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# Teachers and Curriculum



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Teachers and Curriculum is an online peer-reviewed publication supported by Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research (WMIER), Faculty of Education, The University of Waikato, Hamilton 3240, New Zealand. It is directed towards a professional audience and focuses on contemporary issues and research relating to curriculum pedagogy and assessment.

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### **Acknowledgement of Reviewers**

The Editors would like to acknowledge the contribution of the reviewers.

## THINKPIECE: OUTSOURCING: THE HIDDEN PRIVATISATION OF EDUCATION IN NEW ZEALAND

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The strategy to increase private sector control and decision-making power over management, teaching and curriculum in schools has led to an array of reforms across the globe (see Ball, 2012). This neoliberal reform of public education is also evident in Aotearoa/New Zealand. What is often described as the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM), is frequently criticised by teachers, academics, journalists and members of the public as having deleterious effects on the New Zealand education system. In this article I wish to shed light on a GERM currently invading primary schools across New Zealand: the practice of *outsourcing*. In particular, I pay attention to the ways in which teachers are being encouraged to choose from an ever-increasing range of curricula and programmes provided by corporations, charities and other ‘not-for-profit’ organisations. The aim of my article is not to criticise teachers or principals for outsourcing their teaching and/or curricula to external providers. Rather, I seek to critically reflect on the ways in which the outsourcing of teaching and curriculum is a form of ‘hidden privatisation’ (Ball & Youdell, 2007), one that carries with it a number of ‘hidden’ dangers for teaching and learning, teachers and children.

### The privatisation ‘in’ and ‘of’ education

The neoliberal political rationality and its ‘less state, more market’ mantra has not only changed the role of the state, but has “called into question the very aims and purposes of public education” (Codd, 2008, p. 15). Education for developing critical citizenship has been re-shaped by private sector players, including ‘edu-businesses’ (e.g., *Pearson Education*<sup>i</sup>), corporations (e.g., *Coca-Cola*, *Nestlé*, *McDonald’s*), industry groups (e.g., *United Fresh*, *International Food & Beverage Alliance*) and venture philanthropists (e.g., *Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation*) (for further discussion, see Ball, 2012). Underpinned by the discourse of economism, where market logic is attached to every sphere of life, schooling has been re-positioned as a tool for developing state economies and improving multinational and regional corporations’ ‘bottom line’. This is not simply a shift in business culture, but a fundamental transformation of *how* children in Aotearoa/New Zealand (and beyond) are taught, and *by whom*.

Privatisation is an integral element of the neoliberalisation of public education, transferring the responsibility for the management of schools and the teaching of students to an array of non-public sector (i.e., private, voluntary and other ‘not-for-profit’) actors and authorities. It is a particularly effective process when it is masked by the rhetoric of ‘educational reform’ or ‘keeping up with modern times’. In this way, the privatisation of education is often ‘hidden’ and may take two forms: ‘endogenous’ and ‘exogenous’ (see Ball & Youdell, 2007).

Endogenous privatisation refers to privatisation *in* public education, where various practices, rationales and techniques of the private sector are imported into the public sphere. In the context of Aotearoa/New Zealand this includes: the rise of New Public Management (NPM) and the reinvention of the principal as a business ‘manager’; the introduction of National Standards and publication of school league tables; proposals to introduce performance-related pay measures for teachers and principals; and, an increased focus on student ‘performance’ and ‘outcomes’, especially in literacy and mathematics.

There are also a number of examples of exogenous privatisation in Aotearoa/New Zealand—the privatisation *of* public education—“the opening up of public education services to private sector

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<sup>i</sup> Please note names of businesses and organisations have been italicised for easy identification

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participation on a for-profit basis and using the private sector to design, manage or deliver aspects of public education” (Ball & Youdell, 2007, p. 13). The out-sourcing of payroll services to *Novopay* was one example of exogenous privatisation, where public education was used as a means for private profit. The development and funding of charter or ‘partnership’ schools is another contentious form of exogenous privatisation that has opened up an opportunity for a variety of organisations to ‘profit’ from public education funding.

However, there is one kind of privatisation that straddles both exogenous and endogenous privatisation—‘outsourcing’—in particular the outsourcing of both teaching and curricula to ‘privatised’ providers. As a form of privatisation *in* public education, outsourcing mimics the ‘efficient’ and ‘effective’ practices of the private sector. As a privatisation *of* education, outsourcing shifts the development of curricula, the use of pedagogies and the actual teaching of students to private sector (and private sector-funded) providers, including those that appear to have little, if any, educational expertise or interests. It is a neoliberal reform of education that seems to have stealthily crept into Aotearoa/New Zealand schools, particularly primary schools, a GERM that appears to be mostly ‘hidden’ from the teachers and principals who outsource their teaching and curricula on a regular basis (see Powell, 2014).

### A hidden privatisation

The outsourcing of teaching and curricula to ‘outside’ organisations is ubiquitous in New Zealand primary schools, especially in the field of health and physical education (see Petrie, Penney, & Fellows, 2014). Over 90% of New Zealand primary schools pay to use the ‘JUMP JAM’ aerobics programme ([www.jumpjam.co.nz](http://www.jumpjam.co.nz)). More than 50,000 primary school children have been ‘taught’ about healthy eating by *Iron Brion*, a promotional character for marketing organisation *Beef + Lamb New Zealand* (see *Primary Industry Capability Alliance*, 2014) and ‘his’ free curricula-linked resources. ‘Food for Thought™’ is “a free nutrition education programme” sponsored by *Foodstuffs New Zealand* and includes 126 activities, a lesson from a ‘Food for Thought™’ nutritionist, as well as “a supermarket visit to either a *Pak’n’Save*, *New World*, *Write Price*, *Four Square* or *Shoprite* supermarket” (Foodstuffs New Zealand, 2013, para. 2). *McDonald’s* continues to provide branded teaching and learning resources—and a branded ‘teacher’—for teaching children about road safety: “This year Ronald McDonald® will go to over 600 schools and thousands of New Zealand children will enjoy a memorable lesson about passenger and pedestrian safety in a traffic environment” (see [www.roadsafetyinschools.co.nz/](http://www.roadsafetyinschools.co.nz/)).

Outsourcing is not restricted to health and physical education. Industry representatives Seafood New Zealand (n.d.) have devised science resources. Energy company *Genesis Energy* (2014, para. 3) has created, funded and implemented ‘Schoolgen’: “Free, New Zealand curriculum-linked, teaching resources that any primary, intermediate or secondary school in New Zealand can use to explore electricity generation, energy efficiency, renewable energy and climate change.” New Zealand Pork (n.d.) produces cross-curricula resources “related to pigs and pig farming in New Zealand”, whilst *ASB* promotes that it has “world class facilitators” to deliver its ‘GetWise’ financial literacy programme to “over 400,000 Kiwi kids” (<http://www.getwise.co.nz>). There is undoubtedly an ever-increasing supply of easily accessible curricula and ‘teachers’ that schools can outsource, usually for free.

In some instances, the role of the private sector in providing outsourced programmes and resources is obscured through the use of *multi-sector partnerships* (see also Powell, 2013; Powell & Gard, 2014). For instance, the *Life Education* programme and its mascot Harold the Giraffe teach health education to “245,000 primary and intermediate children every year” (Life Education Trust, 2010). Although Life Education is run by its own charitable trust—a registered charity—it is made possible by funding from its multiple ‘for profit’ partners: *Just Juice* (Frucon), *Macleans* (GlaxoSmithKline), *ANZ*, *The Warehouse*, *Mainfreight*, *Konica Minolta*, *AWG*, as well as ‘not-for-profit’ gaming (or ‘pokies’) trusts: *Pub Charity* and *The Lion Foundation* (see Life Education Trust, 2010). These types of partnerships help to relieve inevitable tensions between the profit-seeking motives of the private sector and the educational interests of schools. The involvement of the private sector in partnership-based programmes is not as obvious as when Ronald McDonald® ‘comes to school’. Yet the intent of these

multi-sector partnerships is the same. They are a tactic to shape how children are taught and what children learn, a business strategy to improve the brand image of an organisation and its products (see Powell & Gard, 2014).

### The 'hidden' dangers of outsourcing

On the surface, the outsourcing of teaching and curriculum may appear innocuous. There is certainly a taken-for-granted assumption by some principals and teachers that outsourcing could 'do no harm' (see Powell, 2015). While I am not suggesting that outsourcing these aforementioned organisations, programmes or resources is inherently 'bad', I argue that it is, in a Foucauldian sense, "dangerous" (Foucault, 1984, p. 343). A number of scholars have warned that outsourcing teaching to external organisations and using pre-packaged curricula may not only de-professionalise certain fields and curriculum areas, such as health and physical education (see Macdonald, Hay, & Williams, 2008; Petrie et al., 2014), but also de-professionalise, de-skill and de-value teachers themselves (Vander Schee & Boyles, 2010). Burch (2009) also points out that the 'new privatisation' in education has resulted in a trend towards pre-packaged programmes and curricula that are based on a 'one-size-fits-all' model. This trend is evident in the outsourced programmes and resources in New Zealand that are often 'taught' to students using pre-packaged resources and lessons, with whole-class, instructional teaching approaches that are not designed or adapted to meet the needs of individual students within a particular class or school (see Petrie, 2012; Petrie et al., 2014). This is hardly surprising; given that the outside providers and resource writers do not actually *know* the children they are attempting to teach.

A further danger is that when schools outsource to programmes and resources designed and/or funded by the private sector, schools help conceal the broader interests and strategies of for-profit organisations, such as improving public relations, shaping government regulations, increasing consumption, creating a philanthropic image, building brand trust and loyalty, diverting attention from controversial practices or issues (i.e. childhood obesity, commercial fishing, food prices), and, of course, profiteering (for further discussions, see Burch, 2009; Molnar, 2005). The private sector players expect (and receive) 'bang for their buck'. In a number of instances, corporations readily exploit their relationships with outside providers of outsourced programmes to directly market branded products to children. In Life Education, for instance, children are asked to create advertisements for Just Juice, learn about healthy eating through a food pyramid that included a bottle of h2go water (Life Education Trust, n.d., p. 9), and children are given a free 'gift bag', replete with Macleans-branded toothpaste, a toothbrush, stickers, colouring-in pages and links to a Macleans website and smartphone app.

### Concluding thoughts

Perhaps outsourcing's greatest risk is that it has become, or at least will become, the 'new normal'; that outsourcing is not merely considered a 'good' way of teaching, but the 'best' way. As one New Zealand primary school teacher reported, outsourcing is "perfect. I personally think it should happen more often" (Powell, 2014, p. 15).

Despite the outsourcing of teaching and curricula being seen as an acceptable, even preferred, practice in some primary schools, there are possibilities for resistance. Teachers, principals and researchers can work together to 'connect the dots' between the everyday use of outsourced lessons, resources or providers and the broader social, cultural, political and economic factors that shape teachers' 'choice' to outsource, such as a lack of government-funded professional development or advisory support. They can also exploit the free resources by using them as a catalyst for discussion and debate, to disrupt teachers' and students' understanding of *why* 'for-profit' organisations are providing free 'education' programmes and 'educators', and to critically examine *how* these resources may shape teaching and learning in ways that are not necessarily in the best interests of schools, teachers or students. Researchers may also illuminate the ways in which outsourcing is not simply enforced from the 'outside in', but is made possible from the 'inside out', pointing to the critical role teachers and school leaders play in (re)producing the ever-present practices of privatisation. By rendering visible how government policies, corporate activities, teachers' identities and the interests of 'not-for-profits'



are shaping teachers' practices and children's learning, the notion that outsourcing education is normal, natural and harmless may be successfully challenged.

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