self-managing schools, began to partially colonize the ground of the citizen/taxpayer, because they were now pressing for – as they represented it - transparent information on a murky, bureaucratic realm full of shady deals, which promoted only the interests of those involved. Once the populist logic had been reversed, with Tolley and the Ministry of Education, rather than the educationalists, becoming the opaque status quo, the motivations of teachers could begin to be represented as “motivated by sincere professional concern to achieve the best for pupils” as well as “ideological” reasons. As will become clearer in the discussions of class sizes and charter schools, this reverse in polarity had potentially politicizing effects which were positive

from the perspective of the sector.

Tolley had been represented through the figure of the obfuscating bureaucrat on another occasion by *The Press* (Backdown wrong, 15 October 2009), when, under “pressure from powerful vested interests”, she was perceived as renegeing on the promise of league tables. While previously she had demonstrated her commitment to “the principles of freedom of information” with her “the best disinfectant is fresh air” comment, she was now accused of “making common cause with those who want to cover up and obscure it”, by stating the government would “work to make it as difficult as possible for the media to produce league tables”. However, on 21 November 2011, five days before the general election, Anne Tolley and John Key issued twin press releases on National’s education policy, rearticulating the rhetorical focus on giving “parents better information” and “lifting student achievement” through strengthening “accountability and performance measurement”. Hence, following its over-determination by the politically tumultuous events of the previous 21 months (since the policy’s rollout to schools), National Standards was being rearticulated once more through the construction of a parent/taxpayer identity who demands greater transparency, accountability and performance from an educationalist status quo. With this we also see a return of the promise of league tables which hegemonized journalistic identifications. In a *Stuff* news article published soon afterwards (Nats open door to primary school league tables), Tolley was quoted as stating that schools would again “be required to publish their results against the National Standards. [And]...there will be *no steps* to stop media or anyone else from constructing league tables out of the information” [*emphasis added*].

However, unlike in 2009 when league tables were originally promised, by late 2011 a new obstacle to their realisation had arrived: with schools beginning to collate National Standards results, the data “has been muddied somewhat by schools being able to set their own goals and measure their pupils against them”, which “makes it more difficult to accurately identify schools that are failing pupils and parents” (*New Zealand Herald*, Trust parents with the facts about schools, 22 November 2011). Rather than schools being ranked by comparison to a fixed and standardized measure, there could now be as many versions of the “National” standards as schools, potentially seriously undermining the legitimacy of league tables. However, this “muddiness” issue was rhetorically resolved by the *New Zealand Herald* through a rearticulation of *parents* as the objective analyst, possessing sufficient intelligence to be both aware of the limitations of the data, but also able to weigh it up, together with other sources of information, before coolly employing their judgment in order to choose rationally between education options. Together with objective and calculating, we also see a ruthless, self-centred streak in a parent who disidentifies with the “complaints” of an education sector, who warn that league tables will simply reflect existing socio-economic disadvantage. Parents “will not expect a lower-decile school to match the results of, say, Auckland Grammar School, but they do want to know it is serving *their* child relatively well [*emphasis added*]”. Parents are articulated as desiring league table data in order that their own individual child is receiving the best possible education, caring little if the information damages the school’s reputation, and therefore the other students who remain there. Parents are not expecting their school to compete in terms of results

with the top tier elite (Auckland Grammar), however, this does not mean they will remain within the constraints of the educationalists' culture of low-expectations; they will use the information in league tables in order to hold those schools to account that fall within their achievement price-range.

Seven months later *The Press* (Publish league tables, 21 June 2012) articulated a very similar representation of the parent as an individualist consumer and as therefore opposed to “the educationists' objections to the release of the information”. Again, the flow of data, even when it contradicts other sources of information, making it potentially misleading and even damaging, is positioned as a neutral, necessary good, which will “simply be added to the mix of information”. The parent is represented as highly adept at employing their objective, rational judgments in order to “take into account a multitude of factors when weighing up the value of a school”. While it is acknowledged that National Standards data has its “shortcomings”, specifically in narrowly focusing on achievement in English and Maths, parents are “well aware” of these deficiencies, and it is “patronising” for the education establishment to assume that they would not be. By being opposed to the data's release, teachers are represented as impeding access to the full breadth of information, and thus the choices available to the enterprising consumer-parent. The inherent contradiction between equity and choice, with the competitive impulses of the latter necessitating a decline in the former, is papered over through investment in the beatific figure of the rationally-choosing parent, who is unmarked by class or race and craving of consumer information.

*The Press'* editorial came two days after the proposed release of National

Standards data was put firmly back onto the media's agenda through comments made by the Prime Minister, John Key. As I will outline in the next section, the class sizes backdown in June 2012 was disastrous for Government public relations, and it was keen to "take the headlines back again" (Martin - interview), through a populist logic which again sought to construct a hegemony around the demands of the parent. However, this time, having had their fingers burned with class sizes, they were much warier of overtly antagonizing the education sector. Quoted in a 19 June *Dominion Post* news article (PM backs school league tables), "Key insists he is not picking another fight with teachers - and that parents want league tables". Citing the example of the Australian *School Plus* website, which purportedly crashed due to high user demand, Key claimed that "parents are desperate for this information" and that "there's that much appetite from parents to understand how their school and their child is going". However, while insisting that he's "not picking another fight with teachers" as the demand for this data is coming solely from parents, Key belies another key logic behind schools being required to release data: he is cited as stating that "if standards aren't being measured and reported on then they [teachers and schools] won't improve". In other words, improvements in education can only be realised through performativity's ritualised demonstrations of quality and efficiency embodied in quantitative data.

Following Key's comments, the *Dominion Post* (Stop shouting and start talking, 22 June 2012), is emboldened to claim that the fight over National Standards is now over, asserting that they "are here to stay...parents want more information about the performance of their children" and that "league

tables are also a certainty”. Conjuring historic images in the reader of militant union campaign tactics, the editorial urges the “teacher unions [to] lay down their megaphones” and work with the new Minister of Education (Hekia Parata), in improving the data produced by schools. Now that league tables are “a certainty”, the *Dominion Post* urged that the muddiness and socio-economic disadvantage issues so far plaguing them should be addressed by both sides rationally and collaboratively, without self-interested politicking.

However, the muddiness re-emerged less than two weeks later on the 2 July 2012, following further comments from the Prime Minister which were quoted in a *Dominion Post* straight news article (School standards report card 'ropey'). Remarking on the nature of the National Standards information being received by the Ministry of Education from schools<sup>21</sup> (the collection of which began in May 2012), Key described it as "very ropey", and also “extremely patchy and it's in different forms...that will make it very difficult to interpret”. Again attempting to keep the media on-side while at the same time de-antagonizing relations with teachers, Key went on to say that a “kind of league table” would still be unveiled in September, but only following consultation with the sector.

This conciliatory approach towards the education sector was then roundly admonished by a *New Zealand Herald* editorial on 10 August (Flawed school data no reason not to publish), with the Government viewed as in complicity with the sector in permitting the data to become “ropey”, against the wishes

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<sup>21</sup> In our interview Martin described the format of the received material as “it was just PDFs that were basically taken off board reports to the Ministry, it was in all sorts of different formats, sometimes it had handwritten notes on it”.

of parents and the public. Allowing “schools to set their own goals and measure their pupils against them” was “a major mistake” and “just another plain old compromise for a Government policy that enjoys popular support and should have been pursued more assertively”. The *New Zealand Herald* reminded the reader however, much like *The Press* earlier, that this weakness in the data should not be used as an excuse for not releasing it. What is at stake has become much more than the particular realities of murky, subjective, and incomparable data; its potential release has become a universalizing symbol of the national value of freedom of information. However now, unlike “their counterparts in Australia, Britain and the United States”, New Zealand parents will stand alone in being denied this “viable and valuable information”.

The *Dominion Post*, perhaps sensing that the momentum was slowing around league tables, conducted a campaign to collect data directly, bypassing the Government by writing letters to schools demanding that achievement data be submitted to their newspaper, through reference to the Official Information Act. While many schools refused, or employed stalling tactics, the Fairfax New Zealand owned newspaper’s requests were then backed up by the authority of the Information Ombudsman. While not all schools still complied, this tactic allowed the journalists to collect sufficient data to launch the *School Report* website on 22 September 2012, six days before the Ministry of Education’s own data-release on *Education Counts*.

*School Report* was launched on the front-page of the *Dominion Post* with the accompanying headline: “How your child’s school rates: today we reveal the figures some teachers don’t want you to see”. The attendant front-page article



triumphantly proclaimed victory over the resisting, obstructing and stalling-tactics of the educational status-quo. However, it is the explanatory statement, “Our standards for School Report”, written by senior political reporter John Hartevelt (the team leader on the Fairfax Media National Standards data-collection campaign), that is perhaps most revealing of the ways in which the moral narratives overdetermining the meaning of National Standards had become intermeshed with journalistic logics and identities, through a populist logic. Hartevelt retroactively frames the complexities of the debates around the release of the data over the succeeding three-year period as a moral “struggle between right and wrong” (Mouffe, 2005, p. 5). While not strictly an editorial, Hartevelt blurs the generic boundary-lines by assuming the authority of the institutional voice (Fowler, 1991). The positioned identity of the author resembles the discursive posture of the politician, with its associated power to make statements on behalf of others (Fairclough, 2003, p. 171). Through “the words of linguistic deixis” (Billig, 1995, p. 94) – *we* and *us*, Hartevelt constitutes a national community (Conboy, 2006; Fowler, 1991) at war with the enemies of freedom of information. The below extract resembles the determined rhetoric of a war-time political speech, designed to stiffen the resolve of those going into battle:

Many people told *us* not to publish the information you see on this site.

They fought to stop *us*. Some sent *us* bills for the privilege of their school's data. Others buried the figures we asked for in complex matrices and pages of indecipherable bumph [*emphasis added*].

Hartevelt invites the reader to identify themselves with that *us* (repeated three times), defined through its exclusion of an anti-transparency, educationalist status quo, towards which steely resolve has been displayed by *Dominion Post* journalists. The sentences beginning with “they” and “some” in the second paragraph are specific references to the tactics employed by schools after they received the letters from Fairfax requesting their achievement data. As with earlier iterations within government speeches and the editorials, the actions of educationalists in resisting the journalistic field of judgment are viewed as conforming to the horrific fantasmatic representation of the ineffective, bureaucratic teacher, whose ultimate fear is the transparent flow of data, because it will lead to their being held to account for performance. The war metaphor which textures the extract reinforces this representation, closing out the possibility that schools wanted to withhold data in order to protect their students and teachers. The enemy’s key weapon in this war is *anti-transparency* – unnecessarily complex language and procedures which hide the data “in complex matrices and pages of indecipherable bumph”.

Further on in the piece Hartevelt identifies another enemy, “an official in the Education Minister's office [who] charged that it [the School Report website] was "solely aimed at gazumping the Government's own website”, in order sell newspapers and attract advertising revenue. This is perhaps revealing of a break in the temporary hegemonic alliance between government and media institutions. Hartevelt contends that such “accusations [that publishing the data was solely a business decision] reflect the bias of their authors”, implying that government officials lack the objectivity of journalists, being corrupted by the realm of ideology and politicking. By way of contrast, Hartevelt draws

on the trope of the tireless investigative reporter (Schudson, 2015), working “objectively and independently in order to inform the citizenry” (Hollings et al., 2016, p. 130). Hartevelt proclaims that the Fairfax journalists involved in making the “ropey” data from schools easily readable in web form demonstrated both high “standards of journalistic rigour” and “data handling processes [which] have been checked by independent experts”.

This figure of the heroic journalist as objective data handler is then absolved from any responsibility around what the published data actually does when it reaches the public. This is because, as in the earlier editorials, the parent/reader is assumed as modernity’s critical, rational agent, who desires the journalist to only pass on the information, without the risk of sullyng it with subjective judgments. Hence the taxpaying public relies on the “media[‘s]...work to turn over National Standards information and report on it as best it can”. And “we cannot lose faith” in this ideal through a paternalistic wish to protect “them from information just because it is challenging”. With the discursive links made between *parents* and *the people* over the course of the newspaper editorials’ campaigning for league tables, failure to invest in the analytical abilities of an autonomous, self-interested parent could mean losing faith in the very idea of the press as Western democracy’s fourth estate.

## **Class sizes: technocratic objectivity to bureaucratic bungling**

The journalistic logic of objectivity and the neoliberalized logic of

performativity, which represent data as a neutral facilitator of innovation and enterprise, were also prominent in editorial representations of the Government's proposal to increase class sizes. At first the newspapers largely rearticulated Treasury's technocratic assurances of a slight tweaking of the system to effect increases in efficiency. Further, the rhetorical separation of "good" and "bad" teachers again facilitated a journalistic representation of teaching culture as a dependency-spreading impediment to economic growth. However, once it was obvious that public opinion was strongly against the policy and it was withdrawn by the Government, representations became much more varied, which acted to politicize the discursive terrain through wide disparities on the apportionment of blame.

Following the National Party securing a second successive term in November 2011, Treasury submitted their traditional briefing to the incoming Minister of Finance, Bill English. Within this document, reforming "the education system to improve educational attainment at lower cost" came under a general policy recommendation for "a smaller, more effective and responsive state sector" (p. 4). Thus, twenty-seven years after the 1984 Briefing, we see a re-problematization of education through the now sedimented and closely interlinked logics of performativity and instrumentalization. For Treasury, education and the needs of the economy were now firmly coupled, meaning that decreased inputs (costs to the taxpayer) and increased outputs (student achievement) derived from that system are presupposed as leading to economic growth.

As also argued in the previous chapter, articulating education through that discursive frame correspondingly permits the reification and segmentation of

the system into its constituent parts, which become differentiated, independent variables, removed from the messiness of context. Accordingly, no tension could be perceived within the Treasury briefing between the three aims of implementing “initiatives to improve school teacher quality”, the “consolidation of the school network”, and “increasing student/teacher ratios” (p. 4). The aim of improving “teacher quality” was thus entirely disconnected from being impacted by the proposals for school closures and larger class sizes. Instead, teacher quality was regarded as the “key lever” through which “efficiencies” could be gleaned elsewhere in the system, without any overall loss of outputs to the economy. Whereas increasing funding to schools and decreasing class sizes were viewed as inefficient and unwieldy tools for driving economic growth, by contrast, relatively small increases in teacher quality could enable an efficient, concentrated addressment of *the one-in-five* problem, which was seen as having a detrimental effect on New Zealand’s competitiveness.

Therefore, the highly political aspects of increasing class sizes for New Zealand public school children were de-emphasized within Treasury’s technocratic discourse, through the logics of instrumentalization and performativity, with the former tying education policy decision-making closely to neoliberal economic rationalism through the language of the latter. As I will outline below, this attempted ideological closure hinged on rearticulations of the two fantasmatic narratives of equality of opportunity and decline, within which the beatific figure of *the quality teacher* was held aloft as our potential economic saviour, in dichotomist opposition to an overly bureaucratic and techno-phobic *bad teacher*.

However, despite these attempts at depoliticization, the NZEI were swift in attempting to re-politicize the issue, publishing a media release just one day following the release of Treasury's briefing to the public on 2 February 2012 (Education should not be a government cash-cow). Together with situating the policy within a history of struggle, undermining Treasury's claim to objectivity, the release seized the opportunity to lay claim to the *parents* signifier in warning that "parents and schools fought long and hard to lower class sizes and student ratios...and they would not want to see all that work undone".

This criticism from the NZEI and elsewhere prompted Treasury to go on the public relations offensive, releasing a transcript of Gabriel Makhoulf's (Secretary to the Treasury) speech to the Trans-Tasman Business Circle in Wellington, together with an "Evidence Brief" which was designed to provide "a short summary of the evidence base that underpins" (p.1) the claims made around education within the full briefing. Makhoulf's speech rearticulated the earlier reports' rhetorical emphasis on the ongoing "repercussions of the Global Financial Crisis" (p. 3) and the continuing instability in the global economic outlook. Assuming the rhetorical position of *the economic expert*, Makhoulf is the guarantor of normalized uncertainty (W. Davies, 2014), persistently repeating phrases such as "instability and risk", "uncertainty, fragility, and volatility", "rapid changes in economic power", and the need for "government polices...to support our economy to adapt to uncertainty" (p. 2). While articulated within a post-2008 financial crisis context, we see similarities to the 1984 Treasury Briefing, as again New Zealand must "be flexible enough to adapt" (p. 5) to a volatile and ever-changing market. And

again it is too many rigidities in the system, or “barriers to flows of people, goods, capital and ideas” (p. 7), which prevents flexibility and adaptability.

Education is “fundamental” to this quest, as “better skills make us more adaptable” (p. 8), but Makhlouf reminds us that low teacher performance constitutes a key barrier to this vision. Poor teaching, like the 2009 ERO report, means bad data-analysis, however this time its de-antagonising merger with the discourse of diversity is more comprehensive. Through their poor use of data, teachers fail to know enough about the low-achievement levels of minority students, leading too many students to “get lost in the system, put in the too-hard basket...to have specific learning needs identified and addressed” (p. 9).

This objectification of *the ineffective teacher* is also repeated in the Evidence Brief. It states that “although we have almost no information about the quality of teaching in New Zealand” (p. 4), a chain reaction of independent variables points to a cause, pronounced as guilty in absentia:

...there is no reason why we would not have the wide variation in teaching quality that is observed in other countries. The strong impact of teachers on student learning, the large within-school variance in student achievement, low equity, and relatively high proportion of low achievers, all suggest that New Zealand should turn its attention to ensuring there is consistently high quality teaching practice in all schools. (p. 4)

Hence the discursive link between the two variables of student achievement and teacher quality is firmly consolidated, with evidence for the former, in

the form of a “high proportion of low achievers”, providing evidence for the latter, because “the evidence shows [teacher quality] is the largest in-school influence on student outcomes”. Despite there being “no information about the quality of teaching in New Zealand” (p. 4), “the evidence” is constructed as conclusive on the theoretical link between achievement and teacher quality, through citing US-based educational economists such as Erik Hanushek<sup>22</sup>. Their work has seemingly established an authoritative “causal law” (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, pp. 18-19), which can then be applied to predict the relations between variables in any context, without having to collect empirical data.

At the same time, the link between the variables of class size and student achievement, historically presupposed as self-evidential, is problematized as subjective, inexplicit and unable to specify “the optimal class size” (p. 3). Amidst such rhetorically-constituted uncertainty about the influence of class size, the recommended decision is instead to “focus on ensuring effective teaching across the system” (p. 4). Once judged as guilty, the Evidence Brief then goes on to specify a key reason why those imagined teachers are failing to perform optimally; again, it is a failure to integrate the use of quantitative data into the evaluation of teaching practices at the local level. Treasury, for an economic institution, elaborates in some depth on how data-analysis should be integrated into daily teaching practices:

...a growing body of evidence has highlighted the importance of using data to inform teaching practice and decision-making in schools [...]

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<sup>22</sup> See Education Policy Response Group (2013) for a comprehensive critique of econometric methodologies, such as that pioneered by the educational economist Erik Hanushek.



This includes gathering and analysing data to assess individual student progress and identify who is falling behind. It also includes aggregating data and using it to inform school and teacher self-review processes, help allocate resources, and facilitate conversations about effective teaching strategies and possible development needs. (p. 4)

Makhlouf also remarked that he found it “frankly incomprehensible that data on student achievement is seen as dangerous” within education, and that “all organisations need data and information to help them improve” (p. 10). However, belying the non-neutrality of data in constituting a performative field of judgement, Makhlouf goes on to remark that “public scrutiny keeps the pressure on us to lift our game” (p. 10). What this performance data will enable for Makhlouf is the comparison of all teachers to two fixed standards: a “developing teacher” and a “master teacher”, “with remuneration consistent with those roles” (p. 9). In other words, the introduction of performance related-pay is being proposed, where a teacher would no longer see their salary progress through length of service, but through their displays of “quality”, constituted through audit regimes. This is seen to both professionalize and individualize teachers, whose current professional development processes are a remnant from a pre-audit, pre-competition era. Makhlouf urges that we must abandon the “egalitarian notion that all teachers are equally effective”, as this “is simply not borne out in the evidence” (p. 9). Perhaps indicating a lesser degree of sedimentation in the public imagination about easy distinctions between “good” and “bad” teachers than within the institutions of government, the *Dominion Post* rhetorically accentuates the distinction by transgressing the technocratic language of “developing” and

“master” teachers. In an editorial (Lessons to be learnt on class size issue) published on 26 March, four days after Makhlouf’s speech, it is:

...not just that some teachers are better than others, but that some teachers are very, very good while others do no good at all. (*Dominion Post*, Lessons to be learnt on class size issue, 26 March 2012)

The *Dominion Post* is expending Treasury’s symbolic authority in order to widen the discursive gap between the “very, very good” teacher and one doing “no good at all”. The maintenance of this gap is essential to the articulation of the individualizing logic of competition, which presupposes winners and losers. The problem constituted by the articulation of this logic is that *the quality teacher* cannot be either identified or encouraged to remain in their position, as the current pay system rewards seniority, rather than merit. Hence, with a new competitive system introduced, the editorial presupposes, in a circular logic, that self-interest will be the driving force which “keeps them [good teachers] in the classroom”, rather than leaving into management positions. The cream will necessarily rise to the top in a “pay system that better rewards good teachers”, while also ensuring that the losers, the “bad teachers [will be] weeded out of the profession”.

The editorial was also a rebuke of a second NZEI media-release (Treasury should stick to its knitting – 20 March 2012), which interrogated the logic behind Treasury’s assumed links between investment in teacher quality and economic growth, even “questioning what expertise Treasury has in trying to shape educational policy” at all. Against this, justifying the reach of an economic institution into the field of education policy, the *Dominion Post*

claimed that Treasury's research is backed by "[New Zealand] education academic and researcher John Hattie". Further supporting Treasury's legitimacy is that for the *Dominion Post* they were merely advocating "a marginal increase in class sizes"; in other words, a deft tweaking of the cogs of the machine, in order that it can perform more efficiently.

This representation of Treasury cool-headedness and scientific accuracy was built on further by the next editorial to discuss the class size issue on the 17 May, following Hekia Parata's (appointed Minister of Education following the 2011 election) pre-budget speech "Raising achievement for all in Budget 2012". For the *New Zealand Herald* (Size matters, but excellence even more so, 17 May 2012), Treasury could be trusted because it "recommends policies without taking account of the political risk in implementing them", such as "increasing the retirement age from 65 to 67, as well as bigger class sizes as a way of finding money to improve teacher effectiveness". Following an analytic interrogation of Treasury's calculations, which invites the reader to be an objective analyst by actually highlighting "the importance of class size" as well as "the accent on [teacher] quality", the *New Zealand Herald* resolves this internally-constructed problematic through recourse to the authority of Parata's quantitatively-based assurance, whereby "90 per cent of schools would gain or have a net loss of less than one fulltime equivalent teacher", while efficiencies will fund "an improvement in teaching". Hence Parata, together with the reader, is drawn under Treasury's objective, apolitical and economically prudent umbrella. Providing a contrast to this representation of level-headedness, "the teacher unions" are depicted as issuing a warning of the "severe impact" of the changes.

Hekia Parata's speech, made one week before the release of the budget, repeated the distinction between high and low teacher quality, by containing a horrific fantasmatic representation of teachers in the system "who are just going through the motions", needing to be identified within data and then weeded out. For Parata, good teachers stand to enjoy the benefits of increased investment in professional development, but that will only come through submission to the demands of performativity: individualization and competition. The meaning of professionalism thus becomes overdetermined by the pre-loaded signifiers of accountability and performance, whereby "*professions* have a number of characteristics of which *accountability for performance* – good, great, outstanding, unacceptable - is one" [*emphasis added*].

However, Parata and the Ministry of Education would soon become judged themselves against these signifiers of "quality" in the newspaper editorials. The policy had been thus far largely defined in hegemonic discourse as an objective tweaking of the system, in order to produce greater results more efficiently and cost-effectively, by targeting those children who need the resources most (*the one-in-five*). As Parata stated in her speech, "quality not quantity, better teaching not more teachers" would enable *all* New Zealand children, not just "four out of five kids", to enjoy the benefits of quality teaching. Higher standards of teaching would therefore potentially remove two fantasmatic obstacles – both the horrific teacher and child, opening the way for a beatific future whereby New Zealand's productivity would come to match the richest OECD nations. While keeping this utopian vision in mind, in the meantime "we have to make some trade-offs... by making a small

change to teacher: student ratios”, which as mentioned above, would theoretically result in just 10 per cent of schools experiencing a largely insignificant loss of staff. However, on 26 May, just two days after the release of the budget, *The Press* reported in a news article on the emergence of “unpleasant budget surprises” in the form of calculations by intermediate schools, which disputed Parata’s claims of inconsequential levels of staff losses. The schools warned of much higher than predicted cuts to technology teachers and even the closure of technology centres. By their calculations, larger schools could have been forced to lose 7-9 teachers each. Following these revelations, on the 29 May, Parata was forced into announcing an embarrassing concession, guaranteeing that no school would lose more than two teachers in the first three years following the change in ratios.

In a similar way to National Standards, for the newspapers an inherently rational and objective policy was becoming represented as tainted through its incompetent handling by politicians and bureaucrats, who were making it “look like an ideologically driven exercise” (*Dominion Post*, Minister needs to do her homework, 1 June). “Flawed modelling” (*New Zealand Herald*, Parents should see past mess over class sizes, 2 June) revealed by schools, bloggers and the unions, leading to a “hasty backtrack”, followed by an inability to answer questions on how much the concession would cost, meant that the government were now at risk of dragging down Treasury’s “rational readjustment of spending priorities” into the “ideologically driven” quagmire of politics. The impression being given to the public was “of policy being made on the hoof”, and “the Education Ministry and the Beehive” (note not Treasury) were pushed out from under the protection of the umbrella of

objectivity and rationalism. Reminded that they too were not immune from the judging gaze of performativity, “mediocrity” made a contiguous leap from teachers across to the Minister and her Ministry:

On the evidence of the past few days, the answer is that the mediocrity in some of the nation's classrooms is matched only by the mediocrity within the Education Ministry and the Beehive. (*Dominion Post*, Minister needs to do her homework, 1 June 2012)

“Mediocrity within the Education Ministry and the Beehive” (the colloquial term for New Zealand’s Parliament) signifies bureaucracy, characterized in neoliberalized discourse as in an insulated position from the competitive rigours of market-discipline (Du Gay, 1996). Parata’s concession, made just two days after the budget, was in danger of placing her on the side of timid and placid dependency culture, rather than brave and unflinching enterprise culture.

The *New Zealand Herald* on the 2 June was less eager to blame the government for “one instance of mismanagement” than the *Dominion Post*. Sensing that the symbolic crisis could widen to contaminate all education policy, the editorial urged that “parents should see pass the mess over class sizes” and not allow the unions to seize the initiative over performance pay and other ways “to recognise and reward teacher excellence”. Moving back towards the rhetorical security of the two-sided populist logic seen within National Standards coverage, *parents* were rearticulated as “only too keen to know more about their children's progress at school”, despite the protestations of the educationalists. The Government was urged to take heart over those

levels of support and “win back public confidence for [all of] its policies”.

The *New Zealand Herald's* sister paper the *Herald on Sunday* (Putting the spin on bad news, 3 June 12) also perceived the wider implications of events. However, this time the populist polarity was reversed, with the newspaper accusing National of placing spin and ideology at the heart of their reform agenda. Taking aim at the inherent emptiness of “quality teaching” when it is “numerically quantified”, the editorial remarked on the signifier’s distinctly qualitative texture for most people. By urging the reader to recall their own memories of schooling, and how they defined a good or bad teacher through emotions and identifications, the Government’s “commitment to a nebulous notion of quality” is viewed as little more than “political humbug”, designed to place a positive spin on what is essentially a “cost-cutting” exercise, which will actually “make it harder for teachers to deliver quality”, in particular in schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas.

However, this level of politicizing critique was not maintained within the small sample of editorials, and following the eventual scrapping of the policy on the 7 June, the final two to discuss the policy framed events through the closely interlinked *politics-as-war* and *politics-as-game* metaphors (Louw, 2005). Together with encouraging the reader to focus on personality and strategy over policy, the metaphors constrain interpretations of events within the established, two-sided debates of representative politics. In such a frame the instrumental pursuit of winning for the individual politician becomes the end-game in itself.

Hence Parata’ public acceptance of responsibility for the policy backdown,

while refusing to resign, was portrayed by the *Waikato Times* (Collective irresponsibility, 11 June 12) as displaying “political pluck”. Rather than the prior representation of bureaucratic bungling and buckling under pressure, the Minister was now standing firm in a battle against the pressure of a Labour Party opposition, who have “harried her and pressed her” and were “baying for Ms Parata's blood”.

The *Otago Daily Times* (Time to go back to school, 11 June 12) then employed the *politics-as-game* metaphor in order to point to the ironic anomaly that a usually well drilled political marketing machine had permitted this severe miscalculation of public opinion to occur. While highlighting the centrality of spin and the “art of bite-sized, highly targeted information delivery” to National’s politics, the metaphor functions to *de-politicize*, by framing such techniques as endemic to all “modern politics”, from the identificatory stance of the post-political cynic (Žižek, 1989, 2008). With a tongue-in-cheek style, the *Otago Daily Times* naturalizes and thus normalizes the practices of political marketing by offering no alternatives for the construction and dissemination of education policy, with bigger questions such as the merits of Treasury devising education policy remaining undiscussed.

## **Charter schools: the empowerment of choice and the exclusions of competition**

The National-led government’s intention to establish charter schools in New Zealand was announced on the 5 December 2011, as one of seven policy areas



addressed within the National Party's *Confidence and Supply Agreement with ACT New Zealand*. As with class sizes, but unlike National Standards, charter schools had not been campaigned on as part of any party's manifesto, despite emerging in the immediate aftermath of the November 2011 election. Hence the policy lacked a democratic mandate from the outset, restricting the ability for the *parents* signifier to function as a synecdoche for *the people* within the editorials, and consequently for journalistic identities to be hegemonically articulated.

When announced in December 2011 the "commitment to introduce a charter school system came as a complete surprise to most people" (Education Policy Response Group, 2012, p. 11). However, the policy's origins can be traced back to the 2008 Agreement between National and the right-wing libertarian ACT Party, which generally polls between 1.5 and 3.5% of the party votes cast. That document outlined a commitment "to increase the education choices available to parents and pupils", and spawned an Inter-Party Working Group on education between ACT, National and the Māori Party (also part of the coalition government with National), culminating in the publishing of a report in 2010 on school choice: "Step change: Success the Only Option".

Also deriving from the 2008 agreement, and also calling for increased school choice, was the 2025 Taskforce, chaired by the former leader of both the ACT and National parties, Don Brash. The report re-valorized the rational, self-interested entrepreneur, obstructed in their projects of self-realization within an institutional context of stifling bureaucracy. Hence the rhetorical style is more akin to the doctrinal and interventionist phases of neoliberalization, rather than normalization, displaying an overt antagonism towards the

remnants of the welfare state. Despite New Zealand being subject to the most “radical experiment in free market economics” (Boshier, 2001, p. 363) seen in the West, the report linked relative economic decline, in comparison to other OECD nations such as Australia, directly to high “Government spending as a share of GDP”. Brash cited irresponsible and undisciplined welfare spending as permitting the contamination of dependency culture, allowing “an increasingly large proportion of the working age population to opt out of working, fully financially supported” (p. 4).

When discussing education, the 2025 Taskforce report claimed that “the school system remains unresponsive and without mechanisms to generate serious accountability and to reward excellence” (p. 94). Despite the marketization implemented by the *Tomorrow’s Schools* reforms, and despite considerable public funds already being allocated to private schools, public providers were seen to retain a monopolistic hold over government funding and therefore the delivery of education, allowing them to impede “private schools seeking to enter the market” and “to avoid serious accountability to purchasers” (p. 94). Hence in order to increase the public education system’s input/output equation and create both “better value for money” and “better educational outcomes”, “better choice” would enforce “more effective discipline on existing providers” (p. 94), by compelling them to become more responsive and accountable to consumers, or else risk that consumer choosing an alternative product. Central to this logic is the rational choice assumption that “people [both providers and consumers] are rational [and that] they respond to incentives” (p. 94). By this logic, only by allowing “private for-profit providers” (p. 95) to fully compete in the public school sector can the

perverse incentives of provider-capture be curtailed.

Brash resigned as leader of the ACT Party following their disappointing 2011 general election result (polling just 1.07% of the party vote), to be replaced by John Banks, their sole representative in Parliament (who served in cabinet as Associate Minister of Education 2011-14). And by the launch of the charter schools policy in December 2011, Brash's doctrinally neoliberal legitimization of charter schools had become softened through an increased alignment to the discourse of diversity, signified by the potential empowerment and autonomy offered by choice for minority communities.

However, as in the Third Way rhetoric seen in Chapter 5, an antagonism towards the perceived perpetrators of dependency culture remains, but these are constructed more as enemies of modernisation, progress, cultural diversity and the equal opportunities of minorities. Signifying the merging of management, diversity and enterprise discourses, the 2011 Confidence and Supply Agreement assures that charter schools will follow "a clearly-defined, ambitious mission" (p. 3). This phrasing denotes the nature of the escape route for Māori and Pasifika from poverty: enterprise culture's managerial practices of incentivising workforces through the setting of targets.

What the agreement stipulates that they must escape from is "entrenched...intergenerational disadvantage", symptomized by "poor health, poverty, joblessness, welfare dependence, criminal offending and social dysfunction" (p. 3), which act as horrific warning of the failure to actualize the equality of opportunity beatific narrative. However, as the Governor General Jeremy Mateparae stated in his Parliament-opening speech

in December 2011, rather than a *one-in-five* which is potentially *everywhere*, thereby prompting the anxious collection of data, this problematic Other is located within specific *somewheres*: “areas where educational underachievement is most entrenched”, identified as South Auckland and Christchurch (with the former containing proportionately high populations of Māori and Pasifika).

Seven editorials were published within four days of the policy announcement, and even those in support of the policy were at least partly textured by the tension between the doctrinal emphasis on the disciplinary effects of competition, and the Third Way (or normalization) emphasis on autonomy, self-realisation and equality of opportunity for disadvantaged groups. The *New Zealand Herald* (Welcome step for choice in child learning, 7 December 2011) chose to foreground the former logic, assertively claiming that “at heart, charter schools are all about giving parents in low socio-economic areas a welcome degree of choice in the education of their children”. With the implication being that schools in such areas are simply not trying hard enough and not setting high enough expectations for students, the editorial adds that the new schools will be able to “set extended class hours and introduce performance-related pay for teachers”. Existing schools in the areas of “South Auckland and east and central Christchurch” will then be forced to “improve...performance and persuade parents that their children will fare better there”, or else see their students depart in droves for the new charter schools.

However, with charter schools “creaming off” the top-performing students, a contradiction is created within the beatific equality of opportunity narrative,

because competition necessarily increases the number of educational losers in those areas, disproportionately affecting those already most disadvantaged. The way to navigate this tension for the *New Zealand Herald* was through the symbolic expulsion of the *non-chooser* from the identity of the assumed reader:

It is common for *these children* to come from dysfunctional or one-parent families, or to have parents who have little interest in their children's education and offer them no support.

*Such people* are unlikely to go to the trouble of taking their children out of state schools or show the level of commitment necessary for involvement with a charter school [*emphasis added*]. (*New Zealand Herald*, 7 December 2011)

Thus while *choice* potentially offers empowerment, freedom and autonomy to excluded groups, allowing access to the beatific narratives of an entrepreneurial self, we are reminded here that the subject-position carries with it a moral responsibility to ensure an individual's choices further "their own interests and those of their family" (B. Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 249), at the expense of others less fortunate than themselves. Those that finish on top of the pile are there because they have made the right choices on a level playing-field, as "an active and responsible citizen" (Wright, 2012, p. 290) who has taken on involvement with a (private-sector enabled) higher standard of education for their child. "Such people", who are offered *choice* yet fail to take it, must lack sufficient moral fibre, or the "level of commitment necessary for involvement with a charter school", in a representation of

(public-sector subverted) irresponsible parenting redolent of Sexton's in Chapter 5. Consequently *choice*, unlike data, transparency and accountability in National Standards, excludes non-choosing Others from the hegemonic identity, placing structural limits on the ability of *parents* to function as a universalizing synecdoche for *the people*.

This is perhaps why *The Press* (Charter schools, 8 December 2011) decided to background the logics of marketization and competition, instead foregrounding diversity discourse. By emphasizing the inclusive signifiers linked to *choice*: empowerment, freedom and autonomy, *The Press* was able to re-articulate a *parents* identity in united antagonistic opposition to an overly bureaucratic, unresponsive and elitist education system, which caters only to mainstream needs, unsympathetically ignoring the more specialist requirements of “Maori and Pacific Island children”, the achievements of whom have “for a long time lagged behind that of the general population”. However, rather than encouraging teachers to monitor these students through the collection of achievement data, as with National Standards, the solution now is a break from the existing system, whereby “iwi or community organisations” are given the autonomy to “establish schools with curriculums and teaching methods more suited to the needs of their people”.

Given New Zealand's history of colonialism, with its near-destruction of Māori culture (Rankine et al., 2014), this logic of independence and self-determination is persuasive, carrying a moral weight which is difficult to argue against (Mouffe, 2005). It was to become a central legitimizing focus for the policy, with ongoing Māori Party support crucial to the eventual passing of the Education Amendment Act in June 2013. However, outside

the Māori Party (who were directly involved in its development) the policy lacked widespread support within “Māoridom”, with many prominent Māori education scholars publicly voicing their opposition, and “several leading Māori educationalists and leaders...sign[ing] an Open Letter to the Government” outlining their concerns (Collins, 2013, n.p.). However, contingent links to Māori cultural autonomy were given a degree of rhetorical stability with the naming of the policy in 2012 as *Partnership Schools/Kura Hourua*. In a Cabinet Paper later released to the public through an OIA request, John Banks outlined that the name derived from “Waka Hourua...the Māori name for a double hulled canoe”, which was a “metaphor for the journey of partnership we are embarking on with these schools” (p. 1).

While the three largest national newspapers the *New Zealand Herald*, the *Dominion Post* and *The Press* articulated a position of overarching support for charter schools, despite acknowledging the tensions and inconsistencies, the *Waikato Times* and *Taranaki Daily News* were overtly oppositional in the early stages. The *Waikato Times* (Tinkering with education, 7 December 2011) anchored its opposition around the aforementioned lack of democratic accountability around the policy, with it not being “on the education policy agendas of either major party during the recent election campaign”. As discussed in Chapter 3, the press, as articulated within the fourth estate identity, plays a key role in liberal democracies by transmitting information from political party manifestos to the citizenry in a condensed, but neutral and objective format. Deciding to pursue a policy not so reviewed thus risks it becoming represented as both against the culturally valorized transparent flow of information, and against journalistic practices of holding the powerful

to account through being the conduits for that flow. Hence the *Waikato Times* laments that the “merits [of the policy] were neither examined nor discussed”.

John Key’s “That’s MMP for you, isn’t it?” response when questioned on why the policy was not open to review by the public prior to the election was considered by the *Waikato Times* as “provocatively dismissive”. The comments by Key, who regularly articulated the post-political persona of the pragmatic realist (Devadas & Nicholls, 2012; C. Jones, 2016; Tie, 2017), could be seen as an attempt to frame journalistic representations through the *politics-as-game* metaphor, seen earlier in class sizes discourse. Instead however, the *Waikato Times* articulated a popular identity which was inclusive of the education sector and which excluded a government seen as unnecessarily “triggering further controversy” by “tinkering with a system that wasn’t broken”, citing the legitimizing authority of a recent OECD study which found New Zealand to be “a top-performing country in terms of the quality of its education system”.

Similarly, the *Taranaki Daily News* (Acting in own interests, not education’s, 9 December 2011), linked charter schools to “another attack from the Right on the ethos of *our* education system [*emphasis added*]”, signifying identification with educationalists. While “the Right” references an ACT Party pushing a “libertarian ideology”, which seeks to “make the delivery of education more market-like and entrepreneurial”, with National merely “party to that delusion”, there is an underlying acknowledgment that National may have been allowing ACT to be represented as the ideological party<sup>23</sup>,

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<sup>23</sup> See Phelan (2012) for a discussion of National’s use of the ACT Party in order to present themselves as an anti-ideology party.



while tacitly supporting the policy. Charter school's promise to make the sector "more market- like and entrepreneurial" is seen as "probably why National is comfortable with a charter school trial".

The *Southland Times* (Unchartered waters, 7 December 2011) represented the policy through the two contrasting identificatory positions of the cynic and the objective analyst. While attributing the combative reactions of the unions and the Labour Party to the "squawking" of "those lefties", the editorial shifts to the rational analyst when hinting at the ideological impetus behind the policy. The newspaper asserted that there was no necessary requirement for private sector involvement in the new schools, and that "a trial that could have been undertaken within, rather than *resolutely* outside of, *our* existing school system [*emphasis added*]".

Following this initial flurry of mixed editorial coverage in December 2011, 2012 was a year in which the National Government's education policy platform came under intense scrutiny<sup>24</sup>. Analogous links were being drawn between the Government's poor handling of a range of educational policies, and The *New Zealand Herald* (Parata lucky to stay after year of errors, 20 December 2012) placed the blame for such handling squarely at the door of a Minister of Education responsible for a "number of errors that have embarrassed the Government in education this year". Following class sizes, the instrumental approach towards schools was losing discursive links to *the*

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<sup>24</sup> Already described in the previous section was the government being forced to back-down on their class sizes policy. Further embarrassments included an expensive purchasing of Novopay software for the payment of teachers, which generated a large amount of errors in payments and resultant bad PR, and parent protests against a proposal to impose an experimental school structure on Christchurch. The latter proposal aimed to close 13 schools and merge together 18, within unconsulted communities still traumatized from the highly distressing experiences of the devastating 2010-11 earthquakes.

*people*, and the Ministry of Education's plan to close a series of Christchurch schools, without appropriate consultation and soon after the earthquakes of 2010-11, was seen as "utterly out of touch with the people its schools are supposed to serve". Parata was criticized for passing on the "gobbledegook she accepts from officials" and failing "to inject some common sense into the planning".

These negative associations perhaps contributed to the National Party largely leaving the ACT Party to construct the discursive legitimacy for charter schools over 2012 and 2013. Together with organizing a publicity tour with Mike Feinberg, co-founder of the KIPP charter schools company in the US, ACT Party leader John Banks and President John Boscawen both made speeches in the first half of 2013 which promoted the policy. These placed the signifiers of flexibility, freedom and innovation as nodal points within a logic of problematization. The current system, dominated by the bureaucratic interests of providers, was represented as denying children in disadvantaged areas (as well as "talented educators" and "dedicated parents") the "freedom to achieve". Charter schools were able to provide an escape route for "young Māori...*captured* in poorer performing state schools [*emphasis added*]".

While Banks articulated a doctrinally-inflected discourse set against the traditional enemy of neoliberalism - "the entitlement society", perpetuated by "a government of hand outs", Boscawen related how the ACT and Māori parties, often at odds, have been brought together on "providing choice in education as a means of raising educational achievement...for those in lower socio-economic groups". Both parties purportedly also recognised "the huge

damage the social welfare system has done to Māori and the way it has created a system of dependency and a feeling of entitlement”.

Banks, in a speech to Parliament during the second reading of the Education Amendment Bill in May 2013, then linked charter schools to the beatific narrative of *the one-in-five*, in asserting that “being a first world nation means five out of five students gaining the knowledge and skills to be successful citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”. Connecting the narrative of equality of opportunity to the nodal point of *choice*, Banks then rearticulated the discourse of diversity, autonomy and self-realisation. Charter schools offered “more choice, and more flexibility...more choice for parents – who would have greater freedom to choose the education that best suits their children’s learning needs”. Together with parents and students, charter schools would also offer “more flexibility” for schools, who would “have the freedom to offer a different curriculum” and “would be allowed to use new and diverse approaches to teaching and learning”.

The *New Zealand Herald*, by far the most vociferous newspaper on charter schools (publishing seven editorials in favour), also articulated its discourse around the signifiers of autonomy and innovation in an October 2012 piece (Partnership opportunity for teachers). Claiming that Partnership Schools (the branded name for New Zealand charter schools) are true to the spirit of the 1980s reforms, “when schools were also put under the nominal control of parent-elected boards of trustees”, the *New Zealand Herald* excluded the troubling information that in the Education Amendment Bill being debated in Parliament there was to be no elected parental representatives, with total control over the operation of the schools being held by private “sponsors”.

Despite this, the newspaper claimed that schools would now have the autonomy originally promised them, but which “disappeared...somewhere between the Picot plan...and the revised version called Tomorrow's Schools”. Hence, we see a rearticulation of the narrative of betrayal seen in the Sexton Report, where the potential of total empowerment through autonomy was stolen by bureaucrats and the corrupting influence of the public education sector.

Together with flexibility, innovation and autonomy, in a later speech Banks attempts to create discursive links between Partnership Schools and accountability, emphasising that they “will have higher levels of accountability with a unique evaluation framework”. However, the *Waikato Times* (Charter schools a punt, 31 May 2013) stated that it was Chris Hipkins, education spokesperson for the Labour Party, who introduced an amendment to the bill which would have included the new schools under the requirements of the Official Information Act (OIA). As when it highlighted the lack of democratic accountability for the policy in December 2011, a lack of journalistic “monitoring arrangements” for the “educational experiment” is something which the *Waikato Times* would not be approving of. The lack of investment in accountability from the editorials had also been signalled in an earlier piece in *The Southland Times* (Partners in what, exactly?, 18 October 2012), prompting it to diverge from its normally ironic style in asserting that “the Education Amendment Bill empowers a system that is far, far too secretive”. This tension increased when Hipkins’ amendments were rejected, with charter schools, officially recognised as outside the public sector, exempted from the OIA. This rejection of the journalistic nodes of

transparency and accountability even prompted the supportive *New Zealand Herald* (New schools must perform to be success, 6 June 2013) to refer to “obduracy” from the Government.

What that *New Zealand Herald* editorial also revealed was that there remained the same tension between *competition* and *equality of opportunity* as had been present in December 2011:

Charter schools will give parents an additional choice. At their best, they will appeal to those in lower socio-economic areas who are motivated to have their children do well and want them in the best possible learning environment.

[...] But Mr Banks is wrong to hold them up as a solution for this country's long tail of under-achieving pupils.

Commonly, the children in *this group* come from dysfunctional or one-parent families, or have parents who take a limited interest in their schooling. *These parents* are unlikely to have the level of commitment required to be involved in the best sort of charter school [*emphasis added*]. (*New Zealand Herald*, New schools must perform to be success, 6 June 2013)

Drawing on the same “dysfunctional or one-parent families” representation of moral dysfunction seen eighteen months prior, the *New Zealand Herald* remained unconvinced of Bank’s argument that *choice* can provide “this group”, and “these parents”, who contribute to the majority of the “country’s long tail of under-achieving pupils”, with the beatific narrative path. Unlike National Standards, where the clear obstacle to the that path was an insulated

teaching culture, charter schools' reliance on a representation of spatially entrenched and intergenerational disadvantage assigns moral blame onto a problematized section of bad parents, rather than bad teachers. The logic that choice will ultimately trump equity makes little difference to this group of parents, because they "take a limited interest in their [child's] schooling" anyway. Charter schools require a step up in performance from parents, one that is beyond morally "dysfunctional or one-parent families".

## Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated that journalistic identifications, hegemonically articulated as the fourth estate, impacted the editorial representations of each of the three policies in different ways. National Standards, through foregrounding neoliberalized versions of transparency and accountability, mapped closely onto journalistic imperatives to be the carriers of neutral information on the performance of public servants (teachers). This role also allowed, through the *parents* signifier, a construction of a comparatively unified public through the exclusion of educationalists who refused to be held accountable by transmitting transparent data to parents.

This populist logic permitted a certain degree of adaptability to potentially dislocatory events, allowing reasonably seamless shifts of discursive emphasis from the precarious future of *the one-in-five* to the consumer-desires of entrepreneurial parents for data. By contrast, *teacher quality* during class sizes debates could not function either as a synecdoche for *the people* or as a name for the aligned interests of government and media. While there was

common-ground through the logics of objectivity and performativity, which allowed the outsourcing of bad teachers and their unions, once public opinion turned and key errors were made by politicians and bureaucrats, those logics could not adapt, which became manifested in highly variegated coverage. Charter schools also found common ground through the logic of marketization, which presumed that increased parental choice would increase the performance of schools in disadvantaged areas through competition, thus increasing equality of opportunity. However, the innate incompatibility of choice and equity could not be resolved, and investment in the entrepreneurial parent representation was limited in its universalizing appeal, split between those who choose to improve themselves and those who lack the moral discipline to choose.

As discussed in the introduction chapter, all three policies can be characterized as neoliberal: National Standards foregrounding performativity and problematization, class sizes instrumentalism and objectivity, and charter schools marketization and the entrepreneurial self. However, National Standards proved to be the most closely aligned to journalistic identifications as the chosen transmitters of objective data in liberal democracies. Parents (both Māori and Pākehā), their readership, the consumer citizen and the taxpaying New Zealand people could all become conflated into a subjectivity which desires, above all else, the transparent flow of clear information on the performance of schools, in order to both hold teachers to account for performance and ensure that their own self-orientated choices were best informed. Once on the wrong side of this populist front, and represented as the deniers of this information, it would prove very difficult for teachers,

principals and other educationalists to be portrayed as anything else. The next chapter will outline how they navigated this challenge, by articulating an alternative vision for education.



# Chapter 7

## Articulating a New Zealand holistic teaching ethos

### Introduction

While the previous two chapters described the neoliberalization of New Zealand's school-sector education, this chapter aims to outline some of the tools for the undermining and critique of that process, which, by doing so, outlined alternative visions for the purposes of education (research question 3). I argue that the strong resistance in New Zealand to neoliberal policies from school teachers and their representative bodies can be at least partly explained by a sense that it is a nation which does schooling differently. In other words, it was perceived that neoliberalized logics imposed an alien philosophy which, through its narrowing emphasis on that which can be measured and therefore efficiently improved, is incommensurable with an ethos which emphasizes the growth of the whole child – it is a holistic paradigm which includes affects, identifications and creative faculties which cannot be quantified.

This is an ethos articulated around (along with others) the ethical signifiers of care, justice, democracy, humanism, fairness and diversity, all seen as denied by neoliberalization. Their articulation advanced an alternative philosophical resource through which the interviewed activists could understand the purposes of education and teaching. The first section describes, very briefly,

the history of this ethos, and how it is reproduced today in the writings of two bloggers who have lived and worked in a pre-neoliberalization educational context. The next section then argues that, far from being constrained to these blogs, the holistic ethos can also be observed within the much more widely impacting communicative campaigns of the NZEI. The final section examines how the holistic ethos, understood as a diverse and diffuse “popular knowledge” (Foucault, 1980), is drawn upon in the strategies, culture, identifications and motivations of the interviewees. The primary aim is the exploration of their political identifications, i.e. what motivated them to speak out publically against government policy, when some potentially had much to lose from doing so? I highlight how many express an increasing carefulness, and are turning towards micro or private resistant practices, which, when examined under a Lacanian lens, may even prompt us to reconsider what resistance or contestation means for public sector workers within the context of neoliberal hegemony.

## **A brief history of New Zealand’s holistic teaching ethos**

A key tenet of the holistic ethos, particularly as articulated by the interviewees Bruce and Kelvin, is a rejection of neoliberalization’s denial of the affective and the identificatory, or in other words the ability to make meaningful connections with others. As outlined previously, neoliberal regimes construct the learning process as the accrual of skills, or “educational investments” (Foucault, 2008, p. 229) by individual rational actors, in order for them to increase the value of their human capital in the marketplace, and therefore the

economic productivity of the state. Such a reified worldview encourages us all to view other subjects as objects with a specified use-value (Bai, 2001) and positions those involved in educational processes as responsive only to cognitive and rational incentives to improve their own human capital as “abilities machines” (Foucault, 2008, p. 229). The requirement to be productive machines imposes a problematizing lens on education and the actors within it as necessarily inefficient – a problem which can only be addressed through the collection and analysis of quantitative achievement data. The more data that is collected and analysed, the more efficient the teacher will become at identifying underachieving “problems” early on, which they can target, hence also increasing the efficiency of their teaching.

As was outlined in the previous two chapters, this shapes subjectifications of the teacher and the student in certain directions. A teacher’s knowledge of their students becomes defined through the measurement of achievement, resulting in their intrinsic and qualitative feelings about their students being regarded as too biased to be trusted. This definition results in disaffection and alienation, as students’ tendencies towards the making of meaningful connections to their teacher, other students and their environment are discouraged. As Allan described in our interview, this is particularly prevalent at secondary level, as knowledge becomes compartmentalised into subject-areas, divorced from their context and environment, where teachers and students are given just an hour at a time to make a connection. As Bruce related, the majority of students underachieve not because the teacher was inefficient at transmitting knowledge at the cognitive level, but because they become “disaffected at the school, they get bad attitudes”. This disconnection

is often amplified for Māori students, who often grow up within a culture which valorises the collective and which perceives development and learning as inseparable from “a sense of *belonging to* and a sense of *relating to others*” (Macfarlane et al., 2008, p. 107).

This centrality of the affective and the identificatory to the learning process was already recognised in New Zealand education circles in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the writings of education theorists such as Dewey and Rousseau began to gain influence with a series of “innovative individuals who, with dextrous opportunism seized openings for change” (MacDonald, 2016, p. 27). This new thinking, institutionalized in the 1929 syllabus (which became known as the Red Book), began to view the child holistically, as a whole person with a personality which needs to be nurtured and developed, rather than an “empty account” to be deposited with knowledge by the teacher (Freire, 1996). The 1929 syllabus also recognised the importance of identification with the local region and even Māori culture, de-emphasising the post-World War I stress on British national identification. Also emergent during this early period were interlinked humanist and social-democratic rationales for the purposes of education; the development of the whole human, including “spiritual, mental and physical development” was beneficial not only for the individual concerned, but also “for the wider service of humanity” (1929 Syllabus quoted in MacDonald, 2016, p. 51).

This intertwinement of the ethics of humanism and social democracy in the emergent ethos was then cemented by Clarence Beeby, widely regarded as the “father of the modern education system” (New Zealand Herald, 2016) who served as New Zealand’s director of education in the 1940s and 50s.

Beeby wrote Peter Fraser's famous 1939 speech (used by Treasury in Chapter 5 to denote that by the 1980s the social democratic ethos was out of date) which articulated a vision whereby every child in the nation has "a right as citizens to a free education of the kind for which they are best fitted and to the fullest extent of their powers" (Fraser quoted in *The Treasury*, 1987). Therefore, the rights of citizenship within New Zealand's mid-20<sup>th</sup> century liberal democracy included a *universal* and *eternal* right to free education, tied to an expectation that as a public good, equal and unlimited access based on need would lead to an informed citizenship and thus a healthy democracy. This came with the recognition that the facilitation of this vision would require a curriculum that was as rich and varied as the student population, in order to combat the alienation experienced within industrialised societies<sup>25</sup>. Following a 1937 New Education Fellowship conference held in New Zealand, Beeby became influenced by a movement which perceived education through art as a way of working against the disaffecting tendencies of modern society. The Department of Education under Beeby began to encourage teacher experimentation with methods, and appointed subject-advisors who visited teachers in schools in order to assist and stimulate this experimentation. In such a climate, a teacher in the remote rural community of Oruaiti was encouraged to cultivate a unique developmental education philosophy, and published an account of his experiences in the influential book *In the Early World* (E. S. Richardson, 1964/2012). MacDonald (2016)

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<sup>25</sup> See the work of the Frankfurt School, such as Horkheimer and Adorno (2002), for more detailed theoretical explications of the links between industrial capitalism and increasing alienation and disaffection.

summarises Elwyn Richardson's philosophy below:

He discarded the official syllabus and turned instead to the children's lives and immediate environment for the basis of his curriculum. Using the children's natural curiosity and interest, he taught his pupils how to look closely at the world around them, and to observe and record their new discoveries and their own responses to them. From here he developed a dynamic programme that was anchored in the children's surroundings and lives. Through this environmental study the children learned the basis of scientific method and brought these skills to bear on studies that spanned different subjects. (MacDonald, 2016, p. 2)

Therefore, for Richardson, the disciplines of art and science were not seen as necessarily distinct. He viewed the techniques of the former, such as experimentation and self-expression, as working to develop and engage the innate abilities of the child, and hence their curiosity and love of *all* knowledge. Concomitant to this re-enjoinment of art and science, fact began to become viewed as indistinct from value, thereby imbuing children with a sense of communal purpose to their learning beyond individualized technical proficiency and the accrual of marketable skills. Communal values emerged through meaningful connections between students, and were used to guide weekly class meetings, where the children discussed, and openly critiqued, each other's work. For MacDonald (2016) this led to a "class culture akin to a community of artists working together" (p. 6). Characterised by openness and dynamism, it was a system through which collective decisions could be made in a truly bottom-up, democratic form.

In the early 1970s Bruce combined insights from Richardson with those from the progressive movement in the UK to develop what became known later as the Taranaki Environmental Approach, a pedagogy that he helped a small number of teachers implement. This approach included a strong conviction that the environment which learning took place within was crucial to engaging children at the affective level. This engagement was therefore viewed as a potential leveller, in particular for those from working class backgrounds whose home environment may not be the most conducive to learning. In order to maximise engagement and experimentation, Bruce advised teachers that “the classroom should be a cross between a workshop, an art gallery and a science laboratory”.

Before spending time in the UK learning about the British progressive education movement, Bruce worked as a science adviser, in one of the positions instigated by Beeby’s reforms which “encouraged creative teachers like Elwyn”. Following a brief period of three or four years as a teacher, in order to “to put the ideas that I had picked up over there [Britain] into practice”, Bruce became a principal of a New Plymouth school in the late 1980s and “right at that very moment Tomorrow’s Schools hit”. Bruce admitted to at first being seduced by that policy’s promise of democratic empowerment and independence for principals, schools and parents. Viewing himself as a “creative type”, he perceived the then Department of Education as overly bureaucratic, centralised, patronising and stifling of innovation. By contrast, those promoting the 1980s reforms were delivering a message of “democracy, and neighbourhood schools, and involving parents in their own choices, and diversity”.

However, four years later, the 1993 Curriculum Framework was introduced. This document, which came with detailed instructions for teachers, attempted to break the educational experience “down into [hundreds of] discrete chunks, measurable chunks” (Allan) and became an antagonistic emblem of a “technocratic ideology” (Peters et al., 1994, p. 260) for much of the teaching profession. This ideology, strongly linked to the exclusion of educational practitioners from the policy development process, was also seen to disempower and downgrade the professionalism of teachers by negating a large part of their work - the relational.

As Bruce described, within the Curriculum Framework teaching was represented as a neat technical process centred on the ticking off of learning objectives via cognitive assessments. There was no space given to the nurturing of relationships, the importance of affect, or democratic, localized control over the learning process. Hence, its enactment within schools can be seen to directly contradict the empowerment discourse of *Tomorrow's Schools*, and constituted a dislocatory experience for Bruce, who left his post as a school principal soon afterwards. However, he retained a strong belief in the transformative potential of art, together with the importance of communicating his philosophies to other practitioners, and began a website in the 1990s. In 2008 the website developed into the Leading and Learning blog, described on its homepage as an “opportunity to share ideas about ways to transform schooling as we know it”. The blog allows Bruce to convey his ideas about environmental teaching to a new generation of teachers, and he continues to blog weekly, confiding that it is now “part of my purpose in life to write a blog”.



Also published on Leading and Learning is a weekly list of global readings aimed at education professionals, compiled by Bruce's friend and former school principal Allan. Allan also provides technical assistance for Leading and Learning, together with Networkkonnet. The latter blog is written by Kelvin, who was a school inspector prior to the Tomorrow's Schools reforms, but left his position, perceiving that the programme was aimed at a centralisation of power, while espousing the rhetoric of local democratic control. In a talk he gave in Taranaki with Bruce in the audience, Kelvin issued an early warning (mostly unheeded at the time) that the reforms were merely "replacing bureaucrats with technocrats".

Following Tomorrow's Schools the Schools Inspectorate was reorganised into the Education Review Office (ERO), with a much narrower scope, centred on ensuring the newly self-managing schools remained "steerable" by the state, through being held accountable to the targets and achievement objectives outlined in their charters. Instead of offering advice or support to schools, as had been the case with the Schools Inspectorate, ERO would become predominantly an instrument of audit, collecting quantitative data through a detached, neutral, objective standpoint. Prior to the changes, as a school inspector Kelvin was able to work in an advisory capacity with schools in order to promote his "Feeling-For" pedagogical approach, even though it was not a part of the official syllabus. He describes the approach below:

I developed the [...] Treaty of Waitangi resources, a set of 25; and I got paintings of all the scenes from the battles from various museums from around New Zealand, and I had what the Māori chiefs were saying at the time. My approach could take nine year olds into that and make it

meaningful for them, and have the teachers and the children crying at the end of it. That's the Feeling-For approach. But I did that because my mind was free.

Hence Kelvin felt that his approach offered more than merely transmitting the facts of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi at the cognitive register. Rather, it aimed at an immersive experience for the children, who would get as close as possible to experiencing what it would actually have been like to be there, through identifying with both the discourse and the emotions of the various participants, including the Māori chiefs. What it also showed was that (in contrast to Steve Maharey's call for "Personalising Learning") a unique, personally-meaningful educational experience could be engineered in the 1980s, before the widespread use of information technologies in the classroom.

In our interview Kelvin articulated this approach and the flexibility in the system which enabled it, as representative of a holistic curriculum (which he also termed "the holistic") which met its nemesis in the 1993 Curriculum Framework. Regarding the latter as representative of a philosophy "of control", Kelvin felt its implementation meant the previous system pioneered by Beeby could not be allowed to continue as "you can't control a holistic curriculum, because not everything in a holistic curriculum is measurable". In other words, because a holistic curriculum implicitly recognises that much of the knowledge we gain is at the affective, bodily or unconscious levels (Berman, 1981), it is inherently incompatible with neoliberalism's narrowing of value to that which can be verified through quantitative data (W. Davies, 2014).

After leaving the inspectorate, Kelvin took to publishing on the holistic and the Feeling-For approach, releasing a book entitled *Developmental Teaching and Learning*, together with a quarterly magazine intended for primary school staffrooms, the *Developmental Network Newsletter*. He produced the newsletter tirelessly throughout the 1990s, and included, together with examples of suggested classroom activities, Kelvin's opinions on the politics of education, including the history behind what he saw as the philosophy of control in education. In a particularly prescient article on what he terms the "positivist philosophy", written in 1989 and reproduced on Networkonnet in 2016, Kelvin recounted how in the post-World War II years education became dominated by "specialist academics who through measurement research had acquired a status as experts" (Smythe, 2016b, n.p.). For Kelvin the hegemonic position of positivism had been achieved through arguments around "the superiority of scientific knowledge over other forms of knowledge, in other words, the knowledge of qualitative academics and teachers" (Smythe, 2016b, n.p.).

More recently, one key antagonist on Networkonnet has been the education academic John Hattie, prompting Smythe to be coined by the *New Zealand Herald* in 2010 as "Hattie's Nemesis". Kelvin views him both as "a fraud" and "right at the heart" of the Government's project to control education. Now based at the University of Melbourne, Hattie was at the University of Auckland until 2011, where he pioneered a big-data method of meta-analysis borrowed from the field of medicine (see Hattie, 2008). For this he brought together data from more than 50,000 smaller quantitative studies conducted globally, to produce a list of 138 variables, each ranked by their influence on

student achievement, such as *quality of teaching* and *micro-teaching*, both of which influenced the development of the National Standards and class sizes policies. Smythe (2015b) cites Hattie as consistently naming his own knowledge as superior to “teachers by labelling them purveyors of opinion and myth”. By contrast, Hattie’s own work contains a “message of education certainty”, based as it is on large-scale quantitative calculation. This makes it very useful for “surface-skating media, politicians wanting simplistic ideas for control purposes, [and] to multi-national education corporations wanting an easily divisible product to sell” (Smythe, 2016a).

However, while articulating the rhetoric of certainty, on close scrutiny Kelvin argues that the ranking results that Hattie produced are empirically problematic, as they attempt to apply research findings from highly diverse international contexts and apply them to the specifics of New Zealand classrooms. For example, “Hattie’s ranking *quality of teaching*... came solely from student ratings by college and university students”, rather than the actual experiences of schoolchildren. While asserting that anyone who interrogated his research in any detail would find it “rubbish” as he had, Kelvin maintains that it is Hattie’s position within the knowledge hierarchy which prevents others from doing so.<sup>26</sup> This structure includes “other [quantitative] researchers” (interview), the media, government and private interests, who use him as their “reflexive go-to person”; a lofty position from which he is able to “pronounc[e] on everything put to him, supposedly from a research basis, but really just from opinion” (Smythe, 2015b). As we saw

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<sup>26</sup> Hattie’s (2008) book *Visible Learning* has come under criticism from within education academia. See Terhart (2011), who points out that “Qualitative studies are not considered, and methodological problems and debates are neglected” (p. 426).

with the debates on class sizes in the previous chapter, the *Dominion Post* drew on Hattie's authoritative position in order to cast a policy devised by Treasury as backed by educational research, thereby discrediting the NZEI's arguments that economic institutions should "stick to their knitting".

While certainly acting as a thorn in the side of Hattie, the Government, and often the education unions, Kelvin now cuts an increasingly isolated figure. With Kelvin and Bruce both now in their 70s, in our interview Allan lamented a lack of strong political voices emerging on the blogosphere, and several interviewees described a situation whereby older, more experienced school principals, who have experience of an education system imbued with a purpose beyond "achievement...targets, and raising standards", are increasingly reaching retirement age. This would appear to indicate a generational embodiment of sedimented logics, whereby the contingent origins of the current conjuncture, and earlier struggles between an instrumental view of education and a holistic one, are in danger of being forgotten.

However, as will be outlined, the key tenets of the holistic, intertwined with a social democratic education rationale, remain strong within the personal philosophies of several of my interviewees, with many viewing the 2007 New Zealand Curriculum as an important, institutionally embedded symbol of this enduring ethos. And, as will be described in the next section, the communicative campaigns of the NZEI in the three-year period following the introduction of National Standards also drew heavily on these values.

## **NZEI campaigns 2010-13: inscribing the ethos in activist practice**

This section examines four campaigns which involved the NZEI in differing organizational aspects: *Hands Up For Learning* and *Stand Up For Kids* were primarily media campaigns, focused on communicating to the public and the membership an alternative vision for education, while class sizes and in particular the Boards Taking Action Coalition saw the union working in a more behind the scenes facilitation role. However, this is not to say that the latter two campaigns did not involve communicative aspects, but simply that they were manifested in different forms. I discuss the four campaigns chronologically in order to illustrate a developing strategy focused on articulating the shared ethical values of the membership, overlapping these values with those of parents, providing identificatory spaces of belonging for those involved in the actions and campaigns, and identifying a unificatory antagonist, eventually embodied in the horrific figure of *the GERM*. This period thereby saw the NZEI transition from a relatively participative and collaborative relation to government, towards an identity of a combative, political, campaigning union, employing a populist articulatory logic.

### *Hands Up For Learning and the bus tour campaign: 2010*

The Education (National Standards) Amendment Act 2008 was assented through parliament on 16 December 2008. However, the policy had been “little more than a slogan before the 2008 election” (Thrupp & Easter, 2012, p. 10) and the legislation itself (New Zealand Government, 2008), enacted under urgency with no select committee scrutiny, contained few solid details

of how it would work on the ground. Hence the policy remained in development for the majority of 2009, officially launched by John Key and Anne Tolley on 23 October of that year. The following month an information package was distributed to all primary and intermediate schools, including a timeline which expected them to “prepare to work with the National Standards from term 1 2010” (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 1). Having been planned and designed in a rather clandestine fashion<sup>27</sup>, the full implications of the policy for their teaching membership only began to be recognized from that point onwards by the NZEI hierarchy. Historically, the union had generally “aimed at promoting policy change within education through negotiation and discussion, rather than by the use of militant tactics” (L. Gordon, 1992, p. 25), within the context of a close professional relationship with the Ministry of Education<sup>28</sup>. Despite the technocratization of policy development during the 1980s and 90s, this close relationship was in the process of being re-established during the 1999-2008 Labour government, and continued relatively unproblematically during the first year of the subsequent National government. Comforted by reassurances that the results to be compared under the new standards would be based on local qualitative teacher judgments (OTJs), rather than standardized tests (as has been implemented in most other Anglophone nations), the sector generally remained cautiously hopeful “until the standards landed on their desk” (Stephanie).

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<sup>27</sup> Thrupp and Easter (2012) wrote that the standards were “developed hastily and without much consultation, in stark contrast to the long history of collaborative policy-making processes that New Zealand teachers had willingly participated in and come to expect” (p. 24).

<sup>28</sup> Prior to 1989 the Ministry of Education was known as the Department of Education.

The launch of National Standards could therefore be defined as a “dislocatory event” (Howarth, 2000) which acts to “disturb identities” (Dellagnelo, Böhm, & Mendonça, 2014), because the existing discursive order cannot appropriate it within its frames of reference. The event then provides a “foundation on which new [more political] identities are constituted” (Dellagnelo et al., 2014, p. 144). Underlying concerns which had circulated “around the narrowing of the curriculum and the labelling of children” (Stephanie) now began to be articulated through a clearer, oppositional voice.

Soon after the launch, the NZEI issued a press release, warning that “the Standards will narrow the curriculum, undermine children’s broader learning and achievement and lead to [the] creation of simplistic school league tables” (New Zealand Educational Institute, 2009). These concerns around the profound impact of the policy on primary education were amplified by the Government’s (perceived as rushed) timetable for implementation, allocating very little time for discussion or the gathering of data on the success or otherwise of the policy within a localized, trial environment. Within this context, the NZEI management team planned a bus tour campaign which would pivot around the delivery of a petition to parliament calling for the standards to be trialled, “before you make all the kids guinea pigs” (Stephanie). Just a month and a half following the official launch, on 14 December 2009, the decision was made to run two busses from either end of the country, from the beginning of term 1 in February 2010 – one starting from Bluff in the far south and the other from Kaitaia in the far north - to meet in Wellington in March for the delivery of the petition to parliament.

The symbolically reverberating spectacle of the bus tour was complemented



by a *Hands Up For Learning: Trial National Standards Not Our Kids* media campaign, informed by research around the overlapping concerns of parents and teachers around the policy. The campaign slogan and logo (see figure 3 below) were thereby designed to connect with these shared anxieties. The presentation in the poster of a colourful diversity of children’s arms and hands draws links to a child-centred education ethos, which celebrates human diversity and plurality, seen to be under threat by the cold statistical evaluations of National Standards. In this way, the design points to a vision of diversity, abundance and plurality denied by an overly scientific and instrumental approach to human beings, which would sooner experiment on the lives of children than trial a policy.



Figure 3: “Hands Up For Learning: Trial National Standards, Not Our Kids” poster (reproduced with permission from the New Zealand Educational Institute collection - <http://heritage.nzei.org.nz/>).

The announcement of the bus tour inadvertently prompted a more antagonistic media strategy from the National government, whereby the “gloves were off” (Frances). This change of rhetorical direction was centred on the Anne Tolley and John Key joint press conference on 2 February 2010,

discussed in Chapter 6. Faced with the launch of a campaign which threatened their preferred media optics around the policy, and therefore potentially its meaning in the public sphere, government rhetoric was widely perceived to return “to an old-fashioned union-bashing stance” (Martin). Rather ironically, this stance contributed to the sedimentation of the newly forming “campaigning, political union” (Frances) identity, and the NZEI was now in the process of transitioning into the powerful and combative organization it was depicted as being. While the press conference articulated a break between the interests of teachers and parents in relation to the signifiers of accountability and transparency, the bus tour placed the focus on localised connections to shared experiences within school contexts, and the school’s role as a community hub.

While ostensibly a campaign centred on the instrumental aim of delivering a petition to Parliament with as many signatures as possible, the bus tour became more about embodying a sense of affective belonging for those who participated in it, forging lasting identificatory links between parents, teachers and the union. The following extract is transcribed from the NZEI video “Hands Up For Learning delegation reaches Parliament” (New Zealand Educational Institute, 2010), where three teachers who participated in the bus tour narrate their experiences on camera:

### **Campaign stories**

*Teacher 1:* I went on the bus tour for one day and it was amazing. It was so positive to be with other activists.

*Teacher 2:* Just overwhelming. There was a lot of concern from the

parents, who were all more than happy to sign that petition.

*Teacher 3:* The thing I really liked the most was when we went to one of the schools, and then the principal walked us into a hall and it was full of parents.

*Teacher 1:* And then to come up here today to stand at parliament and cheer for everybody and hold placards from schools that I know really well was really amazing and I had lots of goose-bumps, especially with the Haka.

While the petition is referred to by Teacher 2, the overall focus of these accounts is not the instrumental concern of impacting government policy. Instead, through adjectives such as “overwhelming”, they capture a constitutive experience – the exhilaration of being involved in something larger than themselves, which connects them to an ethically invested activism, potentially transcending normative structural barriers between teachers and parents. At the same time the petition functions as the orientating name of this action, into which both parents and teachers could inscribe their “concern” that a shared common was under attack, and demonstrate a “happiness” to defend it. The “goose-bumps” recalled by Teacher 1 evoke what Dean (2016) describes as “affective intensities” (p. 20) experienced in “crowd events” (p. 28); a raw connective energy, “immediately embodied...in the skin” (Massumi, 1996, p. 219), which can be later channelled into political action.

The accounts of the three teachers can therefore be seen as analogous to the experiences of those involved in the 2011 Occupy protests, when participants

described the excitement of being brought together around common values, within collective spaces which acted as a temporary buffer to everyday subjective pressures. J. Gilbert (2014) argues that such spaces allow the establishment of social relations outside of the “commodifying and alienating logic of the market” (p. 177). Thus Teacher 3’s enthralled reaction to a “hall...full of parents” who had not only signed the petition, but were keen to become involved in the bus tour campaign, can be viewed as at least partly a response to the breaking down of the rigid dichotomous framing of opposed provider-consumer interests, linked only through a relation of market-accountability.

The bus tour also established a common reference point for teachers and parents to talk about the policy after it left their specific locales. Frances relayed that individual teachers would often feel that they lacked the authority to approach the subject before the tour, even with parents whom they knew relatively well. When in town, union staff engaged parents and teachers together in discussions which linked an abstract, complex policy to personal narratives, with many parents articulating an awareness of children in their community who would be labelled as well-below the standard. Connections to a sense of community engagement for parents were strengthened with practices such as inviting iwi leaders and local MPs to the school visits, the writing of school community statements to be delivered to parliament (see figure 4), together with the regular holding of forums to discuss the policy.



Figure 4: School community statements at parliament (reproduced with permission from the New Zealand Educational Institute collection - <http://heritage.nzei.org.nz/>).

Another key shared reference point was created through the “symbolic capital” (Bourdieu, 1989) of media exposure, whereby the tour generated a spectacle which elevated the public status of the campaign (Coudry, 2012). Frances described how parents would see the tour on television and then come to them in person asking for further information. This was not completely by accident, with the timings of the tour being designed to fit with both the routines of parents and journalistic practices, as Stephanie outlines below:

As we stopped we kind of had a photo opportunity for the media, because we had a good billboard you know? It had the logo of the school with a parent standing there signing the petition; so that was a ready-made photo for every local paper.

As shown in figure 5 below, the branded bus and matching attire of the tour created a “ready-made” photo opportunity for journalists seeking to construct a visual hook for their readers (Fairclough, 1995). The visually appealing *Hands Up for Learning* logo, emblazoned on the side of busses, high-vis vests and t-shirts, could be easily juxtaposed with school logos and pictures of

parents signing the petition, providing an instantaneous visual summary of the story for readers. This easy embeddedness within journalistic practices, established the NZEI as the “other side to the government” on education policy from that point onwards, providing increasingly pressured journalists with a quick answer to the question of “who are we going to get?” (Ian) in order to construct a balanced article.



*Figure 5: NZEI staff member interviewed by Mainland (TV 2) during the National Standards bus tour (reproduced with permission from the New Zealand Educational Institute collection - <http://heritage.nzei.org.nz/>).*

Around the same time as the bus tour, a group of ten principals involved in both the NZEI and NZPF’s campaigns were devising a new strategy for further dissolving the antagonistic frontier between teachers and parents. While the bus tour raised public awareness that National Standards was a political issue, established good media relations, and galvanized a proportion of the membership, pressure was beginning to mount on schools to alter their charters to include National Standards targets by mid-2011. In other words, the policy was on its way to becoming embedded within school practices and routines, (see Thrupp & Easter, 2012; Thrupp & White, 2013), where it would

become much more difficult to resist. Imbued with a sense of urgency, this group of principals perceived that a more direct-action form of campaigning would be required.

*The Boards Taking Action Coalition (BTAC): 2010-11*

BTAC was conceived as a grass-roots movement with a specific focus: garnering school boards to pass a motion “to refuse to include National Standards [targets] in their school charters that they have to report the Ministry” (Bill). However much like the bus tour, while grounded in this instrumental objective, its meaning expanded over its ten-month existence, becoming a relatively open space of inscription for a diversity of identifications and demands. This included becoming a space of collectivity and belonging for principals and other board members, brought together through activist practice and shared experiences of denied ethical values. The cohesion of this nascent collective identity was increased further through the development of a siege mentality, as increasingly harsh sanctions were imposed on the rebellious boards by the Ministry of Education.

As outlined previously, in 1989 New Zealand’s roughly 2,000 primary schools became self-managing (Wylie, 2012). With the local education boards disestablished, a board of trustees, populated by and elected by parents<sup>29</sup>, became responsible for budgets, policy, and the hiring of teachers and principals. Another key responsibility was to be the maintenance and

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<sup>29</sup> The requirement for school boards of trustees to be composed of parents of children attending that school was later changed. Membership can now be composed of anyone from the wider public, but who must be *elected* by the parents of that school. Together with elected members of the public, the board is also composed of the school principal, a staff representative and a student representative (for year 9 and above) (Ministry of Education, 2016b).

annual submission of the school charter to the Ministry of Education. This is a statement of values, objectives and targets designed to function as an anchor between the “goals and aspirations” of the school’s community and “the government's priorities” (Ministry of Education, 2016a). Twenty years later, National Standards then added the further requirement that “schools include targets for student achievement in relation to the National Standards in their 2011 charters” (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 1).

It was therefore a deferral of this new requirement, and agreement to a public statement articulating the reasons why, which 225 boards signed up to in November 2010<sup>30</sup>. The below is an extract from that statement:

The National Standards are fundamentally flawed, confusing and unworkable and our school has no confidence in them. Therefore, we will defer setting achievement targets based on National Standards until these concerns are addressed. We will, however, continue to use reliable data to set high expectations for our children which reflects the intent of the New Zealand Curriculum...

In this extract the underlying philosophical premises behind National Standards are not challenged – we see a reproduction of the need to set “achievement targets” with “high expectations”, together with their measurement and monitoring through “reliable data”. “Concerns” were instead focused around practicalities – the difficulty for schools of

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<sup>30</sup> There were two different options on the form that was distributed to school boards. Option 1 included both an expression of no confidence in the Standards *and* the action of deferring setting student achievement targets against National Standards in 2011. Option 2 allowed school boards to just express no confidence. It is unclear now how many chose either option at what stage, but we can say with some certainty that 225 initially chose option 1 (see Binning (2010)).



implementing a “flawed, confusing and unworkable” policy. The sign-up sheet also included an appeal to “the Government to engage in a rebuild of the standards in partnership with the education sector”. Therefore, from its emergence, BTAC was framed by attempts to underplay the political significance of its actions, in order to broaden its appeal to school principals and boards generally regarded as conservative in outlook and understandably anxious around the implications of refusing to implement government policy. Hence the stress on the passive “deferral”, rather than rejection, boycott, or even rebellion (more active verbs which were used in the media).

At the same time however, the emphasis on the confusing and unworkable nature of the policy’s documentation which had been sent to schools drew on widespread unease around the exclusion of the sector from the development of the standards, resulting in a policy that was impracticable at the ground level. This strategy could be seen to be largely successful; the 225 schools that agreed to have their names released in the *New Zealand Herald* on 3 November 2010 represented over 10% of all primary schools<sup>31</sup>. While concrete figures are unavailable, interviewees have indicated that this number reached over 500 at the movement’s peak, or perhaps even as many as a third of all primary schools (approximately 650).

Despite the articulation of a depoliticizing approach to schools and the media, the movements’ brainchild, Perry, revealed in interview that there was a deliberate oppositional strategy developed in the “backroom” which sought to undermine the easy assumption of the parent voice by the National

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<sup>31</sup> Figures for 2011 from the Ministry of Education (2017a) calculated 2,007 primary schools in New Zealand.

government. He recognised that there was a lack of institutional voices for parents in education policy, which journalists could seek the opinion of when looking for the “other side” to a story. Despite one of the key rationales behind the 1989 reforms being parental empowerment, the Parent Advocacy Council was disestablished by the National government in 1991 (PPTA Executive, 2008). NZSTA (New Zealand School Trustee’s Association, also established in 1989) was left as the only remaining organisation to represent the parent voice, and it had the much narrower remit of the provision of professional development training to board members, relying on the Government for the majority of its funding to facilitate that role (probably meaning that the organization would be highly unlikely to criticize National Standards). Perhaps recognising that their position as the representatives of school boards was under threat, NZSTA were reportedly “most unhappy when BTAC took off” (Frances), and immediately sought to undermine it.

Perry established a tight initial planning group of around ten school principals, who were all known personally to him through his professional network. The group were all considered by him “to be strong and effective as...local leader[s]” and perhaps as importantly, vocally oppositional to the National Standards policy. Resultantly this group were much more political in outlook than suggested by that official public statement. All were members of both the NZEI and NZPF (Principals Association), and many had been regularly politically active in the former. However, while receiving small amounts of assistance from the two organisations, such as access to email databases or help with press releases, Perry was keen to retain the institutional independence of BTAC, privately and publically, in order to avoid as much

as possible becoming represented as a politically-motivated, union-linked organisation.

Lacking access to the kinds of staff and resources enjoyed by the NZEI and NZPF meant BTAC was reliant on the work of the leadership group of principals, together with two key parent-spokespeople who were the board chairs at Island Bay School in Wellington and Balmoral School in Auckland. While attempts were made to undermine the authenticity of BTAC as a parental voice, when it was revealed that one of those spokespeople had links to the Labour Party, such educated, confident and articulate spokespeople generally helped to progress the cause. Their making of statements in the media outlining strong concerns with how the policy will narrow children's education, threatened to disrupt easy rhetorical divides and representations which applied self-centred motivations to the education sector's protests.

Furthermore, their mediated public presence gave the movement a degree of symbolic capital and encouraged other parental board members to contact them for information on joining the movement. Jane describes below how she became a central communications hub for smaller urban pockets scattered around the country:

...their boards would phone me, come to me, Google me, ask me for information I could give out, you know ask for things. So I remember going to Palmerston North and speaking to boards up there. And I spoke to people from Auckland on the phone from boards, members of boards up there, spoke to people in Christchurch, in Nelson, about what we were doing, gave them the PowerPoint presentation that I had

used in Palmerston North, that sort of thing.

This networking and feeling of community was crucial for non-education professional board members (see footnote 28 on board-membership) who often supported the principles behind the action, but felt isolated and uncertain as to the legalities, and were coming under increasing pressure from the Ministry of Education to submit their amended charters (more of this below). Often school principals would also feel isolated, as not all were lucky enough to have a supportive board who shared their political and educational viewpoints. Even if the board were sympathetic, they could be located within a geographical locale surrounded by other principals who were keen supporters of National Standards:

...we became quite isolated too. Some principals got on the bandwagon with National Standards, and so [...] from my point of view it was really a support group too. You needed other people around. (Malcolm)

Malcolm captures how the BTAC movement became an identificatory space of belonging for principals who may be alienated by a perception that others within the sector were taking uncritical stances towards the policy. In such relatively isolated circumstances BTAC “was a very good mechanism for talking to people and keeping people’s spirits up, so you didn’t think you were the only person in the world fighting this fight” (Frances). Hence the feeling of being in opposition to sections of the media, the Government and even others within the sector worked to solidify the internal collective identity of those involved, united around a care ethic: they were “doing it for the good

of the kids and the learning” (Malcolm). A sense of community developed through shared ethical values and resistant practices, with the latter providing a space of inscription for the former.

However, this bunker mentality was reliant for its robustness on antagonistic discourse from government and amplifying media institutions. Such discourse was exemplified in Fairfax Media’s provocative headline “Rebel school boards could be sacked, says Key”, released just one day following BTAC’s inaugural announcement, on 4 November 2010. While what Key actually stated, as quoted in the article, was that the sacking of boards was “a possibility” as a “last resort”, the headline belied the limits of the movement in two directions. In one direction it relied on a perception of outside hostility to cohere a geographically and ideologically dispersed membership (which the Government realised and promptly stopped making such public statements). The other limit was created by placing schools at the centre of a movement which sought to challenge government power. Schools, although purportedly self-managing, are ultimately public institutions, directly reliant on the Ministry of Education to pay for salaries, facilities and professional development. Those schools who remained unintimidated by the withdrawal of the latter were sent increasingly threatening letters, signed by the Secretary for Education. The final letter invoked section 78J of the Education Act (New Zealand Government, 1989), to legally mandate the board to provide proof of the implementation of National Standards within the school. Failure to do so within a specified timeframe would indeed lead to the sacking of the board and the appointment of a commissioner to take over their responsibilities and oversee compliance.

This threat struck at the heart of school boards' constitutional remit to ensure the protection of their staff and the best level of education for their students. The BTAC leadership team felt that this could not be guaranteed following the appointment of a commissioner, and Perry, feeling a weight of responsibility, recognising that he "didn't want to see schools in BTAC afflicted with that kind of outcome", advised the membership to make the required changes to their charters in order to include National Standards targets, and made a public statement confirming this on 8 September 2011. While the concession was made to the Ministry's demands, the revised charters included "a disclaimer stating that the targets have been met and imposed by the Ministry of Education against the expressed wishes of the board of trustees" (Perry quoted on Morning Report, 2011).

While ultimately failing in its instrumental aim of stopping, or at least stalling, the policy's implementation in schools, at the levels of the affective and the constitutive, as with the bus tour, BTAC should be viewed as successful, as it forged strong identificatory ties between a community of principals and board members. However, unlike the tour, the embattled collective identity failed to interpolate the wider teacher constituency or significant sections of the public, a limit which ultimately impinged on its ability to construct a more universalising identity. However, fitting in well to a David versus Goliath narrative, with individual schools standing up to an unresponsive and bureaucratic government to assert their right to independence as enshrined in *Tomorrow's Schools*, BTAC was successful in capturing media attention and did contribute to increasing awareness of the political and educational issues around National Standards and education more generally. It therefore

contributed further to an already politicized discursive terrain, which laid the rhetorical ground for the class size protests.

### *Class sizes: 2012*

Despite the dissolution of BTAC and the enactment of National Standards without a trial period, the NZEI's campaigning was successful in opening up a "public conversation about what success looked like for kids" (Stephanie). This "conversation" posed a question which could not be answered, or a demand which could not be absorbed within hegemonic articulations, therefore disrupting their logic: would we conceive a successful progression through school through the narrow prism of quantitative achievement measures, or would such a success be conceived more broadly, and include the development of creative potential and the enactment of shared values?

Consequently, 2010-12 witnessed an accumulative politicization of education in New Zealand, with the latter year becoming coined the National Party's "annus horribilis" (O'Connor, 2017), because they saw their education policies come under sustained criticism on a variety of fronts. However, it was the backdown over a proposed increase to class size ratios in June 2012 which perhaps undermined their authority to the greatest extent. It could even be seen as a watershed moment, with the implementation of policy through top-down models which excluded the input and knowledge of the sector gradually seen to be replaced by a more collaborative approach which "actually [listens to] what the evidence says" (Tom). Opinions on whether subsequent policies such as 2014's Investment for Educational Success

represented a change in direction for government policy varied within the interviewees<sup>32</sup>, however, there was a general recognition that following their experiences of National Standards, charter schools and in particular class sizes, that the Government lost the will to make school education a politicized battleground to the same degree.

During 2012 the NZEI took advantage of this political moment by functioning as a central node within a broader network of education organizations, which successfully articulated a clear and consistent message on class sizes that resonated with parents and the wider public. Initially the message coalesced in opposition to the instrumental coupling of education to the economy, and was articulated by the NZEI in a swift reaction to the public release of Treasury's *Briefing to the Incoming Minister of Finance: Increasing Economic Growth and Resilience*, in February 2012. Quickly interpreting the wider significance for the sector of the proposed "efficiencies" in that report, the release ran with the title "Education should not be a government cash cow". Positioning Treasury's proposals as both "radical reform" and a "money-making scheme", the release sounded early warnings on the recommendations to increase "class sizes and student-teacher ratios". Coupling together "parents and teachers" in opposition to Treasury and the Finance Minister, intuitive knowledge that class size *does* matter, gleaned from seeing "what happens in classrooms everyday", is implicitly valorized, and contrasted against education outsiders from the fields of finance and politics, who reduce education to a means of economic growth. Hence we can perceive the beginnings of a populist logic which would later more

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<sup>32</sup> As discussed in Chapter 4, this policy was not included in the analysis.



explicitly dichotomize the discursive terrain around the defence of a New Zealand educational ethos.

This work at the public level was complemented by moves in the background to bring together a coherent sector-wide oppositional voice, through meetings conducted “in a number of places” (Ian). Wary that certain groups, including NZSTA, had failed to support the NZEI in their opposition to National Standards, it was immediately made clear that on this issue such a failure would lead to exclusion from the nascent coalition:

...first of all we got together; we had a discussion about the policy we had a discussion about the policy position and worked it out; anyone who didn't adhere to an oppositional view was invited not to continue with this discussion, and there are a couple of organisations that were sort of iffy about it, generally everybody thought it was a good sense thing; to have united voice around this would be very strong. (Ian)

Hence “The G7” was formed, comprising of seven professional organisations, which, importantly, included the second largest organisation the PPTA (Post Primary Teachers Association) as well as the historically conservative organisations of SPANZ (Secondary Principals' Association of NZ) and NZSTA. The group also included the NZPF (New Zealand Principals Federation), who had formed a strategic relationship with the NZEI over their shared opposition to National Standards. Other organisations included the intermediate and middle school associations, who, following the release of details, rapidly perceived the disproportionate effect the policy would have on their membership.

Once institutional unity had been negotiated, it was symbolically displayed at a media conference in the NZEI's Wellington office on the 5 June 2012, where "television, newspapers [and] radio" (Ian) were all present. The accompanying media release from what announced itself as the Education Leadership Group confidently voiced that the policy was "collectively rejected by teachers, principals and Boards of Trustees". Assuming the rhetorical position of experts in educational matters, the release asserted that the proposals within the "Budget announcements, including increases in class size, are *educationally flawed [emphasis added]*". While also containing depoliticizing elements which encouraged collaboration, "the G7's" release included an implicit critique of the top-down, instrumental policy model and attempted to discursively isolate the Government on that issue. It urged them to "enter into immediate discussions with the joint sector leadership group [and] to listen to the combined voice of the school sector, parent and public opinion".

This confident laying claim to "parent and public opinion" had been established partly through a strategy whereby "on message" communications, in one format, had been sent to all of the parent and community networks linked to the seven organisations. As Ian put it, when you "had the profession walking together [you also] had huge numbers of parents walk with them". The message sent to parents and community groups included "what we were saying, why we were saying it [and] what you can do to help" (Ian), thereby including concrete actions that were grounded in the defence of New Zealand's education ethos, signified by "quality public education". Linked to this was a moral imperative to protect the most vulnerable children;

ironically, those most likely to suffer adversely from increases to class size ratios were *the one-in-five*.

That ethically resonant message, built on research conducted during the previous two years of National Standards campaigning, was designed to connect strongly to parental experiences “of big classes and not getting teacher time” (Ian), as well as their anxieties around their children’s access to a “quality” level of education within a public sector under pressure in the aftermath of the global financial crisis (J. O’Neill, 2011). This resonance with parental affects was combined with an emergent outrage and resentment regarding the undemocratic nature of the proposed policy (unlike National Standards it was not part of any election manifesto), its unfairness to those who cannot afford private education, and the relative simplicity of representing cuts to public services to those outside the education sector. In fact, this time, in contrast to National Standards, the education sector had simplicity and the populist ground of middle-New Zealand on their side. By contrast, the merits of the policy were being sold by an economist (Gabriel Makhoul) and an inexperienced and then little-known Minister of Education (Hekia Parata), and was justified through the technocratic language of efficiency savings gleaned through investment in “quality teaching” with vague promises of future payback.

Emergent feelings of indignation increased when “number-crunchers” at the unions, in schools and in the blogosphere made public that some intermediate schools could be forced to lose all of their technology teachers and even close

their technology centres altogether<sup>33</sup>. Paul P (an intermediate school principal) described how he was faced with a choice of either losing three technology teachers or increasing the size of the other classes to 38-39 students from 30. The revelation that the Government's reassurances were based on flawed calculations not only swiftly united the intermediate sector, but also led organically to a strategy whereby the local community were urged to contact the National Government and go onto social media to encourage others to do so. Paul also contacted his local MP and Labour Education Spokesperson Chris Hipkins, whose leader David Shearer then took the opportunity to make a televised statement from Paul's school, thus lending his political and media capital to the cause.

Unlike National Standards and charter schools, which put most pressure onto schools in economically disadvantaged areas by expecting them to raise their standards with no funding increase, the proposed ratio changes would equally affect those in middle-class areas. Principals of "very mainstream, leafy suburb schools" (Tom), who may have been relatively hesitant over the political implications of the BTAC movement, immediately perceived the impact that the policy would have on them, and rapidly mobilized their (potentially National voting) parental bases.

Middle class indignation intensified through the online sharing of memes such as figure 6 below. This quoted an interview that John Key gave to *New Zealand Listener* magazine in 2005, when he detailed that the main reason for

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<sup>33</sup> New Zealand's intermediate system means that specialist technology teachers such as cooking, art and hard materials for years 7-8 are funded at a ratio of 1 to 120 students. This means that intermediate schools often have technology centres which students from other full primary schools (years 1-8) are funded to attend.

sending his own children to private schools was due to their smaller class sizes. This not only alluded to the Government's funding of private schools (increased by 22% in 2012 to \$60m per year, actually more than the \$43m that would have been saved by increasing class sizes in public schools), but also threatened to undermine the central fantasmatic narrative structuring National's policy platform; a vision of a beatific utopia whereby all children have equal access to educational opportunities.



Figure 6: Internet meme of John Key which circulated on social media.

The sharing of memes was then quickly followed by protests around the country, organised relatively independently by parents and the wider public through social media. The protests were unconfined to the main (more liberal) urban centres, including smaller regional centres “up and down the country” (John), often in areas surrounded by rural populations (a demographic which recently has tended to vote National)<sup>34</sup>. Tom related an

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<sup>34</sup> See <http://www.scoop.co.nz/ElectionMap/> for a map of the 2011 party vote by General Electorates. National won the most party votes in all electorates apart from those confined to urban areas.

anecdote whereby he spoke “to a mid-40s dairy farmer... blue-as [National voting], in Bill English’s [Minister of Finance] electorate [who] hated that class size change”. Furthermore, Federated Farmers, an advocacy organisation for the agricultural sector, spoke out against the policy, claiming that the ratio changes would adversely affect children in small rural schools.

Added to this pressure were opinion polls showing around 80% of the public against the policy (Nixon, 2012). National backbench MPs began to become concerned about their re-election prospects, which added to the pressure inside Parliament from the Māori Party and United Future (two of National’s three coalition partners), who issued critical public statements. On the 7 June 2012, following consultation with the alarming poll numbers, the decision was made by cabinet to backtrack on the policy.

### *Stand Up For Kids, Protect Our Schools/Fight the GERM: 2012-13*

Published shortly after the Government’s decision to scrap the class size policy, the winter 2012 edition of the NZEI’s quarterly magazine *Education Aotearoa* featured a cover article entitled “The war on education: Frontline report”. Sedimenting the rhetorical division between educational insiders and outsiders with a war metaphor, the article warned that although “the government backdown on increasing class sizes is a victory for educators and school communities, it means just one attack on public education has been prevented. More battles remain” (Nixon, 2012, p. 10). In his forward to the edition the National Secretary Paul Goulter repeated this language of imminent onslaught by warning teachers that they “face a barrage of ills to

come”. The coming tribulations are part of a reform regime named “The GERM”, which would include “charter schools, performance pay, national standards, league tables and public-private partnerships” (Nixon, 2012, p. 10), all of which are perceived to have increased inequality in nations such as the US, where they are already well established. By contrast, as National President Ian Leckie claimed in his forward, Finland enjoys “a system that encourages teachers and students to try new ideas and approaches...to put curiosity, imagination and creativity at the heart of learning... to create a love of learning and to cultivate the development of the whole child”.

The two-sided campaign: *Stand Up For Kids, Protect Our Schools/Fight the GERM*, then developed following the unions’ September 2012 conference, at which the Finnish education academic Pasi Sahlberg, creator of the phrase Global Education Reform Movement (GERM), was invited to speak. In a blog post released around the same time, Sahlberg argued that Finland, which “has remained quite uninfected to viruses of...GERM” (Sahlberg, 2013, n.p.), places “confidence in teachers and principals as high professionals”, and pursues education policy changes incrementally, linked to “commonly accepted values and shared social vision”. This was situated in contrast to the Anglophone nations, who are seen to view education primarily in terms of enabling economic productivity and competitiveness.

While in one sense a continuation of the themes of *Hands Up For Learning*, the new campaign developed these further by creating a more concrete identificatory position for the inscription of the ethical values of New Zealand’s primary education professionals. Like the earlier campaign, ethical investment pivoted on a central value-position: the protection of New

Zealand’s public schooling ethos. However crucially, Sahlberg’s *the GERM* now added a *disidentificatory* agent which provided stronger boundaries for the in-group, through the act of exclusion. From the beginning of 2013 the need to “Fight the GERM” had its own campaign page (see figure 7 below), and was being summarised as a global, ideologically-driven agenda which seeks to create crises within public education systems, in order to “impose a business model” (New Zealand Educational Institute, 2013).

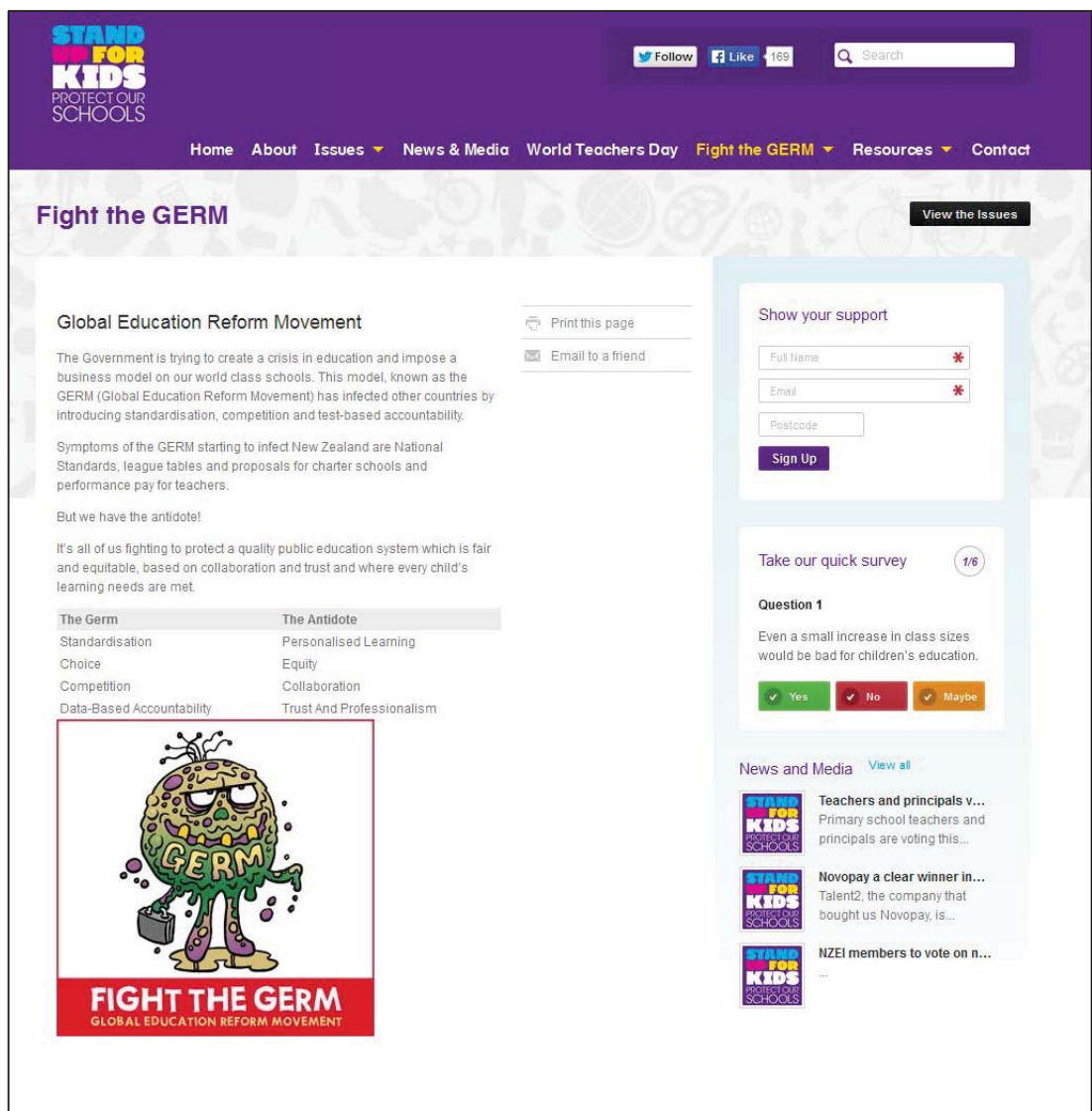


Figure 7: The NZEI's “Fight the GERM” campaign page (<http://www.standupforkids.org.nz/g-e-r-m/>).



Following Sahlberg's appearance at the conference, the leadership team realised *the GERM* could be a useful metaphor for the representation of "a whole bunch of complicated ideas" (Stephanie) to teachers which are relatively abstract in nature, such as *standardisation, choice, competition* and *data-based accountability* (those transposed against New Zealand's educational values in figure 7 above). The union's management hired a cartoonist to initially draft a different figure for each of the four concepts listed under "The GERM" column, but they quickly realised that just one would be more far more effective, settling on the grotesque character shown above. In discourse theoretical terms, *the GERM* condensed a whole series of antagonisms around education, becoming a symbolic enemy which provided the horrific fantasmatic force for a populist articulatory logic which divided the terrain into two clear sides: the protectors of New Zealand's current "world class system", and private, foreign interests who threatened its values. Demonstrating that the populist logic is not restricted to the field of institutional politics, *the GERM* was placed as the central actor in a decline narrative, threatening the enjoyment of a mythical golden age of education for teachers. New Zealand's current school system is identified as "world class" because it is based on the progressive practices of *personalised learning, equity, collaboration, trust and professionalism*. However, the current failure of this "world class", exceptionalism identity is displaced to the insidious actions of *the GERM*, a "conservative effort to undermine public schooling, and to undermine the role that teachers have as being highly influential in this process". Hence the disempowerment of teaching professionals and the marginalization of their knowledges are inextricably

linked to a perception of a historic New Zealand public education identity under threat.

Evidence of the *SUFK/GERM* divide's political resonance came in early 2013, when the NZEI and the Ministry of Education entered negotiations for a new collective agreement. The union was dissatisfied with two particular demands made by the Ministry: handing the Secretary for Education the power to make alterations to collective agreements without prior negotiations, and a decrease in paid parental leave entitlements. By April 2013 the negotiations had stalled, prompting protests attended by approximately 10,000 teachers and members of the public nationwide, with the possibility of industrial action to follow. However, rather than being centred on the two industrial matters under dispute, with parental leave having a direct impact on the financial situation of a large proportion of their membership, a promotional poster for the protests, entitled "Why are educators marching today?" emphasized "the impact the Government's education policies are having on children and their learning". Instead of appealing to the financial interests of the collective membership, the appeal is to the "personal action frames" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), or ethical frameworks of individuals members who may not share a political ideology with other members, or who may feel that to prioritize the interests of their profession is selfish. Through this re-centring, the union's protest action is increased in moral legitimacy in the eyes of members who may not perceive themselves as politically active (Popiel, 2015) and potentially broadened in appeal to parents and the public (many of whom did attend the Wellington protest which I myself attended).

Imbued with a sense of moral purpose, the demonstration came to function as

a space of inscription for ethical signifiers. In the sign in figure 8 below, the “No” in the centre refuses the policies of National Standards, charter schools and performance-pay.<sup>35</sup> But what is also being refused is those policies’ denials of *trust, fairness, respect* and *love*. In this way, the NZEI, through organizing the protest, was in the process of transitioning towards our definition of a social movement union from Chapter 3. Through offering a space of ethical inscription and investment it was keeping open the possibility of a different, better society – the politicizing gap between being and ought to be.



Figure 8: Sign from Wellington protest at Parliament, 13 April 2013.

At these protests and at other meetings during this period, *Fight the GERM* appeared regularly reproduced as the cartoon figure, juxtaposed with *Stand Up For Kids, Protect Our Schools* on an official NZEI two-sided placard (see

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<sup>35</sup> Performance-pay has never actually been introduced as a policy by the current government, but has been continuously hinted at rhetorically as an intention within speeches, and the National Standards policy has established a framework for its possible future implementation.

figure 9 below). The placard embodied the dichotomization of the discursive terrain, and in sharp contrast to the disempowerment and ethical denial signified by *The GERM*, the verbal imperative within *Stand Up* mobilized positive political action. However, this was not mobilization which could be easily attributed to representations of union action as doctrinally prescribed and protective of narrow, selfish material interests. Instead, it was centred on the ethically-infused protection of *schools* and *kids*. While grounded in the everyday, particular experiences of teachers, the slogan also points to something much more universal, something intangible - thereby becoming a “name of the ethical” (Laclau, 2014). This is an ideal which, although impossible to ever achieve fully (there can never be completely stood up for kids or protected schools), can galvanize particular struggles, imbuing them with a higher moral purpose, by pointing towards the future possibility of ethical change which is currently denied by normative structures. The key to this process is that *schools* and *kids* are at the perfect distance between the particular and the universal (or the personal and the collective) – all teachers (and most parents) have a personal investment in their protection – while at the same time they reference a collectivity which lies beyond individual concerns (without asking teachers to submit to a collective ideology imposed from above).

While seemingly organic, the campaign was based on a purposeful strategy. As with *Hands Up For Learning*, the slogan was based on research around the overlapping values of the membership with the broader public. It was also perceived by the leadership to voice the historically established values of the institution in a more “front-footed way” (Paul G) than previously, with a clear

statement that “what we think is important is...*kids*” [*emphasis added*] (Ian). Hence, an action-orientated political message emerged which was aligned closely with what the management identified as the historically-mandated role for the union at the current conjuncture: the rejection of individualizing, self-centring, measuring and calculating logics. By drawing investment to the protection all kids and all schools, via the “individualized orientations” (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) of teachers and the public, standing up for kids and saving schools celebrated the achievements of the profession and school communities in collectivist terms, refusing to acknowledge that there are “good schools and bad schools” (Ian).

The campaign was not without its critics, however. Sarah, a teacher who is not a member of the NZEI, felt that the attempt to politically mobilize the membership around the universalizing name of *Stand Up For Kids, Protect Our Schools* moved too far from the particulars of teaching. What made teaching special for her – strong personal relationships, couldn’t be fully captured within a campaign slogan. Tom, who works in a strategic communications role for the PPTA, cautioned that the condensation effect of *the GERM* risked an over-simplification of the complex power struggles within and between the National government, the bureaucracies in Wellington and private interests. And Kelvin described the campaign as following a marketing logic which cynically seeks to trigger an emotional response in teachers, so that “the NZEI can get them to vote any way they like”.



Figure 9: Stand Up For Kids, Protect Our Schools/Fight the GERM placards being held up by members at an NZEI meeting (taken from <http://www.standupforkids.org.nz/>).

Despite these critiques, those behind the campaign such as Stephanie viewed it as an opportunity to build on the experimentation within *Hands Up For Learning* for the development of more democratic, less hierarchical channels of union communication. *SUFK* included a more concrete and coordinated online strategy, with a more strategic use of social media (see figure 10). While face-to-face communications through local work-site reps, regional meetings and national conferences remained the primary channel between head office and the membership, there was a broad recognition that the instantaneous nature of digital media was in danger of “bypassing very rapidly” (Tom) these more traditional means. The looser, informal networks constituted by the blogosphere and social media, through sheer speed of circulation, also created a danger of circumventing official channels, having a potentially detrimental effect on the authority and credibility of the NZEI and PPTA. Unconcerned about working relationships with government departments, popular online commentators (discussed in more detail in the next section) had the potential to frame the oppositional position with a more politically radical perspective - one which would be out of the control of the unions’ communications teams.

Developing a strong social media presence provided a potential avenue for

the engagement of members on the political processes impacting education, while attaining a degree of control over the direction of debates. As commented by one blogger Allan, many teachers find it difficult to find the time or the mental capacity to engage with the complex, global issues now impacting New Zealand education. With a job that is intense, emotionally draining and increasingly pressured, on top of family commitments, teachers often rely on their principal or union hierarchy to keep them informed. Facebook groups such as *Stand Up For Kids* offer a more flexible channel, fitted around busy lifestyles, which teachers can use to become more informed on issues such as media representations of policy (see figure 10). Additionally, the commenting function provides the ability for teachers to speak back to neoliberalized logics in a form that is simultaneously collective and individual. Through such “collective analysis” (Tie, 2017), the NZEI is constituted as a dynamic organization, able to absorb the experiences and informational updates of members without being reduced to them.

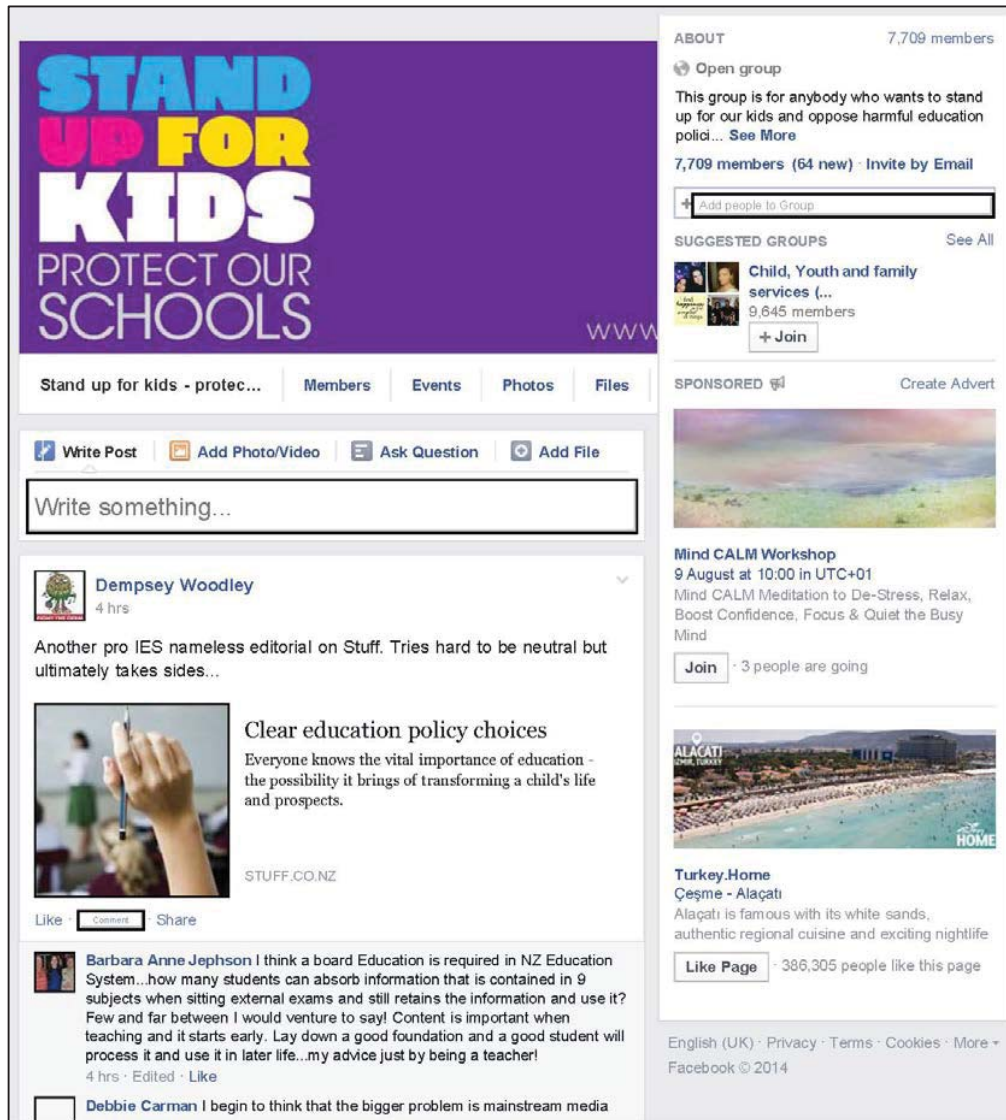


Figure 10: The Stand Up For Kids, Protect Our Schools Facebook group, showing a Fairfax editorial on the Investing for Educational Success policy being discussed (screenshot taken July 2014).

Many members also share posts of teaching practice which exemplify and celebrate shared holistic values. As argued by Brickner (2016), pictures of kids undertaking creative projects not directly related to increasing achievement can articulate a “feminist ethics of care”, placing emphasis on the nurturing of relations, together with curiosity, imagination and creativity. Further, such “articulations act as a form of political dissent and resistance” (p. 12), implicitly rejecting neoliberalized logics and the subjectifications of



the entrepreneurial self. Such mediated practices offer a “space of becoming” (Goodwin, 2011), functioning to both politicize and collectivize teaching identities.

And from the union's perspective, a more engaged and mobilised membership are able to make better informed decisions within their personal and professional networks, and are more likely to become involved in a local union branch. The well-frequented *Stand Up For Kids* Facebook group (possessing nearly 10,000 members at the time of writing), offers the NZEI a relatively low-cost empowerment and engagement route, in keeping with a broad democratising commitment towards “building capacity in members to do stuff themselves, rather than them thinking that it all happens in Wellington somehow” (Stephanie). The next section focuses on this micro-resistant, subjective level.

## **Narratives of resistance: politics, ethics and subjectivity**

In the first part of this section I aim to discuss the extent to which the New Zealand holistic educational ethos informed the interviewees' descriptions of their motivations for resistant practices. To what extent did subjective disidentifications against *the GERM*, or other names for neoliberalization, inform their justifications for the need to defend public education? Put differently, did they feel that the teaching sector's voice and vision for how education should work in New Zealand was being denied by the methods in which policy is currently formulated, and the ways in which education issues

are represented and framed in the mainstream media? If so, what alternative political values, pedagogical standpoints, ethical beliefs and educational philosophies motivate their activism, and what practices or policies best embody those values (and their denial)?

The next part of this section then explores how the participants rationalize these feelings of exclusion and denial, what they see as the historical mechanisms which reproduce it, and the extent to which they view social media and particularly blogging as offering alternative avenues for the voice of the teaching sector. The final part then illuminates the inherent risks involved in such forms of textual dissent, together with other forms of protest, for participants employed by institutions with a high public profile, such as school principals. I explore the strategies increasingly deployed at the private and micro levels, where the boundaries between resistance and submission become increasingly blurred.

*Identifications and disidentifications: symbols of contrasting philosophies*

A majority of the interviewees expressed a belief that the Government's programme of reforms since 2008 have been grounded in a philosophy or ideology which is alien to New Zealand's teaching traditions. Concurring with the analysis in Chapter 5, this ideology was generally understood as being a global initiative, influenced by private sector discourses, and that it privileged quantified measurement, accountability to performance indicators, and control over the workforce through extrinsic incentives and punitive sanctions, rather than intrinsic values and professional ethics. Introduced to

New Zealand during the 1980s and 90s, the ideology was seen to continue to be imposed from an external point in more recent times, exerting its dominance over the education field by excluding the voices of teachers, principals, and qualitative academics.

Specific members of the National Government were frequently named as embodying the ideology, such as the Minister of Education Hekia Parata, her predecessor Anne Tolley, Prime Minister John Key, and the Minister of Finance Bill English<sup>36</sup>. These politicians were perceived as driven by a desire to marketize all of the public sector, a process which failed to take into account the distinct complexities of education. Further, their collective handling of the implementation of the three policies discussed in Chapter 6 was broadly perceived as botched, heavy-handed and obstinate, largely due to a dogmatic belief in “increasing choice and hence competition between schools” (Paul G), which impinges on their ability to listen to diverse voices.

Having said that, attitudes towards the National party and its programme of policies varied between those currently union or university employed, who have regular contact with government officials, and those who do not, such as the bloggers. While there were overlaps, in very general terms the former tended to view the policy programme (in particular National Standards) as part of a populist opportunistic strategy with which to leverage electoral popularity, while also guided by discourses such as public choice and new public management. While the blogging group were more inclined to

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<sup>36</sup> When the interviews were conducted these were the current post-holders, however at the time of writing John Key had been replaced by Bill English as Prime Minister. Hekia Parata has also been replaced as Minister of Education by Nikki Kaye.

perceive a broader and more deliberate strategy to undermine public education through gradual privatization, the former perceived that marketization was not necessarily “about deriving profit” for private companies, but more about enacting a “neoliberal faith in competition” (Paul G).

Stephanie, one of the key architects of the *Fight the GERM* campaign in her role as Director of Communications at NZEI, acknowledged that this faith in the disciplinary power of competition for the education sector was recently waning within the Minister of Education Hekia Parata, if not the Finance Minister Bill English. Reflecting a global discursive shift away from *the GERM* model<sup>37</sup>, Parata was seen as gradually coming “to recognise that approach doesn’t work, and [to be] moving her language, and her framing and her whole thinking into probably a much more positive approach”. Tom, who works in a strategic communications role for the PPTA, and has frequent “liaison with politicians and political parties and the Ministry”, perhaps best represented this more multi-faceted, contingent view of policy development. For Tom, diverse interests are often pulling in different ideological directions simultaneously, with a policy such as charter schools merely reflecting the temporarily dominant interest-direction, rather than a long-term, overarching privatization strategy. Tom identified three main divisions – the “classic sort of neoliberal view” exemplified by the ACT Party and charter schools, “the populist [and] totally ruthlessly pragmatic” view, whereby policy is tailored closely to focus groups and opinion-polling in order to gain maximum

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<sup>37</sup> Campaigns for testing and charter schools have under coming under increasing counter-pressure in the US, the former stronghold for the GERM model, together with the “broken-system” trope (Salter & Phelan, 2017; Schneider, 2016).

electoral advantage (see National Standards), and a third more progressive view which actually listens to “what the officials are saying and what the evidence says”, which he sees as gaining more influence of late.

By contrast Dianne, a blogger and a teacher, perceived contradictions between policies, such as individual charter schools not coming under as much pressure “to push National Standards”, as all part of “the GERM plan”:

...you under fund, put pressures on and bring in performance pay, and do all these things to public schools to make it untenable [...] meanwhile funding charter schools to one side making them look utopian, so even the people [...] who don't support them think 'oh fuck it, if I want to teach properly I have to drop to that side'.

Having researched other locations where privatization agendas have been implemented, Dianne expressed a concern that New Zealand is experiencing a gradual but incremental process of “sneak[ing] privatisation...past enough people, so they won't fight back”. The alienation and disempowerment connected to the implementation of National Standards feeds into the marketization of charter schools, whereby the relative freedoms for teachers offered by the latter, amplified in a New Zealand setting which has historically privileged teaching autonomy, gradually wears down overall resistance to *the GERM* agenda. Alienation is contributed to by the downgrading of intrinsic, ethical motivations and popular knowledges within daily practice:

...it's this thing of you will only be motivated by extrinsic things so you will [...] work because if you don't you will get sacked, you will

get the kids to pass these exams because otherwise you will lose pay [...] because otherwise you will be terminated [...] as opposed to understanding most teachers are there because they want to, they want to teach they want children to improve

For Dianne, neoliberalism's discursive logics subjectify all actors as motivated only in terms of maximising their individual interests, therefore requiring market-style incentives or penalties to ensure that they perform optimally in their roles. She strongly disidentifies with this narrowed view of teacher motivations, with its low-trust assumptions which marginalize the role of care-ethics and localized knowledges. Instead, she maintains that teachers are not motivated by such instruments which impose external value-systems, such as those from economics, but by care for the child's emotional, social and educational wellbeing.

Allan and Bruce, both of whom have previously been educators but who are now predominantly textual dissenters, also placed National's policies within the context of a deliberate plan. However, this was more centred on the constraint of critical thinking capacities in children, which was interlinked with privatization. As Allan outlines, this plan derived from a distinct conception of the purpose of education, which differs markedly to New Zealand's public education ethos:

...do you want education that's going to challenge you, make you think, or do you want education that's going to [make them] passively do what they're told, and go out and be dutiful wage-earners?

Hence for Allan the coupling of education to the economy, with its

concomitant focus on vocational skills, leads to a less critical and more easily controlled population. Creativity, which is seen as largely being evacuated from education, is closely linked to criticality and therefore the sustainment of a democratic society. Critical thinkers, able to gain a deeper understanding of political events, are more likely to become involved in civic life and hold their governments to account. And for Bruce, the degradation of the capacity for critical thinking in young people enables a privatization agenda, whereby decreased political unrest creates a more stable ground for multinational corporations to eventually turn schools into money making opportunities. Referencing what has already happened in the US, corporations are also seen as knowing “very well that some of the biggest money to be made is in the school system”.

For Bruce, the focus on evaluation through standardized quantitative measurements not only supports the hegemonic position of positivistic knowledges and academics such as John Hattie, but also contributes to the marketization of education. This is why there is such a strong emphasis on standards and standardization within neoliberal reform discourse; in order for privately-run charter schools to display their superior quality to consumers, the latter must be confident that each product has been judged by the same criterion in order to make valid comparative judgements<sup>38</sup>. Consequently, for Bruce, the policies of National Standards and charter schools are inextricably linked - the former is required by the latter for its legitimacy. But taken together they have a highly detrimental effect on creativity and criticality as

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<sup>38</sup> There are ongoing debates around the validity of New Zealand charter schools’ assessment results. See the monitor blogging work of Bill Courtney on Save Our Schools NZ.

struggling state schools, in particular those within low socioeconomic areas, are forced into a competitive “race to the bottom” (Stern, 2013), whereby the requirement for high-performance in terms of numeracy and literacy results becomes a survival game against powerful private interests.

For many interviewees, charter schools, together with their more particular injustices (for example their superior funding levels, relaxed targets and decreased accountability levels), also symbolised the more general inequity of a competitive business model, which necessarily creates losers. The logic of competition which motivates people to get ahead of others at all costs, creating unprecedented levels of inequality in New Zealand (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009), was seen as “not a Kiwi goal” by Dianne, creating divides within a country which previously “didn’t see [itself] as a class divided society” (John).

National Standards also represented something more universal than its particular details, particularly for the school principals interviewed. For them the policy was a symbol of the denial of celebrations of human diversity, complexity, and wellbeing, which were inextricably linked to the fostering of democratic values. In other words, with its comparison of all children to static levels for reading, writing and maths, and its expectations of linear progression to annual performance measures, the policy represented the neoliberal or GERM philosophy. By contrast, the 2007 New Zealand Curriculum, with its rhetorical emphasis on values, the development of the whole child through a broad syllabus, and the pedagogical autonomy of school and teacher, symbolised New Zealand’s holistic educational ethos.



This representative status of the two government programmes, introduced just 24 months apart, can be clearly perceived in this quotation from Frances:

We've seen this morph from the system that we knew and loved, implementing the New Zealand curriculum which gives you purposively the opportunity to design curriculum and personalise it for the kids that you're actually teaching...

The sense of denial and decline here is palpable, with the 2007 curriculum placed within a historical narrative of a "system that we knew and loved" (note the past tense). Once placed within that narrative, also noticeable is a degree of affective investment. Despite it "just getting off the ground" (Allan) when National introduced National Standards in 2009, which, with its "linear...thinking...dealt a blow to the energy and passion and excitement that existed early on around the...curriculum" (Perry), pushing back the full implementation of its possibilities, that document had already come to symbolise a New Zealand teaching practice which "we...loved" (Frances).

That retroactive symbolization for school principals can be partly explained by the extensive collaboration with the sector which formed the basis of the final curriculum document, producing a feeling of empowered ownership over its contents, and an impression that it was built "from the ground up, using the expertise within the profession" (Ernie). As outlined, the period of neoliberalization in the 1980s and 90s witnessed the widespread technocratization of policy processes, with the general exclusion of "teachers from having a say" (Kelvin). The 1999-2008 Labour Government's decision to develop the curriculum over an inclusive seven year period, including

“trials in schools [and] collaborative working parties” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 4), therefore represented a break from the previous 15-20 years of exclusion and disempowerment. Steve Maharey (Minister of Education 2005-07) embodied this “brief spell” of “open-ended” educational philosophy for Allan, being viewed as relatively attentive to the sector’s concerns.

This inclusive and expansive curriculum development period contrasted starkly with National Standards for the interviewees, most concurring with the analysis that the latter’s consultation process was a token gesture (Thrupp & Easter, 2012). While 5-7,000 submissions were made on how the standards could better integrate with the curriculum and school’s existing data collection processes, these were perceived by those close to events, such as Frances and Ernie (presidents of the NZEI and NZPF respectively), as almost completely disregarded from decision-making processes. What was seen as important for the Government was that sector organizations could be included within media releases as having “been part of the consultation process” (Frances) in an exercise of “perception management” (Perry), with included sector organizations being played “off against each other” (Stephanie).

Together with the democratic participation of the teaching sector, also seen as denied by National Standards was the richness and complexity of students as human beings, together with the ability of teachers to place that innate complexity at the centre of their teaching. As Ernie put it, “rather than students having to fit a curriculum, it was the other way round, the curriculum fitted the student”. In contrast, the instrumental rationality behind National Standards, valorizing the quantitative measurement of literacy and numeracy and devaluing all else, was seen as working to narrow the learning experience.

Perry, who referred to the 2007 curriculum as a “brave, exciting, extraordinary document”, articulates this perspective below:

...we have a perception of human capability as being complex, difficult to measure [...] I'd much rather tell a story about that, get that complexity, rather than try to impose this linear, simple way of thinking about learning onto these very messy, colourful and creative beings.

Perry's perspective here could be seen as analogous to a Deleuzian ontology (see Tønder & Thomassen, 2005), in that he sees human diversity, abundance and plurality as necessarily excessive and therefore unable to be ever fully captured within the cold, calculative measurement of audit regimes. In contrast to this, National Standards was viewed by Perry as imposing a Taylorist “production line mentality, [with] a linear sameness”. Also drawing on the metaphor of the factory, Frances chided how a narrow focus on the statistically measurable cannot capture children's abundantly diverse human characteristics, illustrating that with contrasts between colour and greyness:

You get all of these colourful kids coming into your school and what a National Standards type analysis of this education system does is turn them all into little grey people.

Not only does National Standards fail to capture human complexity for the school principals, but it imposes that narrowing worldview onto the children coming through its imposed system. Similarly to the bloggers Bruce and Allan, this dampening of innate “colourful” creativity by a “production line mentality”, ambivalent to diversity, was seen as potentially dangerous for

New Zealand's democracy, by reducing autonomy and critical thinking. This perspective was articulated by a third school Principal Malcolm, who was "trailing a Reggio curriculum", a "student-centred... philosophy of education" developed in post-WWII Italy, "because they didn't want fascism to arise again".

Frances' distinction between colour and grey also symbolizes a contrast between an educational philosophy which looks to the future and one which is "very antiquated" and disconnected from the recent "decades of research around what we know how children learn" (Sarah). Jane, a parent activist and former BTAC spokesperson, saw National Standards as a "real looking back at the 3Rs, reading, writing and arithmetic", in comparison to how the curriculum "positioned education in New Zealand... as something much broader than that narrow focus".

Sarah, a blogger, also critiqued the impetus in National Standards to banish uncertainty and risk around achievement through the aggregation of vast amounts of data. For Sarah, audit systems cannot either capture or motivate children's creative side, which will always rely on the encouragement and intrinsic knowledge of experienced teachers who have achieved affective bonds with students. Revelling in the joy of risk-taking and its centrality to the educational experience, with considerable amounts of "learning...happening in play", Sarah maintained that:

You can't quantify creativity, and you can't quantify problem-solving and all of those 'soft-skills' [as] they call them. And because you can't quantify it you can't measure it, so you don't actually know how

much someone's learned by it.

Sarah's view chimes with scholarship which sees education as a form of social production which is inherently communicative, relational and affective, and that a valuing of only the quantifiable necessarily misses these aspects of teacher's work (see J. Gilbert, 2014; Hardt & Negri, 2009; G. B. Slater & Griggs, 2015). Allan added that the focus on individual achievement also contradicts the arguments, such as Treasury's in the previous chapter, for the need to increase innovation in order to generate economic growth:

...creating young adults who are creative and innovative, who know how to learn for themselves, who are passionate about what they want to do, who are curious and who have all those personal [skills]...they're the ones who are going to achieve, not the ones who can sit exams and get pass-marks.

Thereby the doctrinal aim of ensuring that all children achieve basic skills in order that they have some market-value, reducing their welfare risk to the state, is seen as ultimately at odds with the vision of the "knowledge society" (often seen expressed in Third Way discourse): encouraging creativity, knowledge-exchange and innovation. This inability of the neoliberal policy agenda to secure the philosophical ground for its arguments, let alone convince others of their validity, leads many of the interviewees to conclude that there were other hidden motivations underneath the surface-level (e.g. "the GERM plan"). For example, Kelvin concluded that the philosophy was really one of power and control, rather than educational achievement or economic growth.

This situation where the “philosophical foundations [of policies] are [seen as] absolutely flawed” (Perry), was often linked by interviewees to the increasing exclusion of education academics, in particular those who follow qualitative methodologies, from the policy development process, in favour of research from think tanks and the opinions of close advisors such as political marketing experts and PR specialists. This results in advice being drawn from a closed group in an “extremely tribal” atmosphere whereby only those perceived as “on-side” are permitted into the trusted inner circle (Martin). Within this context, research which is critical of government policy, such as the Research, Analysis and Insight into National Standards (RAINS) project conducted by The University of Waikato (Thrupp, 2013; Thrupp & Easter, 2012; Thrupp & White, 2013) and the Education Policy Response Group (2012, 2013) by Massey University, would tend to be ignored (as in the latter) or dismissed as politically motivated and academically flawed (as in the former)<sup>39</sup>, despite being led by eminent researchers within their field.

However, such acts of discursive exclusion from the decision-making processes of government served to reinforce the position of prominent researchers such as Martin Thrupp and John O’Neill as located within the *us*: the protectors of public education who appreciate its situation within a complex social field. Perry contrasted this against the “extraordinarily simplistic thinking about learning that exists in the hands of our Ministry officials and Government”, which enables projections such as directly linking

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<sup>39</sup> When confronted in November 2013 by a Fairfax reporter on the findings of the RAINS project, which were critical of the impact National Standards was having on schools, Hekia Parata responded with “it’s a three-year study of six schools only, [and] it’s paid for by the NZEI, who have a public position of opposing National Standards. So it’s hardly unbiased and balanced research, and its sample is extremely small” (quoted in Kirk, 2013).

PISA rankings to increasing GDP (The Treasury, 2012), and comments by the Minister of Education such as “four consecutive years of quality teaching eliminate[s] any trace of socio-economic disadvantage” (Parata quoted in Fea, 2013). By contrast, John O’Neill points to the continuing impact of “social class [on] education” (Liz) in his research, and the inability of the latter on its own to resolve the inequities faced by the former.

As against this principled position, the previously mentioned John Hattie is criticised for being “happy to have his arguments used by the right-wing in the most dubious...ways” (John), even though he may not explicitly share their ideological perspectives. This sense of solidarity with principled university academics was reinforced through their participation in activist practices and textual forms of dissent. Martin Thrupp, John O’Neill and Ivan Snook have all had an involvement with the Quality Public Education Coalition (QPEC), an organization established in the late 1990s as “a coalition [between academics] parents and educators” (John).

The extent to which the perceived over-simplified view of education within Government circles was also linked to the exclusion of sector voices from the mainstream media, and the possibilities of digital media forms for articulating alternative educational philosophies, is explored in the next section.

### *Attitudes to mainstream media and alternative avenues for textual dissent*

The perceived centrality of the rhetorical over the evidential in policy decision-making during the heightened period of antagonism between the

sector and government (2010-13), was widely remarked on, especially by current school principals and former NZEI and NZPF presidents. In particular, the National Standards policy was viewed as centred on the problematization of the education system and those who work within it. Viewed as “the start of the National rhetoric around failure” by Ernie, National Standards was seen as “more about getting runs on the board than doing something formative for the sector” by Frances. Malcolm described the kinds of antagonistic and exclusionary mediated discourse seen in the last chapter as contributing to a cynical and disengaged attitude amongst many in the teacher profession, added to further by a perceived reduction of the complex sociological issues around the sector into “very easily digestible lines for the public [such as the] *one-in-five*, we’ve got a long tail of underachievement [etc.]” (Frances).

While acknowledged as reproducing this discourse, in general terms, the mainstream media were largely viewed as manipulated by government in this process, with the antagonistic coverage of the sector largely resulting from the “dedicated unit within the National party to make sure the media messaging is spot-on” (Ernie), rather than a strong agentive role from media institutions themselves. A key factor seen as contributing to the uncritical coverage of government policy was recent cuts to journalistic budgets, linked to a decline in dedicated education correspondents who had the sufficient depth of knowledge and time in order to put balanced articles together. This was also linked to a perceived decline in the print media’s ability to conduct its roles as the fourth estate and civic society’s public sphere. This view is exemplified by Malcolm below, who cites the continuing failure of the media



to hold the government to account for poor policy not backed by sufficient empirical evidence and educational expertise, even after the shortcomings of the policy agenda become clearer with time:

...what the journalists should be doing is getting the advice out and saying: this is the advice that was given to the government and they didn't listen.

While on the one hand there was a perceived decline in the media's ability to conduct its traditional roles, there was also an awareness of the increased power of prominent media personalities such as Mike Hosking and Paul Henry in maintaining a right-wing ideological agenda as mainstream. These figures, in a similar way to prominent members of the National Party, were strongly disidentified with due to their public attacks on the teaching sector. Hosking was described by Paul P as using his position of influence in order to promote National Standards. Through assuming the rhetorical position of the concerned parent (see Hosking, 2012), frustrated with a profession seemingly unable to produce "plain language" reports, Hosking appeared "on TV saying how wonderful it [National Standards] was" in comparison, because "he was going to parent meetings and now being told exactly where his child was at" (Paul P).

In 2009, another prominent right-wing TV personality Paul Henry was publically criticized for attacking the personal appearance of a female NZEI employee on his show, which Frances saw as a pretext to the deliberate undermining of the organization's campaign against National Standards. The former National Party electoral candidate is well known for his frequent

transgressions from societal norms, which he deploys as a form of “dog-whistling” (Paul G) to those in the public who feel constrained by what they see as liberal political correctness. However, less commonly discussed is the darker, political role of such transgressions, and Frances viewed the misogynistic attack on the employee as an opportunity to destabilise the broader credibility of the union and the details of their campaign in the eyes of the public. Frances analogized such tactics to Hager’s (2014) recent book<sup>40</sup>, whereby “dirty politics... was like [a] creeping fog just enveloping the whole environment down there [Wellington]”.

Within this cut-throat political environment, the voices of the education sector were viewed as largely either excluded or derided, with television in particular (viewed as the most influential medium for the framing of debates), dominated by a small selection of mainstream voices. Even the less prominent avenues for dissent and debate, such as letters to newspaper editors and op-eds, were also now seen as being gradually limited. Sam, a retired university lecturer, mourned that he “couldn’t even get a letter into the Dom[inion] Post in recent years”. Martin, also an academic, rationalised this as primarily due to the aforementioned increasing financial pressures that newspapers were coming under, leading them to fill print space with “infotainment”, to the detriment of “considered work”.

Diverging somewhat from this rationalisation for the ascendancy of a right-wing agenda in media spaces, Allan, a blogger and former school principal,

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<sup>40</sup> *Dirty Politics* (Hager, 2014) was released in the lead-up to the 2014 general election and was based on emails and Facebook messages hacked from the right-wing blogger Cameron Slater. The book detailed conversations between Slater and various members of the National government, revealing strategies which sought to undermine political opposition (both in the Labour Party and outside party politics).

saw an alignment between the National government and the media as linked to a “bigger picture” of creeping privatisation and heightened performative controls over education. During the height of the National Standards debates in July 2011, Allan began guest blogging for Bruce’s *Leading and Learning* blog while still working as a school principal. Speculating in one piece written at that time on the future “corporatisation of New Zealand schooling” (Alach, 2011), Allan blogged that he doubted “whether the full extent of the probable agenda is understood by the majority of principals, teachers and parents in New Zealand schools”. And in our interview he stated that the “media’s been captured [by corporate interests] as well” as education, together with stressing the importance of “a free media” for “a well-educated population”, sufficiently equipped to understand and thus critique policy agendas, a role which had been dangerously weakened in recent years.

Hence like Kelvin, for Allan the porous theoretical underpinnings of the Government’s agenda pointed to an ulterior plan, which was not being articulated through the mediated rhetoric of choice and standards, and he saw himself through his blogging as contributing to educating both the education sector and the wider public on the hidden dangers. He described himself as being “one of the most outspoken” principals at the time, and “the articles that [he] was writing [as] bloody hard hitting”. In other words, in highlighting a lack of evidential base, whereby “the Government [is] ignoring the very wide range of national and international educational experts” (Alach, 2011), Allan saw himself as performing the fourth estate role which a “captured” mainstream media were no longer able to do.

Dianne, who has political views which are close to Allan’s, closely followed

the unfolding of the class sizes policy debates in 2012. She told me of her experience of watching the debates unfold “on the television and thinking, well, these figures don’t add up”, but at that time lacking the self-confidence and cultural capital to critique the mainstream mediated narrative. However, being on maternity leave with time on her hands she “started asking around, doing a bit of research...trying to find out whether my feeling was right”. This led her to get “more...into research”, uncovering more and more information which gradually reinforced her view that the official narrative, whereby “90 per cent of schools will either gain, or have a net loss of less than one Full Time Teacher” (Parata, 2012b), was fundamentally flawed. Following the revelations that some intermediate schools would be set to lose up to nine teachers, Dianne’s feelings were confirmed, and her confidence increased, leading her to pursue more investigative work.

Describing this period in her life through the cultural metaphors of falling “down a rabbit hole”, and being offered to “take the red pill or the blue pill”, the government’s climb-down on class sizes could be seen to have a specific dislocatory effect on Dianne. Her level of trust that government policies were based on rationality, evidence and best-practice was drastically reduced. Soon afterwards she established the *Save Our Schools NZ* blog, where she would write frequently on the lack of evidence base for other education policies, with one of its stated aims as “challenging ill-judged education policies that hinder good teaching and effective learning” (Save Our Schools NZ, 2015).

Reinforcing the role of the internet and its semi-permanent traces in her transformation to the identity of textual dissenter, Dianne recounted how she

was able to juggle the commitments of looking after a young son with her investigative work. She was able to open 15 tabs on her laptop, look “after my boy”, then “go back to 15 [still] open”. But it was social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter, which allowed her to broaden her networks, communicate with “MPs and union people” in her field, and open her up to a wide variety of opinions and sources of information. This grew to the extent to where she became a node for the diffusion of news from US and UK teacher organizations, broadening both her own awareness and those of her educator readership of international struggles.

Tom, who works in a strategic communications role for the PPTA, writes for their *Pigeonhole* blog. This has a smaller audience than *Save Our Schools NZ* and is aimed more directly at the ears of Ministry of Education officials. This readership is representative of Tom’s more institutionally embedded role within Wellington’s corridors of power. Nevertheless, Tom still regards the work he does on the blog, particularly on charter schools, as *monitor-blogging* – holding the powerful accountable through data. Much of Tom’s work involves the careful wading through of Ministry documentation in order to find holes or inconsistencies, which he then blogs about, making “the Ministry scabble around” to find answers to. Tom also reported that the slow “dripping stuff out” on the blog “feeds the disquiet around them [charter schools]”. In other words, stories which may begin within *Pigeonhole’s* relatively small readership may be picked up and amplified by Dianne or the mainstream media, indirectly impacting debates on a policy which the union is strongly opposed to, by undermining its discursive foundations.

A different motivation behind blogging for Dianne and Kelvin in particular is

the perceived exclusion of the teaching profession from having a voice in policy. When Dianne began investigating the figures used to justify class size ratio changes, she began to realise that not only was the policy poorly evidenced, but that the Government only agreed to begin to make concessions “when parents started creating a rumpus”. Her lesson was that “we [teachers] have no voice, and if you want anything to be heard parents have the voice”.

Contributing a voice not found elsewhere was also seen as a key role for Sarah and her *Cheeky Kids* blog. A Resource Teacher of Learning and Behaviour (RTL B) and a parent of three, Sarah articulated some interesting tensions between the two identificatory positions, together with a desire to reconcile them. Started in 2008, the blog began with the aim of simply providing a “parent voice around parenting”. However, this perspective changed somewhat following a particularly frustrating meeting with a parent, which she came away from “feeling really angry that there were parents out there that were not taking more involvement in their children’s learning”. Reflecting on what society expects from a ‘good parent’ and a ‘good teacher’ from “both perspectives”, Sarah likes to “think that it’s [*Cheeky Kids*] two voices; the parent and the teacher”, and offers advice to both sides to break down antagonistic divides.

Coming strongly from both perspectives meant that a statement by Hekia Parata assuming that parents desire National Standards, a policy she strongly disagrees with as a teacher on pedagogical and philosophical grounds, and which is persistently used to problematize teaching practice, became a dislocatory experience:

...politically I really objected, over the election time to Hekia turning round and saying this is what parents want. I just think that actually who asked me? Which parents were you talking to?

The parents that Sarah envisaged as subjectified by the signifier in hegemonic discourse are located in affluent suburbs of Auckland, who readily criticise public school teachers for not performing adequately, not those with whom she interacts with on a regular basis in Napier and Hastings, whose children struggle to attain the required standards in literacy and numeracy. Hence Sarah's blog brings the perspective of parents normally excluded from inclusion within that signifier, *a class of parent* routinely denied access to that space of representation. To facilitate this fight-back Sarah also undertakes more directly political work, employing her knowledge of the Ministry and education sector in order to assist parents in asserting their rights, such as opting out of receiving National Standards data in their child's school reports.

It is this messy involvement in the wider political realm in the era of *Dirty Politics* (Hager, 2014) which led to many of the bloggers, and other interviewees, to become more careful in their policy critiquing strategies, often turning instead to micro or private forms of dissent. The final section will discuss the reasons behind these moves, and their potential for challenging how we conceive resistance.

#### *Dirty politics: turning to micro and private forms of resistance*

While the previous part of this section concentrated on bloggers, all of the interview participants had been involved in forms of textual dissent, either in their public roles as union presidents, school principals, academics or other

organisational roles. Most recounted anecdotes where they felt they had been targeted by combinations of Cameron Slater (a prominent ring-wing blogger operating under the alias of Whale Oil), the Ministry of Education, and print journalists for publicly voicing their dissent. This created a noticeable degree of carefulness around the critical statements that they made, both to myself and to the media, particularly by those holding institutional roles, who potentially have the most to lose by saying the wrong thing. As Malcolm put it, “if you are going to put your head above the parapet you are going to be shot at”.

Allan detailed a particularly traumatic experience that happened to him after making a “throwaway comment”, one of “about 15” he made on someone else’s blog post, which read “Gestapo aka ERO have just been in the school [which they had been reviewing]”. The comment then somehow found its way into the hands of journalists for the *Manawatu Standard*, resulting in him becoming coined as the “Gestapo Principal” in a news story (Ellingham, 2011). Articles also appeared about him on Slater’s Whale Oil blog, followed by the then Minister of Education Anne Tolley making a statement publicly condemning him. Allan described himself as relatively “computer savvy”, but he believed that locating comments that a particular person had made on someone else’s blog belied “a very high level of computer expertise”, whereby they were “scanning huge amounts of data”. Such expertise, together with access to the required expensive hardware is suggestive of the kinds of collaborative networks between government and right-wing bloggers detailed by Hager (2014) in his book.

Jane, one of the parent spokespeople for BTAC, related how a story also



appeared on Whale Oil about her, which cited her appearance in the 1996 documentary *Someone Else's Country*, when she was a young student protesting against the neoliberalization of education. The story, entitled “Politically neutral protest?” (C. Slater, 2010), sought to discredit Jane, and therefore the BTAC movement’s claims to be motivated by the authentic concerns of parents. The quotation taken from the documentary quoted Jane as articulating a desire to “start getting unions, student associations working together and mobilising their membership” to oppose neoliberalism. This plea to the unions (who were generally regarded as being slow to react to Rogernomics (see Boshier, 2001; J. Kelsey, 1995)), was enough to tarnish her “politically neutral image” in Slater’s eyes. However, more importantly it indicates that a significant amount of resourcing and research was being put into the discrediting of educational activists who put their heads above the parapet.

Perhaps even more concerning and potentially dislocating for educationalists than Slater’s blog posts, was the gradual realisation, even before the revelations in *Dirty Politics* (Hager, 2014), of the generalized and institutionalized use of such tactics. Malcolm discovered through an Official Information Act (OIA) request that the Ministry of Education had been compiling newspaper articles on him, highlighting paragraphs where he had spoken out against National Standards. These articles formed the justification behind the sending of a letter requiring “the [school] board to provide specified information” under section 78J of the Education Act. As discussed, the receipt of these official letters by several schools, which were a step towards the removal of the board, contributed to the end of the BTAC

coalition. Section 78J was originally intended only to be used when there is “reasonable grounds for concern about the operation of the school, or the welfare or educational performance of its students” (New Zealand Government, 1989, n.p.). However, as recounted by Malcolm, his school had just received a glowing review from ERO and was generally “deemed to be successful [with a] growing roll”.

Naturally, the climate of fear created by the circulation of stories of targeted individuals and schools had an impact on resistance strategies, with covert or micro contestation practices becoming more common, or as Martin described it, resistance went into the “underground effectively...into a sort of private domain and then you get...tokenism, token responses to policy, or you get fabrication”. As alluded to earlier in the section on BTAC, resistance from education professionals embedded within institutional structures which ultimately rely on their resourcing from government, and are under the increasing pressures of “the culture of audit and surveillance” (Thrupp, 2005, p. 3), are likely to become more subtle, private and covert, creating the complex and diverse picture recounted by the interviewees.

Sarah described how she has lately become involved in an “underground movement of teachers” who are advocates of play-based learning, and who both meet at national “unconferences”, and in local groups in cafés. She described how many teachers she speaks to, in particular those who work in “lower socio-economic areas...are coming under a lot of pressure” to push the school’s National Standards figures up, and often feel constrained by their management in terms of the freedom to try out innovative practices such as play-based learning. At their café meetings she described how the teachers

“got their coffee, and they said ‘I’ve snuck away from school, no one knows I’m here’. I mean we all sort of felt like we were plotting a terrorist attack! Because they were really nervous about being there”. Hence this seemingly innocent scene of like-minded teachers meeting up socially to discuss innovations to practice, which according to Bruce was a regular occurrence in his circles in the 1960s and 70s, has an element of fear attached, primarily due to its location within a public space.

Frances described how recently her local group of politically active principals in Auckland had considered re-forming BTAC following the announcement of the Investing for Educational Success policy in January 2014. However, this time, rather than having a huge email list which was liable to be hacked or leaked, emails were restricted to that “hand-picked group” of seven “concerned principals”. While BTAC aimed to move from a tight planning group towards the accumulation of a critical mass of schools at the national level, through the underplaying of the political aspects of the action, this “Group of Seven”, decided to remain Auckland-only. Safe within their carefully aligned political positions, and enjoying high levels of trust between participants, Frances felt they were more robust when they came under inevitable attack from outside, stating that “if you can shoot us fine, give it your best shot”.

Frances also expressed how her resistance strategies towards National Standards had recently become more indirect and ironic. Whereas when she first returned to her school in early 2011 after completing her term as NZEI President, the BTAC movement was in full swing, and she described a full-frontal refusal approach, justified on firm philosophical and ethical grounds:

...when the review office [ERO] came in here they said ‘are you implementing National Standards?’, and I said no, and they said ‘why not?’, and I said because they don’t make sense and actually they’re not good for kids.

However, referring to later dealings with ERO she describes a more playful form of resistance, acknowledging that she complies with their requirements, while disavowing any ideological attachment to their procedures:

...on our ERO review that we had earlier this year it says we’ve made a really good job of implementing the National Standards [laughter]. And if I’m honest with you we don’t do it at all. We don’t consciously measure our kids against the standards, we just don’t, we measure them against our school curricula and the national curriculum, and when we do our overall teacher judgements we just put them in the boxes basically, but they mean nothing to us, not a thing.

Here she is describing how she plays along with the requirements of audit regimes by doing the minimum required in a detached manner, while being careful to uphold that these mechanisms have no effect on her school’s internal practices, or her own philosophies. She feels as if (and is gleaning a certain enjoyment from this) that she is playing the system by taking advantage of the ritualistic and surface-level nature of ERO’s accountability systems. We can infer from Frances’ comments that even those who work within ERO share her lack of investment in its philosophical underpinnings, but are more concerned with ensuring her production of “statistically manipulable assessment” (De Lissovoy, 2013, p. 427) data - the grease which

ensures the wheels of the audit machine keep turning. As Žižek (1989) has argued, it is what we do, not what we believe, that is “the fundamental level of ideology” (p. 30) and that the position of cynical distance is merely our way of coping with being captured within the system. Hence, despite her detachment from the actions, her practice of “put[ting] them in the boxes” would symbolise for Žižek and ERO that she is “*still doing them*” (1989, p. 30), thus acknowledging her place within the system. While for Frances her insistence that she doesn’t “do it at all...[that is] consciously measure our kids against the standards”, represents her attachment to holistic principles and her defiant stance against instrumentalization and performativity, for ERO her performance of audit practices is all that matters, allowing them to happily note that her school have made “a really good job of implementing the National Standards”.

Acknowledging this grey area between practice and belief, Ernie felt that it was becoming more difficult for principals to retain a philosophically-pure position, reporting that the implementation of National Standards within schools inevitably involves a degree of compromise on ethics, whereby they “had to come to some sort of pragmatic philosophical point that says okay, how can I do this, how can I live with myself and have the minimal impact on curriculum and kids?”. This kind of concessionary approach, where the boundaries would be pushed as far as possible, with the broad aim of avoiding a narrowing of the curriculum for the children’s benefit, was recounted by most of the five current school principals I spoke to. Where a narrowing of the curriculum had occurred, this was reported as happening at other schools from theirs, perhaps with less experienced principals, who may not even

attempt to implement a disjoint between practice and belief as Frances had, and who “probably don’t know much difference, and tend to take things at face value” (Ernie).

Similarly, playing the performative game to consciously and deliberately inflate National Standards figures, what Martin termed as “fabrication”, was perceived as occurring at other schools, where principals took advantage of the vagueness of the standards and the subjective nature of the Overall Teacher Judgement (OTJ), together with the production-line mentality of government agencies, by making claims to improvements in student achievement when “it’s very obvious that you cannot make those claims, those claims are not supportable” (Perry). It was remarked by Ernie that an 85% system target for reaching “the standard”, set by the Minister of Education was also putting pressure on schools to allocate time and resources to certain students “who were not at or above [the standard, in order] to lift their percentage above 85%”. In reference to the secondary level qualification NCEA Level 2, Kelvin was adamant that the 85% pass target merely makes schools “become more efficient at getting children through”, resulting in it becoming “a meaningless qualification” (Liz).

While in one sense you could see these statistical manipulations as capitulation to the system of audit and surveillance, Ball (2001b) highlights the paradoxical nature of fabrication – while in one sense it represents a “submission to the rigours of performativity and the disciplines of competition”, it could also be conceived as a form of passive resistance; an “escape from the gaze, a strategy of impression management” (p. 217). As we saw with the example of Frances, good figures showing that targets have

been met successfully means that audit institutions such as ERO go away happy, perhaps for as long as five years, allowing the school breathing space to cultivate a holistic educational philosophy.

Clarke (2013) highlights that Ball's argument fits well with a Lacanian ontology. For Lacan the distance between subordination and resistance is always indistinct, as the latter can only ever be "in relation to the Other... the discourse of society" (Alakavuklar et al., 2017, p. 461). In other words, the resistance described by Frances in this section and by Dianne in the previous could be viewed as a form of enjoyment accrued from their highlighting of the lack (or powerlessness) in the Other (the state and society). Dianne's calculations that the Government had got its figures wrong on class sizes needed to be confirmed by peers, the media and the state (by making concessions and eventually scrapping the policy). Her personal transformation through the identity of blogger therefore required confirmation from the Other (or the master) of her relative potency, through which it simultaneously exposed itself as non-omnipotent.

Think of Tom's monitor-blogging which derives its influence from the exposure of contingencies in government processes. Tom recounted that what he saw as key evidence that this work was making an impact in the halls of power was that his blog was mentioned in Parliament in an exchange between the Minister of Education and the Labour Party education spokesperson – the ultimate form of recognition by the Other. On a more everyday basis his work functions as a resistant question which the Ministry must at first recognise and then attempt to provide a satisfactory answer to. Even when an answer is eventually found, the fact that they were forced to

“scrabble around” to look for it, undermines their position as the master “who must appear consciously knowledgeable” (Dickson & Holland, 2017, p. 136).

At the same time however, subordination is also enjoyed through the same logic, as another form of “approval...or recognition by, those who dominate them [the Other]” (Steinmetz, 2006, p. 456). This paradox is illustrated well in the below section from Malcolm, where he is describing the end of the BTAC movement. Despite the movement’s leadership having already made a statement encouraging all schools to submit to the requirements, the Ministry of Education attempted to exert their masterful authority by setting a deadline for all schools involved to submit their revised charters, which were now to include National Standards targets:

...we did a protest where I think we all had to hand it in by a certain date, and they would have preferred it electronically but a group of us went down to the Ministry on that date and handed it in on the last day in paper [...] So all the way along there was just that resistance, resistance, you know? Little stuff; and so you handed in by paper, so they had to photocopy and all the rest of it...gives them more work. So there was all that sort of stuff went on, little steps all the way along. Then we publicly stood there and waited till the time, about 10 o’clock...passive resistance, just pushing it into the wire. And that’s the way it was all the way along; how far could you push it, you know?

As is related here, such micro-level acts of subordination/resistance are often acted out in an immanent relation to the Other. A symbolic act of submission, the end of the BTAC movement, is turned into a game of resistance which



seeks a recognition from the Ministry that their subordination and disempowerment is not total. On this occasion the symbolic act of disrupting the Other's power by handing the charters in on paper at the last possible moment is given more weight by the presence of other protesters, together with being conferred wider recognition through sharing photos on social media.

For Alakavuklar et al. (2017), Malcolm and the others involved in the protest adopted the discourse of the hysteric. By employing satire and setting awkward demands which cannot be easily absolved within its procedures, this position undermines the authority of the master (in this case the Ministry of Education), without directly opposing it, therefore avoiding the trap of the resistance/subordination dyad which requires the master's recognition (see also Dean, 2009, p. 80). For the authors, this position is the best hope for resistance for those who work within audit-systems which expect submissive and ritualised displays of "quality". This discourse of the hysteric does not refuse to engage with accountability regimes (which is seen as impossible anyway), but rather exploits their surface-level valorization systems as a platform for subversion from the inside, whereby spaces of progressive, holistic philosophies can be opened up. Acknowledging that we feel good when we perform well in the league tables, we also use the prominent voice that we are afforded when performing "to the standard", to highlight inequalities, injustices and inconsistencies and slowly transform practices. Such full engagement with tokenism and fabrication could also be seen as "traversing the fantasy" (Stavrakakis, 2007) of performativity - by engaging in them fully we can take them to their extremes, allowing them to fall under

their own weight.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has argued that New Zealand's holistic teaching ethos, rather than in danger of being entirely negated by neoliberalization, was articulated, constituted and sustained through discursive practice: the campaigns of the NZEI, the activities of bloggers, and the narratives of activists. While undoubtedly coming under pressure from multiple directions - including the downgrading of the non-economically justifiable, the widespread exclusion of the teacher voice from the public sphere, and the imposition of punitive sanctions for resistance, the ethos found strength and coherence from the perceived denial of ethical values. Feelings of disempowerment and the loss of localised, democratic control textured both activists' descriptions of their motivations and the NZEI's articulations, motivating resistant acts which articulated the ethical signifiers (among others) of care, justice, democracy, humanism, fairness and collective agency. Even within the relatively restricted spaces of schools, these signifiers and the ethos they signified acted as resources for principals, who used them to open up internal spaces of resistance.

Articulations of the purpose of education through the neoliberalized logics of problematization, instrumentalization, marketization and performativity failed to offer either an authentic account of subjectivity or a coherent philosophical grounding embedded in higher ideals for the interviewees, who viewed it as inadequate even to attain its narrow instrumental aim of

achieving economic growth. This lack of grounding led to its interpretation as either highly superficial or simplistic due to its disconnection from educational research, or as a pretext for a privatization agenda.

This inability to rationalize its premises was linked to and amplified by a lack of affective investment in its key signifiers and practices. The requirement to represent education through statistics and measures, with emphases on efficiency, self-promotion and competition, was interpreted as limited and disconnected from both experience and ethical ideals. Those ideals had to find alternative avenues for investment and inscription, and this was provided by the protest actions which the NZEI provided the organizational base for, meaning campaigns such as *Stand Up For Kids* became names of the ethical. Through acting as a space of ethical inscription, the NZEI could be seen to have functioned as a social movement union.

The unity of the holistic ethos increased through the antagonistic rhetoric of the Government and media and the marginalization of teaching knowledges, which, together with events such as the standards landing on principal's desks, contributed to the increasing dislocation of identities from the hegemonic regime. This also allowed a name to be given to what the holistic was not: *the GERM*, permitting it to more clearly define its boundaries. This relative unity allowed it to be articulated more clearly during periods of heightened politicization, working into the cracks, contributing to and exploiting the 2012-13 period of symbolic crisis for the regime. However, such a clear definition of *us* and *them* within a populist articulatory logic also created issues; with some interviewees viewing it as too political, therefore losing connections to the education practice-based ethical signifiers which

originally helped to clearly differentiate it from the neoliberalization process. At the same time, the fantasmatic decline narrative articulated by the NZEI's campaign also imposed certain limits on its politicizing potential (Chang & Glynos, 2011). The narrative constructed neoliberalization as something which only lately threatens New Zealand school education, rather than something which, as demonstrated in Chapter 5, has a much longer historical trajectory. Via the articulation of a national exceptionalism identity (McMillan, 2017) which represented New Zealand education as so far "immune" from neoliberalization, a more fundamental contestation of the instrumentalist definition of the purposes of education was sidestepped. The class sizes victory and the narratives of activists suggested that this was fertile ground, and could possibly have engaged more of the public in a deeper discussion of the role of education and teaching in society (Bascia & Osmond-Johnson, 2015).

As I will reflect on further in the conclusions chapter, perhaps the most potentially political aspect of the movements described within this chapter is their tacit support for collectivity, together with affective and constitutive forms of agency. The discursive logics of neoliberalization subjectify us all as entrepreneurs of the self, reducing human relationships to the relation of accountability. However, as Tie (2017) has argued, this presents "insufficiently coherent experiences of selfhood" (p. 144), which fail to capture the messiness and affectivity of human relationships, together with our desire for being part of something larger than ourselves.

# Chapter 8

## Conclusions

### **Continuous disconnect: Identity struggles within contingent neoliberalization**

This thesis has argued that the policies of National Standards, class sizes and charter schools should be placed within the context of an ongoing meaning-struggle around education in Aotearoa New Zealand. In reference to research question 1, the three policies emerged within a long-term process of the neoliberalization of education, which, informed by discourses such as new public management and audit, recurrently evaluates public sector systems as failing to perform efficiently enough, therefore requiring the imposition of markets and accountability systems. Addressing the problematic defined in the introduction, which was why would the National Party seek to implement such policies through a crisis/failing schools narrative, this form of critique of the education system has been shown to be fundamental to the problematizing agency of neoliberal governance. And in reference to research question 2, newspapers were shown to play a key role in this problematizing discourse, by reproducing and legitimizing logics (*instrumentalization, marketization, performativity*) nodal points (*the one-in-five, choice, etc.*), fantasmatic narratives (*decline, equality of opportunity*) and fantasmatic representations (*the quality teacher, the ineffective teacher*), which helped to constrain the parameters of educational debates to questions

of efficiency and economic growth. However, in reference to research question 3, alternative visions were articulated through collective resistance, which rejected the narrowing frame of neoliberalization, drawing instead from a tradition of teaching practices which privileges the holistic development of the child over economic growth (I will reflect further on the wider political significance of this in the final section of this chapter).

While there were significant continuities between how education was constructed across Chapters 5 and 6, you could also argue that the antagonistic rhetoric surrounding the launches of National Standards, class sizes and charter schools, which critiqued and excluded *the ineffective teacher*, their protective unions and an apathetic, elitist and closed teaching culture, constituted a departure from the more inclusive discourse of the previous Labour government, in particular that observed within the speeches of Steve Maharey. This return to dominance of the politicizing logic of equivalence (or populist logic) which overtly constructs an *us vs them* dichotomy, but which made use of discursive elements from each of the previous three phases, is perhaps indicative of a fourth, post-financial crisis, “zombie” (Jamie Peck, 2010b) phase of neoliberalization, where it becomes increasingly divorced from its doctrinal ideals, forced to respond pragmatically “to crises of [its]...own making” (Jamie Peck, 2010b, p. 106), often leading to contradictory and reactionary reforms, in formerly no-go areas such as education (Jamie Peck, 2010a, pp. 24-27).

For Davies (2014), the fantasy that neoliberalism was ever opposed to state power was dispersed by the events of late 2008, when the major governments of the West used the very abstract sovereign authority which neoliberals

criticized for its imperviousness to measurement, in order to prop up the ailing system. Since those dramatic events, for Davies, “contingent” neoliberalism has taken on a rather ritualistic, performative or rhetorical form, increasingly characterized by adaptability, pragmatism and the formation of temporary and localised rules, rather than the application of universal, rigid doctrine.

However, this problematic demonstrates the benefits of the discourse theoretical approach. For Laclau, with his central concept of *radical contingency*, we always were in the “contingent” phase of neoliberalism, there being a *continuous disconnect* between neoliberal doctrine and subjectivities at the ontological level. As discussed in the conclusions to Chapter 2, the structuration of a regime such as neoliberalism is continuously “subverted by *constitutive* dislocations” (Laclau, 2004, p. 280). Laclau’s incorporation of Lacanian discourse theory, in particular the concept of *the Real*<sup>41</sup>, means that there will always be holes in the symbolic order which disrupt or subvert the sedimentation process. Hence, in one sense the coupling of education to economic growth became increasingly sedimented across the period under investigation in this thesis, yet in another, these links could still be troubled by the NZEI through their framing of Treasury’s use of education as a “cash cow” during the debates over class sizes.

Moreover, the approach undertaken in this thesis adds a degree of weight to a body of Laclauian theory which can be little thin and formalistic, due to his aversion to the ontic, or empirical level (Howarth, 2004). Through the

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<sup>41</sup> While Laclau himself never used the term *the Real*, it is widely acknowledged that some of his key concepts are “names of the Real” (Biglieri & Perelló, 2012), in particular antagonism, dislocation and the constitutive outside (Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2004).

combined analyses of policy, media and interview materials, I have been able to demonstrate that both the perdurability of neoliberalization and its limits lie at the level of subjective identifications and dislocations. Firstly, perdurability was demonstrated in Chapter 6, as we saw the rearticulation and adaptation of key discursive devices. *The one-in-five, the ineffective teacher, the quality teacher*, and the entrepreneurial *consumer-parent* had all been previously signposted, albeit in different discursive forms, within the discourse analysed in Chapter 5. This repetition concurs with Laclau's (2004, p. 326) assertion that it is the libidinal, or the affective, which provides discursive forms with a *force* which endures across temporalities. What was continuous was not the discourse itself but an overlaying structure of two contrasting fantasmatic narratives: decline (the horrific) and equality of opportunity (the beatific). This points to the value of applying Lacanian psychoanalytic concepts to discourse theory in a more developed way than Laclau did himself (Salter, 2016; Stavrakakis, 2007), which I have attempted to do in this thesis with the application of fantasmatic narratives and representations. As put by Glynos (2012), "while fantasy may take on a potentially infinite number of different contents, it...has a certain logic" (p. 2405) which remains consistent; a consistency which has a structuring effect on discourse through an overdetermining relation (Glynos, 2014).

Assigning coherence and stability to the discursive logics of problematization and performativity in National Standards discourse was the articulation of a fantasmatic narrative of educational, economic and moral decline, depicted as resulting from teachers' resistances to performance management and their linked refusal to properly monitor problematic students. This decline



narrative, populated by fantasmatic representations of *the one in five* and *the ineffective teacher*, displayed significant points of continuity with the four reports analysed in Chapter 5, in particular the latter's dichotomizing contrast of "provider interests" against parents. While the discursive features of the symbolic enemy shifted across time, with the *ineffective teacher* coming to replace *the bureaucrat*, the overarching narrative structure remained in place, whereby an antagonist was represented as preventing the realisation of entrepreneurial capacities in children and parents respectively. *The ineffective teacher's* resistance to National Standards consigned *the one-in-five* to a future life of educational underachievement, delinquency and crime, while *the bureaucrat's* propensities towards maximizing their empires with the imposition of rules and regulations while minimizing the input of stakeholders, created a disincentive for parents to perform their normatively expected upbringing duties. In both eras an elitist, opaque and self-serving culture of dependence was represented as preventing the application of high expectations to marginalized groups, thereby thwarting the latter's opportunities to assume moralizing and autonomizing responsibilities. Hence it was affective investment in contrasting representations of entrepreneurial and dependent selves which permitted the navigation of crises and contradictions, providing the cohesive "glue" (Engelken-Jorge, 2010) for the hegemonic closing out of counter-narratives, contradictions and contingency in the editorial representations of National Standards.

However, the hegemonic limits of this libidinally invested discourse were demonstrated in Chapter 7. It was the contradictions between calls for creativity, modernization and innovation in the "knowledge society" and the

implementation of standardization and audit systems which promote conservatism and do not allow for such things, which could not be made sense of by the interview participants (more on this in the next section). This sense of disconnection or alienation was amplified by the antagonistic, exclusionary rhetoric from newspaper editorials and politicians which diametrically opposed the interests of *parents* to those of *educationalists*. Augmenting this dislocation process yet further were key events. The standards landing on the desks of school principals came to symbolize the divergence of two contrasting philosophies in the subjectivities of the interviewees. Other key dislocatory events included the announcements of the charter schools policy and the intention to increase class size ratios. The politicizations of the latter permitted the NZEI to unsettle the sedimented links between education and economic growth, voicing the argument that “education should not be a government cash cow”, and taking the opportunity to frame the use of education as an instrument to stimulate post-crisis economic growth as both “radical reform” and a “money-making scheme”. Both parents and teachers were articulated, through their qualitative experiences of classrooms, as united in understanding that there was more to education than rational readjustments of spending priorities, thereby also opening a space for contesting the consumer-provider relation. This deeper understanding, depicted as deriving from direct involvement in the everyday messiness of education, formed the discursive ground for a unified sector response to the policy.

This confident assertion of a better way of doing public schooling in New Zealand was grounded in retroactive articulations of a holistic educational

philosophy, which had its discursive origins in early 20<sup>th</sup> Century progressive currents. This alternative ethos was embodied in Peter Fraser's 1939 speech which proclaimed free education, tailored around the individual needs of the child, as a universal and eternal right, with the development of the child's creative and critical faculties seen as having broad benefits for a social democracy. Elements of this popular knowledge were traced within the NZEI's media campaigns, blogs, protest signs and the personal narratives of activist interviewees. Through these forms, the ethos was articulated through the nodal points of care, justice, criticality, democracy, humanism, diversity and fairness - ethical signifiers which were all experienced as denied by the process of neoliberalization. As Perry articulated, the privileging of audit and performance measurement was perceived as inevitably failing to capture the "messy, colourful and creative beings" depicted in the NZEI's *Hands Up For Learning* campaign poster. In other words, these policy technologies contained within them an inherently reductionist vision of the human subject, a representation which would lead to their undermining.

The contrast between this holistic ethos which took into account the rich complexity of human experience, and the comparatively thin and contradictory logics, narratives and representations of neoliberalization therefore provided the staging ground for the latter's critique. It became the basis for a collective identity, a rallying point for subjectivities which had become dislocated by the antagonistic language and seeming indifference to sector concerns from the Government, a frontier which was amplified through the representations of the mainstream media. Such divides were then increased within the NZEI's *Stand Up For Kids/Fight the GERM* campaign,

which constituted an activist identity in opposition to a fantasmatic enemy representing global elite interests, which threatened to impose “a business model” on New Zealand schools. This campaign juxtaposed the signifiers of instrumentalism with those of the New Zealand public education ethos (table 1) through a populist articulatory logic, dichotomizing the discursive terrain into two opposed sides, allowing greater investment in the (perceived as denied) signifiers of the latter, through more concrete (dis)identificatory position. However, there were also signs of disconnect between this libidinally invested discourse and the subjectivities of some of the interviewees: in particular Sarah, who complained that it could not fully capture the richness of the teaching experience. This concurs with Laclau’s theorization that constitutive dislocations are not limited to hegemonic discourse, but are equally applicable to counter-hegemonic movements.

In summary, while Laclau’s theory is useful in conceptualizing both the ongoing consistency of neoliberalized discursive forms and their inherent instability, allowing the highlighting of radical contingency across timespans, the empirical evidence which I have compiled in this thesis also highlights the need for its supplementation with other theoretical perspectives and empirical content. As Laclau (1996) acknowledged, what constitutes the subject is “acts of decision” (p. 92) which supersede the undecidable structure of neoliberalization, permeated by constitutive dislocations. As outlined above, concrete actors took advantage of the holes in the symbolic order, its inability to make sense, in order to widen those holes, politicizing the discursive terrain. But in order for those subjects to act against the structure, they required an alternative belief-system, and I drew on Foucault’s (1980)

concept of the popular knowledge in order to supplement Laclau's ontological level theory with ontic details. This knowledge acted as a resource which allowed for subjective dislocations from the structure of neoliberalization, while the integration of Lacanian concepts allowed for the conception of that structure's consistency and subjective appeal. The next section examines in more detail the neoliberal subject and its emergence between the structure of normative constraint and the decisions of choices.

## **The entrepreneurial self, neoliberal morality and performance monitoring**

As argued in the last section, this thesis has demonstrated the importance of discursive/affective identifications in shaping the localized fixity of neoliberalization, together with responses to its dislocations. Chapters 5 and 6 (and to a certain extent Chapter 7) provided evidence for the consistent hegemonic articulation of subject-positions which valorise the ethics of autonomy, self-reliability, self-improvement, competition and an objective/positivistic epistemological stance towards the world. From the consumer-parent, to the self-managing school, to the monitor-teacher, to the ideal-learner, agents have been encouraged to become autonomous, self-realising projects, potentially emancipated through the freedom to make choices. However, those seemingly "free" choices were steered in certain directions within a framework of responsibilities embodied in achievement objectives, standards, contracts, values and targets. This section therefore reflects on this tension between choices and responsibilities with examples from this thesis, arguing that it is within this tension that the neoliberalized

subject emerges. Responsibilities include not only the requirement to work on the self in order to become economically productive, but to ensure that one produces data and does not constitute a blockage to information flows which facilitate market-choices.

The doctrinal and implementation phases in Chapter 5 demonstrated that *provider interests* signified a decline narrative which problematized the education system for failing to perform optimally, through restricting the flow of data to managers and parents, thereby impacting their abilities to make informed choices. This allowed optimal performance to be defined through reference to the market, within which managers have the responsibility to make data-informed decisions, but are held to account by the preferences of consumers (also informed by data). By the normalization phase this data-monitor role became crystalized as the *reflective practitioner*, who was able to use data in order in order to demonstrate that they do not impede the choices and therefore the potential empowerment and productivity of disadvantaged students. Then in Chapter 6 *the ineffective teacher* was unable to live up to this ideal by successfully monitoring achievement data, a lack which prevented access to the beatific path for *the one-in-five*. Within editorial representations this lack also prevented both the full realisation of the parent identity as an entrepreneurial consumer of educational products, and the journalistic identity as the fourth estate.

Within this discourse data-informed choices were consistently linked to freedom and autonomy. We saw John Banks, ACT Party leader, Associate Minister of Education, 2011-14, and key architect of the charter schools policy, voice parent's "freedom to choose the education that best suits their

children's learning needs", and schools' "freedom to offer a different curriculum", with both freedoms seen to lead to the "freedom to achieve". Set against these potential freedoms were the signifiers of dependency culture: the "entitlement society", "entrenched disadvantage", "creeping political correctness" and a teaching culture of "low expectations".

It is therefore in relation to perceived impediments of the freedom to make economically productive choices that the moral logic of neoliberalism emerges most clearly. Horrific representations of self-serving bureaucrats, inefficient teachers and incapable parents function as symbolic enemies which displace the inherent impossibility of providing unlimited choices for all, and for education to enable unlimited economic growth (Gunder, 2016; Wright, 2012). In other words, *choice* signifies a fantasy of total freedom, or omnipotence (Fotaki, 2010; Ormrod, 2009; Richards, 1992), while simultaneously orientating subjectivities in certain normative directions. "The entrepreneur" who enjoys total freedom to choose their own path, embodies this fantasy of "self-sufficiency, complete control...[and] omnipotent invulnerability" (Richards, 1992, p. 199), a sublime object which also "involves a set of quite specific exclusions" (C. Jones & Spicer, 2009, p. 109) around cultural and economic status. Choices which define the entrepreneur are only available to those who hold sufficient social and economic capital for their activity to be recognised as entrepreneurial (C. Jones & Spicer, 2009). However, these fundamental limits and exclusions of choice are displaced through symbolic and affective investment in iterations of the entrepreneurial self and its empowerment fantasies.

This displacement also obscures the narrowing limitations which the coupling

of education to economic growth imposes, with its normative restricting of choices towards those which increase human-capital investment (Foucault, 2008; Peters, 2005). Examples of this include the teacher analysing data in order to make choices which increase the productivity of their students, or the parent doing the same by scanning National Standards data in order to send their child to a higher performing school. These data informed-choices are not “free”, but are pre-structured by normative requirements. The entrepreneurial self is thus responsabilized to make the *right* choices to avert economic catastrophe for themselves and for wider society. As we saw most clearly in the Sexton Report in Chapter 5, in this way the economic becomes closely intertwined with a moral pressure to ensure the production of “adjusted and responsible citizens” (Rose, 1999, p. 157), who are equipped to channel their risk-taking into the normatively sanctioned areas of economic productivity, rather than delinquency, welfare dependency and crime. The production of morally virtuous, responsabilized citizens, who are able to be flexible and adaptable to the uncertain demands of the market, is therefore central to the governance of neoliberal capitalism (Hardt & Negri, 2009).

Rather than being an inherently anti-moral discourse then, moral behaviour in neoliberal discourse means care of the self and/or the immediate family. This logic was exemplified within certain editorial representations of National Standards, where “caring parents want[ed] to know their child is in a good school”, but who cared little for the fortunes of other parents and children who may be left behind in a poorly performing school. Caring therefore becomes analogized to looking after ourselves and our dependents by ensuring that members of the family are equipped with the most valued



skills possible to be competitive in the marketplace. While this may appear self-centred and therefore anti-moral, it becomes a moral “duty to look after ourselves [first and only then] to look after our neighbours” (Thatcher quoted in *The Guardian*, 2013). Hence, collective concern for *the one-in-five* was backgrounded, as it became imperative that each family unit took on the responsibility *themselves* to ensure that they do not fall into that representation’s horrific path, symbolized by the *New Zealand Herald’s* “such people”, who were positioned as excluded from the moral salvations of choice.

There is some variability here and we saw a different orientation to others in the normalization stage in Chapter 5, where the teacher and the ideal-learner were urged to temper their selfish desires for the benefit of others who were not family members. However, we could still perceive that it was the ethics of individualized self-care, or what Foucault (1988) refers to as the “technologies of the self”, which guided relations to others. Rather than perceiving communal values as a collective venture which should be worked upon in groups to serve a notion of the common good, responsibility was placed onto the individual student to internalize change, as the ability to relate to others and to work cooperatively was defined as an outcome of the skills of self-management. Of increasing importance for students and teachers was the ability to give an account of oneself, to be able to prove through the practices of self-monitoring (which generates data that can then be validated by others) that they were both working on the self *and* not impeding the self-development of others.

Linked to this was the increasing definition of interactions between teachers,

students and parents as a data-based relation of accountability. Teachers were encouraged in speeches by the Labour Party Minister of Education Trevor Mallard to “adapt to the thinking of each student”, not through conversation, but through the accumulation of evidence on their performance in achievement assessments. And parents were encouraged by National Party Prime Minister John Key to look to performance information to avoid “being kept in the dark about their children's progress”. By no longer being “kept in the dark”, parents would then be able to demand greater standards of performance from both their children and their children’s teachers. This culture of performance monitoring almost reached the point of absurdity in the 2009 Education Review Office report and its representations within political speeches and newspaper editorials. School principals were critiqued for failing to adequately monitor the performance of teachers who were judged as failing to adequately monitor the performance of five and six-year-old children. The inherent emptiness of this auditing relation was demonstrated by Frances’ account of her dealings with ERO in Chapter 7; all that mattered to ERO was the ticking of the right boxes - they did not have time to actually find out what was happening in the school, presumably because their own performance was being measured by their managers.

Absurdity aside, this culture has potentially serious ramifications. While experienced school principals may be able to partially negotiate what Ball (2003) terms the “terrors of performativity”, younger students and teachers are less likely to have built up such levels of resilience to the guilt and anxiety-inducing pressures to perform. The New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) recently released a report publishing the results of a

survey of teachers on the impacts of National Standards, seven years after their implementation (Bonne, 2016). They found that “63% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that anxiety about their performance on National Standards has negatively affected some students’ learning” (p. 21). It also found that only 20% of teachers thought the standardized categorizations of above, at, below or well below the standard “helped them motivate students to take on new challenges” (p. 21), indicating that fear of failure has a restraining effect on subjectivities, decreasing the likelihood of taking risks in education (which is arguably its essence).

As Lupton (2016) has outlined in her book *The Quantified Self*, in the near future this conservativizing trajectory is likely to accelerate through the ubiquity of digital tracking technologies. As she puts it, while such technologies are sold on the premise of self-emancipation for the data-savvy, their rise should be situated within a broader culture whereby the more vulnerable are “obliged or coerced into monitoring aspects of their lives so as to produce personal data that can then also be used for the purposes of others” (pp. 3-4). At the time of writing the “Social Investment Approach” (National Party, 2017; The Treasury, 2017), which privileges the “increasing use of data and analytics in public policy”, in order to better target “interventions” (National Party, 2017, n.p.), is being transposed onto New Zealand education policy. A “Risk of Not Achieving Index” is to be compiled on each school child through the combination of various indicators, informed by data which has been garnered by, amongst others, the Ministries of Justice and Social Development. The indicators are to include “Mother’s age at child’s birth”, “Ethnicity” and “Father’s offending and sentence history” (Ministry of

Education, 2017b, n.p.). What is clear is that these “objective” indicators are colonized by the socially conservative moral logic outlined throughout this study, from the Sexton Report through to charter schools.

Developing technologies are both situated within and accelerate the broader trajectories of a culture of performance monitoring. This is a culture which constructs numbers as truth (Badiou, 2008; Lupton, 2016), and the technologies which circulate them and the subjects who analyse them as neutral (Kunelius & Reunanen, 2016; Soffer, 2009), thus making their “transparent” circulation as a necessary social good (Allen, 2008; Flyverbom, 2016; Koyama & Kania, 2014). Hence, we saw newspapers assuming a key role in the problematizations of education in Chapter 6, by reproducing the expectations of a culture of performance management in the public sphere. While journalistic reproductions of this culture were perhaps to be expected, given the centrality of the logic of objectivity to journalistic practice, the presumption that “reliable data” should be used “to set high expectations for our children” was even reproduced by groups (such as the Boards Taking Action Coalition) positioning themselves as opposed to National Standards, indicating the widespread cultural normalization of the neutrality and necessity of audit practices (Power, 1999; Shore, 2008).

As the accounts of some of my interviewees illustrated, the ethics of individual autonomy, creativity and self-determination are not inherently regressive, and cannot easily be disentangled from calls to become entrepreneurs of ourselves. Nevertheless, it was the integration of these ethics with the technologies of audit, or the curtailing of choice with the responsibilities of performance monitoring tied to the requirements of

economic productivity, which was rejected within their accounts. The contradictions between the cultural valorization of the freedoms of self-determination and the submissive and narrowing requirements of the relation of accountability therefore offer fertile ground for resistance, providing significant grounds for optimism for those with an interest in de-coupling education from the economy and de-instrumentalizing its purposes, processes and relations. The key would be to engage subjects such as Bruce and Perry, who regarded themselves as “creative types”, at the level of their healthy scepticism towards bureaucratization and ideologies of control, by re-colonizing the signifiers of freedom with an emancipatory, egalitarian politics, which celebrates the inherently risky, protean and excessive consequences of education. The form that this could take within future social movements will be outlined briefly in the next section, together with reflections on the use of discourse theory and recommended areas for future research.

## **Contribution, reflections and recommended areas of further research**

While the two previous sections of this conclusions chapter have primarily considered the contribution of this thesis in conceptual terms, this section will explicate its methodological and firstly, its political contribution. As touched on in the introduction, a key impetus behind this thesis has been an acute awareness of the significance of the case study beyond New Zealand school-sector education. While cognizant that the making of generalizations can be problematic within qualitative research (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Tracy,

2013), one of the key reasons that I began this journey was that I was convinced that the successes that the education movement was experiencing in New Zealand had broader implications for the global fight against the neoliberalization of daily life.

Despite recent proclamations on the death of neoliberalism as the dominant ideology at the political or government-*tal* level, its continued re-structuring of the govern-*ance* level in domains as varied as health, the legal system, and education remains unabated, with potentially catastrophic future implications for our society, culture and the environment (Berardi, 2017; Brown, 2015). I have argued that this process of colonization and reconfiguration is reliant on the proffering of the subject as a rational, selfish, data-savvy entrepreneur, together with the linked instrumental coupling of domains such as education to the production of individualized and atomized selves, designed to fit into that representation. Hence, the articulation of a holistic philosophy has the potential to disrupt this double-pronged process, primarily through its very existence. As has been noted elsewhere, a key contributing factor to neoliberalism's hegemonic status is the reproduction of the idea that there is no alternative (Hay, 2004; McGuigan, 2016). A well-defined and well-articulated holistic educational ethos which full-frontally rejects instrumentalism, through seeing the child as both a whole being and "as part of a whole" (Mahmoudi, Jafari, Nasrabadi, & Liaghatdar, 2012, p. 179), a whole which includes society, humanity and the environment, and who therefore cannot be extracted from that context, therefore becomes an important resource in the project of unseating global neoliberal hegemony over time, by demonstrating that another way of thinking is possible. This is

a project which aims to gradually shift the common-sense away from the primacy of economic growth towards human growth and wellbeing.

However, given the changing climate and deepening inequality, many have expressed the urgency of this counter-hegemonic project, with a concomitant requirement for the left to turn their attention back towards the appropriation of the most powerful institutions of the state apparatus (see Srnicek & Williams, 2015). Srnicek and Williams have called for a new hegemony of left, which is no longer “afraid” of winning power, linking that fear to the recent dominance of a horizontalist politics based in local communities (pejoratively terming it “folk politics”). In contrast to this rather dismissive perspective, I concur with Monbiot (2017) in arguing that both the community level and the level of state institutions will be required to work together in order to shift the dominant narrative. The symbiotic relation between the two levels is reflected in the structure of Chapter 7, whereby the wins achieved by the movement could not have been achieved without both broader cultural change and the institutional-level action instigated by the union.

Srnicek and Williams (2015), unlike Bennett and Segerberg (2013) argue for the central role of unions and other labour organizations in a (counter) hegemonic formation, providing that those organizations recognise the importance of being attentive and flexible to the requirements of a rapidly shifting contemporary terrain (pp. 116-7). As I have argued in this thesis, the NZEI were successful in this, becoming the central organizational node in the re-articulation of the New Zealand educational ethos - facilitating its unfolding from below without imposing a rigid doctrine from above. Through campaigns such as *Stand Up For Kids/Fight the GERM*, the union

offered spaces for engagement, relatively open fora such as the Facebook group where members and others could inscribe their own ethical frameworks, or “personal action frames” (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). I argued that this led to the NZEI’s partial transition towards the ideal-model of the *social movement union* – a transition that will be vital for the future challenging of neoliberal power. Hence, the lessons learned here have broader implications outside the case study – rather than becoming an irrelevant anachronism, trade union involvement will be crucial in other contemporary battle zones – such as tertiary education, trade justice and the environment – where the encouragement of collaborative and politicized networks between union members, the public and other key actors and organizations could be key to progressive reform.

Another strategy which mobilised both the membership and the public, but in a less open and dialogic way, was the deployment of a populist articulatory logic. Srnicek and Williams (2015) see a populist movement as the only form of resistance capable of mounting a sustained challenge to neoliberalism. Non-dependent on shared material interest, or nationalist identification (De Cleen, 2017; Moffitt, 2017), the populist *the people* has the potential to bring together fractured, alienated and atomised populations of individuals, who otherwise lack the strong ties characteristic of the industrial era.

Populism does have its ethical limitations, including the exclusion of an antagonistic other, such as *the GERM*. However, I argue (see Salter (forthcoming) for more detailed arguments around this point) that these can be mitigated to a degree through the grounding of campaigns in widely shared ethical principles, the provision of accessible online spaces for the discussion



of complex issues, and the direction of antagonism towards a globally hegemonic system, rather than a group of vulnerable people. As Laclau (2005b) stated, in the modern, fractured and globalized context, where neoliberal logics have appropriated much resistant discourse, the task of “determin[ing] what your goal is and whom you are fighting against becomes much more difficult” (p. 231). The NZEI’s campaign demonstrated that populism can successfully crystalize both (the task being the defence of public education and the enemy being neoliberal reform).

What then is the role of the academy in the left populist movement? Srnicek and Williams (2015) argue that the academic must see themselves as the Gramscian organic intellectual, as active “participants in practical life, organisers and constructors” (p. 165). This role was perhaps beyond my capacities as a PhD student, however, I did see myself and my research as actively involved in the field in which I was researching – bringing disparate voices together and rearticulating discourses and knowledges which may lack a voice elsewhere. The primary purpose behind this was bringing these together into a coherent political argument centred on the contrasting of neoliberalism’s instrumentalism to the holistic ethos. In other words, in a similar way to the populist movement, I walked the ethical tight-rope between speaking with and for my interviewees, as I sought to construct a persuasive narrative with critical and political bite. I therefore argue that the use of an empirically informed discourse theory was crucial to this careful process of tight-rope walking.

As expounded in Chapter 4, the ontological stance which necessarily underwrites a PhD consonant with the research programme established by the

Essex School rejects the possibility that the researcher can somehow apply theoretical concepts to a fixed and stable world outside of and unaffected by the articulation of those concepts. The positivistic epistemology, taken from the natural sciences, becomes highly problematic when applied to the social sciences, when people are being studied, as it can often lead to a reification effect where they are viewed as research objects rather than active, participative subjects. Instrumental rationality is a world-view which I have critiqued throughout this thesis, as I have argued that it contributes to the narrowing definition of teaching as performance-monitoring, to the coupling of the purposes of education to the economy, and to the narrowing of human interaction as a relation of accountability. I have constituted my own epistemological position in contrast to this paradigm, centred on the ethical imperative behind this thesis - the rearticulation of New Zealand's holistic teaching knowledges, which have been marginalized by the hegemony of "measurement research".

Having said that, there are areas that I would like to have pursued in more detail or have done differently with hindsight. A secondary motivation behind the research was to contribute to the breaking down of barriers between disciplines, in particular between the three areas of critical education, media studies and social movement studies. I have argued that there is much that can be gained by opening up conversations between these schools of thought. For example, Chapter 3 called for more work on the impact of journalistic identifications on education, which moved beyond conceptualizing media effects as necessarily negative. As I demonstrated in Chapter 6, the populist articulatory logic, when articulated by institutional

media, can potentially contribute to the politicization of education, the consequences of which can be progressive from an educational practitioner's standpoint. Further, a stronger understanding of media logics and identifications and why a policy such as National Standards was so strongly supported by media institutions, can potentially assist social movement campaigns in their tailoring of media strategies.

Barriers between disciplines can also be reinforced by the privileging of traditionally dominant empirical objects, such as policy texts in education studies and media texts in media studies. Admittedly, the structure of the three analysis chapters somewhat reproduces these barriers. The analysis in Chapter 5, although including some political speeches, is mostly comprised of policy and curricula texts. The dominant genre in Chapter 6 is newspaper editorials, while in Chapter 7 it is interviews with activists.

Another way I could have structured the three analysis chapters to avoid these divides could have been around the three policies of National Standards, class sizes and charter schools, showing how, for example, the NZEI impacted the meaning of each policy with their counter-hegemonic articulations, in opposition to the dominant meanings emanating from the fields of politics and journalism. Perhaps I could have studied how the union, over time, colonized the *parents* signifier in press releases, making it float, thus displacing the internal frontier between enterprise and dependency cultures (Laclau, 2005b, pp. 132-156). While I did consider a closer analysis of NZEI press releases in the early stages of this PhD, through employing concepts from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with quantitative methodologies such as corpus-linguistics (see Baker et al., 2008), such an approach would

have meant that I would not have had time to conduct as many interviews, meaning I would not have captured their rich descriptions of motivations, identifications and political context. My decision not to pursue this avenue was consonant with both a move away from this PhD being such an NZEI-focused study (see Chapter 4), together with the methodological embrace of a more open-ended discourse analytical approach, which has been able to incorporate a range of texts to provide a fuller representation of the political dynamics of the case-study, “rather than the technical analysis of discourse viewed narrowly as speech or text” (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000, p. 1).

The approach that I did ultimately decided to follow therefore moves away from the more common application in media and communications studies of CDA theory and methods to a corpus of textual data. By doing so I have sought to ensure that “the relation of exteriority between ‘theoretical approach’ and ‘case study’” (Laclau, 1991, n.p.) has been minimised to the greatest possible extent. While it could never be fully negated, I have consciously tried to avoid the reification of theoretical concepts and data, together with their ontological separation. At the same time, this more flexible approach to data construction has allowed me more freedom to build up context for the reader, making it easier to include, for example, fragments of interviews and the analysis of other scholars in Chapters 5 and 6, where they assisted in the construction of a persuasive explanatory narrative.

Further, an overly linguistic focus would likely have overlooked the role of fantasy, with its function as the affective glue which holds disparate and often contradictory discursive elements together, attributing *force* to their form. As argued by Stavrakakis (2007), we have now had several decades of rational

critique of the language of neoliberalism which has consistently highlighted the numerous illogical contradictions within its discourse. However, the overall effect of this veritable mountain of critique from the academy on the institutions of government, or on the majority of the population's everyday understandings of politics, is questionable. And while many commentators have argued that the recent "non-death" (Crouch, 2011) of neoliberalism following the global financial crisis was due to the lack of viable alternatives, one could also argue that it was because these alternatives were not *desirable* – i.e. they could not attract the same degrees of libidinal investment. As I have demonstrated in this thesis, neoliberalism's valorization of a selfish, entrepreneurial subject, who offers a self-affirming and controlling path towards a fleeing from the contingency of the world, makes it very resilient to critique.

As outlined in Chapter 4, this theoretical focus on fantasy also led to an empirical focus on the genre of newspaper editorials. I then took this genre (the content of which is decided by a small team of senior editors (see Rupar, 2007)) as representing the broad landscape of journalistic identifications. My decision to discount named-author opinion pieces resulted in the exclusion of more pro-union, or anti-policy perspectives from journalists and other political actors. While focusing on editorials was partly based on a wish to draw attention to the institutional voice of newspapers in a context of discursive instability around education policy, there are limits to what this genre can tell us about the journalistic profession, particularly in the current context of instability and change in media industries. A future study could conduct interviews with journalists on how they negotiate the tensions

between the traditional fourth estate role, with its historical commitment to objectivity, and a digital-media context which is increasingly calling those ideals into question, together with the diminishing role of the journalist as the privileged transmitter of information within western cultures (Kunelius & Reunanen, 2016; Lievrouw, 2014; Soffer, 2009).

Another area I would like to develop in future research would be the connection between social media use and the politicization of teacher identities. Chapter 7 touches on this subject, where I comment that the *Stand Up For Kids* Facebook page offers a greater potential for critique, monitoring and engagement in the wider political context surrounding education, including media representations, however I would have liked to have developed this area further. At one stage I was considering an analysis of the page combined with interviews with its regular users. I was even considering using focus groups in schools to talk to teachers about their use of social media, together with their attitudes to government policies, politicians, institutional media etc. The reasoning behind this was twofold: a desire to talk to teachers (a marginalised group) in an environment where they would be most comfortable (Liamputtong, 2011), together with an understanding, from symbolic interactionism, that identity construction is a dynamic process, often articulated in conversations with colleagues and friends (Liamputtong, 2011; Tracy, 2013; Zembylas, 2003).

Ultimately a technical difficulty put paid to this whole branch of the research project. I was intending to begin by downloading the entire contents of the

*Stand Up For Kids* Facebook group into NVivo using the NCapture tool<sup>42</sup>. However, I received an error message, and was left unable to complete this task, other than through laboriously taking manual screen-shots of every post (there were literally thousands, the group at that time had nearly 8,000 members).

Further, I decided that organizing focus groups on my own, together with conducting in-depth interviews with individuals, and the media/policy analysis, would potentially be too much work for an individual PhD. The sheer quantities of data produced from the interviews alone, which all had to be transcribed and analysed, was daunting enough without adding to this further with focus-groups, where multiple, crossing lines of conversation would have to be analysed. Focus groups also require the acquisition of an entirely new skill-set, and involve many more variables and things that can go wrong than one-on-one interviews, especially with relatively inexperienced researchers (Liamputtong, 2011; Tracy, 2013). With this in mind, I decided to embark on the strategy described in Chapter 4, where I identified interviewees on the basis of their critiques of National's policies in the public sphere. I reasoned that their motivations for doing so would be informed by an already clearly articulated educational philosophy, and I was proved correct in this assumption (see Chapter 7). However, this did mean that my interviewees were comprised largely of union employees and former

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<sup>42</sup> Other issues with using NVivo included the subscription fee. While I was funded for a year's subscription on my university computer, after this expired I was left unable to access my data. I would recommend to PhD students considering using the software to ensure that they have funding to use it for the full course of their programme. They may find, as I did, that even if they offer to self-fund the subscription this does not comply with the policy on university computers.

leaders, school principals, and bloggers, and not fully representative of a marginalised teaching profession. I certainly do feel that important further work could still be done in this area in a New Zealand teaching context. For example, it could combine content analysis of social media (e.g. Brickner, 2016), with ethnographic methods which spend time interacting with media-activists (e.g. Fenton & Barassi, 2011).

Further research could also be undertaken in this area of teacher marginalisation, but in relation to a *quality teacher* coded as entrepreneurial (Mahony & Hextall, 2001; Smyth, 2001), and therefore white, masculine and middle class (Kerstetter, 2015; Nadesan, 2002; Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000). While Chapters 5 and 6 illustrated the discursive construction of a beatific teacher as a flexible, reflective, and achievement-oriented data analyst, able to objectively monitor those falling behind, further research which talks to teaching practitioners could investigate how this representation is negotiated at the local, lived level. For example, Nadesan and Trethewey (2000), drawing on Judith Butler, found that female workers resisted a masculine (and therefore always unattainable) entrepreneurial self-ideal, found in “success literature”, through acts of bodily performing their identities.

While such future research, focused at the affective and embodied level, could be in danger of essentializing femininity as something attributed only to women, Iyer (2009) argued that resistance is generated in the intersections and contradictions between discourses, which open the space for “new subject positions that are hybrid, heterogeneous and exemplify positive desire” (p. 242). This concurs with my arguments at the end of Chapter 7, where both Malcolm and Frances were able to take advantage of the surface-level nature



of the pressures of performativity, to negotiate resistant, hybrid spaces of becoming at the micro, school level.

One final area which needs to be clarified in order to better facilitate future research employing the model from this thesis is the epistemological status of the psychoanalytic concepts which have been utilized, and how they fit with the anti-essentialist, poststructuralist, discourse-theoretical framework. This responds to critiques from Foucault (see Hutton, 1988) and other poststructuralists, that psychoanalysis proposes an essentialized, internalized and fixed model of “human nature”, which has since played a central role in fixing the concept of the subject as an inherently flawed, self-improving project, ever reliant on the expert knowledge of the psychiatrist (Rose, 1999). However, as Frosh and Baraitser (2008) argue, this disconnect between poststructuralism and psychoanalysis can largely be attributed to the Freudian or Kleinian traditions “with their apparent certainties about the ‘true’ nature of human subjectivity” (p. 347). In Lacanian terms, psychoanalytic practice has become a “masters discourse” – “a touchstone of authority and knowledge” (Hook, 2008, n.p.), which offers “a definitive diagnosis” (Dickson & Holland, 2017, p. 136) on the patient, or analysand. By contrast, this thesis is very much from the Lacanian perspective, which stresses uncertainty and unknowing, and the undermining or subversion of the master’s discourse.

As argued towards the end of Chapter 7, such a stance, which overtly seeks to unsettle relations of domination (Howarth et al., 2016) through a hierarchical objectification of relations, must be premised in future research on the adoption of the discourse of the hysteric, rather than the master. For

Dean (2009), this discourse:

...takes form when the subject challenges the master's word. Read politically, this discourse follows a logic of 'protest and resistance,' of demands that can never actually be met. (p. 80)

This asking of questions which can never be answered, and posing of demands which can never be met under the current system is crucial for the process of politicization, thereby maintaining the prospect of "radical democracy" (Laclau, 2005a). As Laclau (2005b) argues in *On Populist Reason*, if a demand is satisfied then it is subsumed on an individual basis by the totality, restricting its ability to unify with other demands, to become popular demands within equivalential chains that eventually enable the formation of a popular identity (pp. 73-93).

As we saw with the *Stand Up For Kids/Fight the GERM* campaign, it was the NZEI's refusal to ask only for individual demands in the collective agreement, instead framing the issue as two opposed sides with irreconcilable differences and fundamentally opposed views about the nature and purposes of education, which drew 10,000 teachers and sympathisers to protests around the country. Some interviewees and other commentators argued that the construction of an internal frontier hampered their negotiations with the Government on the Investing for Educational Success policy released in January 2013, with the membership voting to reject the policy outright, rather than adopting the more reconciliatory stance of the PPTA, who recognised the progressive and ironically anti-neoliberal potential in the school clusters concept. However, the setting of demands for education centred on the ethics

of collectivity, care and human development embodied a much more fundamental challenge to the premises of neoliberalization which have come to be sedimented in New Zealand over the past four decades - demands which ultimately, could not be answered. These impossible, but necessary, demands allowed the articulation of an alternative vision for education based around connections, collectivity, and the development of the human subject, even within the constraints of a neoliberalized education system.

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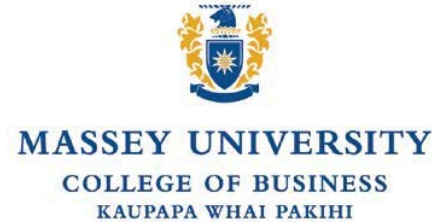
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# Appendix 1: Information sheet

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*Building Resistance to the GERM:  
Discursive struggles and politicized teacher identities, 2008-2014*

## INFORMATION SHEET

Kia ora Allan,

I am writing to invite you to participate in my PhD research project titled: **Building Resistance to the GERM: discursive struggles and politicized teacher identities, 2008-2014.**

The project is part of a broader Marsden-funded project titled ‘Activism, technology and organising: Transformations in collective action in Aotearoa New Zealand’, led by Professor Shiv Ganesh (PhD), my primary supervisor and head of the School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing at Massey University.

Since I completed a Masters degree in Social Research Methods with the Open University in the UK in 2011, my main area of interest lies in how mass media can frame our interpretations of events and debates. A second area of interest lies in how the media can also act as a forum and tool for contestations over the meaning of important areas of society, such as education.

The aim of this project therefore is to chart and analyse media representations over a period of considerable, and controversial, changes to school-sector education in Aotaroa New Zealand. While media analysis can tell us much, it doesn't reveal a full-picture of events and interpretations. This is why I am requesting your participation in this project, as someone that can act as a 'key informant' for my research; an important actor in resisting and contesting mainstream representations of teachers and/or teacher trade unions during education reform debates.

I am specifically want to discuss the debates around: National Standards (2008-12), Class Sizes (2012) and Investing in Educational Success (2014).

I am asking for between one and three hours of your time. This would primarily consist of an interview lasting one to two hours, depending on your availability. I anticipate that there may also be some administration time for example, conversations by phone or email about the project if you have any questions, or to set up an interview time and location, which I estimate would not take longer than half an hour.

I am also asking for your help to bring along to the interview any relevant historical material, for example personal photographs or any other documentation you may feel is relevant to my research. I will only use these materials in my thesis and/or research publications if you give me your permission. The specifics of this request are noted in the consent form, which we will send you if you express interest in being interviewed or learning more about the project.

With your permission, I would like to digitally record the interview to help

with transcription. Following the interview, I will ask you to reflect on whether you would like the information you've provided us to remain confidential. You will also have an opportunity, should you wish it, to review the transcript once it is produced. I will provide you with written assurance that the transcript and the digital recording will be kept in a secure computer, will only be sighted by the researchers, and will not be circulated without your permission. Given the historical nature of the subject of the interview we do not anticipate any risks or adverse psychological impacts for you. Indeed, I hope that the process of reflecting on your work will be of value to you as well as for us. Should you experience any discomfort during the interview, however, you will have the option to pause recording, or terminate the interview and withdraw from the research.

I do hope that you will accept our invitation to be interviewed. Once again, I reiterate that you are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- ask for the recording device to be switched off at any time;
- withdraw from the interview at any time before or during the interview;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

Please let me know, either via email or the phone, whether you are interested in participating. I am happy to answer any additional questions you have.



Best wishes,

Leon Salter

Shiv Ganesh

Researcher

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#### **Compulsory Statement**

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Dr Brian Finch, Director (Research Ethics), telephone 06 356 9099, extn 86015, email [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@massey.ac.nz).

# Appendix 2: Consent form

*Building Resistance to the GERM:*

*Discursive struggles and politicized teacher identities, 2008-2014*

## CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.

I wish/do not wish to review my transcript before publishing.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

**Signature:**

**Date:**

.....

**Full Name - printed**

.....

## Appendix 3: Example interview guide

- **Background** – you were a school inspector?
- You left in 1989 > Tomorrow's Schools?
- **Networkkonnet** evolved from Network magazine in 90s?
- **How do you see role of the blogger?** An independent voice - with an increasingly corporate-controlled media & constrained academia.
- What do you see as the philosophy of Networkkonnet?
- You've been a very vocal critic of John Hattie – and its come out in the media? You believe he's been a very influential force in NZ education?
- On About it is written that you “continues to be frustrated by the paucity of attention given by teacher groups to the ideological underpinnings of education issues.”?
- Do you see NZEI & PPTA as too apolitical? Only tackling individual policies rather than the bigger picture?
- School marketing – you are critical of schools' self-promotion?
- ERO review office bullying?
- Minsitry of Ed acting like the Stazi – Marlene Campbell?
- Allan Alach – hounded out?
- **The GERM** – what are its origins? You mention in a post in 2010 of a system from US in 70s that had “four principles: control by unambiguous outcomes; a theory of control based on measurement; an emphasis on quantitative research; and a tight audit system.” - Aimed at displacement of teacher knowledge & replacement with quantitative expert knowledge
- **The long tail of underachievement** – “The lie was produced to support the myth that New Zealand has a 20% tail (it is 14%) and that this tail is large compared with other countries and our schools are to blame ❖ lies, lies, lies.”
- **Criticism of NS:** “the criticism of national standards and league tables is so wide and well-directed that it has seriously weakened the government's overall position.”
- **Do you think league tables will never come back?** Victory for anti-GERM position?